Out of Alignment: Managing Literacy Assessment Work in the Primary Classroom

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Graduate Program in Education
A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree in Doctor of Philosophy
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OUT OF ALIGNMENT: MANAGING LITERACY ASSESSMENT WORK IN THE PRIMARY CLASSROOM

by

Holly Carol Parkinson

Faculty of Education

Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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Abstract

This thesis presents findings that were investigated using Institutional Ethnography (IE) into teachers’ accountability work in four Ontario primary classrooms. Informed by the writing of Dorothy E. Smith (1987, 2005, 2006), my thesis documented and analyzed curriculum work using IE to explore the social relations organizing the teachers’ accountability work. Specifically my study asked: What work do primary teachers carry out as they engage in literacy assessments? How are literacy assessments implicated in the coordination of teachers’ curriculum work? How is this work coordinating and being coordinated with the work of students, administrators and policy makers at local, national and international levels? My investigation of teachers’ assessment work explores curriculum as an ongoing process in which people’s actions are coordinated. I also sought to bring visibility to work that teachers carried out in order to meet accountability requirements: the ways in which they scheduled activities and organized their curriculum to accommodate assessments and to respond to assessment data. The analysis is based on field notes from classroom observations, artifacts, teachers’ accounts of their work, and interviews with principals and school board administrators. I explicate ways in which required reading and writing assessments were mediating a hidden curriculum. My findings present and discuss the literacy assessment texts that organized the teachers work. I show how the work contributes to the alignment of classroom curriculum with accountability practices at a national and international/transnational level.

Keywords

Institutional Ethnography, teachers’ work, primary classrooms, literacy assessments, standardized, curriculum, learning cycles, instructional cycle, DRA, Daily Five.
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Chapter One

The Setting

Introduction

The doctoral research project on which this thesis is based was an Institutional Ethnography (IE) investigation into teachers’ accountability work in four Ontario primary classrooms. Specifically, my project explored the social relations organizing the teachers’ accountability work. An IE investigation “takes for its entry point the experiences of specific individuals whose everyday activities are in some way hooked into, shaped by, and constituent of the institutional relations under exploration” (DeVault & McCoy, 2002, p. 752). My project also sought to bring visibility to work that teachers carried out in order to meet accountability requirements: the ways in which they scheduled activities and organized their curriculum to accommodate assessments and to respond to assessment data.

The project evolved from and builds on my masters’ study (Parkinson, 2009) in which I acted as a participant observer in two grade one classrooms. At the time, I was interested in the “care/mothering work” (Manicom & Campbell, 1995) that teachers in primary classrooms did to enable children to take advantage of the academic aspects of the curriculum. When I observed the work that the teachers did, I noticed that teachers did not seem to be doing as much of caring/mothering work as I recall doing as a primary teacher. Instead, they seemed to be doing a great deal of work related to assessments. In fact, “gathering and reporting assessment data was consuming inordinate amounts of the teachers’ time” (Parkinson & Stooke, 2012, p. 60). In my master’s thesis I argued that assessment work was mediating the “lived curriculum” (Auger & Rich, 2007, p. 242) in
both of the classrooms and that the teachers’ efforts to address some of the official curriculum goals were being constrained by the quantity of assessment work required. Importantly, I noticed that assessment work was occupying my teacher participants’ attention and taking up enormous amounts of their planning and instructional time so that there was little time left for arts-based instruction, science explorations, and other constructivist learning activities. I conceptualized this situation as an entry point for a focused investigation into teachers’ assessment work.

My master’s research finding, that teachers were preoccupied with assessment work, corroborates evidence in the education literature that the teaching role is ever changing (Comber & Nixon, 2009; Griffith & André-Bechely, 2008; Hargreaves, 1994). Certainly teachers’ responsibilities are more varied and extensive now than they were during my early teaching career. As a result of thirty years of global economic restructuring and demands for public education systems to do more with less, teachers have experienced significant work intensification. To use the language of institutional ethnography, the world economy is increasingly present in local classrooms.

One way in which the world economy intrudes in classrooms is through the purchase of commercial resources for teaching, testing, and test preparation (Griffith & André-Bechely, 2008). Recently, the Ontario school boards in which I conducted field work have purchased and implemented commercially produced materials such as *The Daily 5™* and *Literacy CAFE Menu* (Boushey & Moser, 2006, 2009) and the *PM Benchmarks* (Fountas, 1999, Fountas & Pinnell, 2012). A more important but less tangible aspect of economic intrusion in local classrooms results from the policy borrowing that goes on among member nations of supranational organizations such as the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). Of particular
importance to my study is the global trend toward international comparisons of student achievement in literacy. In a global economy competition among countries creates a need for comparable scores and an increased demand for standardized assessment tools. Thus, as Canada competes in the world economy, Canadian education systems are implementing numerous standardized measures and these appear to be exacerbating stress in the lives of teachers, students and their families (Parkinson & Stooke, 2012). Moreover, the use of standardized assessments tends to produce standardization of curricula across national borders. Many commercial assessment resources used in Canadian schools were first developed for American use and reflect the instructional ideologies promoted in American schooling. Indeed, there are numerous ways in which increased accountability shapes teachers’ curriculum work. The twofold purpose of this thesis is to discuss and raise questions about the many and various uses of literacy assessments in Ontario primary classrooms.

The Study

As noted above, my study documented and analyzed curriculum work using a strategy informed by Institutional Ethnography (IE) (Smith 1987, 2005, 2006). An IE study often takes place in several phases. Research starts from an understanding that something troubling is going on and the researcher sets out to uncover what is happening from the standpoint of the people who are experiencing the troubling situation (DeVault, 2008). IE researchers typically ask two questions: What is the work? How is the work being organized such that it produces or maintains the troubling situation being explored? It must start with an exploration of people’s activities and then aims to discover how those activities are coordinated with other’s activities in other places or at other times.
Specifically my study asked: What work do primary teachers carry out as they engage in literacy assessments? How are literacy assessments implicated in the coordination of teachers’ curriculum work? How is this work coordinating and being coordinated with the work of students, administrators and policy makers at local, national and international levels?

Smith (2005) conceived of IE as an ontology that conceptualizes the social as “the concerting of people’s activities” (DeVault & McCoy, 2002, p. 752). She also describes IE as a research strategy for bringing into view linkages among activities being carried out in diverse sites (Campbell & Gregor, 2008; Comber & Nixon, 2009; DeVault, 2008, 2011; Stooke, 2010). For example, Griffith and André-Bechely (2008) traced a link between the parents’ test preparation work in Los Angeles and the test preparation work of parents in Toronto. Los Angeles and Toronto belong to different school systems, but the commercially produced resources parents were using to help their children prepare for the tests were the same, thereby linking work in the two sites.

Smith’s ontology of the social allowed me to conceptualize the enacted curriculum in each classroom as the ongoing concerting of routine activities. It also allowed me to view assessments as moments in social relations: sequences of action that “pass through local settings and shape them according to a dynamic of transformation that begins and gathers speed somewhere else” (DeVault & McCoy, 2002, p. 752). In IE parlance, my study aimed to draw attention to ways in which particular educational activities such as literacy assessments can be tied into “broader forms of social organization that coordinate action within extended functional complexes involving families and schools” (Grahame & Grahame, 2001, p. 10). As noted in the Introduction,
the social relations that accomplish accountability work in schools emanate from a global economic imperative that requires countries to produce comparable achievement data.

Educational reforms and policy statements that regulate teacher preparation practices and school administration have been implemented by federal, state and local governments. Bazerman (2003) argued that American philosopher, psychologist and educational reformer John Dewey and his followers “regularly preferred to keep evaluation and decision-making local, but for various institutional reasons had to seek larger ways of assessing student achievement without ever being able to develop fully appropriate assessment tools” (p. 429). More recently, educational reforms and policies have dramatically affected most teacher education programs and public schools by the implementation of high stakes assessments (Taubman, 2009). Taubman argued that through these reforms and policies, certain terms that include best practices, performance outcomes, data driven, and learning environments, have been materialized that shape national and local mandates that govern schools, teacher education, pedagogy, and curriculum. Practices such as auditing and accounting that were once part of the corporate world are now part of the education system and they structure how teachers, principals and administrators think about what happens and what should happen in the classrooms.

Assessments hold particular significance for teacher accountability because they are the preeminent textual processes through which individual students’ performances are translated into scores that are then used to develop league tables and the like. Smith does not use the word “translate.” Rather she draws on Marx to propose that concrete activities are made accountable as institutional work when they are worked up through ideological processes. A student’s performance on a reading assessment might be worked up as “level two” using a teacher-made rubric, or as a level twenty-two using a commercially
produced leveled book series. Both processes are ideological in the IE sense and in both
cases the teacher would be expected to record the score and use it to make curricular
decisions. However, the second process is mediated by a widely-used and easily
replicated scoring protocol that coordinates the teacher’s action with the actions of other
teachers working in diverse settings. It is this second type of ideological process that
tends to interest IE researchers because an analysis of the process can provide clues to the
ways in which the process is implicated in ruling processes such as administration and
governance (DeVault, 2008).

A significant theoretical notion in IE is its generous definitions of the term *work*. In IE, work is defined as the practical activities that people do in everyday life that
require effort and a degree of acquired competence (Comber, 2007). This generous notion
of work is commensurable with Smith’s (2006) assertion that research participants are not
subjects, but informants who can tell the researcher about the work they do. A generous
definition of work “represents the informants as active” (Smith, 2006, p. 7). Talking to
informants about the work they do provides the researcher with clues about how those
work activities are being coordinated with other work activities, including activities in
other settings that the informant may not or even be aware of. For example, a teacher’s
class schedule may be coordinated “locally” with the gym timetable and “extralocally”
with the school bus schedule and by extensions with the school board’s budget for buses.

To gather data for my study, I documented work carried out by four primary
teachers employed in two school boards in the province of Ontario as they completed
language arts assessment requirements. I focussed on what the teachers were actually
doing so that I could learn about the assessment work and gather clues about its
organization. I also interviewed principals and school board administrators and asked
them to share with me their board’s policies and procedures with respect to literacy assessments. Smith points out that just talking with people about the work and asking questions about which they just did, why they did what they just did, and most important, how they did what they just did, is important for IE discovery. Going back and forth from one participant to another and talking with them and asking a question for them to clarify a particular point is also crucial.

Reflecting on the data, I identified several texts that appeared to be coordinating the teachers’ curriculum work. I then traced how the texts were being used by people outside of the classroom, that is, how the texts were embedded in institutional processes, such as accountability work. IE researchers are interested in the coordinating power of certain texts. Smith (2006) writes that in IE studies, a text is conceptualized as a material thing that carries a message that is written, is an image, or appears electronically. The texts that interest IE researchers can be replicated many times and activated in similar ways by the people who handle and use them for their work. For example, a blank Ontario report card can be filled out (that is, activated) by a teacher in Toronto or Timmins. It will still be recognizable as a report card. Looking at how one takes up a text and interprets the text in a course of action and coordination can help the investigator to understand the working of the activities. In my study, how the teachers utilized the literacy assessment protocols and interpreted them brought into view a hitherto taken-for-granted area or teachers’ curriculum work for me to explore. The exploration allowed me to recognize ways in which official texts such as the report card and the Ontario K-8 curriculum (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2006) mediate everyday life in institutional settings such as schools.
The products of IE investigations are maps. Researchers draw maps to show how coordination happens: that is, how work carried out by an individual in one setting is connected to work of others elsewhere and at other times. These maps aim to show how institutions are active in people’s everyday lives. In chapter six I include two maps that aim to show how assessment texts were being activated by the teachers and how those actions connected the work they did to the work of other teachers, students, principals, school board officials, Ministry of Education employees, and people employed in transnational non-governmental organizations. I designed my maps for teachers themselves to use. It illuminates some of the assessment-related work being done by others elsewhere which was not visible to them and traces ways in which assessments were organizing other curriculum work. As Smith (1987) explains, it is hard to see the larger web of coordination in which our actions are embedded from a place in the middle of things.

My investigation of teachers’ assessment work explores curriculum as an ongoing process in which people’s actions are coordinated. Constructs from curriculum studies such as hidden curriculum and washback also refer to ways in which assessment practices can mediate the enacted or lived curriculum. These ideas are discussed further in chapter three. My study aims to complement other IE studies of assessment work such as the work of Comber, Cormack, Doecke, Griffith, Kerin, Kostogriz, & Smith (2009-2011) and Griffith & André-Bechely, (2008).

Organization of the Thesis

The thesis is divided into six chapters. In the next chapter I present a review of literature on literacy assessments, teachers’ work, and accountability. Chapter three
describes the study. It elaborates the study as an example of curriculum inquiry and describes the theoretical underpinnings of IE. Chapter four describe the methods employed in the data collection and analysis. It also identifies ethical issues and discusses issues such as trustworthiness. In chapter five I present descriptions of the four teacher participants and situate them in their classrooms, schools, school boards, and surrounding neighborhoods. I then introduce the four principals and the four school board administrators. I also identify and describe a set of texts that appeared to be related to the teachers’ assessment work in some way. Chapter six presents the study findings, conclusions. I present and discuss the literacy assessment texts that organized the teachers work. I will aim to show how the work contributes to the alignment of classroom curriculum with accountability practices at a national and international/transnational level.
Chapter Two

Review of the Literature

Introduction

As noted in chapter one, the broad purpose of my study was to investigate how teachers in primary classrooms were coordinating curriculum work to accommodate and integrate the increased requirements to conduct formal and informal literacy assessments. I adopted IE to help me understand better how teachers’ curriculum work was connected to and shaped by assessment requirements and how their assessment work was itself aligned with and connected to the work in other sites of education such as policy making and even sites of economic policy making at local, national and international levels (see DeVault, 2008; DeVault & McCoy, 2006). Within a complex network of accountability practices, literacy assessments loom large for teachers, students, administrators and politicians. To enrich my understanding of accountability practices in Ontario primary classrooms, I drew on research and professional literature pertaining to accountability in education in order to show the reader how my study contributes to this highly controversial conversation about the role of assessment in education. By reviewing a large body of literature pertaining to accountability and literacy assessments from pre-school to adult education, I aim to show how my study will contribute to and extend the conversation.

In the first section of the chapter I discuss a range of terms commonly used in research and professional literature on the topic of assessment in education. My goal is to show how assessment has been integrated into curricular decision making over a period of time stretching back to the mid twentieth century. I then examine empirical studies of
assessment and essays that express a critical perspective toward education’s current preoccupation with assessment and accountability practices. I have organized this review under the following topics: assessments, literacy assessments, assessment and governance, accountability, accountability and teachers, accountability and institutional ethnography, and teachers’ work and intensification.

Assessments

The term assessment comes from the Latin word *assessus* (Soanes, 2003). Assessment is best described as an action that determines the importance size or value of things such as a taxable property or income. There are several examples of assessment in contemporary life such as: an evaluation of a rate or amount that is determined in a tax, a valuation of a property for tax, an evaluation of one’s feelings, or a judgment of a player in a team. For the purposes of this study, I am concerned chiefly with the term assessment as it relates to education and specifically literacy education.

Assessment preoccupies teachers. Since the last decade, numerous articles have been published on assessment in education and a vast quantity of professional literature for in-service and pre-service teachers describes and discusses assessment as it relates to teachers’ literacy practice (see Airasian, Engemann & Gallagher, 2012; Allington & Gabriel, 2012; Bainbridge, Heydon & Malicky, 2013; Bazerman, 2003; Burke, 2010, Butt, 2010; Davies, 2007; Gredler & Johnson, 2006; Gronlund & Waugh, 2009; Johnson, 2012; Kubiszyn & Borich, 2010; Martone & Sireci, 2009; Winch, Johnston, March, Ljungdal, & Holliday, 2006; Wotherspoon, 2004). In the professional literature, educational assessment is defined as the process of documenting, usually in measurable terms, knowledge, skills, attitudes, and beliefs that are learned in a course of study,
program, or grade level. Assessment can focus on individual student performances, performances in the learning community, the institution, or the educational system as a whole. Assessment can aid in classroom decision making by data collected from teachers from a variety of sources about a variety of aspects of the curriculum. The data can be synthesized, analyzed, and interpreted from the information gained from students, instruction, and classroom climate to determine what students know, value, and are able to do (Airasian, Engemann & Gallagher, 2012; Bainbridge, Heydon, & Malicky, 2013).

It is broadly agreed that there are several types of assessments in education that are utilized in schools and by teachers to assess students’ learning.

An assessment of student achievement typically uses sets of items designed to measure performances on a set of learning tasks and is administered under specified conditions such as time limits and open or closed book options. An assessment is an integral part of learning and is a sample of a student’s achievement. Many different performance samples are needed to get a clear view of a student’s achievement in literacy (Baker 2006). An example of an achievement assessment would be a standardized test that measures skills and knowledge learned.

Assessments can be used to compare the grades of students with one another, or compare performances to an established criterion, such as a driving test criterion when one wants to obtain a license to drive a car. This type of assessment is known as a criterion-referenced assessment. A norm-referenced assessment is not measured against any criteria. It is an effective way of comparing students to other students. Standards may vary from year to year (Airasian, Engemann & Gallagher, 2012). An example of a norm-referenced assessment would be the provincial mandated assessments.
Standardization is a method of promoting reliability. Standardization can apply to the scoring of an assessment or to its administration. Some standardized tests are norm-referenced to “determine how well the learners in the class perform on the test in relation to the learners in the standardization sample” (Bainbridge, Heydon, & Malicky, 2013, p. 231). To interpret test scores is to show how much variation exists between the students’ score and the average or expected value. Standard errors of measurement are used to calculate the standard scores such as percentile rankings (Bainbridge, Heydon, & Malicky, 2013; Gredler & Johnson, 2004, Gronlund & Waugh, 2009). Some standardized tests are criterion referenced. This means that the learners are expected to demonstrate mastery of particular skills or knowledge of particular content. Standardized criteria are common in education. For example they may take the form of is assessed against “a standard-based set of criteria, such as curricular outcomes or expectations” (Bainbridge, Heydon, & Malicky, 2013, p. 230).

The term standardized is often used to refer to assessments that are commercially produced, whether or not the standardization refers to the scoring or the implementation. In my study, an example of a standardized assessment was the Developmental Reading Assessments (DRA and DRA™2) (Beaver & Carter, 2004, 2005, Pearson Education, 2012). Usually included in these commercial standardized assessments are a basic set of directions, a specified scoring system and a prescribed method of administration. Standardized assessments provide several types of information to teachers, schools and school boards, such as information about attitudes and achievements. Gronlund and Waugh (2009) provide particular features of standardized tests that they found important:

1. The content of the test is based on widely used textbooks and curriculum guidelines.
2. The test items are written by test experts in consultation with subject-matter experts and are based on a clear set of specifications.

3. The test items are tried out, reviewed, analyzed for difficulty and discriminating power, and either revised or eliminated.

4. The final set of items is selected on the basis of the test specifications.

5. Directions for administering and scoring the test are rigidly prescribed.

6. The test is administered to select groups of students to establish national, regional, or statewide norms for interpretation of the test scores.

7. The final version of the test is published along with a test manual that describes the test’s technical qualities and the procedures for administering, scoring, interpreting, and using the results (p. 207).

Assessment has gathered a large lexicon to describe its procedures and outcomes. The assessment terminology used in the primary classrooms I observed in my study included diagnostic assessments, formative assessments, summative assessments and evaluation. A diagnostic assessment is an assessment that is taken prior to the topic that will be taught. Diagnostic assessment is meant to be as assessment for learning (Airasian, Engemann & Gallagher, 2012). A diagnostic assessment is sometimes called a pre-assessment. This assessment provides teachers with information about their students’ prior knowledge and knowhow and also provides a baseline for understanding how much learning has taken place after a learning activity is completed. Diagnostic assessments usually take place before a unit of instruction, such as the beginning of the school year or a term. The teacher is looking for the students’ prior knowledge of a topic, observation of the students’ learning styles, or the students’ ability to apply the knowledge to their work. For example, in my study, one teacher administered her own short reading assessments in
the form of running records at the beginning of the year to see where her students were ‘at’. She wanted to know what achievement level according to the official Language Curriculum the students were reading.

Formative assessments happen when the teacher utilizes observation such as questioning to inquire what the students have learned or what they are thinking about or puzzled about. Formative assessment is known as assessment as learning (Airasian, Engemann & Gallagher, 2012). Formative assessments can also utilize qualitative feedback rather than numerical or letter grades for the students (Bainbridge, Heydon, & Malicky, 2013). Or, marking a piece of student’s work can alter and modify the teaching to improve students’ learning while instruction is taking place. The teacher makes decisions about whether to proceed, review, or to change plans for the next unit of instruction. For example, in my study a quick-write was utilized by one teacher to determine if the students were able to grasp a new strategy on writing. A quick-write involves asking a question, giving people a set amount of time for responding (usually between one to ten minutes), and either hearing or reading the responses. The quick-write can be modified endlessly, depending on circumstances (Gronlund & Waugh, 2009).

Formative assessments are contrasted with summative assessments. Summative assessment is sometimes called assessment of learning (Airasian, Engemann & Gallagher, 2012). Summative assessments summarize what the student has learned at a particular time such as culmination of a term of work. The teacher looks for how well the students have learned and understood the unit or topic of instruction, whether they are ready for the next topic or unit of instruction, and/or what grade or mark to be issued (Airasian, Engemann & Gallagher, 2012). Performance-based assessments are focused on students’ achievement. A performance-based assessment can be something that students create
such as a task or perform a task based on what they learned. An example in my study of a summative assessment or a performance-based assessment was when one teacher had her students do a writing project at the end of a social studies unit.

A key term that related to assessment is evaluation. Evaluation is the process of using assessments to determine the level of student learning, interest, and/or attitude and about the quality of classroom instruction (Airasian, Engemann & Gallagher, 2012). Evaluation takes place after assessments have been completed and data has been collected so teachers can make decisions such as regarding future teaching, student groupings and student promotion. Evaluation can be formative and/or summative. Formative evaluation can take place during instruction, with the intention of improving the value or effectiveness. Summative evaluation can take place after a completed project at a later point in time or circumstance. The evaluation process allows teachers to make informed judgments and decisions.

Evaluation is preceded by formal and informal assessments. Kubiszyn and Borich (2010) contend that a formal assessment is one in which the results count towards course marks or grades, such as an end of year exam or scored reading tests designed to measure student achievement after a period of instruction has been completed. Informal assessments are administered more casually. Informal assessments can include diagnostic assessments, formative assessments, oral questioning, short tests or quizzes, or class-based assessments that can be more supportive to a student’s learning, and more supportive to the teacher in their process of teaching.

Decisions that are made from the results of assessments can have prominent educational, financial, or social impact. The results of assessments are often divided into two categories: high stakes and low stakes. Assessments always have implications for a
variety of stakeholders including the business community. High stakes assessments, which are usually formal assessments, may have a long lasting impact and significance on the student’s educational opportunities. High stakes assessments are often standardized. An example of high stakes assessments in my study was the provincial achievement examination administered in the spring of grade three. During my field observation, students were practicing to write the examinations. High stakes assessments may be used to determine a student’s level of performance relative to the performance of other students of similar age and grade or a criterion, such as state academic standards. Some examples of important decisions that are based on high stakes assessments include whether a student will be promoted to the next grade, whether a student will receive a high school diploma; schools are classified as unacceptable, acceptable, or exemplary in terms of their educational performance, schools, principals, or teachers receive financial or other incentives, or penalties, based on student performance of a high stakes assessment (Kubiszyn & Borich, 2010).

Low stakes assessments often refer to the day to day assessments that have a limited impact on students’ future careers or prospects (Butt, 2010). They are often informal assessments and most of them are teacher-made (Baker, 2006). In my study, one teacher administered a short ten question quiz on math calculations each morning. Another teacher chose ten words from the word wall for weekly Friday morning spelling tests.

Assessment can play a central role in the instructional cycle in the classroom. An instructional cycle is a recursive process of teaching and learning (see Airasian, Engemann & Gallagher, 2012; Oakleaf, 2009). Oakleaf (2009) suggests that the instructional cycle begins with identifying learning goals and moves through the
following steps: teacher assessment of student readiness and diagnostic assessments: instruction and practice; receiving and giving feedback to students such as administering formative assessments; ongoing formal and informal teacher and student assessment of student learning along with teacher adjustment of instruction. Finally, re-teaching and re-learning is conducted as needed, and then, formal teacher assessment of student learning is administered in the form of a summative assessment. Please see Figure 1 for a graphic representation of a continuous instructional cycle.

The instructional cycle includes seven stages that follow through from identifying the learning goals to final formal assessment of student learning where the cycle begins again. By encouraging continuous improvement of instruction, the cycle process ensures increased student learning (Oakleaf, 2009). There is evidence in the literature that assessments rather than curriculum sometimes drive the instructional cycle (Parkinson &
Stooke, 2012). The question raised is: How does the teacher determine the learning goals. However in my study I noticed a problem that assessments actually manipulated the instructional cycle; this is discussed further in chapter six.

Research in the area of assessment covers a broad range of topics. These include the purposes of assessment (Buhle & Blachowicz, 2009; Butt, 2010; Davies, 2007; Dennis, 2010; Johnson, 2012), the value of assessments (Davies, 2007; Dennis, 2010), the validity and trustworthiness of various approaches to assessment (Buhle & Blachowicz, 2009), the limitations of assessments (Teale, Hoffman Paciga Lisy & Berkel, 2009), and the constraints that assessments place on students, teachers schools and other stakeholders (Teale, Hoffman, Paciga, Lisy, & Berkel, 2009).

An example of research that addresses the purposes of assessment is in Davies’ (2007) research that involved students within the classroom assessment process. Davis stated that “when students make choices about their learning, their engagement and achievements increase, when they have no choices, their engagement and learning decreases” (p. 34). Similarly, Dennis (2010) states that teachers must consider the abilities that students bring to the classroom. Teachers must focus on those abilities and think best to build upon to provide meaningful instruction. Like Dennis, Johnson (2012) argued that “our assessment practices reflect our beliefs about the use of feedback to improve instruction” and that “assessment is a reflection of values; our assessments policies put into action our beliefs about the ability of all students to succeed” (p. 1). In particular, assessment researcher Butt (2010) argued that “improved test scores do not automatically imply improved learning – they may merely reflect improved ability at taking tests” (p. 36).
An example of the validity and trustworthiness of various approaches to assessment can be found in an American study about a teacher in a kindergarten class who worked with a literacy coach. Buhle and Blachowicz (2009) found that by comparing the students’ recent spring average scores to the state achievement targets would help to inform the decisions about the following year’s curriculum and instruction. Notably, Teale, Hoffman, Paciga, Lisy, and Berkel (2009) argued the limitations and constraints of assessments in their research, and found that sometimes the use and misuse of assessment data and the preoccupation with reading and writing assessment was worrying. Teals et al. contended that specifically mandated assessments created a major source of stress for teachers.

Literacy Assessments

Much has been written about the purposes of literacy assessments and it is broadly agreed that literacy assessment is a crucial component of the effective teaching of literacy (Allington & Gabriel, 2012; Bainbridge, Heydon, & Malicky, 2013; Calkins, 2001; Gredler & Johnson, 2004; Winch, Johnston, March, Ljungdahl & Holliday, 2004). In my study, teachers discussed reading assessments at length. For this reason I too pay particular attention to literature that discusses reading and reading assessments. The teachers’ focus on reading reflects a focus on reading in teachers’ professional literature such as *The Reading Teacher* or ETFO Voice.

There are several formal and informal ways to assess students’ reading skills that include: retelling the passage which has just been read by the student; administering running records where the teacher listens to the student read and takes note of oral reading errors; making portfolios which are a collection of the students’ work that show
significant aspects of development over a period of up to a year; and listening to reading
where the teacher asks comprehension questions to the student about a passage that has
just been read by the student (Burke, 2010, Johnson, 2012; Winch, Johnston, March,
Ljungdal, & Holliday, 2006; Wotherspoon, 2004). Researchers agree that to read
efficiently, students need to read a lot, they need books they can read, they need to learn
to read fluently and they need to develop thoughtful literacy. Allington and Gabriel
(2012) suggest that “the best way to improve reading achievement, as measured by
standardized test scores or any other measure, is with high quality reading lessons” (p. 2).
Educators need to be matching readers with books, understanding and supporting
student’s habits, values, and self perceptions as readers, and taking an early note of
students who fail to succeed (Calkins, 2001).

In the teaching of reading, print literacy assessment is regarded as an important
tool for monitoring the ongoing reading development of students and it provides teachers
and administrators with information on how well their literacy programs and teaching
practices are meeting the learning needs of their students. Winch et al. (2006) suggest that
focusing on each student individually to assess reading, writing and comprehension “can
be time consuming” (p. 138) and by assessing four or five students a day, while the rest of
the class is working independently, the assessments can be completed over a period of a
week.

All provincial schools mandate particular assessments such as Developmental
Reading Assessment (DRA and DRA™2) (Beaver & Carter, 2004, 2005, Pearson
Education, 2012), and the Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark Assessment System (BAS)
(Fountas & Pinnell, 2012) and those are described further in chapter five. In Ontario
classrooms, literacy assessments that have been specifically mandated for use by some
school boards include the Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA and DRA™2). The DRA and DRA™2 is a reading and comprehension assessment that is administered at least twice per year to each student in the classrooms. In my study, I observed the DRA and DRA™2 in one school board and describe them further in chapter five. The Ontario Writing Assessments (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2006) can be administered throughout the year to each student in the classroom. However, not all schools mandate these writing assessments although they are aligned with the Grade 1-8 Ontario Curriculum Language (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2006). Another packaged assessment program that I saw in my fieldwork was the Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark Assessment System (BAS) (Fountas & Pinnell, 2012). This reading assessment program links assessment to instruction with the use of running records in reading. In my study, the above mentioned assessments were adapted to suit the school’s needs. This statement is elaborated in chapter five. For all of these assessments, in my study, teachers saw it as their responsibility to try to accelerate their students through a set of levels in a timely way to prepare for the next testing session. The students were expected to progress evenly as assessments increased in difficulty throughout the year. When I was at the sites for my data collection, I paid close attention to ways in which teachers interacted with the literacy texts and assessments, and as Smith (2006) stated, at the same time I explored their actions in relation to the “relations of ruling”. This too is further described later in the thesis.

Assessment and Governance

“After several decades of globalization, dramatic economic restructuring has created intense pressure on national education systems to prepare students to participate
in the new economy” (DeVault, 2008, p. 3). National, international, and supranational organizations promote evaluations of education systems in the global economy. The Programme for International Student Assessments (PISA) was set in motion in 1997 by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). The PISA is an international study that is aimed to evaluate education systems worldwide by testing the skills and knowledge of 15 year old students. To date, students representing more than 70 countries and economies have participated in the assessment (OECD, 2013). Every three years a randomly selected group of 15 year olds take PISA tests in reading, mathematics and science with focus given to one subject in each year of assessment. The students and school principals fill in questionnaires on the students’ family backgrounds and the way their schools are run. The 2012 data collection focused on mathematics and problem solving. “PISA develops tests which are not directly linked to the school curriculum and provides context through the background questionnaires which can help analysts interpret the results” (OECD, 2013).

The mission of the OECD stated that: Better Policies for Better Lives promotes policies that the authors state “will improve the economic and social well-being of people around the world. The OECD provides a forum in which governments can work together to share experiences and seek solutions to common problems” (OECD, 2013). The OECD statements include the following:

- Measure productivity and global flows of trade and investment.
- Analyze and compare data to predict future trends.
- Set international standards on a wide range of things, from agriculture and tax to the safety of chemicals. (p. 2)
The OECD stated that “Canada continues to be a leader in higher education, with its high attainment rates and its ability to produce a skilled workforce with generally good labour-market outcomes” (p. 1) and “Canada also spends more on tertiary education than most other OECD countries” (OECD, 2013).

*The Progress in International Reading Literacy Study* (PIRLS) (National Center for Education Statistics, 2013) is coordinated by the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA) (Institute of Education Sciences) (OECD 2013). PIRLS is an international comparative study of the reading literacy of young students. PIRLS studies the reading achievement and reading behaviors and attitudes of grade four students in the United States and students in the equivalent of grade four in other participating countries. The first administration of PIRLS was in 2001 that included 36 education systems in countries such as Canada, Hong Kong, and a Special Administrative Region of the People’s Republic of China. It was followed five years later by the second administration in 2006 to students in 45 international education systems. The third and latest administration of PIRLS was in 2011, with 53 international education systems participating at grade four (National Center for Education Statistics, OECD, 2013).

Assessment studies of primary, adolescent and adult literacy by educational researchers (Burgess 2008; Butt, 2010; Hamilton, 2011; Rowsell, McLean & Hamilton, 2012) are important to my study because they show how teachers’ literacy assessment work was aligned with and connected to work in other educational contexts. Burgess’ (2008) ethnographic study of the practice of planning learning and recording progress through the use of individual learning plans in one adult literacy classroom found an importance of literacy practices in the implementation of education policy. Butt (2010)
found in his qualitative research study of adolescent literacy assessment in schools in the United Kingdom, that because the Standard Assessments Tests (SATs) were abolished early in 2009, many teachers were opposed to the over-assessment of (SATs) for 14-year-olds too, and many teachers were not, “perhaps influenced by senior management teams who have built their assessments systems around the regular input of SATs results and other high stakes assessment data” (p. 129). Butt argued that high stakes and summative assessments still existed because of the schools’ insistence on maintaining testing regimes, even though the SATs had been abolished. Butt contended that high stakes assessments can considerably affect the next stage of a student’s learning, the choice of educational and qualifications available, and future employment prospects.

Hamilton (2011) used ethnographic data (observational records including field notes, interviews with participants, collections of documents and artifacts) to study adult literacy policies in the United Kingdom. Hamilton stated that “adult literacy remains an ambiguous social space” (p. 69). Rowsell, McLean and Hamilton (2012) researched adolescent and adult literacy and argued the importance of critically evaluating the potential of visual literacy as a dimension of the school context.

Accountability

Accountability is an aspect of governance that has been central to discussions of public sector work, non-profit, and/or private and corporate institutions. For educational leaders, accountability is the acknowledgment and assumption of responsibility for actions, decisions, and policies including administration and governance (Betebenner, 2012; Dimitriadis & Lamont Hill, 2012; Linn, 2008). Accountability encompasses the
obligation to report, explain and be answerable for resulting consequences. Often in educational governance, accountability has expanded beyond the basic definition of being called to account for one's actions. It has been described as an account-giving relationship between individuals, to justify them, and to suffer punishment in the case of eventual misconduct.

DeVault (2008) wrote that “after several decades of globalization, dramatic economic restructuring has created intense pressure on national education systems to prepare students to participate in the new economy” (p. 3) and to compete with graduates from other countries. In Canada, specifically in Ontario, within the last two decades, a Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat was established to help boost student achievement. At the time of my data collection, experienced educators (known as student achievement officers) “work directly with schools and school boards across the province to build capacity and implement strategies to improve students’ reading, writing and math skills” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2012, p. 1). Several efforts include: working with school boards to set student achievement targets, improving student achievement, providing resources, and supporting teachers: “A solid foundation in literacy and numeracy gives students the widest range of choices in their academic career and beyond” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2012, p. 1).

In her introduction to a chapter by Griffith and André-Bechely, DeVault (2008) explained that embedded in the globalized policies are “conceptual currencies of effectiveness and skill” that represent teachers’ responsibilities in increasingly economic terms and produce “[n]ew forms of performance management” (p. 40). Griffith and André-Bechely (2008) argued that many of the current changes in education are
“embedded in a conception of the need to change schooling to provide for Canada’s participation in a global economy” (p. 42). Griffith and Andrée-Bechely indicated that a labour force produced must have the skills that meet the needs of global capital. In Merriman and Nicoletti’s (2008) research on globalization and the American education system, discussion focused on how globalization had an impact on the welfare of the United States and how that country was tied to the welfare of other countries by economics, environment, politics, culture, information and technology. However, a more global perspective has been slow to appear in school curricula because limited classroom time is already devoted to existing curricula. Merriman and Nicoletti argued that standardized testing and meeting government mandates as well limits teachers’ time. The authors stated that “changing the mind-set of students and teachers to recognize the importance of globalization requires the efforts of a visionary school leader who is committed to the importance of global education” (p. 14).

Linn (2008) stated that school accountability results are best thought of as “providing potentially valuable descriptive information rather than supporting strong inferences about school quality” (p. 699). Taubman (2009) argued that mathematical processes and the impersonality of numbers “have replaced individual teachers’ often unique and context specific approaches to teaching” (p. 6).

Curriculum scholars (e.g. Au, 2009; Eisner, 2002; Martone & Sireci, 2009; Sloan, 2008) argued that the movement for school accountability is essentially a movement for more effective top-down control of the schools. Griffith and Andrée-Bechely (2008) also observed that although schools have been subjected to extensive, top-down restructuring during the past three decades, the standardization practices and global education
discourses, including educational policy borrowing across national boundaries resulted in students undertaking “educational work in local classrooms that has been developed by international educational publishing corporations” (p. 41). Griffith and André-Bechely point out that standardized tests required by educational policy-makers in diverse provincial and state educational systems, “have strong similarities in terms of content and process” (p. 41). Additionally, Martone and Sireci (2009) argued that in this era of accountability, it is crucial that different components of an educational system such as state organizations, school districts, and schools, work together and support each other to send a consistent message to teachers and students about what is required. Alignment of these educational institutions will help to facilitate assessment and instruction. They contended that teachers need valuable professional development to gain a better understanding of the outcomes from standardized assessments. Consistency of alignment is needed to ensure that every student has opportunity to learn the content on which they are assessed and to demonstrate proficiency on the assessments (Martone & Sireci, 2009).

Several educational researchers (Betebenner, 2012; Butt, 2010; Comber, 2012; Eisner, 2002; Hopmann, 2008; Sloan, 2008) have studied adolescent literacy in relation to accountability. This research is important to my study because they show how teachers’ literacy assessment work is accountable, aligned and connected to the work in other sites of local and national educational policy making.

Betebenner’s (2012) study of American education stated that “current state accountability systems rely heavily upon performance standards to make judgments about the quality of education” (p. 439). In the U.S., federal adequate yearly progress (AYP) requirements use annual snap-shots of student’s achievement relative to state performance standards to make judgments about education quality. Betebenner asserted that the snap-
shot approach is appropriate for making judgments about the achievement level of students such as student status, but it is inappropriate to make judgments about educational effectiveness or student progress. Betebenner argued that “status measures are blind to the possibility of low achieving students attending effective schools” (p. 439).

Research has shown that policy makers’ deliberations affect the daily behaviours of teachers in classrooms. Butt (2010) found that connections between accountability and assessment were strong in his research in United Kingdom schools. His research noted that governments tended to assume that teachers will be “slow and inefficient in implementing change” (p. 34), and that accountability systems are implemented to immediately raise standards and meet targets. He argued that policy-makers and ministers in advanced economies used terminology such as “no child left behind”. The policy-makers also set immediate targets that stated “when they are impatient to impose change” (p. 35). By raising expectations of student performance, changes must be enforced into instantaneous action by the schools and their students. Popham (2011) agreed that since large-scale accountability tests had become increasingly important, the deliberations of policy makers affected the daily behaviours of teachers in classrooms. Additionally, in education, critics have argued that accountability practices contribute to the maintenance of social inequities (Apple, 2004; Au, 2009; Comber, 2012; Sloan, 2008).

Accountability research has shown the debate concerning the improvement of schooling. Eisner (2002) found that in the United States and United Kingdom the debate of the improvement of schooling was centered on the appropriateness of prescriptions by federal authorities of common national standards. Eisner argued that when society becomes interested in the quality of public education, monitoring of schools happens frequently, and the national goals for education are reiterated in a public forum. In
Eisner’s research, accountability occurred when “through standardization of assessments and prescriptive curriculum” by the “tightening up and reducing the professional discretionary space for teachers, efforts are made to create more educationally productive schools” (p. 52). Contrastingly, Hopmann’s (2008) research of historical and comparative research and using PISA as an example argued that even though accountability is a global phenomenon, the ways and means of executing and experiencing accountability are not. Hopmann stated that how accountability is experienced depends upon the relationship between the public and its institutions.

A discussion about the improvement of schooling brings up the issue of standard setting. Several documents that set standards for teachers and students that related to my study include: The Ontario curriculum: Grades 1-8: Language (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2006), A guide to effective instruction in reading: Kindergarten to grade 3 (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2003), and the achievement charts that are included in The Ontario curriculum: Grades 1-8: Language (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2006) show levels that the teachers can address so their students can attain. Brown (2012) stated that:

Standard setting has become an important and highly visible activity during the last decade. The relationship between curriculum design and standard setting has been less visible. Significant debate has ensued over the appropriate level of rigor in reading, language arts and mathematics that should be required for high school graduation (p. 579).
Accountability and Teachers

Numerous educational researchers have conducted studies on accountability and teachers’ work and stress (Bazerman, 2003; Calkins 2001; Cremin, 2006; Dimitriadis & Lamont Hill, 2012; Gorman, 1988; Kubiszyn & Borich, 2010; Lawn, 1987; Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery, & Taubman, 2004, 2008; Popham, 2011; Sloan, 2008; Valli & Buese, 2007).

Calkins (2001) argued that teachers need to hold their teaching accountable for having a notable effect on the students’ work. She stated that “our assessment system should provide us with a constant source of feedback on our progress toward our goals” (2001, p. 156). Cremin (2006) argued that the high value that is placed on assessments and high levels of achievement targets in the classrooms “have created short-cuts and inflexible routines that have constrained teacher creativity and reduced professional autonomy and artistry” (p. 416). Cremin (2006) contended that teachers have succumbed to compliance and conformity rather than using their imagination and insight in their daily work. Popham (2011) agreed that teachers often race through some curriculum content and give less attention to other curriculum content that is not assessed by accountability tests. Often, teachers “impose excessive test-preparations drills on their students” (Popham, 2011, p. 296) and test scores may improve, but the joy of learning is dampened. Popham argued that because of the pressure put on the students, no actual improvement of student achievement took place.

A study by Sloan (2008) focused on teacher accountability. Sloan argued that one urban school district in the United States and an intervention by an economics consulting firm shows clear connections between the introduction of neoliberal language and values and the formulation of test-centered curriculum policies at the district level. Sloan’s two
year case study found that the overall quality and equitability of the classroom instruction at the school had declined. Many of the teachers grew frustrated with the “newly scoped-and-sequenced curricula” (p. 572) that they characterized as scripted. Resentment increased as “many pressures placed on them by the district-level administrators to conform to the new curricula mandates and produce higher test scores” (p. 572). Many extra-curricular activities had to be abandoned to administer the state test. Sloan argued that publishing companies “endeavour to influence national and state level educational policies” (p. 571) and labels accountability as a business. Like Sloan, Bazerman (2003) argued that “local, state, and federal policies that have put great weight and high stakes on a battery of assessment tools that stand outside the daily life of the classroom are intended to hold classrooms, teachers, and schools accountable for results” (p. 429). Furthermore, Au (2009) argued that the curriculum is being regulated by high-stakes testing and the regulation is a manifestation of the evaluative roles in operation.

Pinar’s (2004), discussion of Apple and Teitelbaum’s (1986) research of teaching in the United States raised the issue of teacher autonomy: “[A]re teachers losing control of their skills and curriculum?” (p. 251). Pinar et al (2004), argued that “public-school teachers have been reduced to domestic workers instructed by politicians” (p. xi) and “politicians have taken control of what is to be taught: the curriculum” (p. 3); Gorman (1988), who “declared that accountability and pre-packaged curriculum directly franchised teachers from their own occupation” (p. 251); and Lawn (1987), who found that teacher unrest in Great Britain produced a reproduction of colonial rule. Pinar et al. (2008) asserted that the political theorists “saw the reproduction of the status quo, despite apparent efforts to make change.” and “teachers were it seemed, unwitting victims” (p. 252).
Valli and Buese’s (2007) research examined the impact of federal, state, and local policies on the roles that elementary school teachers are asked to assume inside and outside the classroom in the United States. Valli and Buese found that teachers’ roles changed in an era of high-stakes accountability. They found in their analysis that over a 4-year period there were increases in teachers’ tasks, intensification and expansion of teachers’ work, impacts on teacher-student relations, and high teacher stress. The teachers felt that they had to race through the curriculum just to get through it and abandon inquiry lessons as there was no time for them.

More recently, Kubiszyn and Borich’s (2010) proposed that because of reduced school budgets and elimination of special programs, many people had become dissatisfied with the United States’ education system. Kubiszyn and Borich argued that the everyday decisions of classroom teachers were coming under close scrutiny. An example of teachers’ dissatisfaction with accountability happened in early of 2013, at Garfield High School in Seattle, USA. The schools’ teachers unanimously voted not to administer district-mandated standardized tests, calling them a waste of time and money. The teachers believed that the standardized tests were inaccurate, hurtful, and inequitable. The teachers boycotted and “stood up to the accountability machine” (Collett, 2013, p. 1).

A Canadian example of teachers resisting accountability measuring happened when the very active organization Ontario Teachers’ Federation (OTF) lobbied on a provincial educational mandate. In 2010, they argued that provincial testing, specifically the EQAO, needed to be reduced in their significance. McLaughlin (2010) argued that EQAO tests were originally meant to be an aid in examining the delivery of the curriculum and to report to parents. The OTF contended that since Ontario students did very well on international tests, large-scale tests were completely unnecessary. They
expressed that there were many alternative ways to collect data that would inform educational policy, that are less expensive, less intrusive, and save valuable classroom time (McLaughlin, 2010).

Dimitriadis and Lamont Hill (2012) scornfully argued that “if teachers simply did ‘what works’, students would learn (and test) more effectively” (p. 9). They argue that deskilling and banishing teachers’ intellectual ability replaces their individualities and judgments and turns them into a “rotating set of functionaries” (p. 9). Whereas Ravitch (2012) originally supported the American testing reform movement because she contended that it was for the purpose of destroying public education and teachers’ unions, she later argued that restructuring the teaching profession turned it into a market-based activity. Ravitch complained that teaching was more like a business as assessment-based accountability reduced the status of teaching and diminished teacher professionalism.

Teachers’ Work Intensification

It has long been recognized that teaching is hard work. Acker (1999, p. 4) wrote, “Primary teaching is incredibly difficult work; its physical, intellectual, and emotional challenges are generally unrecognized and unrewarded”. In this section I summarize research literature related to teachers’ changing responsibilities as a result of intense economic restructuring discussed earlier by DeVault (2008) (Acker, 1999; Comber, 2011; Comber, 2012; Comber & Nixon, 2009; Cohen, 2010; Gronlund & Waugh, 2009; Hargreaves, 1994; Kubiszyn & Borich, 2010; Mele-McCarthy, 2007; Parkinson & Stooke, 2012; Roberston, 2000; Sammons, Day, Kington, Gu, Stobart. & Smees, 2007; Shacklock, 1998; Wotherspoon, 2004).
Regarding teachers’ work, Hargreaves (1994) observed nearly twenty years ago, that teachers’ responsibilities were becoming more extensive and their roles were changing. He found that elementary teachers were seen as knowledgeable and experienced in curriculum development and improvement and had concerns about the child’s welfare at home as well as performance in school (p. 126). However, Hargreaves argued that the teaching profession was becoming more routinized and deskilled and controlled by prescribed programs, mandated curricula and instruction and “increasingly, teachers are having to attend more conscientiously to external expectations of growing stringency and they must also do this for a wider range of often competing publics and interest groups” (p. 149). He noted too that teachers’ work was being increasingly intensified and there had been major increases in accountability demands over the years. Teachers were “expected to respond to greater pressures under conditions that are at best stable and at worst deteriorating” (pp. 117-118). Patten (2009) reviewed Hargreaves and Shirley’s (2009) book *The Fourth Way: The Inspiring Future for Educational Change*. Hargreaves and Shirley argue that “a vision of an equal and interactive partnership between professionals in schools, governments and people in communities” needs to happen. Additionally, Shacklock (1998) observed in his study of teachers’ work in one secondary school that the teachers’ care in their professionalism played a contradictory role to the motivation and commitment that resulted in the intensification and control of their work. Because of the intensification of their work, the teachers had less time for curriculum decisions, lesson planning, correction of student work, professional development and social interaction with their colleagues. More time had to be focused on teaching extra classes, taking on more duties, and spending time on the promotion of the school as a market. Shacklock argued that the teachers’ pedagogical labour is regarded as
a “highly expandable resource in the production of surplus educational value” (p. 187) and that teaching is viewed as similar work of many other jobs not in education.

Robertson (2000) concurred with Hargreaves (1994), and Shacklock (1998), noting that curriculum reforms had increased the technical elements of teachers’ work and reduced the professional elements (p. 142). Robertson also stated that the nature of teachers’ work and teachers’ class location has been the outcome of a history of struggles that shaped ongoing politics of social class, gender and race (p. 3).

Throughout the 2000s, researchers have continued to note further intensification of teachers’ work and deteriorating working conditions. Wotherspoon (2004) argued that teachers in Canada and other nations were experiencing significant changes in their work amid global economic restructuring and the work of teaching was increasingly brought under the influence of politicians, policy-makers and the leaders of industry. Suarez-Orozco (2005) reported that teachers must challenge their students to engage and work within competing and contrasting cultural models. The students must adjust to the differences in gender, language, race, and ethnicity. An education for the global era must attend to the social and emotional sensibilities needed for cross-cultural work. Teachers must encourage their students to think more globally.

Sammons, Day, Kington, Gu, Stobart, and Smees (2007) found that teachers’ levels of commitment, “their positive professional identity were fundamental to their capacities to become and remain effective” (p. 699) and their capacities for resilience were mediated by factors in their workplace, personal lives and by the direction and pace of national and local interventions in the curriculum, including factors related to the governance of their schools. The researchers found that teachers “with strong commitment and resilience are likely to be more effective” and “that sustaining and
enhancing commitment and resilience is, therefore, a key quality and retention issue” (p. 699). Cohen (2010) wrote:

Teaching can sometimes be so overwhelming, but I have found that the secret is in taking it one day at a time and not taking things personally. It’s so easy to focus on the bad aspects of teaching rather than the good but, at the end of the day, I can always smile about something funny or heart-warming that happened in class, and I guess that’s what keeps me coming back every year (p. 105).

Gronlund and Waugh (2009) in their research on student achievement found that assessments can help the teachers in their work by making various instructional decisions having a direct influence on student learning and “can aid student learning” (p. 10). Kubiszyn and Borich (2010) recommended that teachers teach test-taking skills as part of their regular instruction as they found that students performed better on the tests if they had the test-taking skills. They also suggested that teachers eventually would have to report and interpret both formative and summative test and assessment data to parents, principals, counselors, review committees, and even the courts. However, Mele-McCarthy (2007) argued that while teaching the test content may have better assessment results, “it does not ensure the broad range of knowledge necessary to apply skills to new situations” (p. 13). Mele-McCarthy stated that in an accountability driven education era, the focus is on school districts, schools and teachers to establish student success through objective measures.

Black (2004) described teachers as anxious and apprehensive, especially about meeting the mounting needs of troubled students, doing justice to an all-consuming curriculum, and getting kids ready for a relentless series of tests. Australian researchers Comber and Nixon (2009) reported being “struck” (p. 334) by secondary teachers’
unwillingness to talk about pedagogy. In interviews with the researchers the teachers preferred to dwell on a plethora of “seemingly pointless bureaucratic demands” (p. 334). More recently, Comber’s (2012) research of teachers’ work found that mandated literacy assessments reorganized the work of teachers. In her previous research, Comber (2011) found that “what counts as literacy is increasingly fixed by the normative demands of high-stakes, standardized tests” (p. 5).

Accountability and Institutional Ethnography

The meanings attached to accountability in education evoke the notion of accountability as it is employed in IE. IE draws on Garfinkel’s (1967) definition of accountability from his ethnomethodolgoy. In ethnomethodolgoy accountability is intrinsically concerned with ways in which people’s actions are made accountable as particular kinds of activity such as being a good mother or an “A” student. My study explores accountability as it is used by policy makers and administrators, what Smith (2005, 2006) and others have called a discourse of accountability that currently pervades discussions about public sector work. The technical term from ethnomethodolgoy and the commonly used term in educational research literature are commensurable with my research goals since they help to elucidate ways in which teachers’ literacy assessment work is organized ways in which a preoccupation with assessment may be privileging accountability within the instructional cycle. This preoccupation with assessment and accountability “closes the gap between the intended and operational curricula in that it creates less and less space for teachers to interrupt or mediate the intended curriculum” (Pinar et al., 2008, p. 5). According to Pinar et al., the business sector is also indeed controlling more and more of the curriculum.
Studies that employ assessment and institutional ethnography in educational contexts include (Comber, 2012; Comber & Nixon, 2009; Stock, 2000; Tummons, 2010). My study adds to the array of IE studies. It is like building a patchwork quilt. My study is a quilt square that adds another square to the patchwork quilt. Tummons’ (2010) institutional ethnography and actor-network theory study of an analysis of assessment practices on one university-led teacher training course in England. Tummons argues that assessment practices are “characterized by complexity and contingency which are masked by the dominant discourses of quality assurance and managerialism” (p. 345). Since students have to participate in assessments because of the ruling relations currently organizing accountability in universities and other authoritarian external agencies such as government departments and professional bureaus, their teachers have to facilitate the assessments to meet the needs of their students and the demands of the university and therefore to those same external agencies.

Stock’s (2000) study of report cards in elementary schools explored the role of the report card in teachers’ work lives and how they performed their informal assessments in the classroom and then entered the assessments formally on to the report card form. Stock argued that the report card coordinated her participants’ informal assessments and planning for instruction. Her cumulative work resulted in a thesis which explored how the information found on a student’s report card was articulated with the teacher’s daily work of assessing students in the classroom.

Comber’s (2012) institutional ethnography study of mandated literacy assessments and teachers’ work in Australia found that the accountability of the teachers to the Australia’s National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) affected the teachers’ work in schools situated in low socioeconomic communities. Comber found
that the principals, teachers, and school support staff were spending significant amounts of time on data collection, management and communication and that time was taken away “from other learning areas that are important for students’ long term-engagement with schooling” (p. 133). In particular, in schools situated in low socioeconomic communities the teachers’ accountability work was worse. Not only were the mandated assessments reorganizing the teachers’ work, the students learned too that the data from the “internationally organized testing processes as exemplified in the NAPLAN tests” (p. 133) were important and they had to “coordinate and re-orient their work” (p. 133).

However, where Comber and her colleagues examined curriculum work in secondary schools, I explored primary literacy assessment and curriculum work in primary grades. My study examined the teachers’ constraints in delivering the language curriculum.

Concluding Remarks

This chapter surveys a broad range of literature from a variety of fields. Collectively, the literature points to increased demand for assessment in education and consequent intensification of teachers’ work. It identifies several reasons for these changes: global economic restructuring, global competition, increased demand for highly educated and skilled workers, competition from graduates from other countries, and increased accountability for teachers. My own study locates assessment work within an exploration of the primary language curriculum in Ontario classrooms. In the next chapter I introduce a number of concepts that curriculum researchers have used to discuss curriculum work and make a case that curriculum can be explored in a number of socially
organized work processes mediated by assessment work. I also provide an overview of Institutional Ethnography and its associated theoretical constructs.
Chapter Three
Lenses for Understanding Curriculum

Introduction

As Null (2011, p. 1) has observed, curriculum is not only what should be taught; it is the “heart of education.” This chapter explores notions of curriculum in the theoretical literature of Curriculum Studies and explains how these notions of curriculum are important to a study of teachers’ assessment work. In the chapter I also outline the theoretical underpinnings of IE and provide a rationale for examining curricular processes through that lens. I contend that curricula can be understood as social processes. Constructs such as hidden curriculum and washback helped me to recognize mechanisms by which factors not mentioned in official curriculum documents can mediate the enacted or lived curriculum and can mediate teachers’ curriculum work. Both hidden curriculum and washback provide powerful illustrations of social organization, what I have so far called the local and extralocal coordination of action in sites of institutional activity (Smith, 1987, 2005, 2006).

The idea that curriculum can be viewed as an ongoing process of coordination of people’s actions draws directly on the theoretical writing of Dorothy Smith (1987, 2005, 2006) and I devote the second part of the chapter to her ideas. As noted in chapter one my study is also informed by other IE researchers such as DeVault and McCoy (2002, 2006) and Comber (2007) as well as Dorothy Smith herself. Following examples of these researchers and especially the work of Comber (2011; 2012) and Comber and Nixon (2009), I framed my investigation into teachers’ assessment work as an analytic project
whose purpose is to map the social relations that link assessment work to other aspects of curriculum work and to work being carried out in other educational sites including but not only the Ontario Ministry of Education.

The final section of the chapter describes the role that texts play in an IE study. Studying the ways in which people use texts is central to an IE investigation. In my study, the ways that teachers utilized the literacy assessment texts as curricular informants brought into view formerly taken-for-granted aspects of teachers’ routine work. As I demonstrate in chapter six, assessments create particular kinds of work for teachers that may not be visible in the intended curriculum. I learned about the roles played by official texts such as the provincial curriculum documents and the mandated assessment texts that coordinated the teachers’ curriculum work, but I also examined the work created by texts such as the Daily Five (The Daily 5™) (Boushey & Moser, 2006, 2009) and the leveled readers associated with some popular commercial literacy assessment tools.

What is Curriculum?

The term “curriculum” is often understood as a set of courses and their content offered at an educational institution, but the word actually comes from the Latin word currere which means a racecourse or to run. An official school curriculum, then, is often thought of as “a race to be run, a series of objects, hurdles (subjects) to be passed” (Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery, Taubman, 2008, p.4). A present day curriculum may be thought to define the knowledge to be taught. It may be prescriptive and based on a more general syllabus which merely specifies what topics must be understood and the level of knowledge needed to achieve a particular grade or standard. In its broadest sense the curriculum may refer to all courses offered at a school, or to a defined and prescribed
course of studies, which students must fulfill in order to pass a certain level of education (Pinar et al. 2008). Where education is publicly funded, the curriculum is designed to address policy goals. An elementary school might discuss how its curriculum, or its entire sum of lessons and teachings, is designed to improve national testing scores. But an individual teacher might also refer to his or her curriculum, meaning all the subjects that will be taught during a school year.

Auger and Rich (2007) list many definitions of curriculum and note that the educational curriculum and educational policies are usually controlled through the implementation of curriculum standards. Auger and Rich contend that the curriculum “can be seen as a cultural construction (lived curriculum) and not simply a collection of ideas, concepts, and policies that have to be implemented in the classroom” (p. 242), and “when the curriculum is viewed as a cultural construction, “teachers recognize that subject matter, pedagogy, students, and the school community at large interact to shape it” (p. 242).

An official curriculum is a regulatory text that outlines the subjects that are taught and learning outcomes to be achieved at an educational institution. The Grade 1-8 Ontario Curriculum Language (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2006) is an exemplary regulatory text (Parkinson & Stooke, 2012) that relates directly to my study since it sets out what the public can expect children to learn in Ontario’s elementary language program in the four strands: oral communication, reading, writing and media literacy. Auger and Rich (2007) argue that the classroom teacher has a responsibility to implement the official curriculum. However, there “is often a discrepancy between what is articulated in curriculum and policy documents and what happens in the classroom” (p. 244). Aoki’s work, which has been celebrated by curriculum scholars as a great accomplishment in the twentieth
century, is relevant here. Aoki argued that “to be a teacher is to live in uncomfortable
space of tension between the curriculum-as-plan, and the curriculum-as-lived in actual
schools and classrooms” (Carson, 2004, p. 2).

An intended curriculum is the set of objectives that guide a curricular plan (Eisner,
2002). The intended curriculum answers questions about the curriculum makers’ purposes
and what students are supposed to learn. An example of an intended curriculum is the six-
week intensive learning plans developed by a school-based Professional Learning
Community (PLC) (Examples of such curricular planning are described in chapter five).

An enacted curriculum is what actually happens in the classroom and what people do to
prepare and evaluate the learning (Null, 2011). The enacted curriculum is not simply a
set of plans to be implemented by the teacher, but an active process in which planning,
acting and evaluating are related and integrated into the process. An enacted curriculum
includes the intended, assessed, and learned curricula. An enacted curriculum is
implemented based on the day-to-day choices and decisions teachers make about content
and learning experiences for students. It is also what students get the chance to learn, as
well as how teachers deliver the content. The enacted curriculum is what teachers deliver
in their instruction. For example, in my study, when one teacher planned for the
upcoming provincially mandated literacy assessments for her grade three students, she
made use of the questions from previous year’s assessments and planned her daily
instruction based on those questions. It is worth noting that the enacted curriculum
slightly differs from the intended curriculum because the students have input in the
enacted curriculum. Feedback from the students affects what is planned and taught.

Curriculum can be seen as a physical object such as The Grade 1-8 Ontario
Curriculum Language (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2006) which is a document that
can be picked up, read, and put down. Curriculum can also be seen as a process. The idea of curriculum as a process implicates the work carried out by teachers, students, and other actors as they interact with and create knowledge (Kelly, 2009). I see curriculum as an open-ended process; it is what teachers do to prepare, implement, and evaluate what happened. Curriculum as process includes the planning, the delivery, and the experiencing of curricular activities. Teachers enter the classroom with an idea of what is about to happen, which is their plan, then, through delivery of that plan, they can listen to feedback from the students, encourage questions, think, evaluate, adjust the outcomes of that plan, and evaluate further. The evaluation focuses on the suitability of the content and the methods selected, an evaluation of the process, not the students. In fact, the process of curriculum development is essential to achieve successful educational goals for students (Egan, 2012; Kelly, 2009; Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery, & Taubman, 2008).

To understand curriculum is to think about and raise questions about the relationship between knowledge and power, ideology and institution, the politics of education and teaching, processes of standardizing, legitimating, and accountability issues that come to define what constitutes curriculum (Kridel, 2010). Drawing on Kelly (2009) and other curriculum researchers (Carson, 2012; Egan, 2012; Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery, & Taubman, 2008), my study examines how teachers utilized and produced assessment tools, implemented the assessments, and often adapted them to suit their goals or requirements. I will show how that work was being aligned with goals of which teachers were not necessarily aware. I will also discuss ways in which assessments mediated a hidden curriculum, that is, a curriculum that was enacted in spite of teachers’ intentions.

Curriculum planning takes place at different levels from the highest level of policy making to the level of classroom planning and in-the-moment improvisation. The process
of curriculum planning is also and always a collaborative effort. It is an ongoing process and it occurs in iterative and recursive ways over time rather than in a single planning session. Neither is it carried out by one teacher or one school in isolation; it involves curriculum planning experts and professionals, researchers, parents, community members, teachers, and last but not least, learners.

Learners should be curricular informants. Null (2011) argues that if the needs, interests, and backgrounds of the learners are not taken into consideration, then the curriculum will not have an impact and may alter the curriculum development. To use an example of curriculum planning, from my study, principals and teachers participated and collectively planned many forms of assessment while attending the school board mandated professional learning community meetings. Many of these assessments were planned on the basis of the previous years’ mandated provincial assessments scores.

Joseph Schwab “changed the face of curriculum” (Null, 2011, p. 26) during the 1960s and 1970s. Schwab presented five curriculum commonplaces that he claimed could be found in any attempt to enact curriculum: teachers, learners, subject matter, context, and curriculum making. Together these commonplaces determine the aims, content, and methods of curriculum (Null, 2011, p. 27). The teachers are the central force in curriculum delivery. Teachers always teach something to someone somewhere. The learners are not only the students. The learners’ commonplace also refers to the idea of learning as the ultimate end for education. If the curriculum developers do not take into consideration the interests, needs, or backgrounds of the learners, then the curriculum will not have an impact on the learners. The subject matter is essential to curriculum: teachers teach learners something. The context or milieu refers to the setting in which curriculum is taught (Null, 2011).
Schwab’s *curriculum making* commonplace holds the teachers, learners, subject matter, context and curriculum together and includes three essential dimensions: practice, purpose and integration. The curriculum maker or specialist must work with the other four (teachers, learners, subject matter, and context) to ensure that the commonplaces are properly co-ordinated as changes with one will have consequences for the others (Null, 2011). The challenge for curriculum developers is to balance these five commonplaces while at the same time avoiding the trap of thinking that any one is sufficient by itself to make a good curriculum (Null, 2011).

All five curriculum commonplaces are relevant to my understanding of curriculum because they must be balanced in both theory and practice. If curriculum developers do not consider all of the five commonplaces, the curriculum will be ineffective and incomplete, the teachers may not be able to teach the requirements of it and students in the classroom may not be able to learn the content of the curriculum. The commonplaces are especially helpful for me in understanding teachers’ work and literacy assessments because they help me to understand why and how the commonplaces are crucial to the development of curriculum and curriculum studies.

Hidden Curriculum, Null Curriculum and Washback

A small set of curriculum constructs is central to my study. These are hidden curriculum, null curriculum and washback. The term hidden curriculum is used by many educators, sociologists and psychologists (Anyon, 1980; Apple, 1979, 1990, 2004a, 2006; Brint, Contreras & Matthews, 2001; Kelly, 2009; Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery, & Taubman, 2008; Wotherspoon, 2004). The term was coined by Philip Jackson (1968) who described it as “the lessons students learn that are not necessarily part of the planned or even the
enacted curriculum” (cited in Hansen, Driscoll, & Arcilla, 2007, p. 128). Apple’s (1990) discussion of Jackson’s ideas suggests that hidden curriculum is the “norms and values that are implicitly, but effectively, taught in schools and that are not usually talked about in teachers’ statements of end or goals” (p. 84). Other curriculum theorists have also noted that hidden curriculum is the routine and embedded practices of classroom life that shape children’s orientations in ways that are consistent with the demands of adult life. The curriculum is said to be hidden because “it directs students’ attention through invisible means, rather than through overt and explicit instruction” (Brint, Contreras & Matthews, 2001, p. 165). Anyon’s (1980) analysis suggests that the hidden curriculum of school work was preparation for routine work: that is, “preparation for relating to the processes of production in a particular way” (p. 90).

Wotherspoon (2004) argues that hidden curriculum refers to the more informal or less explicitly defined characteristics that are regular features of the schooling process. The operation of the hidden curriculum among participants “also serves to construct and reinforce identities both within and beyond schooling” (p. 97). Hidden curriculum is also defined as “the tacit teaching to students of norms, values, and dispositions that goes on simply by their living and coping with the institutional expectations and routines of schools day in and day out for a number of years” (p. 168). Pinar et al. (2008) define the hidden curriculum as the “unwanted outcomes of schooling” (p. 27) and as “the ideological and subliminal message presented within the overt curriculum, as well as a by-product of the null curriculum” (p. 27). The research of Michael Apple is particularly relevant to my study because Apple (1979, 1990, 2004a, 2006) discussed hidden curriculum in relation to accountability practices in education.
A null curriculum is constituted by parts of the curriculum that are deliberately avoided in teaching and the message sent to the students is that those things are not important. For example, a teacher who cancels a physical education class in order to teach more math is conveying to students that physical education is not particularly important. Pinar et al. (2008) defines “null or unstudied curriculum” as “those topics not included in the official curriculum” (p. 27). An example of a topic that is often not included is sex education. Null curriculum is important to my study because certain things that teachers neglect to teach might have impact on the students. What students do not process, they are unable to use. Because some things are left out of the curriculum, teachers may convey the message that these things are not important in their educational experiences or in our society.

Washback has been explored in studies of curriculum dating back to the 1990s (Messick 1996). Washback refers to the extent to which the introduction and use of a test influences teachers and learners to do things they would not otherwise do that promote or inhibit learning (Alderson & Wall, 1993; Messick, 1996; Muñoz & Álvarez, 2010; Nichols, 2007; Turner, 2009). There are two kinds of washback: positive and negative. A negative example would be teaching to the test. However, Messick examined the concept of washback in a positive light when he said that an example of washback can also be “authentic and direct assessments” (p. 241). In general terms, positive washback occurs when a testing procedure encourages good teaching practices. For example, if an oral proficiency assessment is introduced it is the expectation that it will promote the teaching of speaking skills (Taylor, 2005). Negative washback refers to the unexpected, harmful consequences of an assessment and the abandonment of the learning goals for the sake of an assessment. For example, instruction may focus too heavily on test preparation
at the expense of other activities (Taylor, 2005). Negative washback occurred at one of my research sites when a teacher described the learning cycles that she planned at their school meetings. The teacher said that because of the school’s low results on the previous year’s provincial assessments on descriptive writing tasks, their staff decided that their Learning Cycle would focus on descriptive writing.

An examination of washback and hidden curriculum can bring into view the relative importance of pedagogical practices and assessment practices and the ways in which the practices mediate an enacted or lived curriculum.

Curriculum Studies

Since the early twentieth century a diverse group of curriculum specialists have conducted research in curriculum studies (e.g. Auger & Rich, 2007; Dillon, 2009; Egan, 1978; Jackson, 1992; Kelly, 2009; Petrina, 2004; Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery, & Taubman, 2008, Schwab, 1978). There is consensus among scholars in the field that curriculum studies is a multi-purpose field concerned with what happens in education and that curriculum “can be understood only if … contextualized socially, economically, and politically” (Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery, & Taubman, 2008, p. 244). Curriculum studies evolved from an attempt to “study education and to explore educational problems in their own right” (Kelly, 2009, p. 24). Egan lists the key questions asked by curriculum studies researchers as follows:

Curriculum studies, in part, considers the answers to the following teaching and learning questions: What should be taught? To whom should it be taught? When should it be taught? By whom should it be taught? How should it be taught? and Why should it be taught? (Egan, 1978 cited in Heydon, 2009, p.132)
Augmented by Dillon (2009) who asked: “What are the things that make up curriculum? and What are we supposed to do about these things?” (p. 345). Dillon argued that to understand curriculum, educators must not only propose questions about curriculum, but they must understand curriculum, construct curriculum, and practice curriculum. Kelly (2009) defined curriculum studies as an “academic and intellectual exploration of all the factors that are needed to take into account of in order to devise an educational curriculum” (p. 23). He advised that curriculum studies should be established prior to developing the school curriculum. A requirement that is placed on curriculum researchers of curriculum, need to be critical and questioning in their approach.

Schwab (1978) listed two contrasting tensions in curriculum making. The first tension is between practice and theory. Schwab said that curriculum researchers should focus on more practical efforts rather than on theory (Jackson, 1992). The second tension is that curriculum researchers must do more research and focus themselves in the social sciences. Jackson observed that there are two versions of what it means to be a curriculum specialist: “moving toward practice: the curriculum specialist as consultant” and “moving toward the academy: the curriculum specialist as generalist” (Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery, Taubman, 2008, p. 37).

However, Petrina (2004) argued that “curriculum theorists love the politics of what should be learned? … but loathe the politics of how it should be organized for teaching” and instructional designers “detest the politics of what should be learned? but specialize in how it should be organized for teaching” (p.116). Petrina contends that this division of labour is a recent accomplishment in the field. The tensions that the curriculum theorists and the instructional designers have created will cause each side to adjust their way of thinking to “change the status quo of educational practice” (p. 117).
My study aims to resolve these tensions by considering curriculum processes as practices that embed theories and are informed by research.

Institutional Ethnography (IE) as a Strategy for Investigating Curriculum Processes

IE is committed to looking at ways in which people’s everyday activities draw them into the work of ruling (DeVault, 2006) and is therefore helpful in illuminating the workings of curricular processes such as hidden curriculum, null curriculum, and washback. The shared ontology of IE researchers is derived from Garfinkel’s (1967) ethnomethodology, a subfield of sociology that construes the social world as an ongoing social accomplishment (Parkinson & Stooke, 2012). It is intrinsically concerned with ways in which people’s actions are made accountable as work in specific contexts. Additionally, Smith reimagined Marx’s theory of coordinating people’s activities on a large scale with people who do not know each other and do not meet face to face (DeVault & McCoy, 2006). Smith uses the term “extralocal social relations” to refer to this process.

For the institutional ethnographer, ordinary routine activities provide a place from which to begin an ethnographic investigation into the organization of a small area of institutional activity. Grahame and Grahame (2001) state that institutional ethnography “centers on work (not just paid employment) and involves studying the work activities through which people are themselves involved in producing the world they experience in daily life” (p. 1). This means that the teachers who participated in my master’s research were considered to be involved in producing the curriculum even if it was constraining their efforts to provide creative activities.
Work in IE studies is always defined generously to denote any action that contributes to “life as usual” in a social setting. This means that the researcher does not limit the scope of inquiry to the kinds of work that are listed in job descriptions or performance evaluations. For example, in my master’s research I wanted to learn how small acts of caring such as helping a child with a snowsuit at recess could play into the curriculum organization. Later in this thesis I discuss scheduling and alignment as types of work related to assessment work.

As noted above, Institutional Ethnography (IE) was first developed by the Canadian sociologist, Dorothy E. Smith, during the 1970s. Smith’s goal was to help people to understand how their routine activities were linked to other activities in ways that were causing problems for them and in the case of human services professionals such as teachers, for the people they aimed to help. She first envisioned IE as a feminist sociology. Her critique of the conceptual practices of power (Smith 1990) drew directly on feminist insights. However, she now thinks of IE more broadly as a sociology for people (Smith, 2005).

Smith’s concern with methodological issues owes much to her involvement in the feminist movement since the 1960s. Feminist researchers aim “to understand better where they fit into a larger systems and in relation to others” (DeVault, 1999, p. 210). As a second-wave feminist, Smith (2005) designed an ontology in which participants in a study are expert informants rather than subjects. They “remain the subjects, the knowers, or potential knowers of what IE discovers” (p. 53). The IE exploration must start with actual people and their activities and how activities are coordinated.

Talking about work activities with the people who actually do the work can provide clues about the ways in which work in a setting is linked to work in other settings.
Such linkages often form a sequence or chain and this is known in IE as a social relation. Social relations tend to cluster around specific societal functions such as health care and education and in IE the clusters of social relations are the institutions. Smith also calls them the ruling relations because they accomplish the work of ruling or governance in contemporary capitalist societies. Social relations coordinate actions across diverse sites. In a textbook example, Campbell and Gregor (2002) trace a social relation linking work carried out by a university student who shows her bus pass to the bus driver to the work of the university administrators who developed the bus company’s contract.

IE is premised on a belief that routine work activities in sites of institutional activity get tangled up in a web of social relations that control as well as coordinate life in industrial and post-industrial societies. Smith (2005) calls this web of coordination the *ruling relations or relations of ruling* because they accomplish the work of governance without seeming to rule (p. 44). The purpose of an IE investigation is to discover how ruling relations are implicated in an observed constellation of everyday activities, especially activities that seem to be causing problems or confusion for the people involved. For example if the local hospital closes, the reasons why it closes would not necessarily be local ones (DeVault & McCoy, 2006, p. 29). Mapping social relations refers to a process of explicating or tracing the social relations with a view to discovering how the ruling relations are active in people’s everyday lives. Mapping the relations allows researchers and their informants to “identify how things are organized, how people’s lives are ruled” (Campbell & Gregor, 2008, p. 34).

IE researchers work from the premise that peoples’ lived experiences of institutional settings produce problematics: questions that are embedded in people’s
experiences, but are not yet framed as questions by the people who have the experiences.
What often happens is that an individual or group of people feels that something is wrong, but they cannot quite name the problem. Smith (1987) defines a problematic for IE as follows:

The concept of problematic is used here to direct attention to a possible set of questions that may not have been posed or a set of puzzles that do not yet exist in the form of puzzles but are “latent” in the actualities of the experienced world. The questions themselves, the inquiry, the puzzles, and perhaps the issues are the means of developing the problematic as an inquiry. (p. 91)

Finally, it is important to note that IE investigations take a standpoint or place from which to look at the relations of ruling. They usually explore puzzles in the everyday lives of people from the standpoints of the people who experience the puzzles. For this reason IE researchers must become familiar with the experienced actualities of a problematic (Campbell & Gregor 2002).

Standpoint theory emerged in the 1970’s and 1980’s as a feminist critical theory. For Smith, standpoint theory was a tool for exploring relations between the production of knowledge and practices of power which later emerged as a method to guide research (Harding, 2004). Smith (1990) had noticed in her own life that there was a standpoint from which a woman might know the world very differently from “the way knowledge had already claimed it” (p. 57). She pointed to a women’s responsibility for everyday life as a source of important critical questions and insights about the relations of ruling and institutional relations and the conceptual practices of power that the discipline of sociology provided for them (Stooke, 2010). Standpoint is “always located in the actualities of people’s lives, their everyday worlds” (Smith, 1990, p. 4).
Smith (2005, p. 200) states that standpoint begins from “the site of [IE researchers] experience with the ways in which we actually exist, and explore the world from where we are.” She now sees the same ideas as applicable to any group of people whose lives are shaped by the ruling relations.

Beginning from people’s accounts of their experience helps researchers identify their study’s standpoint. This is what I did in my master’s research study. It “affords opportunities for people to speak about what they know as embodied subjects and to critically interrogate the discourses of ruling that are organizing their experiences as workers” (Stooke, 2010, p. 4). Campbell and Manicom (1995) suggest that the conceptual importance of experience is to provide a real-life context that reflects administrative practices and their powerful effects on people’s lives. They note that experience has both conceptual and methodological centrality; it “provides a standpoint, a place to begin an inquiry, and a place to return to, to demonstrate its usefulness: (p. 7).

IE researchers state that the key to doing social analysis on behalf of “those whom ruling relations subjugate” (Campbell & Gregor, 2008, p. 124) is what Smith originally said about developing knowledge from a standpoint in women’s experience. In an IE study, the researcher takes a standpoint outside the ruling relations for example, from the standpoint of a patient in a hospital setting. Similarly, the social organization of a lived curriculum can be explored from a standpoint outside of administration, the primary teacher for example (Parkinson & Stooke, 2012). Taking a standpoint on the outer edges of an institution allows the researcher to examine the workings of an institution as it appears to the people.

In the next section, a vital importance in IE for the researcher is to investigate, examine, and identify texts.
Texts

An important assumption of IE is that official texts, such as the school curriculum, play a crucial role in organizing everyday life in institutional settings such as schools. Noting the roles played by texts in the social organization of local activities is crucial to an IE analysis. According to Smith (1987, 2005, 2006), in an IE study, texts are important because they connect and coordinate work carried out across diverse sites. In IE a text is a material thing that carries a message: written, image, electronic, whatever. Smith (2006) writes that “incorporating texts into ethnographic practice is essential to institutional ethnography” (p. 65) because texts are embedded in institutional work processes and coordinate the sequences of actions that Smith calls social relations. IE researchers locate the text in a sequence of action, also known as social relations. Two actions are important to IE researchers: making the text and reading the text to activate it. The IE researcher has to notice the important role that texts play in order to investigate the social organization that exists.

Smith is most interested in replicable texts. A replicable text is defined as “anyone else anywhere can read, see, hear, and so on the same words, images, or sounds as any other person engaged with the same text” (Smith, 2006, p. 66). The replicable text can be copied many times and when it appears in different places it appears as the same text even though different people interact with it, interpret it and use it in different ways.

The IE researcher is interested in how specific replicable texts coordinate the work of people such as teachers, children, parents, administrators and others and especially how it ties people’s work into the work of institutions. For example, the annual Fraser Institute Report Card on Ontario’s Elementary Schools 2013 (Cowley & Easton, 2013) collects a variety of data from the provincial mandated assessments. The report
“facilitates school improvement” (p. 3) and is a public document. Many people read the report, including real estate agents who use it to recommend some locations to potential buyers. In this way the curriculum work of teachers and children is linked to the work of people who may have little interest in the curriculum itself.

An examination of the texts involved in a work process can help the researcher articulate a problematic. Texts open up aspects of “power operating in social life that otherwise lie hidden and mysterious” (Campbell & Gregor, 2008, p. 32). Texts create interactions that are coordinated by the relations of ruling and the local actualities of lived experience. Dialogue and an interaction between the readers and the text are created. For example, how one takes up a text, interprets the text and a course of action and coordination is discovered. In my study, the ways in which teachers took up literacy assessments texts, interpreted them, and integrated the data produced from the assessments informed their curricula decisions.

In my study, the administration of the Developmental Reading Assessments (DRA) was an example of a text that was caught up in a different web of social relations. The DRA, and DRA™2 (Beaver & Carter, 2004, 2005, Pearson Education, 2012) are utilized in elementary schooling and can be seen as an organizing tool for work processes in which individual teachers coordinate their actions with the actions of other people. For example, teachers in one school were told that they had to get the DRA completed for all students by October 31st of the year so that data could be forwarded to the school board office to meet that deadline. What happened to the data after it was forwarded to the school board remained a mystery to the teacher who regarded the task as extra to her curriculum work, rather than part of it. The DRA provided an example of how ruling organization works in the lives of teachers and clearly illustrates Smith’s assertion that in
contemporary industrial and post-industrial societies, many routine work processes hook
the actions of individuals into the workings of macro-level social institutions such as
public education, healthcare and the economy (Smith, 1987).

Another prominent text in the lives of Ontario teachers is the document *Growing
Success: Assessment, Evaluation, and Reporting in Ontario Schools* (Ontario Ministry of
Education, 2010) document. The document outlines and describes the policies and
practices of assessment, evaluation, and reporting policies for Ontario schools and states:
“This document aims to maintain high standards, improve student learning, and benefit
students, parents, and teachers in elementary and secondary schools across the province”

During my field work the *Growing Success* document was visibly seen in the
classrooms and the principals’ offices. It was talked about by the board administrators. It
was continually referred to and spoken about by the teachers and principals. For example,
Laura (see chapter 5), the principal of Ice Park Public School stated that: “And the new
*Growing Success* document is what we have been really giving professional development
too. We’re big on the assessment”.

Smith (2011) refers to this important type of document as a “Boss Text” (p. 5).
Boss texts “are texts that are authorized through some definite institutional procedure so
that the actions they in turn authorize can be treated as acts of the institution or corporate
body or of institutionally designated individuals” (2011, p. 5). The boss texts control how
actualities are read into the text, how they coordinate organizational or institutional
relations, and how peoples’ work is controlled by adapting with the selective
requirements of the boss text.
However, from my experiences as an elementary teacher, a pre-service teacher education instructor, my understandings of the data, and the participants’ discussions, I do not believe that the *Growing Success* document should take precedence over the official curriculum.

Concluding Remarks

In this chapter I described the study as a curriculum inquiry and elaborated on the theoretical underpinnings of IE. Parkinson and Stooke (2012) argue that thinking about social life a process of coordination is suitable of an inquiry into curriculum work. In chapter four I present the methods of inquiry and investigation that I used for my data collection.
Chapter Four

The Study

Introduction

IE investigations identify and examine social relations implicated in a troubling situation and they do so from the standpoint of an individual or group of people who experience the situation as troubling, but do not necessarily understand why. This situation is known in IE as a problematic in the everyday/everynight world of an individual or group (Campbell & Gregor, 2002; DeVault, 2008; Smith, 1987, 2005, 2006). The current study conceptualizes its problematic as a hidden curriculum mediated by myriad assessment and accountability tasks required of classroom teachers and it takes the standpoint of the teachers whose curricular decisions are affected by a preoccupation with accountability.

Institutional ethnography is an analytic project in which researchers often employ data collection strategies associated with a variety of qualitative research traditions. However, in contrast to approaches such as grounded theory, an IE analysis usually begins before carrying out data collection. As I explained in chapter one, my study emerged from an earlier investigation into teachers’ work in two grade one classrooms where I argued that assessments were mediating the lived curriculum and constraining teachers’ efforts to address the official curriculum goals (Parkinson, 2009). The current study further explores primary teachers’ curriculum work in relation to the many assessments that make curriculum work accountable as work to a variety of stakeholders in education and beyond. I entered the research sites with some ideas about what was
being accomplished, but I wanted to better understand how those accomplishments were happening.

DeVault (1999) described IE as an emergent research approach with few rules. I have adopted ways of working in IE proposed by Grahame and Grahame (2001) that conceptualize an IE study as three broad tasks which are not necessarily completed in a step-by-step sequence. In Grahame and Grahame’s organizer, the section headings do not align with a sequence of research activities; rather they describe a messy and recursive research process. The first task is “an examination of the work activities (broadly defined) of people engaged in the production of their daily lives with a view to analyzing how that world is shaped by and maintains the institutional process” (p. 3). Second is “an analysis of ideological procedures which are used to make the institutional work processes accountable” (p. 3). The third task is “analyzing how these work processes in a particular sphere are connected to those performed by others elsewhere that operate as part of an extended set of social relations” (p. 3), that is, mapping the extended social relations in which the institutional work is entangled.

The institutional work of interest in my study is curriculum: a topic discussed in chapter three. Specifically, I observed the teachers’ routine activities in the enactment of the curriculum with a view to observing how assessment activities were coordinated with and coordinating other curriculum work. The ideological procedures of interest were the recording, interpreting, and reporting of assessment data. It was through the sequence of activities that teachers’ and students’ work was made accountable as educational work in the eyes of school and board administrators and educational policy makers. In my study the third task involved mapping the social relations that appeared to link assessment work in classrooms to the teachers’ other work and to work carried out by principals and
administrators in school districts and bureaucrats in the Ministry of Education and beyond.

Task One: Examination of Work Processes

As part of the first task the IE researcher identifies a problematic and research questions to guide the research. In IE a problematic is distinct from a problem area or topic. It is a troubling situation that may feel mysterious to the people who experience it. For example, teachers might feel frustrated about the amount of assessment work required of them and the curriculum requirements they are unable to accomplish as a result of the assessment work, but they may not realize the extent to which their personal frustrations are entangled in the extended relations of educational accountability. Smith (1987) defines a problematic for IE as follows:

The concept of problematic is used here to direct attention to a possible set of questions that may not have been posed or a set of puzzles that do not yet exist in the form of puzzles but are “latent” in the actualities of the experienced world. The questions themselves, the inquiry, the puzzles, and perhaps the issues are the means of developing the problematic as an inquiry. (p. 91)

As I mention above, my study was motivated by a discovery in my master’s research that teachers were doing fewer tasks such as supervising lunch and helping children to get dressed than I had done as a primary teacher, and yet they were just as busy as I had been. When I examined what they were doing I noticed that a disproportionate amount of time was devoted to assessment work (Parkinson & Stooke, 2012). This discovery was the point of entry for my doctoral research. Having established that teachers were doing copious amounts of literacy assessment work, I aimed to understand how teachers’
literacy assessment work was being organized and how it was organizing other curriculum activities.

An IE study is conducted with a standpoint in mind. I took the standpoint of the teachers whose work was caught up in the extended relations of accountability. My study asked: What work do primary teachers carry out to fulfill mandated literacy assessments? How are literacy assessments implicated in the coordination of teachers’ work? How is this work coordinating and being coordinated with the work of students, administrators and policy makers at local, national and international levels? What are some implications for curriculum planners and teachers’ practices? To investigate the questions I was also guided by the following sub questions.

1. How did mandated literacy assessments get done in the primary classroom and how were they organized in an everyday sense of that word? That is, what work did teachers actually do to plan, prepare and administer the literacy assessments?

2. How were activities in the grade two classrooms “connected to and shaped by activities conducted elsewhere” (DeVault, 2008, p. 5)? How was their work coordinated within a network of social relations involving principals and school board administrators and also people at work in the corporate world?

3. What specific literacy assessments were most obviously tied into these “broader forms of social organization that coordinate action within extended functional complexes involving families and schools” (Grahame & Grahame, 2001, p. 10)?

Grahame and Grahame’s first task often (but not always) involves the collection of empirical data. In my study I employed sociological fieldwork methods (DeVault & McCoy, 2002, p. 757) such as observations, interviews, and the collection of artifacts. Among the artifacts were students’ work samples and assessment texts. Field work
methods are not a requirement for IE studies, but they are employed to help the IE researcher see what is happening in a setting and to infer how people’s actual activities are implicated in what Smith calls ruling processes.

My initial intention was to interview and observe grade two teachers, para-professionals in the classrooms, helpers and volunteers, and to interview principals, and administrators at two school boards. After receiving approval from the university research ethics board, I applied to four school boards and was successful in obtaining access to two of them. In IE, investigations in a larger sample of schools does not matter (Smith, 2005, 2006). Four school board administrators, four principals, and four grade two teachers from those principals’ schools agreed to participate. Fortunately, two of the teachers had split-grade classes, which made the scope covered by the study from grade one to grade three. However, there were no para-professionals employed in any of the classrooms and there was only one parent volunteer who came into one teacher’s classroom sporadically. She helped the teacher by cutting paper and preparing class made books. I made twenty visits over a three month period to the four schools.

In the classrooms, I played the role of a participant observer by quietly keeping to the back of the class while the teacher engaged her students. During individual group work in Language Arts, I helped the students with their work and helped the teachers teach and supervise their students. For example, at Oakwood Public School, I managed and helped individual students read and participate during a Reader’s Theatre group of grade one and two children that rehearsed and performed for the rest of the class; at Waterfield Public School, I helped and worked with a group of grade two children on an interactive white board word spelling game. During those times when I was with a group of students, the teachers engaged in intensive small group teaching or performed required
daily assessments on the students’ reading and writing. I also joined in with the whole class in their singing of songs and reading rhymes and poems. As Tedlock (2000) observes, ethnographers in qualitative research attempt to be both engaged participants and coolly dispassionate observers and to play the role to be an active participant within the classroom settings while jotting down notes in a few spare moments, and as Tedlock concludes that “participant observation has become the observation of participation” (p. 471).

Patton (2002a) discusses observation in qualitative research and states that the purpose “is to take the reader into the setting that was observed” (p. 23). Composing field notes gave me the opportunity to “look closely, carefully, and relatively unobtrusively and to develop analyses that aimed for faithfulness to what was actually happening” (DeVault, 1999, p. 47). Many ethnographic researchers have written about field note procedures (e.g. Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995; Heath & Street, 2008; Pole & Morrison, 2003). These procedures involve writing down what is seen and heard, taking brief, jotted notes whenever possible and as soon as possible after the observed actions, paying particular attention to the everyday routines and processes, keeping observations and accounts of interactions in notebooks and supplementing these with digital audio recordings. Jotting down notes in situ during the fieldwork is an important aspect of IE. Pole and Morrison (2003) advise the researcher to get up close to describe behaviours, events, and locations. Heath and Street (2008) state that “the ethnographer is the ultimate instrument of field work” and “the qualities of the best ethnographer include keen listening skills …tolerance for detail and visual acuity” (p. 57). Some elaborations of notes were completed after class as I attempted to make them as descriptive as possible.
and true to the detailed nuanced expressions that I observed (Patton, 2002). I also reflected in writing following each observation.

Jotting down notes in situ during the fieldwork is an important aspect of IE. Topics for my field notes included the nature and purpose of literacy assessments, how the teachers coordinated them with the rest of the language arts teaching and other curriculum work and how the literacy assessments were connected to the work of others including the work that students were assigned. Where possible, when I was observing the teachers at work I asked them to explain what they were doing, why they did what they just did, and most important, how they did what they just did. IE participants are not considered to be research subjects, but competent experts at doing life-as-usual in their respective social settings. I jotted down detailed descriptive field notes. I then went back to the principals and administrators and talked with them about issues that arose from my observations, for example, the details of their assessment work. This method of data collection became an important aspect of my research.

In an IE study, field notes provide clues about the how the work is coordinated with other work. For example, in the resource guide for the DRA (Pearson Canada, 2011), DRA levels have been matched to the levels used in a popular commercial set of books. A field note describes the information in the resource guide and notes that the information provides clues to one way in which teachers’ work is linked to work in the corporate world.

Informal conversations or just talking with people is a common data collection method in IE research. DeVault and McCoy (2006) claim that in IE talking with people occurs during field observation and the IE researcher asks a range of open-ended questions and approaches to talk with informants to talk with them to inquire and
investigate about their work. Informal conversations can be combined with later planned interviews in which the researcher can bring a set of questions or topics based on earlier observations and conversations.

I was able to follow my initial plan to informally talk with the teachers early in the morning before the students arrived at school, during their breaks or walking to and from the classroom. Sometimes, impromptu conversations erupted when the children were working quietly at their desks. The conversations, usually initiated by myself, happened when I needed to enquire about a lesson that was just taught or some work that was just done by the teacher. Also, in the conversations and questions that I had posed to the teachers, I wanted to create opportunities for the teachers to share reflections about the work that they do. I asked both open-ended and specific questions about their schedules, duties, preparation time, abilities of their students, assessments, and their work as an experienced teacher. During a quick moment or later that day, I was able to compose field notes based on these conversations. All of the teachers seemed to enjoy speaking about their work and their duties. From my experience in being an elementary teacher, it is a great relief to talk to another adult during the day.

For the more formal recorded interviews I had pre-arranged appointments with the participants. I wanted to formally record interviews with the participants so that I could go back many times to the transcript to gather information that they talked about. Patton (2002b) states that “the purpose of a research interview is first and foremost to gather data; not change people” (p.405). Interviews in IE are used to explore participants’ activities with a view to producing a detailed and concrete picture of their work. I had an idea of some questions that I wanted to ask such as: What kind of literacy assessments are
used in your school? How are the literacy assessment used? However, I asked more probing questions during the conversations and interviews with each of participant.

IE interviews stress the concrete, the details of what people do. Smith argues that the IE interview process can be challenging as workers “have been trained to use the very concepts and categories that institutional ethnographers wish to unpack, and they are accustomed to speaking from within a ruling discourse” (p. 28). For example, in my study I asked each of the participants what literacy assessments were used in their school board and what happens to the results of the literacy assessments when the assessments were completed. I wanted to find out about the coordination of the literacy assessments. IE interviews aim to gather more than just descriptions of people’s knowledge’s and experiences; the goal is “to make visible the ways the institutional order creates the conditions of individual experience” (Smith, 2005, p. 109). Smith advises that the IE researcher wants to find out what happens to people in their situation by describing their experiences. From the initial exploration, the researcher “can identify specific institutional sites, work processes, or discourses for further investigation” (p. 109). Then, working with the initial interview accounts, the task is to “glean good ethnographic understanding of the informants’ lived experience and circumstances in a way that brings into view the institutional hooks and traces, identifying sites and processes for further investigation” (p. 123).

Finally, the IE researcher identifies further questions to be asked about institutional work processes, or examination of key institutional texts. Smith argues that IE research does not have to follow an orderly process. She states that the researcher can talk with people in powerful positions at the same time talking with people at the receiving end of institutional work processes, especially if one is familiar with the
institutional field. However, what is crucial, “is a way of working systematically with the interview data to bring the institution into view and to raise questions that will open an exploration of institutional processes” (p. 124). In my study, I wanted to wait until I had been in their classroom a few days before I conducted interviews, to give enough time for the teacher to feel comfortable with my presence. Although, in one case an interview with a teacher happened before observation and then I interviewed her again later, to ask more questions. However, some interviews with the school board administrators were done online at the administrators’ requests.

I was able to develop an easy rapport with the participants during the interview processes, by engaging them in conversations about literacy assessment work, talking about their work, and other classroom work which helped me to discover how the assessments were coordinated to sequences of interconnected activities. In IE terms, I wanted to learn how work in one school was connected to work in other settings carried out by people who may not be known to each other. Please see sample interview questions in the appendices.

I recorded interviews with each teacher over several days. We often had to stop talking and turn off the digital recorder; because the bell rang; or one of us needed a break from talking. This process turned out to be a great benefit to me because I was able to listen to the recording that evening, and to follow up on comments in a subsequent interview.

Most IE researchers record the research conversations as an aid in making notes and to preserve details. Recording the conversations allowed me to adopt an easy approach, so to allow the discussion to flow in a way that seemed natural, not stopping the flow of discussion to allow me to take notes. It was also important to me that my
participants would be able to sit quietly with me and discuss their answers without interruptions, having to answer quickly, or rushing to do something else. After each interview, I reflected on the recording and later posed further questions. For example, after interviewing a teacher, if something was said about a school-wide process, I asked the principal of the school for a response. Then, because I had two sites in the same school board, if something came up during interviews and conversations with the principals, I was able to follow up with an administrator at the board level. I connected each conversation and interview to the next person in the line of hierarchy and then back and forth.

It is central to the IE approach that interview data are not viewed as “windows on the informant’s inner experience” (DeVault and McCoy, 2002, p. 751). They provide clues about the relations organizing the respondents’ work. The goals of IE interviewing include building up an understanding of the work process and they do not need to be standardized. When my digitally recorded interviews were completed, that same day I began to transcribe them. As DeVault and McCoy (2006) write, the transcripts of the interviews provide a way for the research participants to speak in published accounts of the research.

I had a few telephone conversations and several email exchanges for purposes of clarification. If there was something that was said during a conversation, interview, email, or jotted down in my field notes that I wanted to further pursue, or a book or reference that was mentioned that I wanted to access, they were readily answered. For example, during an interview with a school board administrator, an independent literacy consultant called Carmel Crévola (2007) was brought into the conversation. Carmel Crévola focuses on helping school systems align their assessment processes, instructional practices and
instructional leadership at the school, district and system levels. At the time, I was not familiar with Carmel Crévola, so I asked the school board administrator for further explanation on how and why her board utilizes Carmel Crévola’s work.

(School board administrator): Well, there is actually in there, (referred to an assessment binder that the teachers have) Carmel Crévola, she has an oral language assessment that is also included in the LAP binder that is an assessment as well. She is one of the co-authors of the book *Breakthrough Classroom Instruction* (Fullan, Hill, Crevola, 2007). It is an excellent book.

After each site visit and interview, I listened and transcribed the recorded interviews, and typed up field notes. I then organized the data according to the types of work observed. I read and reread the observational field notes and final interview transcripts to trace connections between literacy assessments and other work.

Drawing on field notes and interviews, I looked for texts and other artifacts that were relevant to an exploration of assessment work. In chapter three I explain that texts are an important source of data for IE researchers. I was able to learn how my participants created and interacted with a variety of literacy assessment texts as they went about their routine tasks, most notably the *Developmental Reading Assessments* (DRA and DRA™2) (Pearson Canada, 2011), *Growing Success: Assessment, Evaluation, and Reporting in Ontario Schools* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010), and provincial language curriculum documents, programs of reading, and other language programs.
Task Two: Identifying Procedures for Making Work Accountable

The second task of an IE researcher is “an analysis of ideological procedures which are used to make the institutional work processes accountable” (Grahame and Grahame 2001, p. 3).

I looked through the transcripts of the digitally recorded conversations and field notes and found the ways in which the work is made accountable as work. One example of work that can be identified as being accountable as work was that when the teachers had completed their report cards they entered the data in the on-line system. This system used a bank of evaluative or leveled phrases and grades such that teachers’ own judgments needed to be fit into the language available. Then, the principal had to read and check them and a conversation took place between the principal and the teacher if there was something that the principal wanted to address, for example if a student was doing poorly, or they disagreed with the comments. Then, after the principal was satisfied with the report cards, they were sent home to the parents and an interview with the teacher and the parents was scheduled. The report card information was shared with the school boards through the Research and Assessment department to superintendents and principals. The information was then checked by the school principal within a school based meeting and any problems occurred with the marks or comments were discussed. The work that was done by the teachers to create the comments and grades on the report card was accountability work that had to be accountable to the parents and in turn, be accountable to the school board.

Another example that could be identified as ideological was a process whereby the previous years’ results of the EQAO were used to organize the professional development plan for the school. Through school board initiatives, professional learning communities
for the principal and teachers were planned to develop specific learning cycles to address the poor results. Again, I noticed that the teachers’ work that was done to administer the EQAO was accountable to the principals the school boards, the parents, and the Ministry of Education. Teachers were accountable to principals, parents, the school board and other stakeholders.

Task Three: Analyzing Work Processes

The third task for the IE researcher is exploring institutional processes and “analyzing how these work processes in a particular sphere are connected to those performed by others elsewhere that operate as part of an extended set of social relations” (Grahame and Grahame 2001, p. 3). By looking for the missing organizational details in the participants’ accounts, as one clue leads to another “the institutional nexus that shapes the local” (Grahame, 1999, p. 7) is finally brought into view (Stooke, 2004).

An IE analysis does not identify themes, but some sorting takes place. I created maps that showed how the work was situated within an “extended set of social relations” (Grahame & Grahame, 2001, p. 3). I looked for the texts that seemed best to organize the teachers’ assessment work and to address my research questions. I identified that scheduling work and alignment work were important as these were types of work that appeared to be central to linking work across different sites.

Ethics

The study adhered to The University of Western Ontario’s Faculty of Education ethics guidelines. I received an Ethics Approval Notice from the Faculty of Education Sub-Research Ethics Board which adheres to the TRI-COUNCIL policy and protocols.
Ethical considerations require researchers to ask: “How should I be toward these people I am studying?” (Schwandt, 2000, p. 203). As Smith (2005) makes clear, in IE it is the work that is being studied, not the people. Nonetheless, the work of my participants is personal and it was important for me to understand the relationship that I had with the participants and the processes that I used.

I turned to IE researchers (DeVault & Gross, 2007; Smith 2005, 2005) and other researchers (Creswell, 2007; Strike 2006) for ethical considerations of research for my study. Strike (2006) identifies three central ethical obligations of educational researchers: to direct their efforts to individual and social betterment, to protect vulnerable populations, and to maintain the integrity of research and the research community (p. 57).

A researcher protects the anonymity of the participants in the study, by assigning numbers or pseudonyms to them (Creswell, 2007, DeVault & Gross, 2007). To gain support from the participants, I informed them that they would be participating in the study and explained the purpose of the study. I presented general, but not specific information about the study to ease the participants concerns. Sharing information, as Creswell says “off the record” (2007, p. 142) could be a potential danger if the researcher reports information that could be harmful to the participants. The costs of participation in the research are to be weighed against potential benefits of the research for participants and others. On the other hand, sharing information by the researcher of personal experiences may limit or reduce the information that is shared by the participants. I obtained informed consent from the participants and conducted the interview process in ways that were sensitive to participants’ concerns and feelings.

I preserved anonymity, privacy, and trustworthiness throughout the study. Although the teachers and children knew me as a researcher, I mentioned no names of the
children, teachers or schools in my thesis to have respect for vulnerable persons. I saw no known risks to the teachers or the children. I created Letters of Information for all informants and for the parents of students in teacher informants’ classes. However, schools from the Silver Lake District School Board chose not to send out the Letter of Information – Parent as I would not be focusing on the students. The letters and forms used the guidelines for reasonably informed consent and the conditions and guarantees offered for a school-based research project (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007, p. 53, 57). As noted above, in assuming the role of an institutional ethnographer, interview questions usually emerge from the observations. For example, during my conversations with the participants, questions emerged from our discussions. Later, after reviewing the transcripts and field notes, and during subsequent conversations with the participants I posed other investigative questions to help answer my research questions.

Limitations of the Study

Smith (2005) contends that there may be difficulties with the ethical review processes for an IE study as the institutional ethnographer may be unable to define precisely the parameters of the research. She points out that in an IE study; each next step builds on previous discoveries and “invades more extended dimensions of the institutional regime” (p. 35). The mapping of social relations expands from and includes the original site to reveal the larger organization. From the above comments, it is possible to see that some limitations of IE are perceived limitations based on criteria for trustworthiness applied to other qualitative approached as ground theory (Stooke & McKenzie, 2010).
In IE investigations it is important to examine the institutional context as well as the activities carried out in local sites, but my study was limited in its capacity by the need to complete a PhD thesis in a timely way. The research is not generalized. In other schools, in other areas, the teachers’ literacy assessment work may not be the same. IE is a project to open institutions, an IE researcher does a little piece of a much larger puzzle. It may be worthwhile to spend a longer time in the classrooms and to talk with teachers and administrators from a different school board, of course. Four classrooms are insufficient to allow for reliable comparisons, but I am not trying to compare. Therefore, I did not generalize my findings to schools in other similar school boards.

Institutional ethnography is a powerful teaching tool because it can provide anyone with a strategy for investigating the lineaments of ruling (DeVault & McCoy, 2002, p. 771).

Concluding Remarks

In this chapter, I identified the three tasks from Grahame and Grahame (2001) and described IE. I presented the limitations, implications and ethics of the study. In chapter five I present the data which includes descriptive portraits of the participants in the study, school boards, schools, and classrooms. I then present some professional texts that I identified how the participants utilized and incorporated them into curricular decision making.
Chapter 5

The Data

Introduction

This chapter is organized as three sections. In the first section I introduce my participants. I provide portraits of the four teacher participants and aim to situate them in their classrooms, schools, school boards, and surrounding neighborhoods. I also introduce the four principals and the four school board administrators. From my observations and conversations with participants, I wanted to learn from my participants’ insider knowledge of their work and to understand it in an institutional ethnographic sense. That is, I wanted to learn about what Smith (2005), calls their “doings” (p. 94) and how their doings were coordinated with others’ doings. My introductions draw on information provided by participants as well as observational field notes, and school board websites. To protect the participants’ privacy, their names, the names of the schools, and the names of the school boards have been changed. I am not attempting to make any comparison among participants, schools or school boards, but to bring visibility to their work.

In the second section of the chapter, I identify and describe print texts that mediated my participants’ assessment work in some way. I provide detailed descriptions of each text and comment on how each was used by one or more participants. The set of texts I describe may be an incomplete one. That is, teachers may have employed other texts that I did not learn about. In this chapter, however, I focus on data collected during site visits and interviews. Therefore I describe only texts that the participants talked about or used during a site visit.
The third section of the chapter aims to show how the literacy assessments were employed in the planning and learning cycle at each school. This section also draws on field notes and interview transcripts. The stories and descriptions presented in section three do not make up a representative sample of all the events I observed, but each story reveals ways in which the teachers’ curriculum work was organized to accommodate mandated literacy assessment work.

Settings and Participants: Grade Two Teachers, Classrooms, Schools, and School Boards

The data I employed to compile the following descriptions were provided during informal conversations, interviews, telephone conversations, and email correspondence. Following site visits I conducted email interviews with three school board administrators. One other recorded conversation with a school board administrator took place at the school board office. My key informants were four grade two teachers and it is their standpoint (in an institutional ethnography sense) that guides my analysis. It was the teachers who implemented literacy assessments and the teachers who were expected to organize and communicate assessment data to other people.

North Tree District School Board

North Tree (NT) District School Board is a large school board that administers several hundred elementary and secondary schools. Both of the participant elementary schools were on a balanced day schedule which means that their day included three learning blocks of 100 minutes each and two nutrition breaks. The NT Board stated on their website that the balanced day encourages student targets on the learning task and provides satisfactory nutrition levels. Ruby and Heather were the NT Board’s
administrators. Both were experienced administrators and they were happy to answer the many questions that I posed to them about literacy assessments and the reporting processes.

*Oakwood Public School* was a small elementary school in the NT Board. Oakwood was situated on a quiet, tree-lined street and drew its students from a middle-class neighbourhood. Most of the large houses nearby had well-manicured lawns and were owned by retired people; a few of them were owned by professional families with school-aged children. The school, once large with a few portable classrooms on the grounds, had split grade classes of up to twenty children and had a student enrolment of about 230 students from junior kindergarten to grade eight. More children were enrolled in the senior classes, as not many families with young children lived close by. Some children lived close enough to go home for lunch, but most stayed at school.

*Cathy* was the teacher participant at *Oakwood*. She had over twenty years experience teaching in the primary grades. At the time of my study, she had been teaching grades one and two at Oakwood for twelve years and was currently the teacher of a grade one-two split class with three grade ones and nine grade twos. In an earlier study, Cathy told me that she was obliged to do extracurricular activities. She had a music degree and taught music to the grade three students weekly. She also held lunch time choir practice with about thirty children from various grades once a week.

Cathy’s classroom was brightly lit with large windows on one side of the classroom. Numerous teacher-made posters were hung on the walls at child’s eye level. Notably, were the Class Rules’ poster where self regulation, responsibility, collaboration, independent work, and initiative were printed in black marker and the Strategy posters that listed strategies such as “predict what will happen, read it to someone, a great coach
will suggest or ask, read to self, listen to reading, work on writing”. Samples of students’ work in writing, math and science were displayed on small tables and desks and on the classroom walls. Cathy’s large carpet area was surrounded by several book shelves and boxes of books along the walls. The carpet area was very welcoming. It allowed children to cuddle up with a favourite story book on soft cushions or to sit as a group while learning a new concept or singing and chanting a poem that was printed on a large easel. The student desks were in three rows that faced an interactive white board approximately three meters wide and two meters high. Cathy placed an old wooden desk beside the windows and put baskets of teacher books and resources on it. A u-shaped table placed near her desk allowed the teacher to work with one student or a small group.

Cathy’s first learning block of the balanced day, which was 75 minutes long, was allocated to the language curriculum. She told me that she felt it was too long of a time for her rambunctious students to sit quietly and work independently. She needed students to work independently in order to get through all of the required assessment work that she had to complete each day. She said that she had tried several incentive programs with her students throughout the year and found that one of the best incentives was gym which was one of her students’ favourite subjects. Cathy decided to schedule the required thirty minutes of daily physical activity at 9:00 a.m. in the gym before the language block so that the students would be less restless during the language block. On the days when Cathy and her students went to the gym at 9:00 a.m. they were so tired out at the end of Quality Daily Physical Education (QDPE) that they were quite able to sit quietly and focus on their seat work and Cathy was able to complete her required assessments with minimal interruptions from students. Even so, the time period for a language block allowed for only a few assessments. I witnessed a day when Cathy administered
individual Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA2) (Pearson Education, 2011) to three students while the rest of the students worked quietly on their language activities for the duration of the assessments. Cathy told me later that day that if the students did not get their language work finished during the first learning block, she would sometimes continue into the next learning block as she did not want her students to get behind.

Cathy (teacher, Oakwood): Last term when we didn`t have the math learning cycle, I took the whole morning for Daily Five (Boushey & Moser, 2006, 2009), in writing, and everything, I just couldn`t fit it all in. I should be theoretically… I should be doing math in the last period of the morning, but I skipped math many times, (laughing).

Jackie was the principal at Oakwood. At the time of my study, Jackie had been at Oakwood for four months. She started out her education career as a teacher for 15 years and then moved to an administrative position for nine years. Jackie was very excited to talk about Oakwood’s Learning Cycles, an activity in which teachers come together to look at common goals and problem solve how the goals can be addressed in their classrooms.

Ice Park Public School was located in the NT Board in an agricultural area, just a few minutes’ drive from a large city. All of the students at this junior kindergarten to grade eight school arrived by school bus. There were five junior/senior kindergarten classes and the kindergarten program ran full days every other day for the entire year. The surrounding area continued to draw more families out to the Ice Park area resulting in growing numbers at each grade level. The primary division had eight classes. The junior division was distributed among five classes and the intermediate division had three classes. Each visitor was welcomed at the front door of the school by a staff member and
asked to sign in. *Success Though Accepting Responsibility* was painted above eye level on the inside opening wall of the entrance hall. The school goals were fastened to the same wall in very large laminated coloured letters that read:

1. Improve reading and writing scores with a focus on reading.
2. Increase the use of problem solving in math.
3. Character Education

Both the principal and teacher said that the first school goal was the main focus this school year as the results of their Education Quality and Accountability Office’s (EQAO) were low. Therefore the main focus was improving reading and writing.

Liz had been teaching for a total of nine years, much of it in kindergarten. Her first year of teaching was at another school, before she transferred to Ice Park for the following eight years. Liz’s responsibilities and extra-curricular activities included being head of the cross-country team from September to mid October which included 150 students and help from one other teacher. She told me that there is a lot of work involved with that after school. Liz was also on the Healthy School Committee and the School Improvement Committee. She enrolled nineteen students with seven grade twos and twelve grade threes. One grade three student identified with developmental delay worked with an Educational Assistant for a short time per day out of the classroom. The Educational Assistant’s role was to help the student and Liz had no other help in the classroom. Liz’s language block went from 9:00 a.m. until 10:40 a.m. each school day.

Liz’s students sat with the students of the same grade. Their desks were arranged in two groups, one group for each grade. The desks in each group faced each other. Liz told me that the desks were arranged this way because she encouraged her students to collaborate with each other during specific group tasks. Along one wall of the classroom,
were low book shelves, that had an abundance of baskets full of books by authors such as Robert Munsch; characters such as Franklin, Princess, Dragon, Junie B. Jones. The books were organized by theme, for example, Disney, Poetry, Comedy, Fairy Tales, Countries; and so forth. I asked Liz about the number of books that she had, and she said that she had been collecting children’s books for many years and that she loved reading and so did her students.

At one end of the classroom, Liz had a large interactive white board that was surrounded by coloured carpet tiles where her students sat for large-group instruction. A white board stand and Liz’s chair were placed nearby for all students to see. Many teacher and student resources were neatly placed in cupboards and shelves along the classroom walls. A large word wall covered one wall and Liz’s display of owl knickknacks and other teacher gifts were arranged on small tables alongside student’s craft and art work. I noticed several Inuksuk sculptures made from sugar cubes and glue that her students had made for a social studies and science lesson. Most of the blackboard space was covered with student work, class calendar, class rules and student incentive posters. Liz had a large desk that had several baskets of student work that needed her attention. When she was working with students, she sat at a circular table that had DRA kits, boxes of books and other teaching resources on it. Another small table, large enough to seat three students, was used for a quiet work space. It was placed near Liz’s desk.

Liz was deep in the process of mandated assessment when I visited her class. She was half way through the DRA with both grades and was doing practice EQAO testing with her grade three students. A student teacher was in the class for part of the time. Liz told me that she could not have got on with the DRA and the practice EQAO tests without
her student teacher. She said that was one of the main reasons why she agreed to have the student teacher in her classroom at such a busy time of year.

*Laura* was principal at Ice Park and was very experienced in her position. She had been at Ice Park for nearly ten years. Laura specifically stressed the importance of the *Growing Success* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010) document which will be described in the next section. In Laura’s words, “We’re big on the assessment.”

Summary Chart of the district school board, board personnel, schools, principals, and teachers:

**North Tree District School Board**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Administrators/Literacy Experts: Ruby and Heather</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Oakwood Public School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal: Jackie</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher: Cathy</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Silver Lake District School Board**

The Silver Lake (SL) District School Board served small towns and rural areas of Southwestern Ontario. The school board office was welcoming to visitors because there was a friendly front desk person who greeted each person; the office was brightly lit with large windows that were arranged with several plants and I could hear people in the office chatting happily. The office was also open to the community for various activities.

The SL Board’s public website announced that the students and school staff were learning and to engage, inspire, and innovate. A note on their website highlighted the
The website describes the *Growing Success* document as follows:

The Ministry of Education published a new policy document entitled “Growing Success” in the Spring of 2010. This policy directs the assessment, evaluation, and reporting of student achievement in Ontario schools, from Kindergarten to Grade 12. The policies outlined in the Growing Success document reflect the current state of knowledge about assessment, evaluation and reporting. The purpose of the provincial report cards (February and June) is to communicate student achievement to parents and students. The new reporting system will provide ongoing descriptive feedback that is clear, specific, meaningful, and timely to support improved learning and achievement.

*Nora* and *Susan* were administrator participants with the SL Board. I met Nora at the school board office for our conversation and interview. Nora’s position at the school board was called a student work study teacher. At the time of my study Nora was in the schools looking at students’ oral language in kindergarten.

Nora (administrator, SL Board): A student work study teacher is actually an initiative that’s been developed by the Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat (LNS) or the Ministry of Education for Ontario and our role is, every board has a minimum of one student work study teacher. And our role is to actually go into classrooms and as a co-learner enter into an inquiry with teachers. We go in and wait for an area of inquiry to emerge from the observations that we see and hear and we analyze them with the teacher and we look for an area to investigate.
Susan’s role was a curriculum coordinator for the junior and intermediate grades of all the schools in the SL Board. She provided many details about literacy assessments in her school board.

Susan (administrator, SL Board): Our board has developed a Literacy Assessment Portfolio (LAP), which accompanies all students throughout the grades, until all included assessments are successfully completed. It is anticipated that given the focus of the assessments, students would generally successfully complete by the end of grade 3. However, this is often not the case and the LAP continues with the students through the junior and intermediate grades until complete. These assessments include:

- phonological awareness
- modified concepts about print
- letter identification
- upper and lower case letters
- individual letter identification
- identifying letter - sound
- high frequency words

Also completed are regular running records based on Fountas and Pinnell’s Benchmark Assessment System (Heinemann, 2012) levels (targeting levels - end of senior kindergarten (B), end of grade one (I), end of grade two (M), end of grade three (P)).

Waterfield Public School was located on about 30 acres of rural property in the SL Board. The school enrolled students from junior kindergarten to grade eight. The student population consisted of approximately 400 students and 32 staff. All the students arrived
at school on various community school buses. The school website stated that their focus remained on student achievement with a renewed focus on student writing in all areas of the curriculum and that numerous opportunities for student engagement both in and outside of the classroom were consistently provided in order to address the strengths, needs and interests of all their students. The students of Waterfield came from professional families, farming families, and small business owners and their employees. Beautiful plants lined the large windows at the front of the school and the hallways and classrooms were decorated with student’s art work, science displays and letters to various people.

I took special note of the school library which was very welcoming. The large bright room had floor to ceiling windows along one wall and soft carpet on the floor. The sunlight filtered through curtains. There were about a dozen small student computers arranged in a quiet work space. Rows of well stacked book shelves approximately three meters high invited one to browse. Comfortable chairs were placed around the room.

Mary was my teacher participant at Waterfield. She had been teaching the primary grades for 14 years. Her first year of teaching was occasional teaching and then her second year of teaching was for a long term contract at a small school that eventually closed a few years later. Then Mary and her teacher colleagues moved to the newly built Waterfield Public School. While her daughters were young Mary was a half time teacher but as soon as her daughters were in school full time, she resumed full time teaching. At the time of my study, Mary had been at Waterfield for eleven years.

On Mary’s classroom website, Mary described her interest in writing. She wrote that “writing is like putting a puzzle together. If you leave out a piece (or a detail), there's a hole! We need the details to put the whole picture together!” Mary had a particularly
lively and busy class of nineteen grade two students. She told me that her students were very needy and chatty. A parent of one of her students occasionally volunteered to help Mary by cutting paper, preparing class books, and sometimes helping students with their work. Every morning, seven students lined up at the classroom door and waited for a Literacy Teacher to take them to her classroom. They worked with the Literacy Teacher on Empower™ Reading (1999-2012) while the rest of the students stayed with Mary in the classroom and worked on the literacy program.

Mary’s bright classroom displayed samples of student’s writing on sentence strips. Students’ art, science and math samples of work were attached with sentence strips that described the work. The writing focus described on Mary’s classroom website was evident from the work that was displayed. The student’s desks were in five groups of four desks. Each group of desks had a box of markers, pens, and notebooks. A listening centre that included tapes, compact discs and a few sets of headphones were placed along one wall and various shelves of books were on another wall. I noted that there were not a lot of books in the classroom that I used to see in other classrooms, or even in my own classrooms that I had taught. An interactive white board and work tables were located at one end of the classroom. Several carpet mats were available for the students to choose to sit on while listening to their teacher read a story, or write on the white board easel. Mary had a large u-shaped table that she utilized for intensive group work or individual assessments. Her desk was at one corner of the room.

Brenda was the principal at Waterfield and was a very experienced administrator. Brenda told me that she recently spent a week at a major American university with two of her colleagues for a workshop with the author and educator Lucy Calkins. The workshop was on how to gain information to refine school’s practice using the workshop approach
and Brenda brought the information back to her school. Brenda recognized the importance of the workshop approach, specifically for writer’s workshop. Calkins (2005) states that “our goal is to intervene in a way that lifts the level of what kids do independently” and “when we teach toward independence it means that we hold our teaching accountable to make a lasting difference long after we have left the child’s side” (p. 20). Calkins too had to align writer’s workshop to fit into the new audit culture of schooling. Therefore, Brenda utilized her newly acquired information to boost up literacy achievement and she had been working together with her colleagues to plan and provide professional development for her staff of teachers. Brenda said, “We have focused on writing because it is one of the most challenging areas to teach in and it’s the least amount of professional development that’s provided for teachers.”

_Green Meadow Public School_ was located in the SL Board in a very quiet rural area. There was a field across the road from the school that had several black and white cows grazing on it. The school was from junior kindergarten to grade eight. Their student population consisted of approximately 200 students and 19 staff. All the students arrived on buses. The school website stated that their school goals were to improve reading and writing achievement, and the students’ ability to demonstrate higher order thinking skills in all divisions. The website stated that their staff believed that student success was the result of the partnership between the home, school and community and that the community generously supported the entire staff in their goal to provide the best academic environment for their students. Their students relied on the support of their parents and their community in order to achieve success. The students of Green Meadow came from families who were professionals, farmers, and small businesses owners and
employees. As an aside, on one of the days that I was at the school, it was very warm and all the lights in the school were turned off. I asked the teacher why the lights were turned off and she told me that they were turning their school into an eco-friendly school to save energy. The hallways and classrooms were brightly decorated that included student’s art work, story writing, and posters of school rules.

*Jane* was the teacher participant at Green Meadow and an experienced teacher. She had been teaching for ten years and had been at Green Meadow for nine years. Jane also filled in when the principal was away. Her position was called ‘Teacher in Charge’. Jane had sixteen grade two students with two students on an Individual Education Plan for academics. In conversation, she referred to her students as ladies and gentlemen and called them that when she spoke to them.

Jane’s classroom seemed rather small with extremely limited storage space for resources. Her desk was piled high with books and teaching resources. She sat at a small work table when teaching a small group and/or individual student, did her marking, and prepared her work. Several teacher books and resources stacked on top of cupboards or in make-shift plastic boxes and drawers were scattered around the room. Many books of various difficulty levels lined the classroom walls in shelves, baskets and boxes. There were hooks along one wall for the students to hang their coats and bags. A large interactive white board was in the center of the room placed on coloured rubber tiles that had ample space for the students to sit as a group. Jane used an electronic tablet for her work, for keeping track of the categories of her students, such as what language activities they chose to work on during the language block and anecdotal notes. The students’ desks were grouped into two clusters. Noticeably, brightly coloured tennis balls covered the feet of all of the chairs and table legs to stop the scraping noise from the tiled floor. There
were three computers for the students use along one wall of the room. Several boxes of
resources on a few desks grouped together were put together to make centers and displays
for various subjects. Three large bean bag chairs were near large book shelves for the
book corner. All of the books had coloured stickers on them which corresponded to the
reading levels and matched the same colour of stickers on the baskets so the students
could find and put back their reading books into the appropriate basket.

Jessica was the principal at Green Meadow. She told me that she was thrilled to
talk about the Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) which are board driven
initiatives that involve principal and teacher meetings where teachers work together on a
common goal. She explained that when enough funds are provided from the school board,
a few schools meet together. Jessica said “we’re connected to a network of schools, so
that’s why it was so structured and time driven, because you had to have your next thing
done for the next meeting, kind of thing”. However, she preferred having the meetings in
her own school where they have the focus on their own students, “but when you’re in
your own school, you can set your meetings whenever they fit where you’re at. So, it’s
been a lot better this year because we can direct it more to our students.”

Summary Chart of the district school board, board personnel, schools, principals, and
teachers:

Silver Lake District School Board

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Administrators/Literacy Experts: Nora and Susan</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Waterfield Public School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal: Brenda</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher: Mary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Green Meadow Public School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal: Jessica</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher: Jane</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Texts

In this section, I discuss a selection of texts used or described by participants during the data collection phase of the study. Recognizing the roles played by texts in the social organization of local activities is central to an IE analysis (Smith (2006). Texts such as the *Growing Success* or the LAP Binder previously mentioned played an important role in organizing the teachers’ work. My discussion draws on field notes from site visits, examination of the texts themselves, interview transcripts, information provided by school boards, Ministry of Education and other policy organizations, and information from publishing companies.


*Literacy Assessment Portfolio (LAP)*: Both Nora and Susan explained that a Literacy Assessment Portfolio (LAP) is specific to the SL Board. Nora from the SL Board told me that the LAP was developed mainly from the work of Marie Clay (1926 – 2007), a distinguished researcher from New Zealand known for her work in global educational literacy who was committed to the idea that children who struggle to learn to read and
write can be helped with early intervention. She developed the Reading Recovery®
program and several principles and concepts of early writing. Some of Clay’s most
notable principles and concepts of early writing were (1) that writing carries a message;
(2) children realize that that message can be written down; (3) reading is developed in a
pattern; (4) there is spacing between words; and (5) that important directional principles
of reading left to right and top to bottom need to be taught (Clay, 1979, 1985).
Educational researcher Allington, (2012) states that “what makes Reading Recovery
different from the other 152 reading programs is that it is primarily an intensive
professional development program for fostering teacher expertise in teaching reading to
struggling first grade students” (p. 3). The SL board utilized Clay’s work because they
thought it was important for early intervention assessments such as phonological
awareness and rhyming to be started early in Kindergarten.

The LAP is contained in a binder, or a portfolio. It is comprised of assessments.
The LAP must be completed by all the students throughout the grades until assessments
are successfully completed. Assessments in the LAP include: phonological awareness,
modified concepts about print, letter identification, upper and lower case letters,
individual letter identification, identifying letter and sound, high frequency words,
rhyming, sight word assessment, running records, miscue analysis, and a written
assessment.

Figure 2 is an example of a running record sheet (Nelson, 2004, p. 291):
Figure 2 is an example of a running record for a grade two, level M that Jane from Green Meadow administered to a student (Fountas and Pinnell, 2012). Notice the
requirements are different from Figure 3, which was developed from Clay’s work. In Figure 3 the text is pre-written for the teacher to check off every word and the stakes are higher for the students, as a reading level is assigned.
Figure 3 Running Record
Figure 4 is an example of a rubric for a writing assessment that Mary and her colleagues devised and used at Waterfield, “the rubrics are there that we have made together as a staff”:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Expectations</th>
<th>R</th>
<th>Level 1</th>
<th>Level 2</th>
<th>Level 3</th>
<th>Level 4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Topic Sentence</td>
<td>No topic sentence</td>
<td>Confusing/vague sentence No reference to question</td>
<td>Weak topic sentence vague reference to question</td>
<td>Topic sentence that refers to the question</td>
<td>Engaging topic sentence that clearly relates to question</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supporting Details and information</td>
<td>No supporting details</td>
<td>Few details Lack of connection to topic sentence Reader needs to infer</td>
<td>Some details at least 2 Some connection to topic sentence Some inference by reader</td>
<td>Variety of details [2-4] Details connect to topic sentence Little inferring by reader</td>
<td>Several interesting and engaging details Details connect clearly to topic sentence No inferring by reader</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Closing sentence</td>
<td>No closing sentence</td>
<td>Closes abruptly</td>
<td>Weak closing sentence Vaguely relates to topic sentence</td>
<td>Closing sentence that relates to topic sentence</td>
<td>Clear closing sentence that relates back to the topic sentence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conventions (see note)</td>
<td>No grade-appropriate conventions in place</td>
<td>Rarely applies grade-appropriate conventions (consistent prompts)</td>
<td>Sometimes applies grade-appropriate conventions (some prompts)</td>
<td>Usually applies grade-appropriate conventions (occasional prompts)</td>
<td>Consistently applies grade-appropriate conventions (independently)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Spacing □ Proper use of capitals □ Punctuation □ Omissions □ Spelling □ Variety of sentence types □ Descriptive words □

Neat and easy to read? □

Figure 4 Rubric for Writing Assessment

A LAP is kept with the students’ teacher who administers the appropriate grade level or reading ability assessments throughout each year. In completing the assessments in the LAP, the teacher would keep track of a student’s progress starting in kindergarten and follows the students throughout the grades in the primary division. The SL Board expects a LAP to be successfully completed by the students by end of grade three.
However, this is often not the case and the LAP continues with the students throughout
the junior and intermediate grades if necessary.

Jane (teacher, Green Meadow): We have what we call a Literacy Assessment
Portfolio. And so, everything I do goes into this folder all year. And I keep a log
of my own for their running records. (Showed me a running record list for
October) and these are their goals that they’re working on. So, then I just kind of
keep track of who’s working on what.

Growing Success: The Growing Success: Assessment, Evaluation, and Reporting in
Ontario Schools (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010) is a provincially mandated
assessment document for all Ontario schools to improve student learning. The revised
practices were implemented in the fall of 2011 and are outlined in the Growing Success
document. The 159 page document includes guidelines pertaining to grades one to
twelve.

Growing Success lists fundamental principles that “ensure that assessment,
evaluation, and reporting are valid and reliable, and that they lead to the improvement of
learning for all students, teachers use practices and procedures” (Ontario Ministry of
Education, 2010). The seven principles for assessments are listed below.

Assessments are fair, transparent, and equitable for all students.

They support all students, including those with special education needs, those who
are learning the language of instruction (English or French), and those who are
First Nation, Métis, or Inuit.
They are carefully planned to relate to the curriculum expectations and learning goals and, as much as possible, to the interests, learning styles and preferences, needs, and experiences of all students.

They are communicated clearly to students and parents at the beginning of the school year or course and at other appropriate points throughout the school year or course.

They are ongoing, varied in nature, and administered over a period of time to provide multiple opportunities for students to demonstrate the full range of their learning.

They provide ongoing descriptive feedback that is clear, specific, meaningful, and timely to support improved learning and achievement.

They develop students’ self-assessment skills to enable them to assess their own learning, set specific goals, and plan next steps for their learning. (p. 6).

The participants in my study stated that the Growing Success document is used in the schools for developing the school improvement plan, implementing professional development; developing student learning goals, developing learning cycles to improve student learning, directing assessment, and evaluating and reporting of student achievement. Susan, an administrator from SL Board told me that the policies in the Growing Success guide their current work in the area of assessment. The SL Board’s website stated that the Growing Success document directs the assessment, evaluation, and reporting of student achievement, and that the policies outlined in the document reflect the current state of knowledge about assessment, evaluation and reporting.

In conversation with Laura, principal of Ice Park in the NT Board, I learned how administrators appreciated and stressed the Growing Success document.
Laura (principal, Ice Park): And the new Growing Success document is what we have been really giving professional development to. So, that’s where I started is professional development. We’re big on the assessment. I don’t know if you’re familiar with the terminology “For of and as learning.” So, we set up learning goals. What is a learning goal? It needs to be clearly articulated to students in student friendly language. They co-construct success criteria, things that they’re looking for. My job is to make sure that that’s being done and I do that by classroom visits. Things that I’m looking for in curriculum walk-throughs are the Success Criteria and the Learning Goals. They are something that I specifically look for and teachers are notified of that. But my role is more global than it is specific into the classrooms. I’m looking for general trends in implementing the new documents, the Growing Success document and making sure that that’s happening. Then the final component of that is the differentiated assessment which is a continuation of differentiated instruction, making sure that students are receiving the type of assessment that best tells the teacher what they know as opposed to what they can write down. So, that’s my role is just to make sure that all those pieces are in place and the teachers have the information that they need, they have the professional development that they need, and it’s being implemented in the school. The data is being used to drive assessment and that the formative and diagnostic tools are being used. Right now, because of the Growing Success document and it’s only been out the two years. We are really looking at how does assessment drive the report card comment? Because comments are a big thing right now, so learning goals are imperative.
Report Cards: The Ontario Ministry of Education Elementary Progress Report Card (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2012) is a provincially mandated assessment document that records student achievement and provides a communication tool from the school to the parents. The report is used by publicly-funded elementary and secondary schools in Ontario. At the time of my study, the report card was completed three times per year. The teacher(s) assessed all subjects taught and provided comments and a letter grade for each subject. It also included comments on student progress, achievements, advice for next learning goals and steps to be achieved in the next term. The report card is completed electronically using a fillable digital form.

Currently, a progress report is sent home in the fall and a provincial report card two times per year, (February and June) (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2012). The new reporting system aims to provide ongoing descriptive feedback that is clear, specific, meaningful, and timely to support improved learning and achievement. It assesses students’ behaviour on responsibility, organization, collaboration, initiative, independent work, and self-regulation although no grades are given. Liz, teacher at Ice Park commented on the report cards when she referred to her students, “They know when it’s report card time. They know that. So they tend to get really cranky and act out a lot more. We just kind of, we have more fun with it.” Liz explained that the levels and marks were very important to the parents, as they want their children to succeed. She gave her students’ incentives such as extra time in the gym or playing games outside when they worked well during report card time.

After the teachers have completed their report cards and entered the data in the online system, the principal has to read and check them before they are sent home to the parents. These are standardized report cards tied to standardized outcomes statements in
the programmatic curriculum. Examples of the levels from an elementary progress report card are: E-excellent, G-Good, S-Satisfactory, N-Needs improvement, progressing with difficulty, progressing well, and progressing very well (Ministry of Education, 2012). A conversation takes place between the principal and the teacher if there is something the principal wants to address. Then, after the principal is satisfied with the report cards, they are sent home and an interview with the teacher and the parents is scheduled. The report card information is shared with the school boards through the Research and Assessment department to superintendents and principals. This information is then checked by the school principal within a school based meeting and any problems occurred with the marks or comments are discussed.

On their websites, both school boards informed that they utilized report cards and notified the website reader about the new reporting system. Their administrators, principals, and teachers all talked to me about them.

Brenda (principal, Waterfield): Well, I have to read them all. So, if I have any questions about what’s going on, if I see comments that don’t jive with the level that’s provided to the student, then there’s a conversation that takes place with the teacher about that. When they’re done, so they’re sent home and I mean if there’s any concerns before the reports… If we’re looking at something and we see that the student’s going to fail or really performing poorly, a phone call has to go home to the parents ahead of time to talk to them about what they’re going to see on the report card and they are always given the opportunity to comment back to the teacher. In the Fall there’s an interview that’s set up for them, and if they want to,
I mean if they want to talk to the teacher anytime, they just call and request an interview regardless what time of year it is.

Jessica (principal, Green Meadow): Again, it’s board driven. They have their dates and teachers have to meet them. The teachers will review all their data collected, their general observations, their assessments throughout the term, all that sort of thing. There’s a couple of different philosophies about assessment that way, and I’m not sure whether they’ve been combined or not or resolved, or whatever, because some teachers still feel that it should be an average of the term’s work, like where they are in the term, the average work, and some teachers feel that it should be where the kid is right then. Because if a kid didn’t learn it in October but they finally get it by the end of November, then why are you averaging? H: I see.

Jessica: You know what I mean? And my thing is it should be where the kid is at right then. Like if it took them three months to learn it, instead of a month, who cares? They’ve learned it. So, it should be right where it’s at. But I know I have a couple of teachers who still don’t agree with that because if a kid handed in a project, you know, in science that didn’t cut it, and yet they want it to, they want to show that on the report card, that that affected their mark. But it really shouldn’t if the kid knows the information now, the kid knows it.

In contrast to the SL Board, the NT Board stated on their website that both assessment for and as learning provide students with day to day feedback on their work, and are far more valuable to the learning process than a final mark on a report card (an example of assessment of learning).
Laura (principal, Ice Park): The teachers have data to write the report card and that’s the technical part of it. That’s not the important part of it. The important part is that we look at all the data that we’ve been working on. That you’re using summative tasks to assess what the students are doing and that you’re not taking into account something that was done at the very beginning when they didn’t know what they were doing. So [we use] most recent, most frequent kind of data.

But again, the teachers know that in the absence of summative they look to formative or diagnostic information. So, they’re prepared for that. Right now, because of the Growing Success document and it’s only been out the two years we are really looking at: How does assessment drive the report card comment?

Because comments are a big thing right now, so, [learning goals] are imperative. Teachers are starting now to use the term Learning Goal and define that. In their classroom, they will say: “My learning goal is we will be able to write a descriptive paragraph that is entertaining and paints a visual picture”, something along that line. That needs to be carried into the report card. The key things that they learn that becomes a comment that they make that: they can do this, write a descriptive paragraph that is… with a qualifier for each student, depending on how they did. Then the success criteria in the classroom are used to establish the next statement in the report card which is a strength statement. What are they doing well and an example of how they demonstrated that and then the weakness statement or the next steps statement is again based on the success criteria on key or major learnings in the classroom or common things, trends that you find, where’s the next steps that they need to go. So, they’re interconnected. The report cards are intrinsically related to the assessment and if you’re not doing that, if you
don’t have that continuity, then there’s a big break in there that there can’t be.
And you’re not planning properly for the students and you’re not informing the parents of what they can do to help.

Jackie, principal at Oakwood Public School who has been at the school only three months so far, also talked with me about the report card process.

Jackie (principal, Oakwood): Well, I need to, I read them over, so really I mean, the report card belongs to the teacher and they’re the ones who have to speak to the marks that they give the kids and to the parents, obviously. So, what I look to see is, individuality, I don’t know the kids that well, it’s hard for me to read the report cards, but what I would look to see if they’re achieving a C, but on the comment it indicates: doing very, very well, I would question that? Do you know what I mean? So the way you’re describing how they got that mark, I just look to see if it matches up. So, if anyone is getting a C, obviously isn’t doing extremely well, there’s areas of difficulty that I would probably outline. And too, we also, I’ve asked for next steps. So, students, for example, when we do the literacy comments, then the teacher would indicate next steps for the student of what they need to improve, and that should be individual because every comment is individual.

Cathy (teacher, Oakwood): For the Report Cards I would use my DRA assessments. And you just basically know where they’re at right? So for writing we do have a writing task, then we have rubrics for writing, and DRA will tell you
basically where they are, so you kind of know they’re at because you work with them, because they read with you too every day.

Cathy stated that an experienced teacher knows their students by seeing them and working with them daily. Experienced teachers have learned to quickly identify problems that the students might have. Like Cathy, experienced teachers have written many report cards over the years and can quickly identify what level their students are working at.

The Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO) is a Crown agency of the Government of Ontario legislated into creation in 1996 in response to recommendations made by the Royal Commission on Learning in February 1995 (EQAO, 2012). The EQAO is governed by a board of directors appointed by the Lieutenant Governor in Council. According to the authors, assessments were created to ensure that there is accountability between school boards and schools in the publicly funded system in Ontario. Students attending publicly funded elementary and secondary schools in Ontario are required to participate in the respective tests at their grade level. The authors state that educational accountability is important to three key stakeholders: taxpayers, elected officials, and teachers (EQAO, 2012).

EQAO conducts province-wide tests annually, which take place towards the end of the school year. The assessments are used to help improve student learning and achievement. In grade three and six, there are literacy and math assessments. In grade nine, there is a math assessment. In grade ten, every student in Ontario has to pass the Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test in order to graduate from secondary school. If a student fails the test, teachers at the school work with the student to develop the skills to pass it the second time. Depending on what skills need to be developed to pass the test,
the student may have to have extra help with a teacher at lunch hours or after school, or
the student might have to take an extra credit which could take place over the summer
holidays or after school in an online course. On some occasions the student might have to
repeat the credit the following year. In particular, the EQAO developed the Ontario
Secondary School Literacy Test based on the expectations for reading and writing as set
out by the Ontario curriculum policies and documents. The EQAO authors state that it
was developed to ensure that all students who graduate from secondary school in Ontario
meet the literacy requirements which are fundamental life skills (EQAO, 2012).

My participants told me how the EQAO was administered in grade three.
Teachers administer the EQAO assessments in a very formal standardized manner. The
students taking the tests were supervised by a teacher in a separate room, sat in individual
desks in rows and they are given all the manipulatives they would need to complete the
assessments. There was limited teacher and student communication, with no help given.
The students completed individual workbooks. One half of a workbook was completed in
one sitting. There was one math book and two language books. The entire process should
take four days. Once completed, the EQAO assessments should be sent out to
professional markers and the results are shared with the Ontario Ministry of Education.

Ruby (administrator, NT Board): EQAO is shared with the Ministry as well as
DRA and Phonological Awareness screening. DRA and Phonological Awareness
are shared within networks and Learning cycles that the Student Achievement
Officers attend on a school basis. EQAO, although it is not a ministry sponsored
or funded assessment, has links to the organization that provides the province with
the information.
**CASI Reading Assessments:** The Comprehension, Attitude, Strategies, Interests (CASI), (Reid, Doctorow, McGowan, 2009), is a provincially approved reading assessment that is used throughout Ontario to identify students' reading abilities for the junior grades. It is aligned to the Revised Ontario Language Arts Curriculum (2006), and the Achievement Chart Categories. The authors suggest that the CASI helps teachers identify students' reading comprehension and fluency through age-appropriate, field validated reading passages. Even though my teacher participants did not administer the CASI in their classrooms, as they were all teaching in primary grades, Susan, administrator from SL Board talked about the CASI as one of the mandatory assessments that they use in their schools:

Susan (administrator, SL Board): Up until this year, all students in grades four to eight completed CASI (Comprehension, Attitude, Strategies, Interests published by Nelson) twice each year and submitted data on the eight skill based questions (end of Sept and end of May). We are currently making the transition from collecting CASI data to collecting running record data for junior students. This change marks the end of a three year focus in supporting teachers of the junior grades to administer and analyze running record data. All CASI results (grades four to eight) have been submitted to the board's electronic data collector twice each year (end of September and end of May) but we are looking to collect running record data for grades four to six rather than the CASI data effective September 2012.

**PM Benchmarks:** The PM Benchmarks is system of reading levels that was developed by Irene Fountas and Gay Su Pinnell to support guided reading (Fountas, 1999). Each level
is tentatively associated with a school grade. A grade-level equivalence chart that was also developed is utilized as an assessment tool by teachers:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Recommended grade</th>
<th>Fountas and Pinnell level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>K</td>
<td>A, B, C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>C, D, E, F, G, H, I</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>I, J, K, L, M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>M, N, O, P</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>P, Q, R, S</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>S, T, U, V</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>V, W, X, Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Y, Z</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 and above</td>
<td>Z (p. 1)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Small illustrated books are provided to teachers for each reading level. The reading text is classified according to parameters, such as word count, number of different words, number of high-frequency words, sentence length, sentence complexity, word repetitions, illustration support, and so forth. Some schools adopt target reading levels for their pupils.

The authors of the publishing company Heinemann state that the PM Benchmarks “seamlessly and gracefully links assessment to instruction along The Continuum of Literacy Learning. This comprehensive system for one-on-one assessment reliably and systematically matches students' instructional and independent reading abilities” (Fountas & Pinnell, 2012).
The PM Benchmarks reading text is classified according to various parameters, such as word count, number of different words, number of high-frequency words, sentence length, sentence complexity, word repetitions, illustration support, and so forth. The SL Board teachers utilized the PM Benchmarks. Jane, from Green Meadow, in conversation with me said:

Jane (teacher, Green Meadow): We do a running record. I believe they are Fountas and Pinnell, product, PM.

H: So, how often does that occur during the year?

Jane: Depends upon the kids.

H: OK

Jane: When I think that they’re ready, I do one. But I definitely do one in September, the end of September, the beginning of October. I went through them again, everybody in December, and I will go through them all again shortly.

H: OK

Jane: yea, and then I’ll do them again for the June report card, for sure.

Figure 5 is an example of a PM Benchmarks reading assessment administered to a Grade one student by Jane and I noticed that after the assessment took place, she made a note to herself on the top of the page, “leave on Level H for awhile longer”, as the student had too many errors and had not reached the required 98% to be moved onto the next level:
A boy named Spencer went to a farm to pick out a cat, but he had trouble finding the best cat. Read to find out if Spencer found the best cat for him.

Spencer wanted a cat more than anything in the world. He wanted a cat that would sleep on his bed and purr in his ear and be his best furry friend. "Please, can I get a cat?"

Spencer asked. "I really want one." "Are you sure?" his mother asked. "It is hard work to take care of a cat." "I'll take good care of him," said Spencer. "I promise. I'll brush him and feed him and give him water every day." "All right," said his mother. "Let's go to Apple Tree Farm. Maybe we can get a cat there." Spencer and his mother went to Apple Tree Farm. Many animals lived on the farm. There were cows and horses in the field. There was a friendly farmer. And there were cats everywhere! Spencer had never seen so many cats and kittens! "How will you choose just one?" asked Spencer's mother. Spencer thought about it. Then he said, "I'll choose the best cat for me." Spencer saw a black cat playing on the straw in the barn. "I like your shiny fur," said Spencer. "Will you be my cat?" The cat ducked under the straw. "I guess you're not the best cat for me," said Spencer. "I'll look for another cat." Spencer watched another cat licking her paw down by the pond. "I like your fluffy tail and your pink tongue," said Spencer. "Will you be my cat?"
The cat didn't even look at Spencer. "I can tell that you are not the best cat for me," Spencer said. "I'll look for another cat."
**Figure 5** PM Benchmarks Reading Assessment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key Understandings</th>
<th>Prompts</th>
<th>Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Within the Text</strong></td>
<td>What was the problem in the story?</td>
<td>0 1 2 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spencer went to a farm to get a cat but he could not find one. Finally, he did find a cat.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recounts some essential information from the text, such as: the boy went to the farm to choose a cat; something was wrong with all the cats he saw; finally, a little cat chose him.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Beyond the Text</strong></td>
<td>How was Spencer's problem solved? Tell what the boy did to find the best cat for him.</td>
<td>0 1 2 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spencer really wanted a cat because (gives a plausible reason). He loves them. They're cuddly.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spencer was disappointed (or said) when none of the cats at the farm were the right cat.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The little cat wanted a home and the cat really chose the boy.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spencer was glad the cat chose him.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It would be a good way to get a cat because (gives a plausible reason).</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Summary of Reading Behaviours**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Understanding</th>
<th>Cueing Systems Errors</th>
<th>Fluency</th>
<th>Concepts of Print/Text Features</th>
<th>Reading Strategies Observed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Makes sense of text</td>
<td>Meaning cues</td>
<td>Slow, word by word</td>
<td>Attends to punctuation</td>
<td>Use of pictures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-correction</td>
<td>Structural cues</td>
<td>Some phrasing</td>
<td>Attends to title, labels, subheadings</td>
<td>Reads only</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Refers to illustrations, charts, graphs, etc.</td>
<td>Visual cues</td>
<td>Phrased and fluent</td>
<td>Uses illustrations, graphs, charts</td>
<td>Letterboxed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uses meaningful substitutions</td>
<td>Context Checking: Meaning cues</td>
<td>Appropriate interaction and expression</td>
<td>Other:</td>
<td>Finds little words in larger words</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uses vocabulary from texts</td>
<td>Structural cues</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Re-tries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Visual cues</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Meaningful substitutions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Syllables</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Guide to Total Score:
- 6-7 Excellent Comprehension
- 5 Satisfactory Comprehension
- 4 Limited Comprehension
- 0-3 Unsatisfactory Comprehension

Subtotal Score: 16
Add 1 for any additional understandings: 17

Total Score: 17
Developmental Reading Assessment: (DRA) The DRA, and DRA™2 is an NT Board mandated reading assessment. The DRA was written by Joetta Beaver (2006) and a group of primary teachers in Upper Arlington School District, Ohio and produced by the publishing company Pearson (Pearson Canada, 2011). The DRA™2 is the second edition of the tool kit is described as an “assessment that drives instruction” (Pearson Canada, 2011) and available for the results to be inputted online.

At the time of my study I had not seen the DRA™2 and I asked Liz at Ice Park what the difference was between the first edition:

Liz (teacher, Ice Park): The books are better. They are actual books. The cover is card stock, but it feels like a book, because the other ones (DRA first kit) were just paper.

H: Yes, I noticed that the DRA2 books were plasticized.

Liz: Well, the other ones, they were not a book. The pages, the words would start on the back of the title page. Books don’t start like that. So of course, that threw them off. The colours were wrong, like the lower ones (levels) were all colour based. So where’s my red hat, well the hat doesn’t look red it looks orange. So, it was challenging. But the paper work for this one is more intensive, like more words per minute, more stuff that I have to do after we’re done reading.

H: This is the first time I have ever seen the DRA2. So is it brand new this year?

Liz: Two years I think. It’s better but I think it’s labour and paper intensive.

The DRA is a set of individually administered criterion-referenced reading assessments for students in kindergarten through grade eight (Pearson Canada, 2011), that according to the publisher evaluates each student’s reading ability with a research-based
assessment. The DRA materials are contained in a large box called the DRA kit that includes teacher guides, student sheets, and several levels of student reading books. Each division has its own kit. For example, the primary division of kindergarten to grade three includes the reading levels particular for those grades in one box. The approximately five hundred dollar reading assessment was purchased by the school board for the schools to assist in reading assessments and was used in the classrooms by the teacher. Therefore, one DRA kit is usually shared between teachers in the same division. The DRA is intended to be administered, scored, and interpreted by classroom teachers. The teachers then enter the data into a computer program where the principals can view the scores and percentages to see trends in the school, and to see anything that is really high or really low.

During site visits to Oakwood and Ice Park, I witnessed the preparations for the DRA that Cathy and Liz would administer. Preparations included organizing the work that the students would have to do while an assessment took place, and preparing the assessments to administer. I was able to observe and ask questions to the teachers before and after the assessments. I also composed detailed field notes, writing down each question and statement that the teacher posed to the student while the assessment took place. Cathy and Liz both told me that since the DRA had to be done individually, much organization of the classroom lessons, planning quiet and non-disturbing work for all of the other students in the classroom, had to be planned in advance several days before the assessments began. Even the process of taking a test had to be taught, as the higher levels of the DRA, there are several pages that the students have to complete independently to answer comprehension questions. Liz said, “It’s a lot for them, it’s four pages of writing.”
In the DRA, the students’ independent reading level is identified through reading a leveled text on which the reading meets specific criteria in terms of accuracy, fluency, and comprehension. However, no matter how high a level a student can read, if the student cannot answer the several comprehension questions that are posed to them by their teacher, or written down on a form that the student has to complete, the teacher is unable to move the student to a higher level. In one instance that I witnessed the teacher chose the option of redoing the DRA for one student by changing the book because that student had difficulty with the comprehension, as the content of the story was culturally different.

Figure 6 is an example of a teacher made DRA and Fountas and Pinnell (F & P) leveling form:
Characteristics of DRA Books

Levels A - 2: F & P Levels A - B
- highly patterned with simple illustrations
- one or two lines of text on left-hand page
- familiar animals and objects

Levels 3 - 8: F & P Levels B - E
- simple stories with repetitive words, phrases and actions
- predictable language
- highly supportive illustrations
- one to three lines of text below pictures

Levels 10 - 14: F & P Levels F - H
- stories about children and problems to which children can relate
- repetition of events
- more complex book, oral language structures, and high-frequency words
- supportive illustrations
- two to five lines of text below the illustrations

Levels 16 - 28: F & P Levels I - M
- imaginary or animal characters with human characteristics
- some literary language structures
- some description of characters and setting
- moderate to minimum picture support
- three to twelve lines of text

Levels 30 - 44: F & P Levels N - T
- more complex stories
- characters, settings, problems and resolutions described in greater detail
- different genres
- minimum of picture support
- some full pages of text

Adapted from: Developmental Reading Assessment Resource Guide by Joetta Beaver

Figure 6  Leveling Form
According to the publishers, additional purposes of the DRA include identifying students’ reading strengths and weaknesses, planning instruction, monitoring reading growth, and for grades four to eight preparing students to meet classroom and testing expectations and providing information to stakeholders regarding reading achievement levels. Some of the tests have to be timed, and in the higher level tests, there are independent reading passages and forms with comprehension questions included that the students have to complete.

Both teacher participants told me that they wished the DRA was available online so they did not have to do the endless photocopying for the tests and eventual storage of them for the school year, when they had been completed. Cathy told me that her school was very concerned about recycling and that the teachers were allowed to photocopy a little bit. However, when she did the DRA it was necessary to photocopy as there was no other way to do it.

Liz (teacher, Ice Park): I think the DRA is labour and paper intensive. First, we’re not supposed to photocopy a lot. I mean, some of them are eight pages in length of teacher words and then there are four pages for the kids to write on, plus a student survey that they have to do. And then it gets thrown out because it doesn’t travel with the kids.

H: You would think they have a system where even if you sat with a student with a laptop and did that.

Liz: Exactly. And its work, it’s a lot of work still.

H: Yes, and you’re doing this endless photocopying.

Liz: Yes, and usually when I start with the box that I have, because before it was like four or five binders full of paper. Now I just stick it in a box, but usually it’s
full by the Fall (laughing, that she still has the Spring one to do yet) what a waste in paper!

During my visits I asked both Liz and Cathy questions about the DRA, to help to learn how they were organizing it and integrating it into their daily workload, teaching, and curriculum expectations. Liz said, “We do DRA twice a year. I do, at the very beginning of September; I kind of do my own little DRA just to see where they are. And then, I periodically check in with the kids when I’m with them during the year.” While in conversation with Liz about running records, she told me, “I try to get to them once a week, so each kid once a week, but with DRA that kind of gets blown out the window. You just can’t do it all at once!”

One day, after Liz had administered a DRA with one student, I asked her why she had put her timer on.

H: OK. I noticed sometimes the students were reading the book, just reading a passage of the book and you were timing them and then you were sending the students back to their desks to finish the book.

Liz (teacher, Ice Park): Yes.

H: Whereas other times you were sending them back with the book and a paper to write something on. Now how does that work?

Liz: It all depends on the level they’re at. Up until Level 16 there’s nothing for the kids to write about. Once you hit 16 then we have to start timing them.

Figure 7 is an example of a DRA Level 24 (Pearson Canada, 2011) administered by Liz to a Grade one student:
Teacher Observation Guide

Name/Date

Scores:
Reading Engagement
Independent Range: 6-7

Oral Reading Fluency 13/16
Comprehension 19/28

Teacher/Grade

Book Selection
Text selected by:
☐ teacher ☐ student

1. READING ENGAGEMENT

(If the student has recently answered these questions, skip this section.)

T: What kinds of books do you like to read?

T: Tell me about one of your favorite books.

T: How do you choose the books you read?

2. ORAL READING FLUENCY

INTRODUCTION
T: In this story, The Wonderful Day, a rabbit named Roger finds a giant cabbage. He likes cabbage so much that he decides to take it home. Please read aloud pages 2 through 4. Show the student where to stop reading at the *.

RECORD OF ORAL READING
Record the student’s oral reading behaviors. Note the student’s fluency (expression and phrasing). Be sure to time the student’s reading.

Page 2
Roger Rabbit could not believe his eyes. He stood, still in the middle of the road. He stared, and he stared, and he stared. Then he just had to believe his eyes. That really was a giant cabbage sitting there in the road.

“I never saw a cabbage like that,” Roger told himself. “This is the most wonderful day I’ve ever had! A giant cabbage all crisp and green, just for me!”
The Wonder Day
Level 24, Page 2

Page 3
He began to roll the cabbage home. It was a big cabbage. Roger was a small rabbit.
Every once in a while he had to stop and rest.
But at last he rolled the giant cabbage right up to the door of his house. He pushed, and he pushed, and he pushed.

"Something's wrong," he thought. "This cabbage is too big, or my door is too small. I can't get the cabbage into my house. This isn't such a wonderful day after all."

Page 4
Because Roger could not help himself, he began to cry. Big splatzy tears bounced off the cabbage.

Time: 130 minutes:seconds

ORAL READING WORDS PER MINUTE, PERCENT OF ACCURACY
Use the student's oral reading time to circle the WPM range.

Word Count: 172

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Minutes:Seconds</th>
<th>INTRVN</th>
<th>INSTR</th>
<th>IND</th>
<th>ADV</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2.28-1.43</td>
<td>1.42 or less</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WPM</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>70-100</td>
<td>101 or more</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Count the number of miscues that are not self-corrected. Circle the percent of accuracy based on the number of miscues.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of Miscues</th>
<th>INTRVN</th>
<th>INSTR</th>
<th>IND</th>
<th>ADV</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8-9</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5-6</td>
<td>3-4</td>
<td>1-2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percent of Accuracy</th>
<th>INTRVN</th>
<th>INSTR</th>
<th>IND</th>
<th>ADV</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>95</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>99</td>
<td>100</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- If the student's score falls in a shaded area for either WPM or Accuracy, STOP! Reassess with a lower-level text.
- If the student is reading below the grade-level benchmark, administer DRA Word Analysis, beginning with Task 22, at another time.
3. COMPREHENSION

PREDICTION
Students do not use the text when making their predictions. Record the student’s responses.

T: Think about the title, the pictures you have seen, and what you have read so far. (Pause) Tell me three things that you think might happen in the rest of this story.

SILENT READING
T: Now, it’s time to read and enjoy this story by yourself. When you are done, please come to me and I’ll ask you to tell me what happened in this story.

RETELLING
As the student retells, underline and record on the Story Overview the information included in the student’s retelling. Please note the student does not need to use the exact words.

T: Close the book before the retelling, and then say: Start at the beginning, and tell me what happened in this story.

Story Overview
Beginning
1. Roger, a small rabbit, found a giant cabbage in the road. ✓
2. At first, he couldn’t believe there was a cabbage in the road. ✓
3. Then he decided the cabbage was real, and it was all his. ✓

Middle
4. Roger rolled the cabbage home. He had to stop and rest from time to time. ✓
5. He finally rolled the cabbage to the front door of his house, but the cabbage was too big to go through the door.
6. Roger cried, and then said, “Crying never helps anything. Thinking helps. I’ll do some good thinking.” ✓
7. He called rabbits of all kinds to a cabbage party. ✓
8. The rabbits ate until they were full. ✓
9. Now the cabbage was small enough to go through the door. ✓

End
10. Roger rolled the small cabbage inside and put it on his table. ✓
11. Roger laughed and said it was a wonderful day. ✓

If necessary, use one or more of the following prompts to gain further information after the initial retelling. Place a checkmark by a prompt each time it is used.

☐ Tell me more.
☐ What happened at the beginning?
☐ What happened before/after ____________________________ (an event mentioned by the student)?
☐ Who else was in the story?
☐ How did the story end?
**INTERPRETATION**

Record the student’s responses to the prompts and questions below.

T: What do you think the author is trying to tell you in this story?

**REFLECTION**

T: What do you think was the most important thing that happened in this story?

T: Why do you think that was important?

---

### 4. TEACHER ANALYSIS

**ORAL READING**

If the student had 5 or more different miscues, use the information recorded on the Record of Oral Reading to complete the chart below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student problem-solves words using:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>□ beginning letter(s)/sound(s)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ letter-sound clusters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ onset and rime</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ blending letters/sounds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ knowledge of spelling patterns (analogy)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ syllables</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ rereading</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ no observable behaviors</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of miscues self-corrected:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of miscues not self-corrected:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of words told to the student:</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Miscues interfered with meaning:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>□ never</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ at times</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ often</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Miscues included:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>□ omissions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ insertions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ substitutions that were</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ visually similar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ not visually similar</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Copy each substitution to help analyze the student's attention to visual information.

e.g., stood (substitution)
stared (text)

**Oral Reading Rate:** (Optional) Use the formula below to determine the student’s exact oral reading rate. Convert the student’s reading time to all seconds.

\[
172 \text{ (words)} \div 90 \text{ total seconds} = 1.9 \text{ WPS} \times 60 = 114 \text{ WPM}
\]

**DRA2 Continuum**

- Circle the descriptors that best describe the student’s reading behaviors and responses.
  1. Use your daily classroom observations and the student’s responses to the Reading Engagement questions to select statements that best describe the student’s level of Reading Engagement.
  2. Use your recorded observations from this assessment to select the statements that best describe the student’s Oral Reading Fluency and Comprehension.
- Add the circled numbers to obtain a total score for each section.
- Record the total scores at the top of page 1.

Note: If the Comprehension score is less than 19, administer DRA2 with a lower-level text.
### DRA2 Continuum

#### Level 24: Transitional Reader

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reading Engagement</th>
<th>Intervention</th>
<th>Instructional</th>
<th>Independent</th>
<th>Advanced</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Book Selection</td>
<td>1 Selects texts from identified leveled sets with teacher support; uncertain about a favorite book</td>
<td>2 Selects texts from identified leveled sets with moderate support; tells about favorite book in general terms</td>
<td>3 Selects texts from identified leveled sets most of the time; identifies favorite book by title and tells about a particular event</td>
<td>4 Selects a variety of &quot;just right&quot; texts; identifies favorite book by title and gives an overview of the book</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sustained Reading</td>
<td>1 Sustains independent reading for a short period of time with much encouragement</td>
<td>2 Sustains independent reading with moderate encouragement</td>
<td>3 Sustains independent reading for at least 15 minutes at a time</td>
<td>4 Sustains independent reading for an extended period of time</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Oral Reading Fluency</th>
<th>Level 24, Page 5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Score</td>
<td>2 3 4 5 6 7 8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Expression           | 1 Little expression; monotone | 2 Some expression that conveys meaning | 3 Expression reflects mood, pace, and tension at times | 4 Expression reflects mood, pace, and tension most of the time |
| Phrasing             | 1 Reads mostly word-by-word | 2 Reads in short phrases most of the time; inappropiate pauses | 3 Reads in longer phrases; hesit in punctuation | 4 Reads in longer, meaningful phrases most of the time; hesit in punctuation |
| Rate                 | 1 50 WPM or less | 2 60–69 WPM | 3 70–100 WPM | 4 101 WPM or more |
| Accuracy             | 1 93% or less | 2 94% | 3 95%–98% | 4 99%–100% |
| Score                | 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 | 11 12 13 14 | 15 16 |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Comprehension</th>
<th>Level 24, Page 5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Prediction</td>
<td>1 Makes unrelated or no prediction(s)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retelling: Sequence of Events</td>
<td>1 Includes only 1 or 2 events or details (limited retelling)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retelling: Characters and Details</td>
<td>1 Refers to characters using general pronouns; may include incorrect information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retelling: Vocabulary</td>
<td>1 Uses general terms or labels; limited understanding of key words/concepts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retelling: Teacher Support</td>
<td>1 Retells with 5 or more questions or prompts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interpretation</td>
<td>1 Little or no understanding of important text implications</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflection</td>
<td>1 Identifies an unrelated event; no reason for opinion or no response</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Score</td>
<td>7 8 9 10 11 12 13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Choose three to five teaching/learning activities on the DRA2 Focus for Instruction on the next page.
I noticed that Liz crossed out the Reading Engagement section as the form states, Liz had already addressed those questions in the DRA that was administered in the Fall. The above sample was from the Spring assessments. A DRA Word Analysis (Pearson Canada, 2011) is utilized throughout the year to evaluate the phonological awareness and phonics skills of students in kindergarten and early first grade and the word analysis skills of below-grade-level readers in grades one through five. The books are large and soft-covered and contains guided skills specific lesson plans, ideas for the teacher, and skill tests for the students. The NT specifically utilized the Word Analysis book.

Cathy had the Word Analysis book on her desk one morning at 8:00 a.m. and told me how she incorporated it during her language block of teaching.

Cathy (teacher, Oakwood): That’s from the DRA kit (she showed me the Word Analysis book). So I have (she named a group of grade two students) and my grade ones.

H: When do you do the DRA?

Cathy: DRA should be coming soon; probably end of April, early May is when I have to start doing that.

H: And you do it how many times a year?

Cathy: Two times a year, with the running records in between, yes. So here, this is an example of the DRA. I guess they suggest the focus for the next instruction. (She showed me her binder where she checks off what she has completed). This is how you can follow.

H: so you have a little tick on each one. And it gives you the next focus for the next instruction.
Cathy: yes, of course our first DRA was done in October. So when I did my Word Analysis task, I only took what I thought I would like to check them on, as I wanted to see if their sight words were increasing and whether they would improve. This is what I did with them, whether they could get the spelling word. I think you have to read the word and then they spell it, if they can hear the sounds.

H: and you just work from there. You identify the problems.

Cathy: Right and then see what’s going on.

H: You do guided reading, and pick out the strategies, just like you will be doing this morning from this book?

Cathy: Yes.

H: and so you’re constantly assessing them?

Cathy: Yes, I mean the way they write and the way they read to you, you have an idea of where they’re at. The only thing is the comprehension, they tell you back, retell with what they’ve read. Now, the running record is all just checking whether they recognise the words right? Running record doesn’t really show the comprehension part.

H: it doesn’t show the whole picture.

Cathy: No, it doesn’t, so when the DRA comes, when we have to do the comprehension part, it will be interesting to see how much comprehension that they really have.

Since Liz taught a grade two and three split class, her grade three students had to prepare and write the provincially mandated EQAO assessments in the next couple of months. While I was in her classroom in the spring, Liz administered the DRA and was in great preparations with her grade three students for the upcoming EQAO. Liz seemed
very harassed and said she was stressed out about having to do the DRA and the EQAO practice tests at the same time. Liz had a student teacher who was on teaching practicum for four weeks. Liz told me that the only reason she agreed to have a student in at this busy time was so that the student could help Liz with the DRA and the EQAO. I witnessed that the student teacher supervised the grade two students for an hour each morning while Liz did the EQAO preparations with the grade three students. Additionally, the student teacher taught and supervised the whole class while Liz administered a DRA. At the end of a literacy block for one day, Liz had completed three DRA’s and test preparations for the EQAO.

I wanted to find out how Liz would organize her split grade two and grade threes when she did the formal assessments for the EQAO.

H: How would you organize with the grade twos when the grade threes do the formal tests?

Liz (teacher, Ice Park): They [grade threes] go off somewhere else.

H: Oh they do. Is there another grade three class in the school?

Liz: There’s two more. They are both out in the portables.

H: Would they meet altogether?

Liz: No, we all do it in our separate rooms and we have to separate them and have them in rows and give them all the manipulative they need.

H: And it is for English, Math, and Science?

Liz: No, just English and Math. Some of the English does involve Science and Social Studies knowledge. But it’s basically, you get the workbook and I think you do half a workbook each sitting. So there’s one math book and two language books and its four days of (Liz made a movement of showing a headache).
H: Because you have a split class, what’s going to happen? Do they go somewhere with another teacher and then you’ll stay with the grade twos?

Liz: Yes. I think so. But they haven’t figured it out yet.

I wanted to know what happened with the scores of the DRA and EQAO, after the teachers submitted them to school administrators, whether they were just to inform their teaching, or were the results sent somewhere else. I remember when I administered the DRA; the seemingly endless photocopying of the myriad of hand written forms and charts to fill in had to be given to my principal. Liz and Cathy had to input the DRA scores on the computer instead of making hard copies. I wanted to find out from the principals of Liz and Cathy to learn what their work was when they received the DRA information.

Since Cathy had not finished the DRA at the time, and her principal had not received the scores yet, Jackie, told me about what she does with the data results that she recently received from Cathy from a Math Learning Cycle.

Jackie (principal, Oakwood): The results, I would take results, for example we just finished a Learning Cycle, so I would take the results, unfortunately I have only one Primary class, it’s hard for me to compare. So, this is where the other schools come into play, as I can actually take their data to see how the kids did on their diagnostic versus their formative and summative and then you just take that information and you look to see whether the kids have progressed. And they should do much better in the summative, because you’ve done many things in between from where they’re at.

H: So the teacher, does she have to input the data or does she give you papers or what?
Jackie: Here, I’ll show you. This is hers (grade one/two). So, we do the same thing.

H: OK. (Jackie showed and explained where the teacher had filled in a chart with a list of student names that the teacher had completed with small pencil coloured shapes, such as a triangle, and placed the shapes on an invisible line in the space of the chart, to look like that it was on a continuum of a graph)

Jackie: So this demonstrates where they were on the diagnostic, where they were on the formative, and where they end up with the summative. So, that’s the way we track. I would take all that information and then I would take all the information from the different divisions, and then I would indicate to them where we are as a school.

H: OK. So the prediction and the results of the triangles are on the graph.

Jackie: And that gives you a good indication. Because, if they aren’t successful by the summative, then we need to do some reflection of what is it that as a teacher could have done differently to make sure that all the kids are getting to a Level 3/4. And our goal really is to get them here and they’re all at a different.

H: Yea, I can see that she’s (grade one/two teacher) got one (student) at Level 1, but the bulk of them are here (higher Level 2) and these ones will go up eventually. So when they’re here, that means they’re higher than this person, is that right?

Jackie: yea, a 2.5

H: Oh I see, like a little graph.

Jackie: So this student here might need, and this really shows you visually, for example this student probably obviously needs additional strategies in order to be
successful and as you go along too, I mean these kids too, I would say needs probably different strategies too to bump them along.

H: Bump it up! Right!

Jackie: Yes! Bump it up to another Level.

I asked Laura about her work with the results of the DRA.

H: I wanted to ask you (Laura) about the DRA. Liz, your grade two/three teacher told me that she inputs the data onto the system. I wanted to know what your job is when you get those results, what do you do with them.

Laura (principal, Ice Park): OK the DRA results, they come in electronically. We have a research and assessment tool that is available on the internet, so that all comes out. What I do is I look at it to see trends in the school, to see anything really high, really low, or shocking. But mainly is a tool that I forward onto the teachers so what I do is to sort and organize it by classroom. I prepare documents a couple of times a year that has EQAO data, DRA data, the most recent report card data, and I give them that. As well I give them when DRA comes out, the specific data, it’s all highlighted according to students that need help and then I give it to teachers and they have time to look it over. Now, we’re right now at the point where we’re looking at our school effectives framework in preparation for doing our school improvement plan and all of this data is brought together when we look at what do we need to do as a school and what do we need to do as a division and as a grade. All that data is looked at a couple of times for that purpose.
I then asked Laura about parent communication and the DRA:

Laura (principal, Ice Park): Well, the DRA scores do go out. It’s not something that we share with parents in a letter that they’re doing DRA that goes out. But that is something in particular that is shared in parent/teacher interviews or something along that line. It would be certainly the teachers’ view and an expectation of teachers that they would call parents if their students were struggling with strategies for working through that and that’s something that we do regularly through phone calls and interviews.

*Daily Five:* The Daily 5™ and Literacy CAFE Menu is a reading program written by Gail Boushey and Joan Moser, who are known as the 2 Sisters (Boushey & Moser, 2006, 2009):
There are two books available in libraries and for purchase at book stores such as the local university book store and online trade booksellers. The first of two book is *The Daily Five* (2006) and the second is *The Literacy CAFE Menu* (2009). Reading the books, I inferred that the 2 Sisters brought in their own experiences of over forty years of teaching elementary and told how they needed to find ways to get children to engage more easily in reading.

We were frustrated with our inability to engage students in independent, meaningful reading practice. We just wanted someone to tell us what worked, and as the answer eluded us, we were forced to dig deeper. (Boushey and Moser 2006, p. 7)

The Daily Five program consists of five independent rotating activities that the students can work on independently while the teacher can assess individuals or groups of students (Boushey & Moser, 2006, 2009). The Daily Five includes:

- **Read to Self:** the best way to become a better reader is to practice each day with ‘good fit’ books that you have selected yourself. It’s fun!
- **Read to someone:** partner reading provides opportunities to practice strategies, improve fluency, check for understanding, and hear your own voices while sharing in the learning community.
- **Work on writing:** just like reading the best way to become a better writer is to write each day. It’s fun.
- **Listen to reading:** just hearing fluent and expressive reading of good literature expands your vocabulary; helps build your stamina and will make you a better reader.
Spelling/Word work: expanded vocabulary leads to greater fluency in reading, therefore increasing comprehension. Becoming more proficient as a speller leads to writing fluency and the ability to get your ideas down on paper.

Students choose to work on three out of five activities each day in a typical language block.

The Literacy CAFE Menu is an acronym for the four main components for reading: comprehension, accuracy, fluency and expand vocabulary. Each day, the teacher models and teaches a strategy that good readers use to help them when they are reading. These strategies are taught in whole group sessions and then are used in small groups and individual conferences. Students are able to practice using these reading CAFE strategies when they work on their Daily Five activities. The Literacy CAFE menu also includes a spot for students to declare the reading goal that they are working on. Cathy from Oakwood said, “It’s really good. So, when they’re reading to me, then I have to sort of try to find a goal that we can work towards. So, that would be the assessment in that respect.”

The Daily Five and Literacy CAFE Menu were used by all four of my teacher participants. From my discussions and conversations with them, I ascertained that they had learned about the program from other teachers in other schools or from a workshop that Cathy went to that was provided by The Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario (ETFO). The teachers said they enjoyed using the program as it freed up their time so that they could deliver a one-to-one assessment such as a running record reading assessment, administer a reading assessment such as the DRA, or they were able to teach a specific strategy to a small group of students.
Cathy (teacher, Oakwood): It`s like centers, like you, you train them in the beginning of the year, train them to read to self it`s called, read to self, read to someone, work on writing, and word work. There are all different stations. They get to choose, and this is what they like the best. They get to choose which centers they want to go to in the morning, but there I limit, we do have a program on the computer where they can read and then the computer can read back.

H: Do you do the Daily Five every morning?

Cathy: yes every morning. On days like today, I have interruptions (she referred to a class trip that they were going on that day), so it`s hard, but on mornings that I have full mornings, then we do have Daily Five running.

H: So, how long does that take, an hour or?

Cathy: No, that takes… last term when we didn`t have the Math Learning Cycle, I took the whole morning for Daily Five, in writing, and everything, I just couldn`t fit it all in. I should be theoretically, I should be doing Math in the last period of the morning, but I skipped Math many times, (laughing)

Jane from Green Meadow explained how she utilized the Daily Five to organize her language block.

Jane (teacher, Green Meadow): So, my classroom runs a Daily Five Program about three days a week. Doesn`t always happen three days, but we try, we aim for three. A cycle of Daily Five takes about twenty minutes. I spend the first ten with a small group and then I spend the next ten in individual conferences.

H. OK, and so what happens during that individual conferencing?
Jane: We talk about what their reading goal is and we talk about the strategy that they’re supposed to be using and practising. I listen to them read and I basically coach, so when we get to a word that’s unfamiliar or if they’re working on a comprehension strategy I’d stop them and say “OK, now you need to retell the story”, if that’s their goal, or “you need to check for understanding.” So, who, what, where, when, and I sort of coach them along to make sure that they’re using the strategy that they’re working on.

They’re involved in reading and writing activities during that time, while I work with small groups.

The teachers talked about the benefits of grouping the students with the same strategies.

Cathy (teacher, Oakwood): For example, (grade one child) is a very good reader and I put her with a Grade two reader who is a weak reader, so they are about the same level. And (grade two child) who is also a very weak reader is with my grade one group.

H: so it’s grouped by abilities then?

Cathy: Yes, but that’s a nice thing about the Literacy CAFE is that you can: say if kids are working on the same role like for instance if they have (showed me the book) if they want to work on phonemic awareness or something, so you can have a group together and just talk about it. This is some of the reading strategies like chunking letters. So if you want, in the beginning of the year, I can group the kids who need to work on this together, and so I just tell them in the morning: “This morning I want to see so and so”, and the rest of the kids can choose what they want to do.
Jane talked to me about how she groups students with the same reading strategies.

Jane (teacher, Green Meadow): The groups have come about based on their needs shown through a running record, and I try to target strategies. So, they are more strategy groups than a traditional guided reading group. The other days of the week we focus on writing. It’s similar to guided reading. They all come to my table, but all the kids that come, at different levels. OK so that’s the major difference between what I’m doing and what guided reading is.

Traditionally, guided reading, we’re all reading Level L and we work together on one book. But, the trouble I always had with that was that this kid was working on fluency, this kid couldn’t decode the words and this kid didn’t understand at all, so he had no comprehension, even though we’re all reading the same book. I’m still trying to teach four different things because they all had their own difficulties within that level. So, instead of bringing all the kids together that are reading at Level L, I bring all the kids together that are working on decoding and they don’t use first and last letter sounds. So, I bring them all to my table, we practice the strategy, then they pick a book out of their book bag, and this kid might be at B and this kid might be at P and that one at L, they all read their book, I listen in as they read and I watch for them to see that they’re using the strategy we just practised together. So, that’s how my strategy group reading works or my guided reading group works.

Integrating Assessments into the Learning Cycle

In this section I discuss how the assessments discussed earlier in the chapter appeared to be integrated into the planning and instructional cycles of each school board
and school. A planning and instructional cycle is a routine process in which teachers employ formal and informal assessment procedures to inform instruction and other curricular decisions. The process is ongoing, as described in chapter two, but recently in some schools the idea of an instructional cycle has been formalized into a Learning Cycle where teachers collaborate in meetings, on advice from their school board.

Liz from Ice Park told me that in her school a Learning Cycle is “six weeks of intensive teaching and modeling. It’s usually six to eight weeks. As a grade or as a division we come up with what we think we should focus on.” Choosing a topic for a Learning Cycle depends upon the school. Liz said descriptive writing was chosen by the teachers at her school because of the results of the EQAO assessments from the previous year.

Liz (teacher, Ice Park): We’re not good at it [descriptive writing]. Our EQAO scores show that we’re not good at it. For the grade twos we’re starting with paragraphs and just coming up with good sentences. Because they struggle with creating great sentences, which leads to the grade threes doing well on their EQAO writing which they have to do well.

Like Learning Cycles, Professional Learning Communities (PLC) were board-initiated and were based on ideas shared by teachers that. Staff meetings were arranged where teachers came together to work on a common goal. PLC projects and Learning Cycle projects were based on gaps identified by mandated assessments, specifically the EQAO assessment data already identified. Notice, however, that the PLCs and Learning Cycle initiatives created a need for new assessments.

Nora (administrator, SL Board): Every school, it’s changed a little bit this year as schools have taken on their own focus. What happens is that the schools determine
a focus for their school and there is money provided from the board level whereby release time is provided and teachers can get together and develop a diagnostic assessment that they give to their children and it comes back to the table and is examined for skills and the teachers determine then and what their next steps would be and how they’re going to approach.

PLCs and Learning Cycles were organized in various ways. Jane at Green Meadow told me that in her school, the teachers met one half day a month to meet as a division, to collaborate, plan lessons, plan their assessments, and talk about what they’re looking for. In particular, I asked the teachers about the Ontario Writing Assessments, as they were required when I was a classroom teacher just a few years ago, and they were a requirement with the grade one teachers who participated in my masters research (Parkinson, 2009). I asked the teachers if they administered the assessment. Jane from Green Meadow told me how those assessments had been incorporated into PLCs.

Jane (teacher, Green Meadow): Our PLC previous to this year was very writing-focused, and we were in a different form, it’s a long way back, but we were networked with five other schools. I’d say we were networked by our grade. It started as a TLLP so a Teacher Leadership Learning Program and so that was I believe was Ministry of Ontario funded or it was a grant that someone had applied for so that is how it got started and then our board agreed to carry it on for a couple of years. Because they were starting PLC’s in all the schools and we already had a year of it, so they said, well you continue with what you’re doing and we’ll start everybody else up, and from there we’ve gone from being networked to now being back in our own division and our focus has changed from writing to reading. So, I went to a grade two PLC and there were five other grade
two teachers and we developed six week chunks of writing. And so we developed a rubric, we developed the assessment criteria, we did check lists, collected all kinds of samples, and so now I use that. I have a binder that’s just my grade two PLC stuff and in it I have all my samples, I have all the prompts that I use during that time. I have the rubrics and the checklists for both the kids and for my marking assessments stuff. I just pull out my binder and I have read-alouds, you know like the titles that we use and the books that we use, I’ve got them all in there too. I just pull it out and say OK let’s go.

Mary is the head of her school’s PLC at Waterfield and her colleague teachers work together to create informal assessment tools that include rubrics and student and teacher conference checklists. Then after the meetings, Mary types up the assessment tools for everybody and distributes them.

Mary (teacher, Waterfield): Making up the rubrics and the checklist that we do, we generally work together as a primary division, but a lot of it is our own stuff that we generate on our own. We’ve had our Professional Learning Community going on for three years, so we’ve covered quite a few forms. We have a partner school because we all try to follow Lucy Calkins a little bit, and they were also following Lucy Calkins kind of year at a glance. But, we tend just to keep it, when you get too many bodies we’ve got different expectations and it’s hard to get together, so we usually meet with those other schools once a year and just sort of prepare and build on what we’ve developed as a school. We generally just meet as staff in the primary division. Last year we had three different focuses. What we do at the beginning of the year, is lay out our year at a glance so the writing forms that we want to make sure that we cover. So, we use the curriculum, it doesn’t
guide you really that closely. We use it as a loose guide. We did something like small moments from Lucy Calkins, and so it’s writing about moments that you’re familiar with. Because we’ve been doing it for three years, we have developed as a team lots of different mini lessons for each form or writing, rubrics to go with it, student checklists so that they can monitor their own progress, and conferencing checklists that we use with the boys and girls for everything. From realistic fiction, to fantasy fiction and paragraphs, and poetry, we don’t really guide it as much.

H: So you can use them year after year.

Mary: Oh yeah. We have what we call a Legacy Binder, … and then we all refer back to it, as we plan our year at a glance. So, we’re pretty much covered as a staff every writing form that we can think of that we would like to cover, and we have rubrics and checklist and everything to match!

Figure 8 is an example of a teacher made self assessment form:
Some PLCs focus directly in assessment practices. Liz from Ice Park told me that during their PLC meetings, the staff worked together and decided to change the Ontario Writing Assessments to suit the needs of their students.

Liz (teacher, Ice Park): We’ve done a couple. We found the kids do not do well with that. They don’t enjoy the topics. So, we’ve tweaked them to a couple of
them. We put in (name of town) and family stuff. So there was one on: if you could be anything you could do. So, ours was if you could be a hockey player, because our town has hockey and figure skating. So we tweaked it to their interests and they did better on it.

Not only are assessments incorporated into the PLC meetings, but also included is the planning of an entire unit for the learning cycle and step by step lessons that the teachers will teach. For example, Jane talked about planning a school wide unit on using inference when reading.

Jane (teacher, Green Meadow): We just plan for our inferring unit and depending on where we’re at in this (learning) cycle, we do one or two lessons a week on that inferring and in the beginning we started off pretty strong. We started off with a lot of poetry, because there’s lots of inferring in poetry, which is probably why most of us hate it. In our PLC that’s what we’re all like (laughing), ugh! Poetry. Because there’s so much meaning within, it just takes a lot of brain power. It was an area that as a group we decided we needed to work on because we weren’t really that comfortable with it and it’s always better to take something that you’re not comfortable with on as a group. So, we kind of supported each other through that and we used past EQAO questions to get inferring, lots of great read alouds, and we played lots of games, like emotion games, what can you infer by what I’m doing and then translated it back in to a text.

Cathy from Oakwood stressed the importance of networking with other teachers at other schools to plan assessments in her school’s PLC meetings.

Cathy (teacher, Oakwood): We come together with a task that we want to work on, a diagnostic task, a formative which we do on our own, and we sort of talk
about what would be a good summative task. My problem is because I’m the only primary and (teacher’s name) teaches grade three. You know, I don’t have other teachers to talk to, so this networking is great for me. So when we get together, if we have time we talk about the success criteria, what we should put on there, the charts, and the rubric usually has been left up to us alone because we just never have time to get to that part, so we it make out, make a rubric and we will share, send it to each other and share. And then yesterday we got together and we talked about the task, what kinds of problems we had and, yea. It is nice to network with other teachers.

Informal assessment procedures that the teachers talked about included making anecdotal notes, holding writing conferences, putting stickers on reading folders to check that the books were being read independently at home and at school, conducting oral assessments, marking, teaching through quick-writes, administering spelling tests and sight word tests on words from other areas of the curriculum, and using observational assessments for behaviour modification to inform instruction and other curricular decisions. Mary from Waterfield utilized her guided reading and writing sessions to jot down anecdotal notes.

Mary (teacher, Waterfield): OK, well, for reading a lot it’s anecdotal when we do our guided reading sessions. Whether or not they’re using the strategies that we focused on for the last couple of weeks, whether they’re using information from the texts to answer the questions that we’re asking, whether they’re making predictions and using the comprehension strategies that we’ve been focussing on as a class. So, I’ll just jot myself a note, so that’s anecdotal. We do almost daily
writing conferences during those writing focus times. So when we’re talking to
the kids about their next steps and recording their next steps and then the kids are
then accountable for using their next step. It is amazing what the Grade 2 students
can do.

To make sure that the students were returning their reading folders from home to
school and reading their books during independent reading time, Mary put stickers on the
students’ orange reading records every morning.

Mary (teacher, Waterfield): That’s their reading records. That’s how many books
they’ve covered during independent reading time, and then they also take a book
home each night and they’re supposed to read it with somebody at home, so it’s
just keeping track of their reading progress on how much they’re reading in their
independent reading time.

In Liz’s guided reading time, she checked for oral fluency and expression in the
students’ reading and marked the students’ journals.

Liz (teacher, Ice Park): We do guided reading every day, so I’m checking for their
fluency and their expression, and I try to get them to work on that. For writing, I
assess their journals. Everything basically they write I assess it. So the kids come
up with a criteria that they want to look at and then we kind of play with it all year
long.

Liz administered informal quick-writes and informal quizzes. The quizzes were
held on Fridays and included checking up on words that were introduced that week and
quick-writes.

Liz (teacher, Ice Park): For the grade twos we try at the beginning of the year to
do the 100 words from Grade One that they should know. For the grade twos and
threes we do the 100 words from Grade Two and then each week we do five sight words and then we have our little quiz on Friday. Once they go on the word wall, they shouldn’t be spelling them wrong, they know them. And then we’re going to go into theme words. I think we’ll probably do Social Study words and Spring words. We do our quick-writes for a couple of days on whatever topic we did, such as scenery and food.

Cathy from Oakwood used the Daily Five to incorporate informal assessments into the language block to check for fluency when the students read to her and by posing questions to the students to check up on their comprehension.

Cathy (teacher, Oakwood): I would say, let’s work on fluency, so try to read phrases at a time when you’re reading, so next time I see them again, I’ll just monitor to see that they are doing the same thing or we need to work on a new goal, like maybe they have to read with expression, or some of them would have to work on their phonics, like try to sound out words and reading comprehension.

H: How do you administer these assessments?

Cathy: During reading groups, during Daily Five, when I have the group with me. I mean the way they write and the way they read to you, you have an idea of where they’re at. The only thing is the comprehension, they tell you back, retell with what they’ve read. Now, the running record is all just checking whether they recognise the words right? Running record doesn’t really show the comprehension part.
Cathy needed to check up on her students’ behaviour because she had a few students who disrupted the class while she was teaching. She described why she carried a clipboard throughout the day.

Cathy (teacher, Oakwood): It took me awhile to find something that works. The clipboard with a checkmark is that they get gym time on Fridays or computer time. If they get less than five checkmarks, then they don’t get any time at all, they sit out the whole time for gym, but if they five or up to ten they get half the gym time. Those three boys, they love gym. I had to find something that works and it does work (laughing). But I have to be constantly saying: “I’m giving checkmark now”, you know taking checkmark and giving. It’s more work!

In this last section of the chapter, I described two school-level formats literacy assessments that were formally mobilized and integrated into the planning and learning cycles. I provided concrete examples of how teachers’ chose Learning Cycles, team planned lessons, collaborated with teachers from other schools, planned formal and informal assessments, and developed rubrics and checklists. I also described informal ways that assessments were integrated into the curriculum. This assessment work illustrates myriad ways in which the hidden curriculum is enacted. Anyon’s analysis for example, suggests that the hidden curriculum of school work is understood in “preparation for relating to the process of production in a particular way” (1980, p. 90). All of the examples were collaborations among teachers and principals.

Concluding Remarks
In this chapter I introduced the participants and presented data gathered during the fieldwork phase of the research. I provided portraits of the four teacher participants and situated them in their classrooms, schools, school boards, and surrounding neighborhoods. I also introduced the four principals and the four school board administrators. I then presented some professional texts that the participants incorporated into curricular decision making. I provided detailed descriptions of each text and how they were used by the participants.

In the following chapter, I build on the foundation laid in this chapter to address my research questions as stated in chapter three. The research questions are: What work do primary teachers carry out to fulfill mandated literacy assessments? How are literacy assessments implicated in the coordination of teachers’ work? How is this work coordinating and being coordinated with the work of students, administrators and policy makers at local, national and international levels? I also map the social relations that connect assessment work in classrooms to the teachers’ other work and to work carried out by principals and administrators in school districts and bureaucrats in the Ministry of Education.
Chapter Six

Thinking Relationally About Assessment Work

Introduction

IE studies are premised on the belief that when people see how their work is organized they are better positioned to re-organize their work in ways that support their professional and ethical goals. As explained earlier in this thesis, an IE analysis aims to show how work in a setting is organized to produce or maintain a troubling situation. IE does so by identifying one or more work processes that seem to be implicated in the situation, by documenting the work, and by tracing linkages between that work and work being carried out by others elsewhere, including people unknown to one another.

There is no orthodox way to conduct an IE investigation. However, in chapter four I presented a model proposed by Grahame and Grahame (2001) who list three tasks that can be accomplished in a variety of ways.

The first task in the model is an examination of one or more institutional work processes. IE researchers ask: What work is creating the situation I want to understand? The situation I attempted to understand in my study was the primary literacy curriculum being enacted and experienced by teachers in four Ontario classrooms. It recognized that the teachers were doing their work in an era of increased educational accountability and aimed to uncover what that looked like. This problematic was developed in response to my master’s study (Parkinson, 2009) in which I found that teachers were doing an inordinate amount of assessment work. I wanted to understand how that work was being coordinated in and outside of the classroom from the standpoint of the classroom teachers who did this work.
In chapter five I introduced my participants and described several assessment texts that they were employing to address accountability requirements. I also identified another assessment-related work process -- the work of integrating assessment data into the local curriculum or instructional cycle (see Figure 1 in chapter two). The current analysis therefore extends the scope of the earlier study. In my master’s research I noticed that the teachers were collecting copious amounts of assessment data that were not being integrated into instruction.

Second in Grahame and Grahame’s (2001) model is “an examination of ideological processes through which people’s activities are made accountable as institutional work” (p. 3). Ideological procedures provide the categories and concepts on which institutional routines depend. Smith’s use of the term “ideological” originates with Marx. It does not refer to biased or false representations, but to discursive processes through which the actual practices of people are “worked up” to “construct an account of history as expressions of concepts” (Smith, 1990 cited in Stooke, 2004, p.57). In primary classrooms, children read texts and answer questions posed by the teacher but the teacher records a reading level that corresponds to levels in a set of commercial reading texts. Ideological procedures facilitate accountability because people at work in institutional settings use them “to describe and analyze how their own practices fulfill the institutional function” (Grahame & Grahame, 2001, p. 3).

In educational settings assessment practices are the primary mechanism by which an enacted curriculum is made accountable as educational work to teachers, students, parents, administrators, policy makers, and the public. Assessment data make curriculum work visible in institutional terms. Assessments are particularly important in IE because they are the connecting points or nodes in the web of coordination Smith calls the ruling
relations. In Smith (2006), an assessment thus constitutes what Pence has called a “processing interchange” in the sequence of actions set in motion by an assessment (p. 30). For example formal reading assessments such as the DRA include procedures that “work up” students’ performances into standardized scores called levels. The student’s level can then be compared with past scores and with the achievements of students in other settings. In IE terms, assessment procedures were textually-mediated procedures by which participating teachers’ and students’ curriculum work was being hooked into a broad network of accountability practices.

Ideological procedures are not inherently harmful. Teachers employ numerous concepts and categories as they make routine professional judgments. Professional discourses provide the language for teachers to describe students’ performances in ways that facilitate conversations with other teachers, and more importantly they allow the teacher to make inferences about what students know and can do at the time. As Nora, a school board administrator told me, the Marie Clay’s Reading Recovery (Clay, 1979, 1985) work was utilized in the Kindergarten program that she was placed in as a work study teacher. Teachers then use the “worked up” interpretations of students’ performances to plan instruction and organize the curriculum to support learning. For example, Cathy told me, “I mean the way [students] write and the way they read to you, you have an idea of where they’re at”. From Cathy’s twenty year teaching experience and her routine use of mandated assessment criteria, she knew what curriculum achievement levels her students “were at” and she also knew what DRA level the students needed to be “at” to boost up their achievement to Level 3 and Level 4 on the mandated Language Curriculum Achievement Chart. [Please refer to the charts below from the *The Ontario curriculum: Grades 1-8: Language* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2006, pp. 20-21)].
### Achievement Chart – Language, Grades 1–8

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>Level 1</th>
<th>Level 2</th>
<th>Level 3</th>
<th>Level 4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Knowledge and Understanding</strong> – Subject-specific content acquired in each grade (knowledge), and the comprehension of its meaning and significance (understanding)</td>
<td>The student:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge of content</td>
<td>demonstrates limited knowledge of content</td>
<td>demonstrates some knowledge of content</td>
<td>demonstrates considerable knowledge of content</td>
<td>demonstrates thorough knowledge of content</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(e.g., forms of text; strategies associated with reading, writing, speaking, and listening; elements of style; terminology; conventions)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understanding of content</td>
<td>demonstrates limited understanding of content</td>
<td>demonstrates some understanding of content</td>
<td>demonstrates considerable understanding of content</td>
<td>demonstrates thorough understanding of content</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(e.g., concepts; ideas; opinions; relationships among facts; ideas; concepts; themes)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Thinking</strong> – The use of critical and creative thinking skills and/or processes</td>
<td>The student:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of planning skills</td>
<td>uses planning skills with limited effectiveness</td>
<td>uses planning skills with some effectiveness</td>
<td>uses planning skills with considerable effectiveness</td>
<td>uses planning skills with a high degree of effectiveness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(e.g., generating ideas, gathering information, focusing research, organizing information)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of processing skills</td>
<td>uses processing skills with limited effectiveness</td>
<td>uses processing skills with some effectiveness</td>
<td>uses processing skills with considerable effectiveness</td>
<td>uses processing skills with a high degree of effectiveness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(e.g., making inferences, interpreting, analyzing, detecting bias, synthesizing, evaluating, forming conclusions)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of critical/creative thinking processes</td>
<td>uses critical/creative thinking processes with limited effectiveness</td>
<td>uses critical/creative thinking processes with some effectiveness</td>
<td>uses critical/creative thinking processes with considerable effectiveness</td>
<td>uses critical/creative thinking processes with a high degree of effectiveness</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 9        Achievement Chart – Language, Grades 1-8
It is worth noting, however, that many of the recently introduced ideological procedures in schools such as the ones being carried out by the teachers in my study tend to support institutional goals. Standardized achievement scores are useful to policy makers and planners at the school district, ministry and national levels who use them for large-scale planning. Furthermore, the achievement scores are most helpful to policy makers when the ideological procedures used to derive the scores are aligned with ideological procedures used by other systems. It is for this reason that the OECD and other supranational organizations have such well-developed and well-publicized assessment programs. By contrast, the standardized achievement scores are less directly useful for local curriculum planning and pedagogical decision making. The teachers who participated in my master’s study saw them as a waste of time because they were creating work for teachers and students, but producing few data that could be immediately relevant to student learning. But recently, as illustrated by the descriptions of professional learning activities presented in chapter five, there has been a move to integrate assessment data in curriculum planning and this new work process is creating a market for commercial resources such as the Daily Five that can facilitate the integration of assessment data into the instructional cycle. Later in this chapter I expand on this observation and show that the participating teachers in my study were routinely coordinating their curricular decisions to align with the interests of non-educators. In other words, their work was drawing them further into the web of coordination and control that Smith calls ruling relations.

The third IE task identified by Grahame and Grahame is the creation of a map that shows how the work described and examined in a study is located within an “extended set of social relations” (2001, p. 3). This task is achieved by “thinking relationally” about the
data (DeVault & McCoy, 2006, p. 17). Thinking relationally means thinking about how an action fits into a sequence of coordinated actions. It is a recursive strategy and it may not at first uncover a relation that is analytically interesting. For example, I was not surprised to learn that assessment data were being used as curricular informants. As a teacher I expected to employ assessment data in my planning. However, further reflection on the ways in which assessment practices were being integrated into the teachers’ instructional cycles provided new clues to the organization of the work.

To summarize, my analysis confirmed my suspicion that assessments and the discourses embedded in the various assessment texts employed by the teachers had become key organizers or mediators of the teachers’ and their students’ classroom activities. Second, I inferred that the assessment work being carried out by the teachers was not being unproblematically integrated into the instructional cycle, as a jigsaw puzzle piece might fit into an available space. Rather, the assessment work was generating other kinds of assessment-related work that also had to be completed during the work day. This meant that assessment-related work was displacing other kinds of curriculum work. Third, in tracing linkages between assessment work and other curriculum work, it became possible to discern how the teachers’ local curricula were being extralocally organized – that is, tied into “broader forms of social organization that coordinate action within extended functional complexes involving families and schools” (Grahame & Grahame, 2001, p. 10).

In this chapter I present a relational analysis of the data. I show how teachers’ assessment work was linked to other curriculum work being carried out by teachers and students. I will propose ways in which the work was caught up in the ruling relations, by which I mean the ruling work being done in settings beyond the classroom.
A relational analysis requires an examination of ideological procedures by which participating teachers were intentionally and unintentionally aligning local curricula with official, unofficial and sometimes unstated expectations of people outside of the local educational administration. As noted in chapter three, in teacher professional discourse, *curriculum* is most often conceptualized as a set of officially mandated learning expectations sometimes known as the official curriculum. In the academic discourse of Curriculum Studies the term *curriculum* is variously used to refer to intended and unintended outcomes of curriculum work such as unintended learning that results from the way work is organized in an educational setting (see e.g. Anyon, 1980; Apple, 1979, 1990, 2004; Auger & Rich, 2007; Dillon, 2009; Egan, 1978; Eisner, 2002; Jackson, 1992; Kelly, 2009; Null, 2011; Petrina, 2004; Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery, & Taubman, 2008, Schwab, 1978). IE investigations contribute to the knowledge base of a field of study by showing how a situation that seems to be emerging locally is one or more constituents of a web of coordinated practices. My thesis shares this goal, but as a former primary teacher I also sought to shed light on some unintended local consequences of the current preoccupation with assessment in Ontario classrooms. To this end I employ curriculum constructs such as hidden curriculum (Anyon, 1980; Apple, 1979, 1990, 2004a, 2006; Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery, & Taubman, 2008), washback (Alderson & Wall, 1993; Messick, 1996; Nichols, 2007; Turner, 2009), and null curriculum (Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery, Taubman, 2008) as discussed in chapter three.

The rest of the chapter considers the following topics: connections of field notes and transcripts to the local curriculum, connections to work elsewhere and at other times, maps, hidden curriculum, washback and null curriculum. I conclude the chapter and thesis by describing how my study complements the work of Comber, Cormack, Doecke,

Connections to the Locally Enacted Curriculum

The following charts identify assessment activities observed by me during my site visits to the schools or described to me by participants in interviews. I have organized the activities into three categories that parallel the categories often used for lesson planning in primary grades: preparing for assessments, implementing assessments, and following up on assessments. In each chart I name a type of work and provide an example from my data. I then suggest ways in which the work is linked to teachers’ local curricular decision making.

Assessment Preparation Work

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Work</th>
<th>Example from the Data</th>
<th>Connections to the locally enacted curriculum</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participating in Professional Learning Community Learning Cycles, and other collaborative assessment-related development work</td>
<td>Jane said, “I went to a Grade 2 PLC and there were 5 other Grade 2 teachers and we developed six week chunks of writing. We developed a rubric, we developed the assessment criteria, we did check lists, collected all kinds of samples, and so now I use that.”</td>
<td>Collaboration with other teachers from other schools facilitates standardization at the school level and privileges assessment in curriculum.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attending training workshops</td>
<td>Cathy attended a workshop sponsored by ETFO to learn how to do the Daily Five.</td>
<td>The Daily Five allowed Cathy to organize the literacy block so that students worked independently and she could administer assessments.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gathering resources and making assessments such as rubrics and student</td>
<td>In describing the PLC Mary said, “we always make up a rubric and student checklists.”</td>
<td>This process makes the teacher’s plans accountable to the Ontario curriculum achievement charts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Checklist</td>
<td>Description</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scheduling blocks of time to conduct assessments</td>
<td>Liz said about running records, “I try to get to them once a week, so each kid once a week, but with DRA that kind of gets blown out the window. You just can’t do it all at once!”</td>
<td>The frequency of assessments is overwhelming for teachers. One assessment seems to be displacing another. I wonder what is not being done to make room for the assessments.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Photocopying assessments and organizing resources needed and class furniture</td>
<td>Pam said about the DRA, “it is labour and paper intensive. First, we’re not supposed to photocopy a lot. I mean, some of them are eight pages in length of teacher words and then there’s four pages for the kids to write on, plus a student survey that they have to do.” Pam said about the EQAO, “we all do it in our separate rooms and we have to separate them and have them in rows and give them all the manipulative they need.”</td>
<td>The DRA trains students to think of school work as doing tests, filling blanks on forms, and doing surveys. Preparing for EQAO creates a plethora of material task preparations. Teacher also ‘trains’ students to prepare right from the beginning of the year.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planning lessons for other students and reading the teacher’s manual for an assessment protocol</td>
<td>Each morning before the students came in to class, I observed Cathy reading and taking notes from the DRA Word Analysis manual that she used for her teaching. Cathy said, “The DRA word analysis task is the other one that I have done with my weak readers.”</td>
<td>The DRA word analysis provides support for struggling students.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conducting a mini DRA as a rehearsal for the actual assessment</td>
<td>Liz said, “I do them at the very beginning of September my own little DRA just to see where they are.”</td>
<td>Mini DRAs take up time from the teaching schedule. This practice is aligning instruction with an assessment rather than the other way around. The mini DRAs help students to become test wise. The ‘real’ DRA scores may be inaccurate.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching while planning for assessments.</td>
<td>Liz said, “I periodically check in with the kids when I’m with them during the year. We do guided reading every day, so I’m checking for their fluency and their expression, and I try to get them to work on that. For writing, I assess their journals.”</td>
<td>Guided reading sessions help with the learning and planning future instruction, but also create documentation work. It also constrains the teachers’ ability to improvise and be spontaneous.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizing students into instructional groupings.</td>
<td>Cathy said about the Daily Five, “I can group the kids who need to work on this together, and so I just tell them in the morning: This morning I want to see so and so”, and the rest of the kids can choose what they want to do.”</td>
<td>The Daily Five helps Cathy to organize her students so she can</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Work Done During Assessments

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Work</th>
<th>Example from the data</th>
<th>Connections to the locally enacted curriculum</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Listening to student read, asking questions, observation of student’s reading and writing behaviours, reminding of reading and writing strategies, feedback, conferencing</td>
<td>Jane said about individual reading conferences, “So we talk about what they’re reading goal is and we talk about the strategy that they’re supposed to be using and practising. I listen to them read and I basically coach, so when we get to a word that’s unfamiliar or if they’re working on a comprehension strategy I’d stop them and say, “OK, now you need to retell the story”, if that’s their goal”, or “you need to check for understanding” so, who, what, where, when, and I sort of coach them along to make sure that they’re using the strategy that they’re working on.”</td>
<td>Jane’s reading conference is organized to align with the PM Benchmarks assessments.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figuring out how to streamline the recording process when conducting informal assessments</td>
<td>Cathy said about running records, “this was so time consuming. I copied everything (she showed me all the numerous pages of passages from books and the forms for the running records that she had photocopied and worked on) so I could see. Then, having talked with other teachers, this is how they started to do it, the running record: 1 piece of paper divided into 9 squares, 1 square was for 1 running record that was filled up with about 8 rows of checkmarks [word read correctly by the student] and other symbols that represented a word omitted by the student, a self correction by the student, and so forth.”</td>
<td>Extra record keeping creates more work.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monitoring other students to keep on task and stay focused and quiet while assessment was being administered.</td>
<td>Periodically during the assessments, all teachers’ heads popped up to glance around the classroom to check on the rest of the class and to remind the students of quiet time.</td>
<td>The Daily Five is needed to do this work.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing on forms</td>
<td>Cathy said, “it’s always hard trying to find the time to record everything. You know, like doing the running records, two running records a day and putting it into my binder. It’s hard! It’s really hard!”</td>
<td>This process makes the teacher’s plans accountable to the principal. However, the principal does not see them. So integrating running record data is not made accountable...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Note taking, anecdotal work</td>
<td>Mary said, “I’ll just jot myself a note, so that’s anecdotal and then when it’s running record time, then I write myself more formalized notes regarding their growth.”</td>
<td>Note taking and anecdotal work gathers information for report cards. These are ideological procedures that lift students’ actions out of their everyday contexts.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Work Done After Assessments**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of work</th>
<th>Example from the data</th>
<th>Connections to the locally enacted curriculum</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Calculating the total score after an assessment is finished</td>
<td>Liz said about the DRA, “I do the paperwork with them, then I have to go back and calculate words per minute and then I have to use their rubric from the DRA to score them on their comprehension, and their text features and knowledge and all that. Then I put them on the website the school board data base and they’re gone.”</td>
<td>The scoring is taking up time and not being cycled back into the planning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marking a variety of classroom literacy work.</td>
<td>Liz said, “Oh, it’s a nightmare! For just general writing, all of their stuff is in their books, their journals, all, like we have to do a level for them, and then we do written comments, and then we have to tell them orally. So it’s a lot of feedback for them. For writing, I assess their journals. Everything basically they write I assess it.”</td>
<td>Marking gathers information for report cards and makes teachers accountable for writing report cards.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planning on re-teaching, re-learning content/strategies</td>
<td>Liz said, “For my new class, I’ll get this year’s scores [from the Spring] and then I have to do it all again in the Fall. And hopefully they are around the same level or a lot of times they go backwards. They don’t read over the summer.”</td>
<td>Planning and re-teaching and re-learning helps to raise levels of achievement but it also creates work away from the instruction and makes children test-wise.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planning and organizing for next assessments</td>
<td>Liz said, “I pull my hair out (laughing). It depends on what it is. We do a lot of modeling. So, if it’s a written, if it’s our Learning Cycle in our descriptive writing, we hammer that thing to death. We model it, we do quick writes, we do this, we do that, and then we give them a final task. Today, the Grade Two’s will be doing a final task. Hopefully, I can see they’re ready. For reading assessments, I just basically prep all my stuff”</td>
<td>Planning and organizing helps to raise levels of achievement.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ahead of time, or as much as I can and they go in cold turkey. Because I’ve noticed with this class, in particular, if they know I’m assessing them, they panic and then they get really self-conscious. So, I, you know it’s kind of hard. I try to tell them it’s not a big deal. It’s not really assessment assessment, because they seem to think that’s a bad word and then we go from there.

### Planning individual student goals

Liz said, “I’m doing one on one stuff, even though I’m not supposed to, I do some of it on my prep for the kids who can’t focus. I have to get it done. And if that’s the best time for them, then that’s what I do.”

Liz organized her day to get her required work done. Liz is using time allocated for other preparation to focus on individual student needs.

### Filing assessments in assessment binders, Literacy Assessment Portfolio (LAP), planning future teaching, planning future goals and strategies for students based on assessments

Mary said, “I keep almost all of their formalized writing in an assessment binder. Each child has a plastic page protector. So, their diagnostic from today and their rubric will go in there, and then following that will be a page of my conference notes. That’s the way that I keep track of their writing, all of their rubrics are in there, and that way, at a quick glance and I can see what we conference about next time, did they meet the goals that I set out for them and what are their next steps for next time, and then the kids know too, because they got their own checklists, so they know what their next steps are, it’s handy in their books as well.”

Jane said, “we have what we call a Literacy Assessment Portfolio. Everything I do goes into this folder all year. I keep a log of my own for their running records and these are their goals that they’re working on in our Daily Five. So, then I just kind of keep track of who’s working on what.”

Keeping track of students’ work makes teachers accountable for archiving assessments.

### Storing/discarding/shredding

Liz said about the DRA, “usually when I start with the box that I have, because before it was like four or five binders full of paper. Now I just stick it in a box, but usually it’s full by the Fall. What a waste in paper! And then it gets thrown out because it doesn’t travel with the kids.”

### Reporting to principal, parent school board, Ontario Ministry of Education

Mary said, “I do monthly newsletters and I let them know our writing focus and our reading focus and comprehension strategy that we’re working on.”

The report process aligns work to the curriculum.

### Writing report cards

Mary said, “I fill out a report card for our own notes and for next year’s teacher’s too.”

Liz said about her students, “They know when it’s report card time. They know that. So they

The report cards are aligned to curriculum achievement charts.
IE researchers use the term local organization to refer to the linkages among actions carried out by individuals within a single site of institutional activity such as a school. For example, in the chart depicting Assessment Preparation Work, there is a reference to a teacher’s participation in a training workshop for the Daily Five. Training workshops lend authority to workshop facilitators rather than teachers and they promote standardization of practices. But most importantly, the Daily Five facilitated the teachers’ ability to cope with the work of individual literacy assessments during the literacy block. The Daily Five enabled teachers to assign independent literacy activities thereby freeing up teachers to conduct individual assessments with a minimum of interruptions. Cathy told me, “You train them in the beginning of the year, train them to read to themselves. It’s called: Read to self; Read to someone; Listen to someone read; Work on writing; Word work.” Training students to work on the activities independently is central to the success of the Daily Five. However, teachers were not able to be as responsive to individual students’ needs as they might have been in a more interactive program because they were engaged in individual assessments.

The Work Done During Assessments chart includes the individual reading conferences which were used by the teachers to give guidance to the students, but also served to prepare them for formal assessments. The ways in which Jane related to students during reading conferences paralleled the PM Benchmarks protocol. In fact, individual reading conferences seemed more like the performance evaluation interviews that take place between employees and managers. Timing students’ reading may have
added to students’ stress during a conference. Certainly teachers must prepare students to work under time constraints, but an increasing number of classroom activities seemed to mimic exam conditions and I suspect that the frequent practice tests would mediate students’ and teachers’ orientations and attitudes toward literacy. There is a hidden curriculum in which students may come to believe that assessment is their school work. They learn that the work of being a student includes learning to practise for tests.

After assessments have been completed there is often a great deal of interpretive work to do. Liz had a tremendous amount of extra work calculating marks, scoring tests using rubrics, and finally entering scores into the school board data collector – a software program designed for that purpose. When was she to do this? If Liz took time out of instructional time, her future lessons would be less effective so she felt obliged to take the interpretive work home. Liz talked about the paperwork associated with the DRA.

Liz: I do the paperwork with them, then I have to go back and calculate words per minute and then I have to use their rubric from the DRA to score them on their comprehension, and their text features and knowledge and all that. Then I put them on the website the school board data base and they’re gone.

Liz was not the only teacher to devote large amounts of time to interpreting assessments. All of the teachers created documentations that were used for further teaching and new assessments as well as report cards. Additionally, teachers figured out ways to organize students in the Daily Five activities, assigned levels, gathered the information that would be used for future assessments and report cards. They stored the assessments, shredded and discarded the older ones. I believe much more time could have been used for the re-teaching of material, or reviewing other aspects of the instructional cycle.
One other way that the local curriculum was connected to assessment work was discussed in chapter five. I refer here to the work of integrating assessment data into the instructional cycle through professional learning activities. The schools and school boards in my study were utilizing dis-aggregated assessment results to organize professional learning activities.

At a glance the charts highlight record keeping as a dominant activity. For example, Cathy set herself goals of doing two running records per day. During my observations, an average running record took Cathy between 10 and 15 minutes. Cathy explained how she divided her paper into nine squares in order to fit several running records on one page to save time and paper. Additionally, Mary doubled up on her record keeping by jotting anecdotal notes and then creating more formalized notes later on. Mary also did additional work for the report card process. She filled out report cards for herself and for the next year’s teacher. Mary also reported assessment information to the parents in the form of monthly newsletters, packages of assessment samples, and home reading journals. Jane kept an extra record for herself in her assessment binder. Self-initiated record keeping done by the teachers suggests that they may be coming to see their work as assessing student work and record keeping although Liz referred to her marking as a nightmare!

How much record keeping is enough? Wintle and Harrison (1999) argue that “many schools still have a burdensome and over-elaborate record keeping system” (p. 94). How do teachers maintain curriculum planning when they feel they must mark and record everything to keep their work accountable to the students, the parents, the principals, the school boards, and so on (eg. Ball & Olmedo, 2013)? I wondered about the missed literacy learning opportunities that were smothered by the teachers’ record
keeping. I wondered about the impact on student creativity and teachers’ spontaneity. What does this mean for teachers and education? (eg. Acker, 1999; Cremin, 2006; Popham, 2011; Sloan, 2008; Taubman, 2009).

Connections to Work Elsewhere and at Other Times

IE researchers use the term extralocal organization and sometimes extended relations to refer to connections to work elsewhere and at other times. The teachers’ local work as recorded in the charts points to the extra-local work of policy-borrowing, standardization, and corporatization of curriculum. One way that work is linked to work elsewhere is through standardization of workplace practices. Extra-local organization refers to the linkages among actions carried out in diverse sites of institutional activity. In my study, these sites include corporate settings, publishing companies, other educational systems, and supranational organizations such as OECD. Teachers’ preparation duties such as gathering resources, making assessments, photocopying, organizing, and attending training workshops, mirror common practices in the corporate world. Teachers’ informal assessment strategies resemble the strategies widely employed in large-scale, international assessments such as the Scholastic Aptitude Tests (SATs) and the Ontario Grade 10 Literacy Test (OSSLT). Participating in Professional Learning Community activities fosters standardization of practices across districts and these types of working groups are widely employed in the corporate world too.

Another way that work is linked to work elsewhere is through the use of commercial resources. The Daily Five and the DRA are commercial products that are designed to align tasks with the United States Curriculum standards such as the State of Washington (K-10 Reading Grade Level Expectations, 2004). Timing the students on their
reading tests stresses efficiency, a practice that is highly valued in workplaces. For example, an employee has to get a report out by a certain deadline. In the teachers’ work done after the assessments are completed, I noticed that there was a focus on organizing for the next assessments by calculating marks and sending off the results to other people. Data collected for report cards and assessment results were sent off in a data collector that the principal and school boards had access to. Since the importance and focus on high-stakes assessments, the report card process appeared to be less of an importance. This reminded me of the tasks that I used to do while working in the corporate world for a bank such as organizational duties, planning goals, reporting to superiors, meetings, note-taking, writing on forms, meeting deadlines, filing, storing, discarding, and shredding. The business-like approach in the teachers’ work is very similar. Planning what to teach next and reporting information outside of the classroom for informal assessments also mirrors the corporate world. Strategic data-driven planning is a corporate practice that is increasingly occurring in education.

Mapping Social Relations

In this section I present two graphic representations of teachers’ assessments work and it linkages to work carried out beyond the classroom. Each graphic shows that individuals’ actions in local sites of institutional activity are caught up in a web of relations that was organizing professional life for teachers. However, the second map represents an attempt to tease out a few threads of what appeared at first to be a chaotic jumble of connections. The second map is based on what the teachers and other participants told me about assessment work in their school districts.
Figure 10  Mapping the Social Organization of the Teachers’ Work (Technology by Phil Stooke, PhD, used by permission)
Figure 10 shows that teachers’ curricular decisions are caught up in a chaotic tangled web of coordination that uses “texts to anchor the sequencing of work processes” (Smith, 2005, p. 177). The lines trace the ways in which teachers’ work connects them to various stakeholders in education and beyond. They also show that texts are crucial to the connections. As Smith (1987, 2005, 2006) says, texts are crucial to an IE investigation. In the maps the texts are book shaped, while circles refer to people.

Figure 11 aims to show the actual sequences of action referenced in participants’ accounts of their work. As Smith (2005) stated, the focus of an IE investigation is “always on the social, understood as the coordinating of people’s actual activities, their work in the generous sense” (p. 211). Smith argued that in IE investigations, incorporating texts “makes it possible to expand exploration of institutional relations into higher levels of organization” (p. 212). In the first map one can see that the lines connect the teachers to the texts they were using and also to texts that were organizing their work in a less direct way. It shows people at the local level (i.e. the schools, students, families) whose actions were linked to the actions of the teachers and people working elsewhere including Ontario Ministry of Education bureaucrats, educational publishers, supranational organizations such as the OECD and American educational jurisdictions. Another map could also be drawn to connect other peoples’ work. From each standpoint, the web of relations has a unique appearance.

In Figure 10, the lines connecting teachers’ assessments to commercial publishers reveal an important aspect of the social organization of assessment as demonstrated in my study. I concur with DeVault (2008) who argued nearly five years ago that standardized assessments and reporting of the assessments are “tied to internationally developed
curricula and, increasingly, to the products of an international educational industry” (p. 41). In an interview with an educational publishing company called Pearson, Griffith & André-Bechely (2008) learned that Pearson saw their enterprise as one in which “we think we will make a lot of money” (p. 48). Pearson claimed to have “enterprise solutions” (p. 48) for “testing and data collection” (p. 48). Pearson is also the publisher of the DRA which was mandated for use in one school board in my study.

Like many of the authors who have written about educational reform and the intensification of teachers’ work (e.g. Acker, 1999; Hargreaves, 1994), DeVault (2008) is critical of the large scale changes in workplaces that she attributes to globalization and neoliberal economic policies. She says that the changes “sweep through educational systems, altering the everyday work of all the participants – administrators, teachers, and parents – and that these changes are situated in an increasingly globalizing economy” (p. 55). My study data suggest that the situation may have actually intensified since I completed my master’s study in 2009 as more work is now expected of teachers to integrate assessment data into curriculum decision making. This point is underlined by Lessaux and Marietta (2012) who write that “the looming and daunting challenge for educators is to ensure they have a comprehensive assessment approach that includes action steps to link assessment results to the day-to-day instruction” (p. 5). This point is taken up at the board level as my interview with Jackie shows.

Jackie [principal, Ice Park]: As far as implementing and working with teachers to implement proper assessments, again we’re part of (Name of School Board) that has adopted network meetings and learning cycles which allow teachers to come together to pick out from the curriculum, right? They choose a goal of what they’re going to work on, they design a rubric that they’re going to assess the
students, all the students. . . . And they’re actually assessing at provincial standards. So, we’re not comparing student to student. We should be really comparing students to the provincial levels. So, what does a Level 1 look like at the provincial standards, Level 2, 3, 4? And how do you do that? We’re given an exemplar from the Ministry and which we look at to see how a child should be achieving that. And a lot of what’s great about learning cycles and bringing teachers together and to do what we call the assessment of students and looking at rubrics, is that there’s lots of dialogue of why the student achieved a Level 2 versus a Level 3 and therefore teachers can really decipher why they’ve given the marks that they are.

Also in chapter two I cite several curriculum scholars who have argued that the movement for school accountability is essentially a movement for more effective top-down control of the schools (Au, 2009; Eisner, 2002; Martone & Sireci, 2009; Sloan, 2008).
Figure 11  How texts fit into sequences of actions (Technology by Phil Stooke, PhD, used by permission)
In Figure 11 the image of a person at the bottom of the map represents a teacher. The arrows direct the reader to three groups of texts that mediate the teachers’ curriculum work. Notice that the arrows pointing to the EQAO texts make a loop bringing work process back to the teacher. This is the work process of integrating data from standardized assessments back into the local curriculum. The running records and the texts at the lower right of the map (writing assessments and assignment assessments) are informal assessments created by the teacher with students. The data created by these assessments is interpreted by using the Achievement Chart rubric and the interpreted grades are entered into the report card data collector along with comments which are selected from a bank of generic comments. The principal reviews the file and recommends edits. The report card is kept on file in the student’s Ontario Student Record and a copy is sent home to the parent(s). To the best of my knowledge the report cards were used exclusively for record keeping and notification to families.

The texts at the left of the map are produced outside the Ontario education system. PM Benchmarks and DRA are school board mandated formal assessments. The broken lines connect these assessment texts to other curriculum expectations such as the United States Department of Education standards and the Daily Five as well as the Leveled Books marketed by the publisher of the PM Benchmarks and the DRA. As stated earlier in this chapter, commercial products link Ontario teachers’ work to global economic activities. The linking of Ontario discourses of learning, education and reforms for public education are carried into Ontario teachers’ professional activities.

The loop traced from the teacher through the EQAO process and back to the teacher via PLCs and Learning Cycles is creating an enormous amount of pressure on teachers and students to perform well. It also shows a layer of work that is rarely
recognized by the public and even teachers as work. In order to make interpretations of how well the system is performing data from all students who write EQAO assessments are aggregated. The data are later disaggregated to show patterns that apply to individual districts and schools. For example, Ice Park School learned that their students as a group had performed poorly on the descriptive writing items. This finding was mobilized into a six-week Learning Cycle.

It is possible to conceptualize the EQAO process as a boss text. Boss texts are “texts that are authorized through some definite institutional procedure so that the actions they in turn authorize can be treated as acts of the institution or corporate body or of institutionally designated individuals” (Smith, 2011, p. 5). Smith argues that the boss texts “control how actualities are read into the text, how they coordinate organizational or institutional relations, and how peoples’ work is controlled by adapting to the selective requirements of the boss text” (p. 5). The boss texts are written in the institutional discourse in categories and concepts and that people’s actualities have to be fitted into the categories and concepts of the institutional discourse. The boss texts “can then be read in terms of the boss text and articulated to/as institutional courses or sequences of action” (p. 5).

I initially identified the Growing Success document as a “Boss Text”, but I did not notice the document in any of the classrooms, and only the principals mentioned it, not the teachers. Therefore I changed my mind. The EQAO was mentioned by all of the participants in my study. It is the previous years’ scores of the EQAO that facilitate the PLC meetings and dominate the content of the six-week Learning Cycles.

In the next section, I discuss alignment work and curriculum constructs important to my study.
Integrating and Aligning as Sources of Work Intensification

In chapter three I discuss several lenses for understanding curriculum. Hidden curriculum, null curriculum, and washback are important constructs for understanding my data. In this section I argue that alignment work was mediating a hidden curriculum in which teachers and students were learning that the valuable work of school was performances on tasks that appeared on high-stakes tests. In the following two sections I discuss washback and the null curriculum as they relate to the data.

Alignment work is a form of coordination. When pieces of a process are well aligned, they fit together smoothly. They are coordinated. In a global economy, alignment of practices along with standardization facilitates trade. This is one reason why there is so much policy borrowing among nations. At the local level too, alignment is a pervasive goal of systems such as school systems. Teachers are expected to align curricular decisions with assessment data.

For my participants the achievement charts in the Ontario Curriculum documents assumed huge importance. In the section on assessment and evaluation and student achievement, several suggestions on program planning are provided that include instructional approaches, other documents to refer to, cross-curricular and integrated learning, planning language programs for students with special educational needs and language learners, suggestions for the use of the school library and technology, and definitions of what should be done in each grade. A leveled achievement chart and descriptions of what the student should know in each category is provided. For example, in the Knowledge and Understanding sections of the achievement chart the description states: “Subject-specific content acquired in each grade (knowledge), and the comprehension of its meaning and significance (understanding)” (Ontario Ministry of
Each level on the chart is defined: Level 1 states that the student demonstrates limited knowledge of content, Level 2 states that the student demonstrates some knowledge of content, Level 3 states that the student demonstrates considerable knowledge of content, and Level 4 states that the student demonstrates thorough knowledge of content (p. 19).

Teachers are expected to become very adept at using the Achievement Chart. In describing the professional learning activities organized by her district, Jackie [principal, Ice Park] noted: “We have four schools that come together to do that, and so, our job is to make sure that whatever we’re asking teachers to implement at the grade level, that they are aligning, right?” Aligning the curriculum with assessment criteria was work that had to be done but was not documented as work. Moreover, it was almost always more complicated than the earlier example of using spelling tests to select words for a word wall would suggest since assessment data were often generated from sources whose criteria were not well aligned with the official Ontario curriculum. Witness for example the teacher-made chart presented in chapter five that attempted to align the PM Benchmark levels to the DRA levels. However, none of the teachers in my study had any instructions for matching levels of various publishing companies to curriculum documents.

Liz: The levels and the rubrics are the Achievement Charts in the Curriculum.

H: Do they coincide with the DRA or not?

Liz: No. The DRA is a whole other (sighing and laughing). Yea, it doesn’t really seem to fit well with the curriculum with the way they [administrators] want it.

From the above conversation, it is easy to surmise that one creator of alignment work in schools would be the widespread use of commercial teaching and assessment
resources. The increased profitability of producing materials for wide distribution promotes standardization. In the DRA assessment kit, for example, there are step by step instructions on how to administer the reading assessment. All the books, the test booklets, and resources needed are included and questions that the teacher must pose to the student are scripted and are laid out in a step by step sequence. How to calculate the reading scores and what to do with them are also provided in the instructions in the teachers’ manual. At first glance, the scripted nature of the DRA may appear to streamline the work of the teacher. However, in addition to the material preparation and learning of procedures, teachers need to translate the standards employed in the DRA and other commercial resources to fit the Ontario Language Curriculum achievement charts.

Lately some commercial products in Ontario have been developed specifically to align with the Ontario curriculum. Jane and Cathy both talked about using Nelson Education (2013) products.

Jane: We don’t have the whole Nelson Kit for Grade 2 and I know Nelson’s really good about bringing in the Social Studies and the Science and the Language altogether. But that’s not a program we have all of. I think they’re guided reading selections.

However, even within one school system, alignment can be challenging. Jackie talked about the problems of aligning the Achievement Chart levels in the official Ontario Curriculum documents to the letter grades used for report cards.

Jackie: So now you have Level 1, 2, 3, 4, but on a report card, you have A, B, C, D.

H: Right.
Jackie: OK. So, sometimes that becomes very confusing. So, if you’re not in Education, it becomes really confusing in what that is. Because a Level 2 doesn’t necessarily mean that’s a C, it can mean something very different. And also when you’re assessing, you’re assessing many different levels. So, you’re assessing the knowledge, application, and also the higher level of thinking. For example, when we go into problem solving, we like to bring the kids to a higher level of thinking, because problem solving is about really deciphering what the problem is about, applying it, and then communicating what the answer is.

Liz too discussed challenges associated with mismatched assessment criteria. She told me how frustrating it was to be working with published resources and curriculum documents that used levels, numbers, and letters derived in diverse ways.

Liz: The DRA has numbers but the numbers don’t match up very well with the Fountas and Pinnell grade levels or the levels that they have [in the Ontario Language Curriculum].

Where most alignment work appeared to be associated with resources designed in or for other places, Jane talked about aligning her curriculum with learning expectations to be tested in the following grade. Even though Jane taught grade two, she wanted to prepare her students so that they would be ready to answer inferential questions of the kind expected of grade three students. Jane described to me how the teachers in their school got together to plan to teach inference in reading. One of the supports that they used was previous years’ EQAO tests.

Jane: Inferring is using a new schema and text clues to understand the author’s message. We started off with a lot of poetry, because there’s lots of inferring in poetry, which is probably why most of us hate it. In our PLC (Professional
Learning Community) that’s what we’re all like (laughing), ugh! Poetry! Because there’s so much meaning within. It just takes a lot of brain power. It was an area that as a group we decided we needed to work on because we weren’t really that comfortable with it and it’s always better to take something that you’re not comfortable with on as a group. So, we kind of supported each other through that and we used past EQAO questions to get inferring, lots of great read alouds, and we played lots of games, like emotion games, what can you infer by what I’m doing and then translated it back into a text.

The necessity to engage in alignment work is not unique to teachers. Alignment, like standardized assessments and ranking practices are practices that serve institutional interests, including the interests of the globalized economy that has for more than 30 years been influenced by neoliberal economic philosophy. As stated in chapter two, the OECD provides a forum in which governments can work together to share experiences and seek solutions to common problems. TheOECE works with governments to understand what drives economic, social and environmental change. Policies are recommended to make the lives of ordinary people better. The following principles appear in a recent document published by the OECD (2013).

Measure productivity and global flows of trade and investment.

Analyze and compare data to predict future trends.

Set international standards on a wide range of things, from agriculture and tax to the safety of chemicals. (p. 2)

Although these principles do not refer directly to educational work, there is ample evidence in my data that my participants were held responsible for measuring productivity and analyzing data to predict future trends. The school board administrators,
teachers and principals used previous EQAO student assessment results to plan future instruction; the standards they set for their students aimed to demonstrate the effectiveness of Canadian education on a global stage. As Griffith and André-Bechely (2008) put it, many of the current changes in education are “embedded in a conception of the need to change schooling to provide for Canada’s participation in a global economy” (p. 42).

The practice of leveling is one manifestation of alignment that has become pervasive in education. At the beginning of this section I described the four levels of the Ontario Curriculum Achievement Charts. The EQAO scores are similarly leveled, as is the International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS) (Statistics Canada, 2007). The four-level framework has been active in communicating standards across sites and communicating to educators where they should focus attention. The goal is to increase the number of people (students) who achieve level three and this has resulted in much attention to people who score in the high level two range. In my study I observed several events in which students were learning how to assess a piece of writing using the level system.

When I was in Jane’s classroom, I observed a writing lesson. A letter that was written by Jane to the principal of their school served as an exemplar. The letter was printed on a large piece of white paper and fastened to a classroom wall so that Jane and the students could read it together. Jane asked the students what level the writing was and they replied it was a Level 2 with no supporting detail. She asked them, “How can I turn that into supporting detail that supports my opinion?” Jane asked the students for supporting detail, explained about working on a draft copy, and modelled how to edit a piece of writing. She stressed the importance of supporting detail and told the students that she wanted to see it in their work. Later on while the students were in groups working
on Daily Five activities, Jane worked with individual students on their letters and discussed what they needed to do “bump up” (improve by one level) their writing on the second draft.

In the classrooms, the major sources of leveling discourse were the PM Benchmarks and DRA assessments. Each of these assessment tools is accompanied by a set of leveled reading texts aligned with the difficulty levels in the assessment. I noticed that most of the students’ reading and take home books were in leveled boxes. I observed teachers pointing out the leveled boxes to the students, telling them where they could choose a book to read.

Mary kept track of the take home reading folders by putting stickers on her students’ reading folders every morning when they returned them to the class. The folders were also used for independent reading that was done throughout the school day. Most of the levelled books were from the PM Benchmarks reading program. Mary wanted to know what books the students read, their levelled reading progress and how much they read in their independent reading time. Mary kept track of the take home reading folders by putting stickers on her students’ reading folders every morning when they returned them to the class. The folders were also used for independent reading that was done throughout the school day. Most of the levelled books were from the PM Benchmarks reading program. Mary wanted to know what books the students read, their levelled reading progress and how much they read in their independent reading time.

Leveling limits students’ reading choices. For example, the DRA stipulates, that no matter how well the student can read, the student cannot move up to another level if the student does not succeed in the comprehension questions. In all classrooms, leveled books were used in the teachers’ entire literacy block. All of the teachers entered
assessment levels into an on-line system twice per year to track student reading levels from Kindergarten on, so the teachers, principals and school board administrators could see the progress of the students moving through the levels. Dzaldov and Peterson (2005) contend that teachers have created a *leveling mania*.

We have observed teachers in many schools who are creating classroom text collections organized by book levels, rather than creating literature-based classroom libraries that are organized by genre, author, or theme. We seem to be in the midst of a leveling mania (a term used by Szymusiak & Sibberson, 2001), in which massive amounts of time, money, and energy are devoted to organizing books by reading levels within classrooms and schools. It appears that teachers are driven to attach a level to every text that students encounter during their school day. (p. 1)

I argue that leveling may be mediating a hidden curriculum in which students and teachers are learning to view reading in terms of difficulty levels rather than as opportunities for students to learn about themselves as readers and to make connections to books. Aesthetic experiences and learning about the world seem less important than skill and strategy work. And worse, teachers sometimes talk of students as levels and students identify themselves that way too. In the long run, students may come to see their careers at school as progress through an endless line of very small steps.

DeVault and others have described alignment work as part of a broader form of social organization in which local practices in the public sphere are increasingly aligned with the goals of a global economy that is “undergoing a period of radical change” (DeVault, 2008, p. 3). Alignment is a form of standardization that enables comparisons and, as noted in chapter two, it is a goal of large international organizations such as the
OECD that rank countries in the manner of sports leagues. The need for comparison promotes standardizations of curriculum and assessment practices and demands that individual teachers align their assessment practices with those of the large organizations.

Washback from Literacy Assessments

The term washback refers to the ways in which the introduction or use of a test influences teachers and learners to do things they would not otherwise do. Washback can promote or inhibit learning (Alderson & Wall, 1993; Messick, 1996; Muñoz & Álvarez, 2010; Nichols, 2007; Turner, 2009). For example, a staff’s creation of a Legacy Binder that contained teacher-made assessment tools was much valued by Mary.

Mary: The Legacy Binder that we (as a staff) put together is awesome for referring back to what we’ve done, and we’ve made a really great bank of mini lessons. We have what we call a Legacy Binder, is what we call it, and then we all refer back to it, as we plan our year at a glance. So, we’re pretty much covered as a staff every writing form that we can think of that we would like to cover, and we have rubrics and checklists and everything to match.

As stated in chapter three, washback may be as straightforward as teaching to the test -- as when one group of teachers employed items on inferential reading from the EQAO tests to teach inferential thinking to grade two students. Where the curriculum itself drives assessment practices, this type of washback is likely to have a positive outcome for student learning. For example, Liz’s school’s response to low scores on the previous year’s provincial assessments of descriptive writing would have potential benefits for students because descriptive writing is a component of the curriculum. In my
conversation with Liz I learned that an explicit focus on descriptive writing was reaping benefits as students’ writing was improving.

H: I noticed that you were doing descriptive writing words. You were really forcing it in both grades [grade two and three].

Liz: Yes.

H: And how do you find it? Is it improving?

Liz: Oh in leaps and bounds.

H: Really!

Liz: Yes, as long as I tell them “you need to use descriptive words”. If I just say write in your journal about the flower or whatever, it’s horrible, they totally forget. Some of them remember and some of them are trying to add it in more and more.

H: Yes and when you were talking to them on the carpet too, you were asking them what they needed and they were saying “it needs juicy words!”

Liz: Yes, exactly. (laughing). They can’t remember what an adjective is but they can tell a juicy word now and they can describe it.

H: Yes, using the five w words [what, where, why, who, when]

Liz: Exactly! Just hounding them and it’s working so far! It’s a lot of repetition.

So we do our quick writes for a couple of days on whatever topic we did, such as scenery and food. And they had to describe it all.

Conversely, when the results of large scale achievement tests are mobilised in such a way that they dominate curriculum planning in a school over a long period of time, or when teachers focus on improving test scores without contextualizing the scores and considering other sources of assessment data, the washback is more likely to be negative.
The teachers’ reliance on the Daily Five program to carve out uninterrupted time for individual reading assessments is an example of negative washback. No program can substitute for a thoughtful and skilled professional educator, but the teacher’s professional expertise and time were being directed to assessments rather than interactions with students.

The most visible manifestation of washback from required literacy assessments in my study took the form of scheduling work. I use the term *scheduling* work to refer to the work involved in organizing and coordinating routines and activities throughout the school day. Scheduling work is routine work for teachers, but I noticed how much scheduling was being done in order to accommodate assessment requirements. All the teachers utilized the The Daily 5™ and Literacy CAFE Menu (Boushey & Moser, 2006, 2009) reading program during their language blocks because the Daily Five encouraged students to work independently while a teacher administered a literacy assessment. Jane said that one cycle of Daily Five activities took about twenty minutes. During that time she scheduled individual conferences to administer running records or to discuss reading strategies and goals. She also had time to schedule intensive teaching to a small group.

Cathy regularly scheduled the Quality Daily Physical Education (QDPE) which included thirty minutes of daily physical activity. Cathy scheduled the gym at 9:00 a.m. before the language block started so that the students would be less restless and more able to sit quietly and focus on their seat work. During this language block, Cathy completed the required DRA assessments with minimal interruptions from the students. Cathy told me that she needed her class to be calm and quiet while the assessment was taking place, so the student that was reading for the assessment could concentrate and do well on it.
Liz and Mary each employed other teachers to create smaller instructional groupings in order to focus on a few students and to assess their performances more closely. Liz was also able to administer DRA assessments to her students while a student teacher taught and supervised the rest of the class. She told me that having the student teacher in her class at that time of year was a great relief because she had to prepare one group for the EQAO tests as well. Mary scheduled her language block in conjunction with the specialist teacher who taught the Empower™ Reading (Learning Disabilities Research Program) (LDRP, 1999-2012) program to seven students in a separate classroom. Mary told me that she saved some time when she did her report cards by not having to write up a language report card comment for the seven students, as the specialist teacher did that for her.

The positive and negative consequences of washback are well illustrated by teachers’ comments about Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) and Learning Cycles. As illustrated on the above map (Figure 11), Professional Learning Community (PLC) work and Learning Cycle work were ongoing at all the schools in my study and the activities were all coordinated with EQAO assessment data. The groups developed assessment tools for local use and decided on strategies and learning goals for the students to improve the scores on the assessments such as the EQAO. They created valuable resources such as the Legacy Binder, but Mary and Liz complained about the work of creating assessment tools for her PLC. More work was created for Mary as she was the head of her school’s PLC. She told me that in the evenings at home, she typed up assessment tools for everybody and distributed them. Assessment tools that were developed and created by the PLC included rubrics as well as teacher and student checklists.
One day, when I was in Mary’s class, I observed Mary teach a lesson on writing paragraphs. She began with a diagnostic test. Mary told me that she was preparing her students for the grade three EQAO that her students would have to write the following year. This activity was planned from Mary’s PLC meetings and covered two criteria: personal narratives and paragraph writing. Mary asked her students to write a paragraph describing their favourite type of weather and provide reasons why. Mary told her students that it was an easy writing activity, to do their best, that she could not help them and that she would mark their completed piece of writing with a rubric. I noticed that some students got right at their writing; some students put their hands up to ask questions, while others talked and tried to help each other. When the allotted time of half an hour was finished, some students had written a page, while others only had a few words on the page. I wondered if there might have been other ways for Mary to learn about what her students could do with respect to the two criteria. The lesson seemed to be a waste of time for some students. However, as Mary told me this diagnostic test was something that their PLC planned together. I propose that the six-week intensive Learning Cycles planned by Mary’s PLC allowed for too little flexibility. There was no room or time to allow extra or re-teaching to those students who may have needed the extra practice. There was no diversification of the plans. Moreover, PLC school and teacher meetings seemed to focus exclusively on boosting up achievement levels. There was no time in the Learning Cycles to investigate something further or to spend more time on a topic of interest. There was no planning or thinking on the teachers’ part because the entire Learning Cycle was already planned.
Null Curriculum

Liz: Some days it’s a miracle to get through. I have to practice for the EQAO and we have to get the DRA done and we have to get the curriculum done!

The teachers in my study appeared to be sacrificing many aspects of curriculum work to administer assessments. DeVault (2008) contends that “overworked teachers may not be able to meet accountability demands (p. 40). However, I am inclined to reverse the statement to say that accountability demands are getting in the way of teachers being able to carry out their professional work. When I observed teachers racing through some aspects of the curriculum in order to have time to organize and administer more assessments, I began to systematically reflect on the null curriculum – the curriculum that has been omitted for some reason. The following comment made by Cathy is interesting because it focuses on assessment, but Cathy is telling me that she is unable to do literacy assessments because instruction (admittedly math instruction) is getting in the way of assessment. Cathy’s comment illustrates the notions of washback, hidden curriculum and the null curriculum.

Cathy: You don’t have time! Yeah. So this last month I haven’t been on top of my running records because of my Learning Cycle (math), but I will be back to it again.

In chapter two I cited Merriman and Nicoletti (2008) who argued that standardized testing and meeting government mandates limited teachers’ time for other work. I found this to be the case in my study. The teachers’ thoughts were always on assessment work: figuring out ways to organize student groupings, using previous results from EQAO scores to plan instructional and learning cycles, and performing daily running record assessments to boost up students’ reading levels on the DRA or Benchmark assessments.
It is hard to identify aspects of a null curriculum unless one has an idea of what ought to be done. However, the official Language curriculum provides some guidance here.

The Ontario Curriculum Grades 1-8 Language (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2006) is a 155 page document that provides “the importance of literacy, language and the language curriculum” (p. 4). The expectations of the curriculum are organized into four strands: reading, writing, oral communication and media literacy. However a curriculum is more than a course of study. Depending on the priorities of the day, or on the priorities of the teachers, the emphasis of the curriculum varied, as particular areas of study were deemed more or less worthy of attention.

An important consideration that I discovered in Liz and Cathy’s classrooms was the focus in particular on the curriculum strand of reading. In chapter two, I stated that Winch, Johnston, March, Ljungdal, and Holliday (2006) contended that focusing on each student individually to assess reading, writing and comprehension “can be time consuming” (p. 138). The importance of reading was stressed as the daily running records that the teachers administered and the reading assessments of the DRA. The DRA is organized as a continuum of reading skills. In the higher levels of the DRA writing tasks are introduced.

A tendency to emphasize certain strands of the curriculum above all others posed certain issues. For one thing, intense pressure on teachers to ensure that students absorbed the material needed for the assessments within a limited time-span created the risk that the subject matter was dealt with at too fast a pace for many students. An example that was discussed earlier in the chapter about a diagnostic writing test that showed many students could not complete the writing.
An emphasis on skills and strategies rather than appreciation and enjoyment and meaning making was present.

Jane: So occasionally, I have a group of boys right now that are working on identifying the theme, main idea and supporting details. So, I’m pulling lots of those Nelson readers because I want that particular groups of boys to be reading all the same things so that we can hone in on the main idea and the supporting detail. And we can’t do that if they’re all reading a different text.

In all of the classrooms, I noticed that there was an absence of children’s magazines, investigation and discovery books, picture books, traditional fairy tales, and other imaginative stories. The focus of the teachers in the classrooms was on the strategies of reading and boosting up the achievement levels of reading, rather than a focus on imagination, investigation, creativity, and discovery.

In Jane’s description stated earlier in the chapter of how she and other teachers disliked poetry and how poetry was being used in an instrumental way to teach inference in reading. I wondered what was important: learning inference in reading or developing a love of poetry.

Certain strands of the curriculum were raced over or not covered at all. Bainbridge, Heydon, and Malicky (2013) argue that teachers must “straddle accountability standards that reflect traditional forms of literacy while meeting society’s expectations” (p. 525). There was limited focus on the official language curriculum strand of oral communication, as it was not part of the assessment process. The limited focus on the official language curriculum strand of media literacy was apparent in all of the classrooms. The lack of digital tools being used in the classrooms was limited. Computer games that focused on phonics and spelling appeared to be a time-filler before the recess
bell or used as a small group activity when the teachers’ administered assessments. Jane used her digital organizer to place students in the Daily Five groups. Siegel (2006) argued that multimodalities and multiliteracies have appeared “at the very moment when literacy is shrinking to fit federal and state educational policies” (p. 75). Siegel stated that “reframing our work as social justice may allow us to maintain political clarity” (p. 75). Official language curriculum strands of oral communication and media literacy were not addressed because of the business-like focus on the reading and writing strands of the official language curriculum.

I can surmise that the teachers’ work of aligning the assessments to the official curriculum did not include media literacy and oral communication which were part of the hidden curriculum.

Implications for Further Research

In chapter two I cited Mele-McCarthy (2007) who stated that in an accountability driven education era, the focus is on school districts, schools and teachers to establish student success through objective measures. I also cited Merriman and Nicoletti (2008) who argued that standardized testing and meeting government mandates limited teachers’ time for other work. I am not sure about the first statement, but found the second one to be true for the teachers who participated in my study. Their thoughts were always on assessment work: figuring out ways to organize student groupings; using previous results from EQAO scores to plan instruction and learning cycles; performing daily running record assessments to boost up students’ reading levels on the DRA or Benchmark assessments.
My study suggests indications for further research in teachers’ work and assessments. I hope to benefit other educators to help them better understand how their classrooms are situated in larger social processes. I intend to publish at least two papers from the thesis. One paper would be a condensed version of the thesis and the other would be how the Daily Five coordinates mandated literacy assessments. I intend to attend educational conferences to present my thesis. With the information gained from this study I hope that teachers, principals, school board officials, and other educational stakeholders will be made aware of what is going on in primary classrooms to aid in the education of primary children. I hope this research may help colleges and universities who partake in educating teachers in preparing them to teach in primary classrooms.

Traditional ethnographic studies require extended periods of time engaged in field research. It would have been worthwhile for me to have spent a longer time in each site and some researchers would argue that two classrooms are insufficient to allow for reliable comparisons. However, I did not intend to generalize my findings aimed to explicate the work processes that were actually being performed and to discover how the situation I had documented in my earlier study was being accomplished in two different school boards. Smith (2011) argues that in an IE study, institutions are opened up ethnographically. My starting point in the investigation was looking at the everyday experience of the teachers. From there, I explored “up into the institutional relations” (Smith, 2011, p. 6) that organized the concerns that motivated my research.

Future research could be done by me by utilizing more school boards, spending a longer time in each classroom for observation, working with teachers, and interviewing other education professionals to investigate if what the teachers’ work was would be consistent in other school boards and districts.
My study adds to the growing literature on IE studies, complementing the work of (Campbell & Gregor, 2002, 2008; Comber, 2011; Comber, 2012; Comber & Nixon, 2009; DeVault & McCoy, 2006; Hamilton, 2011; Parkinson & Stooke, 2012; Smith, 1987, 2005, 2006; Stooke, 2010) by demonstrating how IE can be utilized to investigate work processes in an era of accountability and how that work is coordinated to other peoples’ work in other places and at other times. Like DeVault and McCoy (2002) I found IE to be a powerful apparatus for teacher researchers because it is a strategy for investigating how one’s own work is coordinated with the work of people who do not necessarily share the same goals and concerns. My experience working with the IE approach to investigate the social organization of teachers’ assessment work convinced me that if teachers, principals, school board administrators, ministries of educational bureaucrats and educational policy makers could “make spaces for critical conversations” (Stooke, 2004, p. 65).
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This is to notify you that the Faculty of Education Sub-Research Ethics Board (REB), which operates under the authority of the Western University Research Ethics Board for Non-Medical Research Involving Human Subjects, according to the Tri-Council Policy Statement and the applicable laws and regulations of Ontario has granted approval to the above named research study on the date noted above. The approval shall remain valid until the expiry date noted above assuming timely and acceptable responses to the REB’s periodic requests for surveillance and monitoring information.

During the course of the research, no deviations from, or changes to, the study or information/consent documents may be initiated without prior written approval from the REB, except for minor administrative aspects. Participants must receive a copy of the signed information/consent documentation. Investigators must promptly report to the Chair of the Faculty Sub-REB any adverse or unexpected experiences or events that are both serious and unexpected, and any new information which may adversely affect the safety of the subjects or the conduct of the study. In the event that any changes require a change in the information/consent documentation and/or recruitment advertisement, newly revised documents must be submitted to the Sub-REB for approval.

Dr. Alan Edmunds  (Chair)
An Institutional Ethnography of Teachers’ Work in Literacy Assessments for Grade Two

LETTER OF INFORMATION for Teacher

Introduction
My name is Holly Parkinson and I am a 3rd year PhD student at the Faculty of Education at The University of Western Ontario. I am currently conducting research into teachers’ work in literacy assessments for Grade Two and would like to invite you to participate in this study.

Purpose of the study
The aims of this study is to investigate how literacy assessment work associated with Grade Two Language Arts Curriculum gets done in the classrooms.

If you agree to participate
If you agree to participate in this study I will observe in your Grade Two classroom on occasional days in February, March, April, May, 2012 agreed by you. I will be taking notes and observing the literacy assessment work that you do. I will discuss your work with you for a brief period (no longer than two separate half hours) before/after school/breaks at a time and place in the school which is convenient for you. I will audio record these interviews and they will be transcribed into written form for my research purpose only. You will be able to go over the transcripts and make corrections to them. This process might take one half hour.

Confidentiality
The information collected will be used for research purposes only, and neither your name nor information which could identify you will be used in any publication or presentation of the study results. All information collected for the study will be kept confidential. Confidentiality will be protected by storing the notes in encrypted files and the audio recordings and hand written notes will be stored in a locked drawer in my office and destroyed at the end of the study.

Risks & Benefits
There are no known risks to participating in this study.

Voluntary Participation
Participation in this study is voluntary. You may refuse to participate, refuse to answer any questions or withdraw from the study at any time with no effect on your employment status.

Questions
If you have any questions about the conduct of this study or your rights as a research participant you may contact the Office of Research Ethics, The University of Western Ontario at 519-661-3036 or ethics@uwo.ca. If you
have any questions about this study, please contact Holly Parkinson or my supervisor Dr. Roz Stooke.

This letter is yours to keep for future reference.
Thank you, Holly Parkinson
An Institutional Ethnography of Teachers’ Work in Literacy Assessments for Grade Two

Holly Parkinson, PhD Student, U.W. O.

CONSENT FORM for Teacher

I have read the Letter of Information, have had the nature of the study explained to me and I agree to participate. All questions have been answered to my satisfaction.

Name (please print):

Signature: Date:

Name of Person Obtaining Informed Consent:

Signature of Person Obtaining Informed Consent:

Date:
An Institutional Ethnography of Teachers’ Work in Literacy Assessments for Grade Two

LETTER OF INFORMATION for Principal

Introduction
My name is Holly Parkinson and I am a 3rd year PhD student at the Faculty of Education at The University of Western Ontario. I am currently conducting research into teachers’ work in Literacy Assessments for Grade Two and would like to invite you to participate in this study.

Purpose of the study
The aims of this study is to investigate how literacy assessment work associated with Grade Two Language Arts Curriculum gets done in the classrooms.

If you agree to participate
If you agree to participate in this study I will discuss your Literacy Assessment work with you for a brief period (about one half hour) before/after school/breaks at a time and place in the school which is convenient for you. I will audio record these interviews for my research purpose only. You will be able to go over the transcripts and make corrections to them. This process might take one half hour.

Confidentiality
The information collected will be used for research purposes only, and neither your name nor information which could identify you will be used in any publication or presentation of the study results. All information collected for the study will be kept confidential. Confidentiality will be protected by storing the notes in encrypted files and the audio recordings and hand written notes will be stored in a locked drawer in my office and destroyed at the end of the study.

Risks & Benefits
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Voluntary Participation
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Questions
If you have any questions about the conduct of this study or your rights as a research participant you may contact the Office of Research Ethics, The University of Western Ontario at 519-661-3036 or ethics@uwo.ca. If you have any questions about this study, please contact Holly Parkinson or my supervisor Dr. Roz Stooke. This letter is yours to keep for future reference.
Holly Parkinson  
*An Institutional Ethnography of Teachers’ Work in Literacy Assessments for Grade Two*

Holly Parkinson, PhD Student, U.W. O.

CONSENT FORM for Principal

I have read the Letter of Information, have had the nature of the study explained to me and I agree to participate. All questions have been answered to my satisfaction.

Name (please print):

Signature: Date:

Name of Person Obtaining Informed Consent:

Signature of Person Obtaining Informed Consent:

Date:
LETTER OF INFORMATION for Board Administrator

Introduction
My name is Holly Parkinson and I am a 3rd year PhD student at the Faculty of Education at The University of Western Ontario. I am currently conducting research into teachers’ work in Literacy Assessments for Grade Two and would like to invite you to participate in this study.

Purpose of the study
The aims of this study is to investigate how literacy assessment work associated with Grade Two Language Arts Curriculum gets done in the classrooms.

If you agree to participate
If you agree to participate in this study I will discuss your Literacy Assessment work with you for a brief period (about one half hour) at a time which is convenient for you. I will audio record these interviews for my research purpose only. You will be able to go over the transcripts and make corrections to them. This process might take one half hour.

Confidentiality
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Risks & Benefits
There are no known risks to participating in this study.

Voluntary Participation
Participation in this study is voluntary. You may refuse to participate, refuse to answer any questions or withdraw from the study at any time with no effect on your employment status.

Questions
If you have any questions about the conduct of this study or your rights as a research participant you may contact the Office of Research Ethics, The University of Western Ontario at 519-661-3036 or ethics@uwo.ca. If you have any questions about this study, please contact Holly Parkinson or my
supervisor Dr. Roz Stooke.
This letter is yours to keep for future reference.

Holly Parkinson

An Institutional Ethnography of Teachers’ Work in Literacy Assessments for Grade Two

Holly Parkinson, PhD Student, U.W. O.

CONSENT FORM for Board Administrator

I have read the Letter of Information, have had the nature of the study explained to me and I agree to participate. All questions have been answered to my satisfaction.

Name (please print):

Signature: Date:

Name of Person Obtaining Informed Consent:

Signature of Person Obtaining Informed Consent:

Date:
An Institutional Ethnography of Teachers’ Work in Literacy Assessments for Grade Two
LETTER OF INFORMATION for Classroom Assistant

Introduction
My name is Holly Parkinson and I am a 3rd year PhD student at the Faculty of Education at The University of Western Ontario. I am currently conducting research into teachers’ work in Literacy Assessments for Grade Two and would like to invite you to participate in this study.

Purpose of the study
The aims of this study is to investigate how literacy assessment work associated with Grade Two Language Arts Curriculum gets done in the classrooms.

If you agree to participate
If you agree to participate in this study I will discuss your Literacy Assessment work with you for a brief period (about one half hour) before/after school/breaks at a time and place in the school which is convenient for you. I will audio record these interviews for my research purpose only. You will be able to go over the transcripts and make corrections to them. This process might take one half hour.

Confidentiality
The information collected will be used for research purposes only, and neither your name nor information which could identify you will be used in any publication or presentation of the study results. All information collected for the study will be kept confidential. Confidentiality will be protected by storing the notes in encrypted files and the audio recordings and hand written notes will be stored in a locked drawer in my office and destroyed at the end of the study.

Risks & Benefits
There are no known risks to participating in this study.

Voluntary Participation
Participation in this study is voluntary. You may refuse to participate, refuse to answer any questions or withdraw from the study at any time with no effect on your employment status.

Questions
If you have any questions about the conduct of this study or your rights as a research participant you may contact the Office of Research Ethics, The University of Western Ontario at 519-661-3036 or ethics@uwo.ca. If you have any questions about this study, please contact Holly Parkinson or my
LETTER OF INFORMATION for Parent

Introduction
My name is Holly Parkinson and I am a 3rd year PhD student at the Faculty of Education at The University of Western Ontario. I am currently conducting research into teachers’ work in Literacy Assessments for Grade Two.

Purpose of the study
The aims of this study is to investigate how literacy assessment work associated with Grade Two Language Arts Curriculum gets done in the classrooms.

I will observe your child’s teacher in your child’s Grade Two classroom on occasional days in January, February, March, 2012. I will be taking notes and observing the literacy assessment work that the teacher does. I may take notes of the teacher’s interactions with the students, but no names will be used.

Confidentiality
The information collected will be used for research purposes only, and neither your name, nor your child’s name, nor information which could identify you or your child will be used in any publication or presentation of the study results. All information collected for the study will be kept confidential. Confidentiality will be protected by storing the notes in encrypted files and the audio recordings and hand written notes will be stored in a locked drawer in my office and destroyed at the end of the study.

Risks & Benefits
There are no known risks for your child.

Questions
If you have any questions about the conduct of this study or your rights as a research participant you may contact the Office of Research Ethics, The University of Western Ontario at 519-661-3036 or ethics@uwo.ca. If you have any questions about this study, please contact Holly Parkinson or my supervisor Dr. Roz Stooke.

This letter is yours to keep for future reference.
An Institutional Ethnography of Teachers’ Work in Literacy Assessments for Grade Two

LETTER OF INFORMATION for adult participation (not teachers)

Introduction
My name is Holly Parkinson and I am a 3rd year PhD student at the Faculty of Education at The University of Western Ontario. I am currently conducting research into teachers’ work in Literacy Assessments for Grade Two and would like to invite you to participate in this study.

Purpose of the study
The aims of this study is to investigate how literacy assessment work associated with Grade Two Language Arts Curriculum gets done in the classrooms.

If you agree to participate
If you agree to participate in this study I will discuss your Literacy Assessment work with you for a brief period (about one half hour) before/after school/breaks at a time which is convenient for you. I will audio record these interviews and they will be transcribed into written form for my research purpose only. You will be able to go over the transcripts and make corrections to them. This process might take one half hour.

Confidentiality
The information collected will be used for research purposes only, and neither your name nor information which could identify you will be used in any publication or presentation of the study results. All information collected for the study will be kept confidential. Confidentiality will be protected by storing the notes in encrypted files and the audio recordings and hand written notes will be stored in a locked drawer in my office and destroyed at the end of the study.

Risks & Benefits
There are no known risks to participating in this study.

Voluntary Participation
Participation in this study is voluntary. You may refuse to participate, refuse to answer any questions or withdraw from the study at any time with no effect on your employment status.

Questions
If you have any questions about the conduct of this study or your rights as a research participant you may contact the Office of Research Ethics, The University of Western Ontario at 519-661-3036 or ethics@uwo.ca. If you have any questions about this study, please contact Holly Parkinson or my
supervisor Dr. Roz Stooke. This letter is yours to keep for future reference.

Holly Parkinson

Sample Interview Questions:

Teachers:

1. Please could you teach me how to do the Developmental Reading Assessments and the Ontario Writing Assessments. May I sit down with you to go through it?

2. What other literacy assessments do you do during the year?

3. Please explain in detail the processes involved on how you administer any other mandatory literacy assessments.

4. Who else works with you on the assessments?

5. What kind of work do you do to utilize the supports you have for the literacy assessments?

6. What do you do to plan for the literacy assessments?

7. Tell me about and show me the record keeping, other literacy assessments and the report card processes for the language arts.

8. What do you to plan for your Language Arts program? What actually happens?

9. When do you do the planning for Language Arts?

10. Tell me about how plans change when you are actually teaching?

Principals:

1. What kinds of assessments do you use in your school?

2. What are the literacy assessments used for Grade Two?
3. What do you do to implement them?

4. What do you do with the results from the literacy assessments?

5. How does the report card process work?

6. What plans are put in place to boost up the achievement of literacy in your school?

Administrators at Board Level:

1. What kinds of literacy assessments are used in your school board? Please describe.

2. Does each school use the same assessments? If not, please explain.

3. What happens with the results from the literacy assessments?

4. Please describe how the reporting process of the literacy assessments is done?

5. Is there reporting of the literacy assessments to the Ministry of Education?

6. Please explain how that process works?

7. What happens with the report card process?
Curriculum Vitae

Name: Holly Carol Parkinson

Post-secondary Education and Degrees:

2009-2013  Doctoral Studies (Educational Studies).
           University of Western Ontario

           University of Western Ontario
2008      The Advanced Teaching Program, Teaching Support Centre,
           University of Western Ontario
2006-2007  five courses: 3 French, 1 Canadian Political Science, 1 History of
           Western Art. University of Western Ontario
2005      Special Education, Specialist
           University of Western Ontario
2004      Special Education, Part 2
           University of Western Ontario
2003      Special Education, Part 1
           University of Western Ontario
2002      Intermediate Division: Visual Arts
           University of Western Ontario
2001      Certificate of Qualification
           Primary and Junior Divisions
           Ontario College of Teachers
2001      Certificate of Qualification
           Primary and Junior Divisions
           Ontario College of Teachers
1996      Post Graduate Certificate in Education, Primary
           University of Liverpool, England
1992      Bachelor of Arts
           Minors in History and Art,
           University of Western Ontario

Honours and Awards:

University of Western Ontario (Ph.D.)
2012      Western Graduate Research Scholarship ~ $8000
2011      Western Graduate Research Scholarship ~ $8000
2010      Western Graduate Research Scholarship ~ $8000
2009      Western Graduate Research Scholarship ~$8000
2008 Joan Pedersen Memorial Graduate Award for Research in Early Years Education ~$1000

Related Work Experience:

Instructor (2012-2013): for Teaching and Learning Theory in Elementary School Language Arts: Bachelor of Education course at The University of Western Ontario, Faculty of Education. Teaching 38 students one two-hour class each week.

Instructor (2012-2012): for Teaching and Learning Theory in Elementary School Language Arts: Bachelor of Education course at The University of Western Ontario, Faculty of Education. Teaching 35 students one two-hour class each week.

Teaching Assistant (2012-2013): for Teaching and Learning Theory in Elementary School Language Arts: Bachelor of Education course at The University of Western Ontario, Faculty of Education. Providing assistance to Rachel Heydon, PhD, Associate Professor at The University of Western Ontario during one two-hour class each week, grading assignments and providing examples and assistance to 34 students.

Teaching Assistant (2012-2012): for Teaching and Learning Theory in Elementary School Language Arts: Bachelor of Education course at The University of Western Ontario, Faculty of Education. Providing assistance to Rachel Heydon, PhD, Associate Professor at The University of Western Ontario during one two-hour class each week, grading assignments and providing examples and assistance to 36 students.

Teaching Assistant (2009): for Using Literature in the Elementary Classroom: Bachelor of Education course at The University of Western Ontario, Faculty of Education. Providing assistance to Roz Stooke, PhD, Assistant Professor at The University of Western Ontario during two two-hour classes each week and providing examples and assistance to 35 students.

Kindergarten Teacher (2006-2007) Chippewas of the Thames First Nation Piano Teacher (2002-2007) to three students
Grade One Teacher (2001-2006) Chippewa of the Thames First Nation
Grade One and Kindergarten Teacher (1999-2000) Margaret Wix Primary School, St. Albans, Hertfordshire, U.K.

Pre-Service Teaching


Publications:
Papers in Journals (Refereed)


(Non-refereed)