

# How Can You Be an Effective Special Education Teacher? Portraits of Literacy Expertise

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# Purpose of this Study

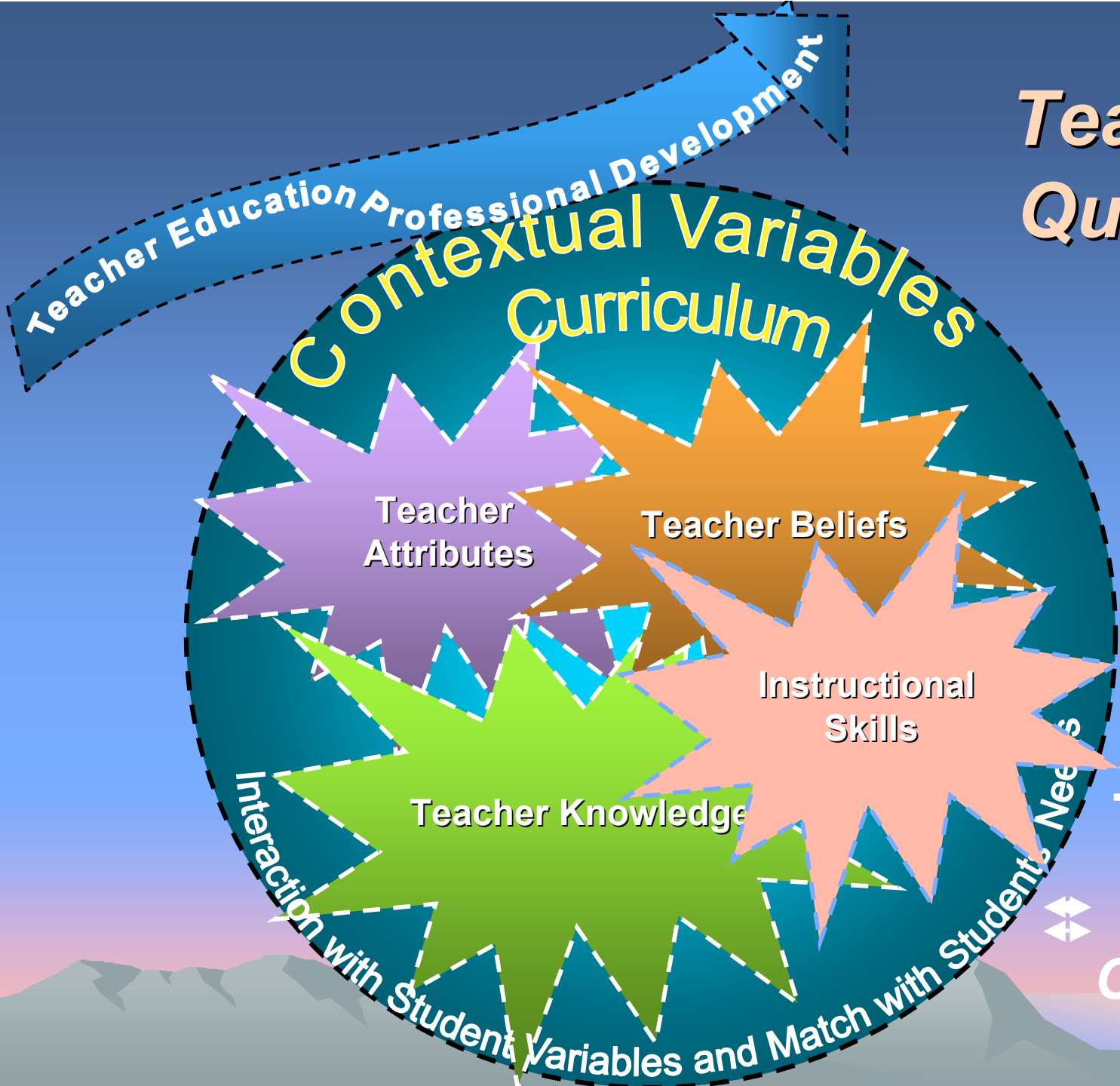
To develop a rich conceptualization of highly effective special education teachers of reading by examining their practices, beliefs, knowledge, and personal attributes



# Portraits of Highly Effective Teachers

- What do we know about highly effective reading teachers?
  - Early process-product research on teachers in special education settings (Sindelar, Smith, Harriman, Hale, & Wilson, 1986; Leinhardt, Zigmund and Cooley, 1981)
  - Exemplary teachers studies (Bogner, Raphael, & Pressley, 2002; Dolezal, Mohan, Welsh, Pressley, & Vincent, 2003; Wharton-McDonald, Pressley, & Hampston, 1998; Pressley, Rankin, & Yokoi, 1996)
  - Studies of effective teachers in low income schools (Taylor, Pearson, Clark, & Wadpole; 2000)
- How has the Center on Personnel Studies in Special Education (COPSSE) attempted to capture what highly effective teachers know and do?

# Teacher Quality



+ *Time*  
↕ *Student Outcomes*

# Methodology



# Participants

- **Teachers**

- First Study:

- Beginning Special Education Teachers (N = 34)
      - Within first three years of teaching
      - Held credential, or was within a year of completing alternative route
      - 3 states (California, Colorado, and Florida)
      - multiple settings, delivery models, and curriculum

- Second Study:

- Special Education Classrooms (N = 60)
      - Experienced teachers (N=53) and beginners (N=9) (Total N=62)
      - 3 states
      - Multiple settings, delivery models, and curriculum



# Participants

- Students with Learning Disabilities
  - Majority of students were SLD (Specific Learning Disabilities)
  - 3rd to 5th grade
  - Receive special education instruction for reading
  - Have IEP goals in reading
  - Minimum of 3 students per teacher
    - Florida: 3 to 13
    - California: 4 to 12
    - Colorado: 3 to 8
- First study: 173 students with SLD participated
- Second study: 369 students with SLD participated



# Student Achievement Measures

- Oral reading rates on CBM passages at the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd grade levels
- Woodcock Reading Mastery Word Identification and Word Attack Subtests
- Gray Oral Reading Test
- All measures given pre and post with approximately 24 weeks between testing





# Teacher Measures

- **Reading Instruction in Special Education Observation Instrument** (Items adapted from the English Language Learner Observation Instrument: Baker, Gersten, Haager, Goldenberg, & Graves, 1999)
- **Theoretical Orientation to Reading Profile** (Deford, 1995)
- **Content Knowledge for Teaching Reading Questionnaire** (Ball & Phelps, 2002)
- **Eloise Teacher Interview on Beliefs, Knowledge, and Reflections**
- **Special Education Influences on Practices Survey**



# Reading Instruction in Special Education Observation Instrument

- Rating Scale Adapted from the English-Language Learner Classroom Observation Instrument
- Based on research on effective reading instruction, observational studies of reading instruction for students with learning disabilities in inclusive settings (e.g., Haager, et al., 2003; Stanovich & Jordan, 1998)



# Observation Instrument

## Subscales

- a) Instructional Practices
- b) General Instructional Environment
- c) Phonemic Awareness: Dropped from this analysis
- d) Word study
- e) Fluency
- f) Vocabulary
- g) Comprehension
- h) Classroom Management

Instrument had 28 items rated using a Likert scale (coefficient alpha = .98)

# Example from Observation Instrument

Applies word study instruction in connected text

- Prompts students to use strategies and rules (e.g., reminds students of the rules, reminds them to look for chunks, reminds them to think about the sounds in the words)
- Multiple opportunities to apply skills with words while reading connected text
- Reinforces rules as students practice with connected text
- Provides connected text that reinforces word study

1

Low



2

Moderate

3

4

High

Not Observed

Fieldnotes

# Observation Procedures

## Observations

- Observation of complete reading lesson, on 2 to 4 separate occasions (usually 3). Times ranged from 1-3 hours per observation.
- Anecdotal field notes used to complete observation tool.
- Interrater reliability established with one anchor person at each site (Mean 91.06%; Range 71% - 100%).



# Overall Observation Rating

## OVERALL TEACHER RATINGS

HOW WOULD YOU RATE THIS TEACHER? (1 -4) \_\_\_\_\_

HOW WOULD YOU RATE THIS TEACHER'S CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT SKILLS? (1 -4) \_\_\_\_\_

Complete as a Final Observation Score - Overall ratings in Reading Components

COMPONENT	SCORE (1-4) including .5
Phonemic Awareness	
Word Study	
Vocabulary	
Fluency	
Reading Comprehension	



# Content Knowledge for Teaching Reading Questionnaire

- Total number of items (n=119)
  - 3 subscales were used in this study
    - Comprehension/Knowledge of Content ( $\alpha=.74$ )
    - Comprehension/Knowledge of Teaching and Content ( $\alpha=.67$ )
    - Word Analysis/Knowledge of Content ( $\alpha=.82$ )

# *Eloise* Teacher Interview

- Beliefs
  - about ability to teach,
  - about learning,
  - about the role of the special education teacher
- General Pedagogical Knowledge
  - about learners and the learning context
- Reflections
  - about teaching reading as a special educator,
  - about the impact of teacher education coursework and professional development



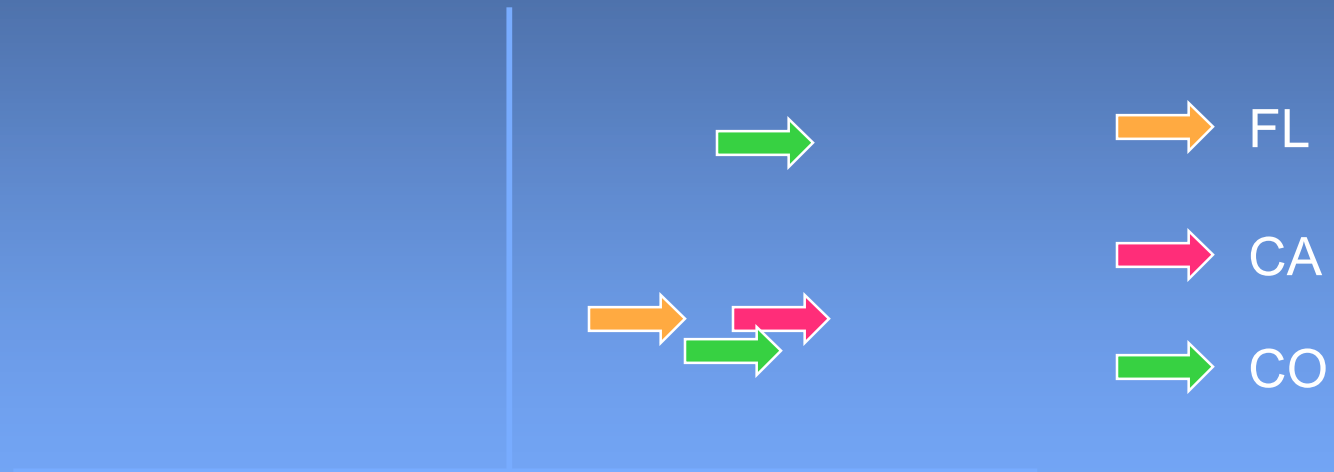


# Selecting Teachers to Profile

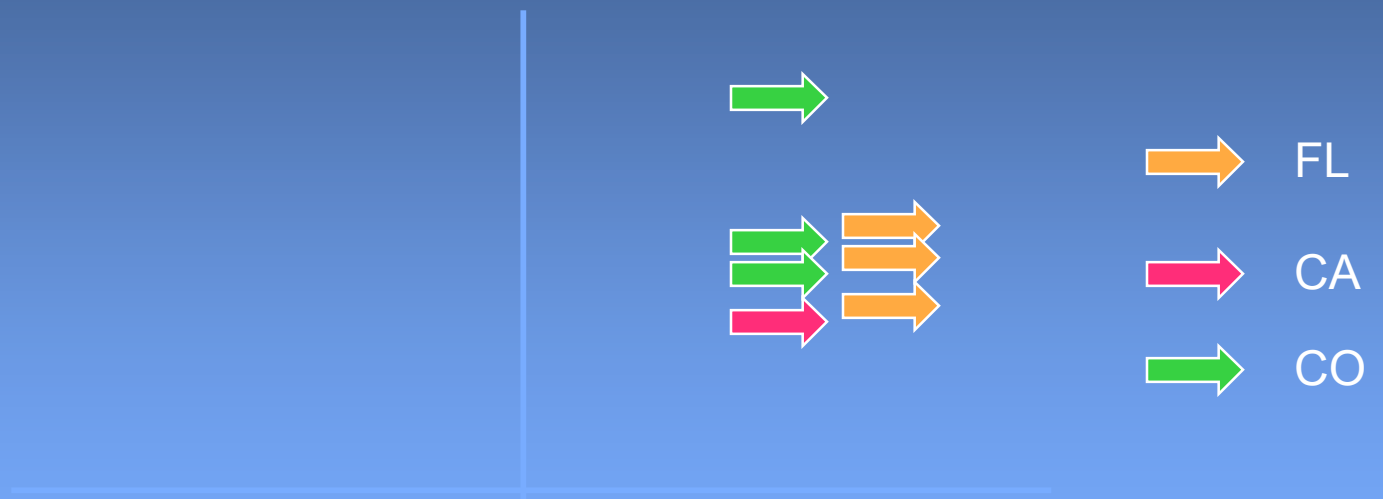
- We selected teachers based on their students' reading achievement as well as their scores on our observation instrument.
  - Grade 2 CBM and holistic teacher score,
  - Grade 3 CBM and holistic teacher score, and
  - WID and holistic teacher score.
- We identified teachers in the upper left-hand quadrants for each scatterplot.



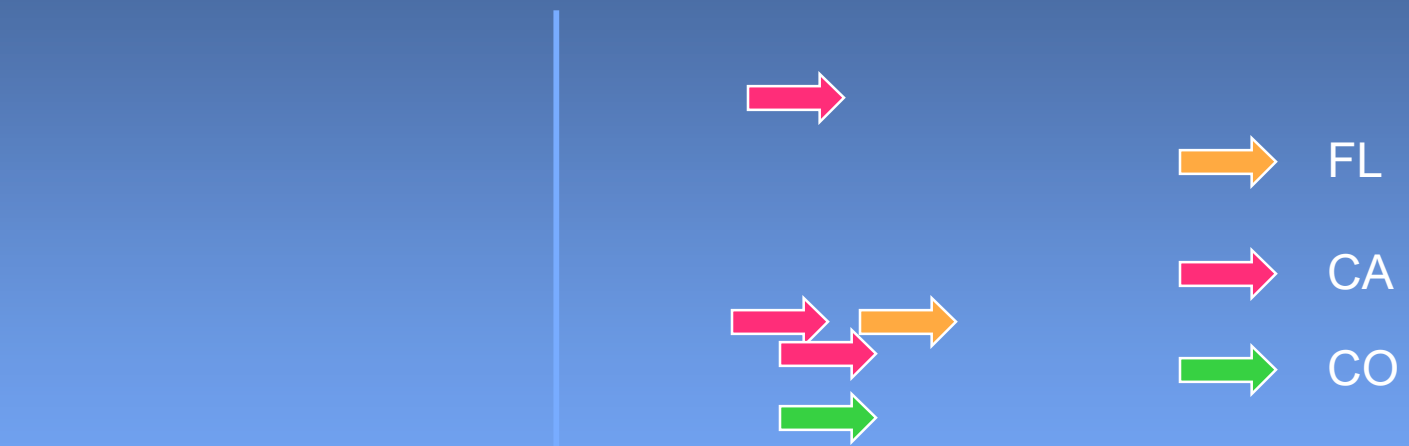
# Scatterplot of CBM 2 Gains and Holistic Total Teacher Practice Score: All Sites ( $r = .327$ )



# Scatterplot of CBM 3 Gains and Holistic Total Teacher Practice Score: All Sites ( $r = .181$ )



# Scatterplot of WID Gains and Holistic Total Teacher Practice Score: All Sites ( $r = .226$ )



# Data Analysis

- Profiles
  - We compiled information from all data sources for each teacher to develop a “portrait.”
- Qualitative data analysis
  - Both “bottom up” and “top down”
  - Inductive
    - We developed codes by reading through and chunking the data
    - We applied the codes
    - We categorized the data using the codes
    - We developed themes, looking for confirming and disconfirming evidence
  - Deductive
    - Based on our conceptual framework, we looked for examples of constructs in our data



# Florida Teachers



# Highly Qualified Florida Teachers

## Our Experienced Experts

- Laurie (22 years)
  - OCP score 4.0
    - Management 4.0
    - Pa 3.5
    - Word study 4
    - Vocabulary 3
    - Fluency 4
    - Comprehension 3
    - Engagement 4.0
  - Knowledge 90%
  - Resource setting
  - Instructional time 150/daily
  - No general ed time
  - Pretest scores 3rd lowest in FL
  - Multi-faceted curriculum
  - Degree B.S.
- Lisa (27 years)
  - OCP score 4.0
    - Management 4.0
    - Pa N/A
    - Word study 3
    - Vocabulary 3.5
    - Fluency 4.0
    - Comprehension 3.5
    - Engagement 3.5
  - Knowledge 84%
  - Resource setting
  - Instructional time 90/daily
  - No general ed time
  - Pretest scores just below median
  - Harcourt Brace/ Multifaceted
  - Degree -Bachelors NBTPS

# Highly Qualified Florida Teachers An Accomplished Beginner

- Karen (4th year)
- OCP score 3.5
  - Management 4.0
  - Pa 4.0
  - Word study 3.5
  - Vocabulary 3
  - Fluency 3.0
  - Comprehension N/O
- Knowledge 83%
- Resource setting
- Instructional time 100/daily
- No general ed time
- Pretest scores dramatically below median - lowest in sample
- Curriculum - Multi faceted
- Degree 2001 M.S. Dual certification plus reading endorsement (2004)





# Portraits of Highly Effective Teachers

## Knowledge

- Knowledge is a valued and integral part of daily decision making
- An integrated knowledge of curriculum, diagnostic abilities and experiences are used to provide a good match between student and instruction

# Portraits of Highly Effective Teachers

## **Beliefs**

Teaching is their life's work and they believe in the power of their teaching

## **Attributes**

Reflective, Resourceful, Relentless



# Portraits of Highly Effective Teachers

## General Classroom Practices

Classroom practices and classroom environment provided an opportunity to learn in a supportive setting

- Purposeful reading instruction delivered consistently across groups and across time while attending to individual needs
- Teacher talk is supportive, academically focused
- Classroom climate reflects a true learning community, and issues are handled with dignity
- Students are highly engaged in continuous, intensive instruction



# Portraits of Highly Effective Teachers

## Classroom Practices - Reading

Reading practices were sophisticated and well-tuned, drawing from their experiences, knowledge of reading and their students

- Used a multi-faceted approach to reading - one size doesn't fit all
- Provided deep instruction across several components of reading
  - Comprehension strategies and self monitoring, reading in connected text, explicit fluency instruction
- Recognized the role motivation plays in the reading process



# Florida's Highly Effective Teachers Experienced vs. Beginners

- The more experienced experts enacted their practice with a high degree of automaticity, making teaching appear effortless
- Their level of experience supported them - there were few new challenges or settings that could derail them



# Conclusions - Florida Site

- Highly effective Florida teachers are not defined by one curriculum, or derailed by the context or complexity of student needs
- They integrated knowledge of curriculum, diagnostic abilities and experiences to effectively match students' needs with their instructional practice
- A deep, comprehensive and student centered approach to teaching reading was apparent, despite individual differences among teachers
- In a nutshell, they were knowledgeable, highly engaging, purposeful in their teaching, and committed to meet the needs of each student



# Highly Effective Teachers - “It takes one to know one...”

- Karen - “One who’s flexible. That’s the very the first word that comes to mind. Someone who’s willing – yeah, willing to try out new things. Someone who really gets to know their students on an individual basis and really look at them as individuals and think about what they need and ... you know, try to meet those needs as best as you can. Someone, too, who’s constantly trying to learn more. You know, like, continuing education, ‘cause there’s always something new to learn, and, or, just to remind yourself of, or, you know, just kind of staying on top of things, staying on the ball.”





# California Teachers



# Highly Qualified California Teachers

- Janice (16 years)
  - OCP score 3.5
    - Management 3.0
    - Pa 3.5
    - Word study 3.5
    - Vocabulary 3.0
    - Fluency 4.0
    - Comprehension 3.4
    - Engagement 3.5
  - Knowledge 82%
  - Self-contained classroom
  - Instructional time 135/daily
  - No general ed time
  - Pretest scores 12.41
  - Open Court
- Amy (26 years)
  - OCP score 3.5
    - Management 3.5
    - Pa 3.5
    - Word study 3.5
    - Vocabulary 3.5
    - Fluency 3.0
    - Comprehension 3.5
    - Engagement 4.0
  - Knowledge 78%
  - Resource setting
  - Instructional time 60/daily
  - General ed time 120/daily
  - Pretest scores 31.12
  - Open Court/Corrective Reading

# Highly Qualified California Teachers

## An Accomplished Beginner

- Michael (1st year credential- 2 years Intern)
- OCP score 3.0
  - Management 4.0
  - Pa 3.0
  - Word study 4.0
  - Vocabulary 2.5
  - Fluency 4.0
  - Comprehension 2.0
  - Engagement 4.0
- Knowledge 83%
- Resource setting
- Instructional time 70/daily
- No general ed time
- Pretest scores 30.50
- Curriculum - Wilson
- California Educational Specialist Credential in Mild to Moderate Disabilities

# Portraits of Highly Effective California Teachers

## Knowledge

- Knowledge of students with disabilities
- How to individualize and differentiate
- Curriculum
- Instructional strategies
- Positive behavior support

# Portraits of Highly Effective Teachers

## Beliefs

Every child can learn. It is the teacher's job to make sure that each child does learn.

## Attributes

Flexible, Collaborative, Focused



# Portraits of Highly Effective Teachers

## General Classroom Practices

- Lessons have a clear focus
- Use of prior knowledge, review of past lessons and skills
- Teachers scaffold learning by prompting and the use of visual aids.
  - Attentive to individual student needs.
- Well orchestrated classroom routines
  - Student responsibility and autonomy
- Students are engaged and motivated
- Positive classroom environment

# Portraits of Highly Effective Teachers

## Classroom Practices - Reading

- Supported by the use of a systematic curriculum
- Well sequenced activities with many opportunities to review and practice
- Essential components of reading embedded into all lessons
- Many instances of exemplary practice in word study and fluency skills
- Use of a wide array of instructional strategies

# Highly Effective California *Experienced vs. Beginning Teachers*

- Beginning teacher had many moments of brilliance, but hadn't put the entire package together. Experienced teachers had a more even profile.
- Experienced teachers were less enthusiastic about school and district support.
- Quiet affect of beginning teacher different from that of the experienced teachers
  - One size doesn't fit all.



# Colorado Teachers



# Scatterplot of CBM 3 Gains and Holistic Total Teacher Practice Score: Colorado ( $r = .324$ )



# Scatterplot of CBM 2 Gains and Holistic Total Teacher Practice Score: Colorado ( $r =$ .292)



# Scatterplot of WID Gains and Holistic Total Teacher Practice Score: Colorado ( $r = .197$ )



# Two Effective Beginning Teachers

- **Barbara** (3<sup>rd</sup> year)
  - School: 85.7% free or reduced lunch, 547 students in the school, 47% ELL
  - 72% on Teacher Knowledge
  - 3.5 on Observation
    - 3.5 in Classroom Management
    - Phonemic Awareness NO
    - Word Study NO
    - 3.0 in Vocabulary
    - 2.5 in Fluency
    - 4.0 in Comprehension
  - Regular Certification
  - Inclusion Classroom
  - Focus on Comprehension
- **Catherine** (2<sup>nd</sup> year)
  - School: 12.6% free or reduced lunch, 67% Caucasian, 12.9% Hispanic
  - 82% on Teacher Knowledge
  - 3.5 on Observation
    - 3.5 in Classroom Management
    - 4.0 in PA
    - 3.5 in Word Study
    - Vocabulary NO
    - Fluency NO
    - Comprehension NO
  - Regular Certification
  - Resource Room
  - Focus on Word Study

# More Experienced Effective Teacher

- 18—Erica (5<sup>th</sup> year teaching)
- School: 35% of students on free or reduced lunch
- 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup>, and 5<sup>th</sup> graders
- 51% on Teacher Knowledge
- OCP score 3.5
  - Management 3.5
  - PA 3.5
  - Word study 3.0
  - Vocabulary NA
  - Fluency 1.5
  - Comprehension 2.0
- Resource setting, 3-5 students per group
- Instructional time 45-60 minutes/daily
- Focus on PA and word study

# Excellent Classroom Management

- Erica
  - Reinforces appropriate behavior and redirects behavior.
  - Provides a warm and motivating environment (e.g., “You are so smart,” has students “be the teacher”).
  - Kids are highly engaged.
- Catherine
  - Provides intensive, focused instruction.
  - Well-organized and efficient.
  - Sensitive to her students needs and makes accommodations, e.g.:
    - William, a student who has more trouble reading than the other students, does not want to read aloud. She does not get into a power struggle and gets him to read to her after the others leave.
- Barbara
  - Well-organized and efficient, with clear routines and expectations (e.g., She uses methods such as shaking tambourine to indicate it’s time to transition. Students move quietly and efficiently...).
  - Has “eyes in the back of her head” and skillfully redirects behavior.

# Knowledge and Beliefs

- Erica

- Believes that good special education reading instruction includes assessment, constant feedback, teaching through different modalities, and direct instruction and explicit teaching:
  - “If you are looking at reading or writing or math- there is really direct instruction and skills that have to be taught explicitly and sometimes people don’t realize just how difficult that is and that you need to break it down into smaller bits of information.”
- She talks about the need to integrate comprehension but feels that this is something she needs to work on.



# Knowledge and Beliefs

- Catherine

- Believes that unlike general education, which focuses more on the big picture, special education should focus on skill work.
  - “My situation here is different than a classroom teacher, for the kids that I work with a step-by-step, systematic, very predictable kind of format is the way that most of them are going to learn the best. It doesn’t mean that necessarily, if I was a third grade teacher, I would teach my whole day like that...”
- She believes in a systematic, step by step, teacher-centered approach:
  - “I have a strong belief that there has to be an emphasis and they get direct instruction.”
- She states that you need to break things down and make sure you are using multi-sensory instruction.
- Emphasizes the importance of adjusting her instructional plans based on student assessment.

# Knowledge and Beliefs

- Barbara
  - Believes in importance of activating students' background knowledge.
    - “Just because the backgrounds of my children are so diverse and there is a lot of similarities in some of them but to activate background knowledge -ways to make them comprehend text.
  - Emphasizes the value of assessment notebooks (one for each child) and individual conferencing. The assessment notebooks inform her planning and her instruction in mini-lessons for specific students.
  - Values reading conferences and believes these really motivate children.
    - “I love reading conferences and I think I get the most mileage out of them this year with this group of kids and that may change next year.”



# Instructional Practices

- Erica
  - Provides systematic, explicit, intensive instruction in phonemic awareness and word study.
    - Begins every lesson by reviewing old sounds.
    - Provides clear directions.
    - Uses visuals, provides models.
    - Draws upon ideas learned in previous lessons and earlier in the lesson.
    - Emphasizes distinct features of the word, uses multiple examples.
    - Provides error correction, and multiple opportunities to practice the words.
    - Prompts students to make connections with past lessons:
      - “It is from the R family that we did the other day.”
  - Perhaps her strongest skill is her ability to assess students’ needs and to tailor instruction to match their needs.
  - She doesn’t not apply the word study to connected text, provides little fluency instruction, no vocabulary instruction, and limited comprehension instruction.

# Instructional Practices

- Catherine

- Provides continuous intensive instruction, checks for understanding, and provides immediate feedback.
- Focuses mainly on word study instruction: blends, diagraphs, open and closed syllables, and chunking.
- Uses a “pretty prescribed program” (Wilson).
- Provides some writing activities through journaling.
- Uses SRA for comprehension, but activities are separate from word study instruction.
- Has “assessment days” where she gives spelling tests and reading assessments related to the skills they are doing.
- Provides the students with multiple opportunities to respond (e.g., with magnetic boards).
- Builds on previous lessons and connects her lessons to student: “Let’s read our summary to refresh our memories”

# Instructional Practices

- Barbara

- Starts each lesson with whole class instruction and then explains what students will work on independently.
- As students work independently, she works with small groups.
  - Emphasizes reading comprehension skills (e.g., prediction, reading different genres, and summarization).
    - Prompts students to think of strategies that will help them understand.
    - Has students develop graphic organizers
      - Charts around the room visually represent these organizers and strategies that she talks about.
  - Also emphasizes fluency.
    - “Today when you are reading I’m going to listen for your expression. No one really did it enough yesterday. Some but not enough ..”
  - Regularly assesses students.
    - Has students read silently while she listens to one read aloud and provides feedback.
    - Conducts running records and writes in students’ assessment notebooks.
    - Little focus on phonemic awareness or word study instruction.
- Uses flexibly grouping, pulling students together who need the same skill.

# Conclusions for Colorado Teachers

- All 3 teachers were excellent in classroom management, though styles varied
- Well-organized
- Fast-paced, intense instruction, with students highly engaged, multiple opportunities to respond
- Built on prior knowledge and made connections between lessons
- Excellent at *assessment (figuring out what students knew and could do and needed to learn)*—seemed to know their students well.
- Excellent at *teaching (figuring out the demands of the task and how to support student learning)*
- Provided high quality practice at an appropriate level

# Overall Conclusions

- Classroom practices and classroom environment provided an opportunity to learn in a supportive setting.
- Purposeful reading instruction delivered consistently across groups and across time while attending to individual needs.
- Teacher talk is supportive, academically focused.
- Classroom climate reflects a true learning community.
- Students are highly engaged in continuous, intensive instruction.



# Overall Conclusions

- Reading practices were sophisticated and well-tuned, though not the same across teachers.
  - Teachers varied in the extent to which they emphasized different components of literacy instruction.
- Teachers used a multi-faceted approach to reading - one size doesn't fit all.
- Teachers recognized the role motivation plays in the reading process.
- Teachers were sophisticated in their use of assessment procedures and data-based decision-making.
- Teachers were able to “think on their feet” and adjust their instruction to meet students’ needs.
  - They knew their students well.
  - They understood the demands of the task.

