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**PERCEPTIONS OF PRIMARY TEACHERS USING RESPONSIVE  
CLASSROOM IN THE ERA OF NO CHILD LEFT BEHIND**

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by

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## ABSTRACT

Using a case study design, with a phenomenological perspective, this research focused on a sample of primary classroom teachers (grades K – 3<sup>rd</sup> grade) in south central Pennsylvania who are currently using and have been using Responsive Classroom® (RC) strategies for an extended period of time. Their perspectives provide insight into their use of Responsive Classroom® strategies. Initially the focus of the study was to determine if the mandates of No Child Left Behind were impacting teacher's use of RC. The research questions that guided this study were: (1) What pressures have primary grade teachers (K-3) experienced as a result of No Child Left Behind (NCLB)?, (2) Have teachers changed or adapted their classroom practices to continue to use RC? If so, in what ways?, (3) Why have these teachers made the decisions they have made in their implementation of RC?, and (4) How do these teachers perceive the impact of changes, if any, in their implementation of RC? However as the research process unfolded, the story that developed from the teachers had to do with the teachers' understandings of and perceptions of the value of the RC approach. Though NCLB and changes in curriculum and assessment had impacted the implementation of RC for some of the teachers, the teachers did not perceive in general that the value of the RC approach had been diminished. Examining the lived experiences of these teachers and reporting through their voices provides greater insights and understanding of their challenges, their decision-making and the changes that have been made to their practice.

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## Chapter One

### Introduction to the Study

#### Purpose

The school code in Pennsylvania requires children receive instruction for a total of 900 hours per year (Basic Education Circulars {Purdon's Statutes} Instructional Time and Act 80 Exception) ([www.able.state.pa.us/k12/cwp/view.asp?A=11&Q=54309s](http://www.able.state.pa.us/k12/cwp/view.asp?A=11&Q=54309s)). How is this time in a classroom organized? What areas are given priority? Enter any elementary classroom and spend some time reviewing the schedule. Time on a classroom schedule is specifically allocated for academic purposes such as how much time to dedicate to specific subject areas daily. Decisions must be made about how to spend this time and could be made by the superintendent, the director of curriculum and instruction or a building principal in order to follow directives of the state or federal government.

Typically an elementary classroom schedule indicates that the majority of the day is dedicated to academic learning, specifically literacy and mathematics instruction. Time for social studies and science instruction might be highly limited. Jennifer McMurrer's report *Choices, Changes, and Challenges: Curriculum and Instruction in the NCLB Era* (2007) finds that approximately 62% of school districts increased the amount of time spent in elementary schools on English, language arts and/or math, while 44% of districts cut time on science,

social studies, art and music, physical education, lunch or recess. West (2007) also notes that the focus on student performance in reading and math may be causing schools to reduce or to eliminate instruction in untested subjects such as social studies.

Does social and emotional instruction and learning have a place in the schedule? Has this limited view of education as a two-subject curriculum potentially impacted teachers' practices of teaching a "whole" child? The purpose of this study is to discover how teachers are experiencing the use of Responsive Classroom® strategies in the era of No Child Left Behind.

### **No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and Its Impact**

A significant influence on the use of time within classrooms is the demand imposed by the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001. NCLB, the culmination of 15 years of standards based reform in education (Jennings, 2006), defines the accountability standards by which school districts will measure their proficiency and progress against a federal benchmark. In simplest terms, this benchmark is that 100 percent of American students will achieve proficiency on state assessment measures by 2014. The federal oversight of student achievement has required states to implement changes in educational practices and assessment tools or potentially lose federal aid for failure to comply with the edicts outlined in NCLB (Heck, 2006). While many educators believe that there is too much emphasis and reliance on these tests, the outcome of NCLB "has directed greater attention to low-achieving students and intensified efforts to improve persistently low-performing schools" (Jennings and Rentner, 2006, p.4).

The requirements to prove academic achievement in limited areas and to meet Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) are causing more districts to increase instructional time in areas such as literacy and mathematics. Yet, schools are charged with more global outcomes, as well such as helping children to develop appropriate social skills.

Each year the Center on Education Policy (CEP) surveys officials in state departments of education, administers questionnaires to sample school districts, conducts case studies of individual school districts and monitors the implementation of policy. Through these measures, the CEP gathers data that have been analyzed to determine the impact of NCLB on schools. The multi-year review and analysis has generated 10 broad effects, although the CEP indicates that individual schools may experience differing effects (Jennings and Rentner, 2006). The list of effects determined by the CEP can be categorized into four areas including: student achievement, use of classroom time, alignment of curriculum and instruction, and the role of state and federal government in education. Not all of these reported effects have been positive. (Jennings and Rentner, 2006).

Use of classroom time is especially disturbing to some. The CEP report indicates that 60% of the districts surveyed require a specific amount of time dedicated to reading instruction in the elementary schools. Ninety-seven percent of high poverty districts have a required amount of reading instruction per day compared to 55- 59% of districts with lower levels of poverty (Jennings & Rentner, 2006). Seventy-one percent of districts are reducing the amount of time

spent on other subjects in order to increase the time spent on reading and math instruction. This finding supports the claim that schools are spending more time on subject areas that will be tested to meet accountability standards for NCLB.

The International Reading Association has addressed this finding:

What concerns the International Reading Association about efforts to improve reading achievement is that many schools have traded off instruction attention to significant subject areas, like social studies, science and the arts, in order to gain time for reading drills and test preparation (IRA, 2007, p. 14).

### **Social and Emotional Learning**

With significant changes in time allocated to content area subjects, are social and emotional learning being addressed in public classrooms? “SEL [Social and Emotional Learning] is a process for helping children and even adults develop the fundamental skills for life effectiveness. SEL teaches the skills we all need to handle ourselves, our relationships, and our work, effectively and ethically” (CASEL: Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (<http://www.casel.org/basics/definition.php>)). Programs, such as Responsive Classroom®, Second Step, and PATHS, that teach and support the effective learning of these important skills are becoming more widely available for schools.

Two researchers, Joe Durlak of Loyola University (Chicago) and Roger Weissberg of the University of Illinois at Chicago have recently completed a synthesis of 300 studies of such programs.

The research clearly demonstrates that SEL programming significantly improves children's academic performance on standardized tests.

Moreover, compared to control groups, children who have participated in SEL programs have significantly better school attendance records, less disruptive classroom behavior, like school more, and perform better in school. The research also indicates that children who have participated in SEL programs are less likely than children in control groups to be suspended or otherwise disciplined (<http://www.casel.org>).

The synthesis of these studies indicates that these outcomes have been achieved due to the impact these programs have on children's ability to relate to others, their motivation to attend and do well in school and their avoidance of anti-social behaviors. Further, the researchers found that those programs that have been used over several years and are fully integrated into the curriculum, rather than an add-on instructional approach, are those with the best outcomes. Positive behavioral, social and emotional outcomes did not occur separately from the academic programs, but rather enhanced them. One such social and emotional program that meets the criteria of focusing on improving social behavior and relating skills, integrating social skills with academic learning and has also accumulated evidence of these outcomes over multiple years is The Responsive Classroom ®.

### **The Responsive Classroom®**

The Northeast Foundation for Children in Greenfield, Massachusetts seeks to help teachers “see their academic instruction and curriculum content in

the light of a broader and more encompassing context of social interaction and moral purpose for their students” (NEFC, 1994, p.1). This mission is accomplished through the use of The Responsive Classroom® approach. The Responsive Classroom® approach has been successfully implemented for more than 20 years in The Greenfield Center School in Massachusetts (NEFC, 1994, p.2) and many public schools around the country.

According to Elliot and Gresham (1990) seven important principles guide The Responsive Classroom® approach.

1. The social curriculum is given as much importance as the academic curriculum. Integration and balance of these complementary sides of learning is essential.
2. How children learn is as important as what they learn. Attention must be paid to the instructional process and content. A balance of teacher-directed and student-directed learning with opportunities for inquiry is necessary in classrooms.
3. The greatest cognitive growth occurs through social interaction. Teachers need to be aware of what children are doing and talking about when interacting with each other in order to enhance the cognitive benefits of social collaboration.
4. There is a specific set of social skills that children need in order to be successful academically and socially. Elliot and Gresham (1990) have described the skills as cooperation, assertion, responsibility, empathy, and self-control. These skills are identified using the acronym CARES.

5. Knowing the children who are being taught is as important as knowing the content that is being taught. Teachers need to know each child individually, culturally, and developmentally. Teachers use informal conversation as well as formal instructional time to learn about their students.
6. Knowing the parents of the children in the classroom is as important as knowing the children in the classroom. Parents are the child's first teachers and are an integral part of the learning experience. Teachers need to build on the knowledge of each family to enhance the educational opportunities in the classroom.
7. How the adults at school work together to accomplish a mission is more important than one's individual competence. All faculty, staff, support personnel and administrators should model appropriate working relationships for the children who are in their schools

The Responsive Classroom® approach is used by many schools and teachers in Pennsylvania. The strategies include incorporating academic concepts along with key social skills like respect and responsibility throughout the day. This approach is frequently used at the elementary level, particularly primary grades.

### **Key Components of Responsive Classroom®**

There are six key components that integrate teaching, learning and caring throughout the day: classroom organization, morning meeting, rules and logical consequences, choice time, guided discovery, and assessment and reporting.

These components are set within the context of several core values. Each of the key components supports the development of the seven foundational principles and other social skills such as cooperation, responsibility, empathy and self-control. Further, each component can be implemented independently or in combination and modified to meet the needs and styles of individual teachers or schools (NEFC, 1994).

*Classroom Organization* can be implemented independently or in conjunction with the other components. Teachers are directed to “create active interest areas for students, space for student-created displays of work and an appropriate mix of whole class, group and individual instruction” (NEFC, 1994, p.3). Teachers address the physical, the temporal, and the interpersonal environments through attention to this component.

*Morning Meeting* is a teaching approach that is used at the beginning of each instructional day. The aims of morning meeting are to: create community; to foster responsive interactions; and to teach the skills needed to be a responsive member of the classroom and school through daily rituals and skills (NEFC, 1994).

The four parts of Morning Meeting support both academic and social goals. Each child is greeted daily. By naming everyone, including the teacher, everyone can learn to use the others' names in a friendly and supportive environment. Each child hears his or her name on a daily basis during this whole group circle. Next, the news and announcements chart, a daily message prepared by the teacher, encourages children to interact with the information, to



reflect on previous learning, and to practice skills. The purposes are to transition and orient children to the class day, to develop and reinforce language and other content skills, and to build community through written information (NEFC, 1994). The information on the news and announcements chart is of interest to all children. At the end of the chart, children are invited to sign up to share events, feelings and occasionally objects that matter to them. This is not a show and tell experience, but rather a chance for students to share brief news that others can respond to or ask questions about in a respectful way. Finally, a group activity that is short, fast-paced, and enjoyable builds class cohesion and spirit. Songs, games, chants, and poems that encourage cooperation rather than competition through active involvement are examples of group activities that can be used to conclude Morning Meeting.

Morning Meeting is introduced and modeled for students on the first day of school and is an expected and anticipated part of each day for the rest of the school year. It is scheduled for 15 – 30 minutes daily and begins shortly after school begins when all children have arrived. This is usually the first component of The Responsive Classroom® that teachers incorporate when implementing this approach.

Teachers can also choose to implement the process creating of *Rules and Logical Consequences*. Through this process, children are directly involved in giving input about the rules and consequences. These ideas are then used to generate the class rules at the beginning of the school year. Each member of the community agrees to the rules and consequences, similar to agreeing to a

contract. The rules become the “cornerstone of classroom life” (NEFC, 1994, p. 3). The teacher and the students model and role-play the rules as an instructional method to learn and practice the rules. Consequences are logical responses to inappropriate action. They are not pre-determined, but are respectful, relevant and realistic. The purpose is to enable students to become responsible, self-respecting, and self-controlled citizens.

The *Choice Time* component should be built into each day’s schedule. Choice provides children with the chance to take control “of their own learning in some meaningful way” (NEFC, 1994, p. 3). Children should have a variety of teacher-created choices, student-selected choices, and individual and cooperative choices built into content areas daily.

*Guided Discovery* is the strategy for introducing learning materials, areas of the classroom and ways of behaving that is intentionally structured to make appropriate and inappropriate use of materials or behaviors clear to all students. The teacher assumes that children are unaware of how to use a material or respond to a situation in a caring way. The teacher introduces and models the correct way to use materials or respond to situations, soliciting input from the children throughout the process. Children are then given the chance to practice this newly learned skill with reinforcement and redirection by the teacher.

Finally, *Assessment and Reporting* respects the role of the family in each student’s life. It is an evolving process of mutual communication regarding the families’ wishes and expectations as well as the teacher’s goals. Frequent and

ongoing communication is sent to families to keep them informed about classroom and school activities.

### **Teachers' response to change (reform)**

Change, such as the ongoing pressures of NCLB, may impact teacher behaviors in the classroom. Teachers are frequently identified as those who are resistant to change in practice and beliefs. Jensen identifies three factors that may cause this negative condition: 1) teachers may associate new change expectations to negative past experiences, 2) there may be distracting environmental or situational conditions, or 3) teachers may have negative beliefs about their ability to use the knowledge and skills associated with the change in the future (Jensen, in Hunzicker, 2004). Change is a process that might take years to occur. Teachers may be reluctant to change because they are being required to do so by a change agent outside the school culture (such as the federal government). The fact that they do not buy into the change may not always be due to a lack of motivation, limited knowledge, skill, or experience. They may simply philosophically disagree with the ideals being addressed by change (Hunzicker, 2004).

Richardson (1998) believes that teachers who undertake change voluntarily, rather than having change imposed by various stakeholders, are the teachers who are willing to try out new ideas and test them to see whether they fit into personal beliefs about teaching and learning. Hunzicker (2004) also notes that changing teacher behaviors should focus on changing teachers' beliefs and not their actions.

It is important to consider how teachers respond to change, especially mandatory “reform” efforts such as NCLB while balancing the intensive demands for math and reading instruction with social and emotional learning.

### **Research Questions**

This study addresses the impact of No Child Left Behind on the implementation of Responsive Classroom® (RC) approach in Pennsylvania.

Specifically, four research questions will be addressed:

1. What pressures have primary grade teachers (K-4) perceived as a result of No Child Left Behind (NCLB)?
2. Have teachers changed or adapted their classroom practices to continue to use Responsive Classroom®? If so, in what ways?
3. Why have these teachers made the decisions they have made in their implementation of Responsive Classroom®?
4. How do these teachers perceive the impact of changes, if any, in their implementation of Responsive Classroom®?

### **Significance**

The larger issue of this study is one of thinking beyond meeting a limited definition of education based on academic achievement goals of No Child Left Behind and Adequate Yearly Progress that are measured by a single assessment tool. Social and emotional learning (SEL) are equally as important as content learning. “Social and emotional competence is part of the foundation of academic learning” (CASEL, 2006, p. 6). Absent from the literature is the teachers’ voice in this balancing act. This study would help to fill the gap. This

research might also identify an unintended negative consequence of NCLB due to changes in how classroom time is used to meet high accountability standards.

### **Overview of methodology**

A case study approach will be used to gather data for this study. Through surveys and interviews the researcher can examine how teachers who have used Responsive Classroom® are responding to the pressures of NCLB and perhaps understand why they are responding in such a way.

A sample of PreK-4 teachers will be surveyed to gather the specific information needed. Demographic and professional information from participants will be collected. Districts and/or schools in Pennsylvania who are using Responsive Classroom® strategies will be identified and these districts will be used as the pool of potential participants. An initial survey of K – 3<sup>rd</sup> grade teachers in these districts and schools can be conducted to determine participants who have used Responsive Classroom® strategies for the last 8 – 10 years. They are from several regions throughout Pennsylvania, represent rural, urban, and suburban districts and who serve various socio-economic populations. From the survey participants, teachers will be selected using the defined criteria to be interviewed to understand the experiences of the teachers implementing these practices, how they believe they have adapted, and their understanding of why they have made these decisions.

## **Terms and Definitions**

***Whole Child*** – The components of child development that address the complete learner- including cognitive, language, physical, emotional, and social development.

***Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP)*** – “Adequate yearly progress (AYP) is the measure by which schools, districts, and states are held accountable for student performance under Title I of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB). AYP, however, is not a new concept; it was introduced into federal law in the 1994 reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. Under NCLB, AYP is used to determine if schools are successfully educating their students. NCLB requires states to use a single accountability system for public schools to determine whether all students, as well as individual subgroups of students, are making progress toward meeting state academic content standards” (<http://www.edweek.org/rc/issues/adequate-yearly-progress>).

***No Child Left Behind (NCLB)*** – “NCLB stands for No Child Left Behind which refers to the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, a federal law passed under the George W. Bush administration. NCLB represents legislation that attempts to accomplish standards-based education reform. The law and its subsequent implementation have grown to be a very controversial issue in Education.

The law reauthorized federal programs meant to hold primary and secondary schools measurably accountable to higher standards. It also provided more opportunities to parents for school choice and placed a greater emphasis on reading in schools. NCLB is written so that it requires 100% of students

(including special education students and those from disadvantaged backgrounds) within a school to reach the same set of state standards in math and reading by the year 2014”

<http://k6educators.about.com/od/educationglossary/g/gnclb.htm>)

**Responsive Classroom® (RC)** – “The *Responsive Classroom*® is an approach to elementary teaching that emphasizes social, emotional, and academic growth in a strong and safe school community. The goal is to enable optimal student learning. Created by classroom teachers and backed by evidence from independent research, the *Responsive Classroom*® approach is based on the premise that children learn best when they have both academic and social-emotional skills. The approach therefore consists of classroom and schoolwide practices for deliberately helping children build academic and social-emotional competencies”

<http://www.responsiveclassroom.org/about/aboutrc.html>)

**Social Emotional Learning (SEL)** – “Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) is the educational process that leads to the development of emotional intelligence - that is, the process by which we become better at understanding and managing our emotions AND learning how they impact the choices we make, the relationships we have and our outlook in life. It refers to the acquisition of the understandings and specific skills that are at the heart of a child's academic, personal, social and civic development. Social and emotional learning is critical not only for success in school, but also in life. SEL enables individuals to recognize and manage emotions, understand their personal values, develop caring and concern for

others, make responsible decisions, establish and maintain positive relationships and handle challenging situations effectively. Research has shown that people with social and emotional competence are most likely to succeed academically, have a sense of well-being in their personal lives and act as contributors to their communities. They know what their strengths and challenges are, and are optimistic about the future, have meaningful relationships and are happy with their work lives. They are able to set and achieve goals and solve problems effectively. They are able to empathize with and show respect for others, appreciate diversity, and, live in accordance with their values, making positive contributions to their communities. SEL promotes this development as part of our children's education" (<http://4-h.org/b/Assets/healthy%20living/Social%20and%20Emotional%20Learning.doc>)



## **Chapter Two**

### **Review of Literature**

No Child Left Behind has impacted classrooms across the country since its inception, both positively and negatively. This study is designed to understand how teachers perceive their use of Responsive Classroom® strategies has been impacted by NCLB and how the teachers understand the changes they may have made to their practice. The literature review outlines the purposes of NCLB and some of the impact this act has had on classrooms. Social and emotional learning programs are reviewed in general with specific emphasis on The Responsive Classroom® program. Finally, the chapter concludes with a brief review of teachers' decision-making and response to change.

#### **No Child Left Behind**

The No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act outlines principles and strategies for increasing student achievement including increased accountability systems by all states, more choices of schools for parents and students, more flexibility for states in the use of federal funds, and an expectation that all students be proficient in reading and mathematics as assessed by state standards by the year 2014. Additionally, schools are required to make Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) as measured by the same state standards used to determine proficiency in reading and mathematics (US Department of Education, 2002). The Pennsylvania Department of Education supports these fundamental purposes

and has designed an accountability framework (Adequate Yearly Progress) aligned with NCLB for annual student assessment (PDE, 2007).

Adequate yearly progress or AYP is at the crux of accountability demands associated with NCLB. This component of NCLB requires schools that receive Title I federal funding to make annual progress toward the goal of having 100% of their students rated “proficient” by the end of the 2013-14 school year. The main indicators used to determine this proficiency are math and reading assessments. While NCLB “does not mandate (or encourage) testing of children in Kindergarten, 1<sup>st</sup>, or 2<sup>nd</sup> grades” (Kauerz & McMaken, 2004, p.1) teachers at these grade levels are feeling added pressure to assure that children are ready to take these literacy and mathematics tests in 3<sup>rd</sup> grade. It is essential that early learning professionals ensure that “assessments or other accountability measures for young children are developmentally appropriate and are used to inform and improve curriculum and instruction” (Kauerz & McMaken, 2004, p. 2).

NCLB requires that after the first day of the 2002-03 school year, all newly hired K-12 teachers in programs supported with Title I funds must be “highly qualified.” This means that teachers must have a bachelor’s degree, have full, continuing state certification, and have demonstrated subject-matter competence in the areas that are taught. Schools are also required to provide professional development for teachers that is high quality, sustained, intensive, and classroom-focused. Professional development activities are determined by district administrators. All of these requirements should be regularly evaluated to

determine their impact on teacher effectiveness and improved academic achievement by students (Kauerz & McMaken, 2004).

NCLB has both critics and supporters. Supporters agree that NCLB has helped schools to focus on student achievement especially for those students in subgroups who have been marginalized in the past such as special education students or non-English speaking students (Flake; PDE, 2004). Critics are concerned that student achievement based on test performance does not “address the highly complex and multidimensional nature of learning” (Devers & Carlston, 2004, p. 62). This mixed response aligns with the findings of an International Reading Association (2005) survey of a random sample of its members. Generally, members supported the basic ideas of NCLB, but had concerns regarding its implementation.

A study by the National Council for the Social Studies (2003) stated that teachers used an increased amount of time spent teaching test-taking skills which may not align with teachers’ beliefs regarding effective use of classroom time. Participants in Devers & Carlston’s (2009) study noted that “the focus on tests constrained [their abilities as teachers] to do what they determined was best for their students. Instead of providing learning experiences that addressed children’s needs, teachers felt compelled to teach to the test and teach children skills needed for test taking” (p. 77). Chapman (2007) believes the law is written in terms that reflect a philosophy of transmitting knowledge rather than optimizing learning opportunities and that NCLB is “the most elaborate case of federal

micromanagement of state policy, local schools and teachers in the entire history of American education” (p. 25).

An additional criticism is funding inequity that makes it difficult for schools to reach high levels of academic performance (PDE, 2004). Resources to offset this inequity as well as time to build capacity to improve schools and achievement must be addressed (PDE, 2004; PEN). The Public Education Network (PEN) conducted 25 public meetings to allow stakeholders the opportunity to share their view of NCLB. The conclusions based on discussions in these meetings reveal that “NCLB must have a more compelling vision, strong policies to support it and greater public engagement” (PEN, p.1).

Powell et al (2009), studied NCLB’s impact on decisions regarding curriculum and instruction from teachers and principals perspectives. Results show increased instructional time spent on English language arts in grades K-3 and 4-6 and significant decreases in science instructional time in grades 4-6. “Decisions made today about curriculum and instruction in elementary schools have the potential to influence education at other levels, to have long-term effects on students and could even have an effect on the future of our nation” (p. 26). “NCLB has allowed tests to dictate what is taught in schools regardless of the students’ academic and personal needs” (p. 27). Kaniuka (2009) also focuses on the impact of curriculum decision making. He believes that the curriculum that students are receiving in the classroom are a function of factors including social class, gender, prior academic performance and teachers’ instructional beliefs. This is also related to the explicit instructional design decisions made by the

teachers who feel forced to increase student achievement. He suggests that research is needed to examine how teachers and other school-based personnel make decisions regarding curriculum and instruction.

Comparing student achievement among states that had varying degrees of prior experience with state school-accountability such as that suggested by NCLB indicated gains in math achievement of 4<sup>th</sup> graders and somewhat smaller gains for 8<sup>th</sup> graders. There was no impact on achievement in reading for either 4<sup>th</sup> or 8<sup>th</sup> graders. The researchers believe that these data suggest that the goals of NCLB to close achievement gaps cannot be overcome by schools alone. A similar study of national assessments since NCLB was passed indicated that 4<sup>th</sup> grade reading scores increased by three points, about the same increase as the years prior to the law's enactment. In 8<sup>th</sup> grade reading, there have been no gains in reading scores. In mathematics, the gains in scores were larger before NCLB in both 4<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade. 8<sup>th</sup> grade science scores declined since passage of NCLB (Dee and Jacob, 2010 ; Ravitch, 2009).

The Center on Education Policy (CEP) analyzes survey data from school districts on a yearly basis as part of a study on the impact of No Child Left Behind. The focus in 2008 was to analyze the amount of instructional time being devoted to specific subjects. Since 2002, districts that self-reported increases in English language arts or mathematics instruction time did so by an average of 43%. A specific review of research that impacted literacy instruction in the era of NCLB concluded that "teachers must create time in classrooms to attend to the needs of individual learners. Knowledgeable, caring teachers are key to

implementing NCLB in ways that help children experience learning success and become lifelong learners” (Stewart, 2004, p. 740). Districts that self-reported decreases in instruction time in other subjects such as social studies, science, physical education, recess, art, and music did so by 32% or at least 75 minutes per week for at least one of these subjects (CEP, 2008). Students in states that test elementary students at least once per year in science and history receive more instructional time (up to 1 hour per week) in those subjects than do students in states where these subjects are not tested (West, 2007).

Paone and Lepkowski (2007) are concerned about the potential negative consequences of focusing on NCLB accountability that might detract from personal, social and emotional learning. “The intense and narrow focus NCLB has placed on a few academic subjects to determine if schools are adequate, may be leading schools to ignore or leave little time and resources for the crucial needs of the whole student” (p. 7). Paone and Lepkowski support the American School Counselors Association National Model, which recognizes the importance of academic, career, personal, and social development as important factors to school success.

Additional non-academic factors that impact achievement include ethnicity, poverty, inadequate school resources as well as and personal and family characteristics. Academic achievement can be increased in a positive school environment that assists students with characteristics such as self-efficacy, independence, determination, and cultural appreciation (Lagana-Riordan and Aguilar, 2009).

Henley et al (2007) noted that parents and teachers are concerned about “compromising the holistic needs of the nation’s children” (p. 2). Particularly, there is a concern that children are being robbed of activities such as recess that develop affective and social competence in favor of more time spent on academics.

The narrow view of education proposed by NCLB was examined through the embedded values within high-stake tests and the implications for stakeholders. Embedded values are “the unstated assumptions and taken-for-granted premises underlying the principles and arguments within the NCLB” (p. Duffy et al, 2008, p. 54). Duffy et al (2008) question the value and unstated assumptions of the meaning of scientifically based research, specifically the value of quantitative research and individual assessment as opposed to valuing evidence from a broad range of research designs and assessments that can also include individual, family and cultural characteristics. Additionally, they are concerned about the “myopic view of schooling that emphasizes cognitive development in isolation from emotional, moral, personal and interpersonal development” (p. 60).

Johnson (2006) focuses on the fallacy of the numbers game used to determine scientifically-based research as required by NCLB. NCLB uses scores derived from standardized tests to assign the worth or value of instruction and accountability. All students are expected to be high-scoring, but Johnson questions the notion that this test measures what intelligence really is. He

believes that a focus on the quality of education including methodologies and curricula is necessary, instead of a test and measure mentality.

Mertler (2010) reviewed multiple studies to describe the extent to which K-12 teachers perceive how NCLB has impacted their instructional and assessment practices. He found teachers' response to state reform indicates positive impact on classroom practice, instructional strategies and student achievement.

Another finding indicated that teachers express concerns about negative effects on students, testing preparation, and practices, resources, special learning needs and instructional time. Additional findings indicate that teachers have negative responses to NCLB based on higher levels of stress related to improving student achievement (Elfers et al, 2005, 2008 ;CEP, 2008;Flake et al, 2006; Mertler, 2010).

Several themes regarding the impact of NCLB on subjects not assessed have emerged. First, reduced time and resources for non-assessed subjects has been noted. Next, there appears to be little attempt to integrate non-assessed content into tested subject areas. Finally, aligning curriculum and instruction with state standards is increasing and providing an educational framework to guide districts in meeting the requirements of NCLB (Pederson, 2007).

### **Social and Emotional Learning**

According to the Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (2003) "social and emotional learning (SEL) is the process of developing the ability to recognize and manage emotions, develop caring and concern for others, make responsible decisions, establish positive relationships



and handle challenging situations effectively” (p. 1). Social and emotional competence is an important part of academic success. “Learning is possible only after students’ social, emotional and physical needs have been met” (p. 7). Neuroscience research illustrates that the areas of the brain that control emotional response and cognitive learning are interwoven (Zins et al, 2004). Social and emotional skills like perspective taking and cooperation increase a student’s capacity for learning through increased mastery of subject matter, motivation to learn, commitment to school, time spent on school work, and other school related issues such as improved attendance, graduation rates, and prospects for employment (CASEL, 2003; Snyder et al, 2010; Zins et al, 2004).

SEL programs integrated with academic instruction in classrooms and schools can help to reduce the achievement gap by providing students with skills to be successful in school and life (CASEL, 2006). These programs are not fragmented ideals and concepts but are built into the daily routine of the classroom. They are implemented through each year of school in a safe, caring and orderly environment (Zins et al, 2004).

“Because social and emotional factors play such an important role, schools must attend to this aspect of the educational process for the benefit of all students” (Zins et al, 2010, p. 3). Effective SEL programs develop the following five core social and emotional competencies: self-awareness; social awareness; self-management; relationship skills; and responsible decision making (CASEL, 2007, p. 5). These competencies can be taught through school or classroom-based programs that are grounded in theory and research, teach learners to

apply the skills in daily life, and build a sense of community in the classroom and school. Teachers should provide instruction in developmentally and culturally appropriate ways, teach skills that encourage classroom participation and motivate students to learn. School administrators should involve families and communities, establish organizational supports and policies within the school system, provide staff development and incorporate ongoing evaluation and improvement of the program (CASEL, 2003; Rimm-Kauffman, 2006).

Several hundred studies conducted using experimental designs with control groups have documented the positive effects of SEL programming on children of diverse backgrounds from preschool through high school in urban, suburban, and rural settings (CASEL, 2007). A recent meta-analysis of 28 peer-reviewed studies found that classroom-based social and emotional learning programs can cause a noticeable improvement in students' social skills particularly at transitional periods for students entering elementary and secondary schools.

CASEL conducted a meta-analysis of 207 studies of SEL programs. The findings indicate that children who participate in school-based SEL programs have better attitudes about themselves, each other and school, show improved behavior, have higher achievement test scores and grades in content subjects and fewer emotional concerns such as stress, anxiety and depression (CASEL, 2007; Goleman, 2008). These programs were found to most effective when implemented by classroom teachers or other school personnel. "Schools can give students ample opportunities to develop and practice appropriate social-

emotional skills and serve as bases from which to promote and reinforce SEL” (Zins et al, 2004, p. 8).

Zins et al (2004) published a book of studies aimed at providing a strong empirical case to connect “the enhancement of social and emotional influences to improved school behavior and academic performance” (p. 5). Recently, a group of federal House lawmakers began to explore and establish funding to expand social and emotional learning in schools. They have established the Academic, Social and Emotional Learning Act, H.R. 2437, which would “allow federal Title II grants, generally used for class size reduction and teacher professional development, also to be used to support elementary and secondary social and emotional learning programs” (Sparks, 2011, p. 1). The connection between social and emotional learning and cognitive learning is now being addressed by the government at a basic level.

Bowman et al (2006) note that “no amount of focus on academics will change the fact that the foundation of classroom life is social and emotional. Teaching is a very human profession, and the social and emotional processes involved in relationships between teachers and children should be considered along with issues such as curriculum and assessment in current policy initiatives designed to ensure that no child is left behind” (p. 19). Rather than diverting schools from their primary academic mission, improving the social and emotional competence of students and the climate of schools advances it. SEL also ensures that schools will address a broader mission of educating students to be good problem-solvers and caring, responsible, and engaged citizens (CASEL,

2011). SEL learning fortifies students with the basic skills they need to be successful in school and more importantly in life (CASEL, 2011).

### **Responsive Classroom®**

Several studies have been done on the use of Responsive Classroom® strategies that show the positive impact on students both academically and socially. Rimm-Kauffman (2006), Rimm-Kauffman et al (2004) and Elliott (1993, 1995, 1999) have completed longitudinal studies on the Responsive Classroom® approach with positive outcomes related to stronger social skills. Not only are these skills necessary to help prepare future citizens of a global society, this approach is equally designed to support academic achievement.

Elliott (1993) notes that

there is an empirical and practical rationale for educators to invest time in teaching children prosocial behaviors such as cooperation, assertion, self-control, responsibility and empathy. Increases in these behaviors clearly result in decreases in problem behaviors and increases in academic performances for most students (p. 34).

Elliott (1993, 1995, 1999) conducted two one-year studies and a two-year study on the contributions of the Responsive Classroom® approach. All studies were conducted in schools with economic and racial diversity. The two one-year studies in West Haven, Connecticut (1993) and Washington, DC (1995) found that students taught according to Responsive Classroom® practices had higher levels of social skills and reduced behavior problems compared to those students who had limited or no exposure to the program. The two-year study conducted in

Springfield, Massachusetts (1999) found a positive connection between students with strong social skills and strong scores on standardized tests such as the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS). Over time a correlation was found between improvement of social skills and improved scores on the ITBS.

Rimm-Kauffman's (2006) three-year study examined how the Responsive Classroom® approach affects children's academic and social skills. Since Responsive Classroom® strategies provide many opportunities to learn and practice over time, these skills should improve over time. Her research in six schools (three intervention and three control schools) in a single urban school district in Connecticut found a link between Responsive Classroom® and improved student learning evidenced through higher scores on math and reading tests. Privatsky and Frankenberger found similar data in a smaller study conducted in Wisconsin (2009). "Consistent with theory and research in child development, offering teachers strategies that engage children in learning and developing social and emotional skills appears to be a critical stepping stone on the path toward improving their academic performance" (p. 9). Rimm-Kauffman also notes that this program is equally beneficial for children considered at risk for school failure as for those who are not at risk.

Rimm-Kauffman's (2004) findings of a study of teachers who used Responsive Classroom® strategies reported positive attitudes toward themselves, their beliefs, and their attitudes toward teaching in general. This finding is again reinforced in her 2006 research. Teachers who used more Responsive Classroom® practices felt more effective with respect to discipline,

better able to create a positive school climate, better able to offer more high-quality instruction, and had more positive attitudes toward teaching (Rimm-Kauffman, 2006; Privratsky & Frankenberger, 2009).

CASEL (2007) has identified 10 characteristics of effective SEL programs. Responsive Classroom® has been reviewed by CASEL according to these characteristics. The program is designed to apply and integrate SEL to academic content areas and promote change in teaching strategies. Responsive Classroom® provides consistent opportunities for the five core competencies of self-awareness, social awareness, self-management, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making to be applied beyond a single lesson. Program effectiveness is based on a single longitudinal study conducted to the date of review. High ratings are given to the areas of professional development including the opportunity for teacher feedback, focus on individual performance-based student assessment, and tools for others to observe and provide feedback on classroom implementation. School-wide coordination of strategies and structure for consistent family involvement are also found within Responsive Classroom®. School-community partnership is not included in this program.

Interviews with teachers and parents revealed that Responsive Classroom® strategies help children “internalize appropriate behaviors as opposed to being controlled out of fear by an authoritarian type figure” (Koontz, 2003, p. 67). Elliott (1993) also noted that parents and teachers appreciate the implementation process of Responsive Classroom® that facilitates home-school communication and understanding about social skills.

Missing from the literature is research on teachers' implementation of the strategies. The Northeast Foundation for Children publishes a monthly newsletter focusing on Responsive Classroom®. This frequently highlights individual teacher's use of a strategy. Additionally, a Responsive Classroom® blog offers similar individual anecdotal information.

Teachers are faced with a dilemma. Social and emotional learning programs appear to be a valuable use of instructional time. However, NCLB pressures typically result in increased time in academic learning time on areas such as literacy and mathematics with less time available for other content. This leaves teachers in the position of needing to make decisions about their teaching in response to external mandates.

### **Teachers Response to Change and Decision-Making**

Change occurs for a variety of reasons including personal, organizational forces, societal demands and even external regulation (Devers & Carlston, 2009). Multiple factors may influence change in teacher behaviors. Issues of school-related change must include an examination of what factors influence teachers' attitudes towards change.

Teachers may change as a result of professional development experiences, mentoring, professional reading, or evaluation by an administrator. In particular, "top-down directives resulting from NCLB legislation have, in some cases, left teachers feeling marginalized" (Devers & Carlston, p. 63). Calderhead (2001) notes that teachers may suffer burn-out and a negative professional self-image when their work is increasingly regulated by outside agencies. Ellsworth

(2001) encourages all change efforts to be guided by a systemic understanding of the context in which the change is implemented.

Questioning if age and experience of teachers impacted change or resistance to change in restructuring schools, Rusch (1993) revealed five understandings related mostly to teachers defined as older, experienced teachers (age 55+). First, stereotyping older, experienced teachers as resisters of change by other teachers was equally prevalent among schools regardless of the amount of time spent in the change effort. Next, there was a difference in how older, experienced teachers self-described their attitudes toward change from how mid-life teachers described the attitudes of these teachers. Third, Rusch (1993) found that “older, experienced teachers frequently engaged in a learning experience with a new younger teacher in order to understand new methods and current theories” (p. 13). She also found that in schools that promoted democratic processes in their attempts to change teachers were more willing to admit possible stereotyping to teachers attitudes based on age and experience. Finally, the information about age and experience becomes cloudy because of current school demographics in which an older teacher is not necessarily an experienced teacher. Her conclusions indicate that teachers cannot be categorized by personal characteristics that might relate to a stereotypical view of attitude toward change. Additionally, “all factors seen as resistance to change need to be evaluated within the spectrum of internal and external causes to determine if the concept of fundamental attribution error is in effect and if so, to make adjustments in leadership thinking and actions” (p. 15).



Teachers' reaction to change may vary dependent on whether the change is mandatory or voluntary. Richardson (1998) believes "the best teacher change is carried out in a way that involves teachers in the process, and promotes coherence among teachers in an organization" (p. 1). Administrators must provide professional development in a more systematic and reflective approach to new ideas and programs. Teachers need a sense of autonomy to implement the change, but also be connected to the community and its interdependence. Long-term data collection of students based on the change implemented can help teachers focus on these goals. Hunzicker (2004) notes that "permanently changing teacher behaviors through professional development is most likely to be successful when instruction leaders focus their efforts not on action but on changing teachers' beliefs" (p. 45). Teachers may resist change due to lack of motivation.

Calderhead (1984) identified three types of decisions that teachers make: reflective, immediate, and routine. He relates reflective decisions to long-term decisions made over a period of time, based on intentional thought. Jackson (1968) calls these proactive decisions that include planning, reflection and evaluation. He includes immediate or automatic and routine decisions in his interactive decision making context. Many decisions that teachers make relate to two areas of practice: instruction and classroom management. Studying teachers' decision making helps researchers to "understand the actions of others and to appreciate how our own actions emerge from the thoughts and experiences we have and the context in which we live" (Calderhead, p. 3).

Constraints or barriers to effective decision making can include the physical environment, the teacher's ideological beliefs, and school or district policies that may be out of the teacher's control. Overcoming these barriers must relate to the context and the teacher's control of changing that context.

The use of time in classrooms to meet the accountability demands of NCLB is well documented. A strong case has been made that social and emotional learning is as important as academic content learning. This study helps to fill the gap in the literature about how teachers are responding to these dual imperatives.

## **Chapter Three Methodology**

This study addresses the impact of No Child Left Behind on the implementation of the Responsive Classroom® approach in elementary schools in south central Pennsylvania. Having worked for the state department of Education, I was able to visit many classrooms throughout the Commonwealth and observed the frustration that many teachers experience trying to balance the demands of accountability with the needs of the children in their classrooms.

The purpose of this research is to discover how teachers describe their experiences of balancing the demands for accountability of NCLB in the areas of literacy and mathematics instruction while including social and emotional instruction, how teachers have managed the schedule and environment to make this happen. Additionally, this research will explore the meaning these teachers apply to this description of the experience. Specifically, four research questions were addressed:

1. What pressures have primary grade teachers (K-4) experienced as a result of No Child Left Behind (NCLB)?
2. Have teachers changed or adapted their classroom practices to continue to use Responsive Classroom®? If so, in what ways?
3. Why have these teachers made the decisions they have made in their implementation of Responsive Classroom®?
4. How do these teachers perceive the impact of changes, if any, in their implementation of Responsive Classroom®?

## **Research Framework**

A case study approach was used to gather data to answer these research questions. A case study can be defined as an “in-depth description and analysis of a bounded system” (Merriam, 2009, p. 40,). Yin (1984) describes case study as “an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context” (p. 23). Creswell (1998) expands the definition by including study of a bounded system over time through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information rich in context” (p.61). In this research, the bounded system, phenomenon or entity is a group of teachers who have used the Responsive Classroom® approach over a designated period of time. By focusing on a single entity or case, “the researcher aims to uncover the interaction of significant factors characteristic of the phenomenon” (p. 43, Merriam, 2009).

This case study, with a phenomenological perspective, was focused on a sample of primary classroom teachers (grades K – 3<sup>rd</sup> grade) in south central Pennsylvania who are currently using and have been using Responsive Classroom® strategies for an extended period of time. The case is bounded by the criteria that the participants are K-3rd grade teachers who all have used RC strategies continuously for the last 8 or more years. The eight year period was used in order to capture changes that might have been made in implementation of the Responsive Classroom® approach since No Child Left Behind was adopted by the teacher or district.

The overall goal of qualitative research according to Merriam (2009) is to understand an experience and the meaning it has for the participant. This case study uses a phenomenological lens to understand the participants' experience of implementing Responsive Classroom®. Phenomenology describes the meaning of the lived experiences for several individuals about a concept (Cresswell, 1998). Merriam (2009) outlines the task of the phenomenologist as “to depict the essence or basic structure of experience” (p. 25) using the interview as the primary means of gathering data to get at the underlying structure of the meaning of the experience.

The case study focuses on using multiple sources of information by gathering accounts and information of implementation, frequently from the participants themselves, audiovisual material and possible other documents and reports. This information is presented through rich description and analysis of patterns or themes to provide an in-depth picture of the case. The case should provide the reader with understanding of the phenomenon being researched from a real-life perspective through the voices and interpretations of the participants. The understandings that arise might affect and even improve practice or influence future research.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Abraham Maslow first introduced his hierarchy of needs in a paper written in 1943. He describes five levels of needs with the most basic level including physiological needs such as food, water, sleep, and warmth. This level is depicted as the bottom or foundation of a pyramid. Once these lower-level needs

have been met, a person can move to the next level identified as security needs which includes personal safety. The third level of the pyramid is belonging needs which includes connections to family and friends followed by esteem or the need to feel valued and accepted. Finally, at the top of the pyramid, a person can achieve self-actualization or reaching one's full potential. Maslow's theory has proponents and critics. Researchers at the University of Illinois found that "while fulfillment of the needs was strongly correlated with happiness, people from cultures all over the reported that self-actualization and social needs were important even when many of the most basic needs were unfulfilled" (<http://psychology.about.com/od/theoriesofpersonality/a/hierarchyneeds.htm>).

In her book, *Teaching Children to Care* (1993), Ruth Sidney Charney points to several theorists whose work influence the Responsive Classroom Approach. Throughout the book Charney refers to John Dewey and Lev Vygotsky, Jean Piaget, Erik Erikson, and William Glasser. Their theories, as well as Albert Bandura's social cognitive theory and Jerome Bruner's idea of scaffolding can be found in the seven basis principles of Responsive Classroom®. Additionally, there are significant connections to *Developmentally Appropriate Practice* (2009).

1. The social curriculum is given as much importance as the academic curriculum. This principle of RC is directly related to a principle of *Developmentally Appropriate Practice* (DAP). "Development and learning occur in and are influenced by multiple social and cultural contexts" (p. 12,

Copple and Bredekamp, 2009). Erik Erikson (1963) also comments that children learn about being human through involvement with others.

2. How children learn is as important as what they learn. Two key ideas of child-centered learning address this principle. First, children should be mentally involved and physically active in learning what they need to know and do. Secondly, “children’s ideas, preferences, learning styles, and interests are considered in the planning for and implementation of instructional practices” ([www.education.com](http://www.education.com)). Dewey also purported the use of real situations to help learners achieve understanding.
3. The greatest cognitive growth occurs through social interaction. Piaget suggested that the interactions in groups can create cognitive conflict and disequilibrium that help a learner try out new ideas. Applying the social interdependence perspective of cooperative learning to this principle makes sense. “In an education setting, social interdependence refers to students’ efforts to achieve, develop positive relationships, adjust psychologically, and show social competence” (p. 18, Johnson, Johnson and Holubec, 1998). Bandura’s (1977) theory emphasizes the role of the social context and the power of observation in learning. Vygotsky (1978) also emphasized the importance of the social context when learners are resolving cognitive conflicts that impact learning. Further, his zone of proximal development (ZPD) is intended to give children the opportunity to practice new skills with support. Jerome Bruner’s idea of scaffolding learning dovetails perfectly with Vygotsky’s ZPD.

4. There is a specific set of social skills that children need in order to be successful academically and socially. The skills are identified by Gresham and Elliott (1990) for Responsive Classroom. They are known by the acronym CARES –cooperation, assertion, responsibility, empathy, and self-control.
5. Knowing the children who are being taught is as important as knowing the content that is being taught. This is one of the core considerations of Developmentally Appropriate Practice (Copple and Bredekamp, 2009). “Development and learning proceed at varying rates from child to child as well as at uneven rates across different areas of a child’s individual functioning”( p. 11).
6. Knowing the parents of the children in the classroom is as important as knowing the children in the classroom. Copple and Bredekamp (2009) support this principle within their core considerations. They emphasize the need to recognized and understand the cultural and social contexts in which students live. They also mention the need to develop reciprocal relationships with families in their guidelines for implementing DAP. Erikson (1963) also notes the role of parents in the child’s development.
7. How the adults at school work together to accomplish a mission is more important than one’s individual competence. Responsive Classroom® (RC) is a proactive approach to establishing a climate of caring, safety, respect, and responsibility in a classroom. The strategies have been developed to provide teachers with a framework to address both social-



emotional learning as well as academic emphasis through rituals and routines. A primary tenet of this approach is that “academics and social behavior are profoundly intertwined” (Charney, 1993, p. 11).

The underlying purpose of all the RC strategies is to build a sense of community and belonging (DAP), to develop personal responsibility (Glasser), and to provide a safe and respectful environment for taking risks and learning. Being part of the community means being an active social participant, both giving and receiving care and contributing to the overall benefit of the group. This may be as simple as knowing and using the names of others in the classroom, sharing materials or space, or taking turns. It can be as complex as solving conflicts in a mutually acceptable way. Community involvement is also balanced with individuals having time to have their own specific needs met during the day.

An example of this might be Morning Meeting provides time for the community to come together socially and to prepare for the academic and social learning of the day. Children greet each other, work cooperatively to review the News and Announcements chart, share ideas and information, and participate in an activity related to social or academic learning. Children can participate in this experience at their own level of comfort and engagement. Guided discovery, supported by positive reinforcement, provides children with the opportunity to learn how to respectfully use, and share materials and equipment in the room. Children can then use the materials, manipulatives, and supplies to enhance academic learning experiences.

## **Researcher's Role and Perspective**

The core principles and guidelines outlined by Developmentally Appropriate Practice are the foundation of my personal teaching philosophy. I believe that each child should be considered as a unique learner in the classroom with his or her own culture, social context and set of prior experiences. I also believe that children need to have the opportunity to learn in a safe, secure community. Children need to have the opportunity to practice skills with modeling and support. It is also necessary to involve the parents in the child's learning experiences.

Currently I work as an elementary teacher who uses Responsive Classroom® strategies. I have been trained through two week-long workshops on these approaches and have used them in classrooms since 1990. Having used Responsive Classroom® successfully with a variety of age groups and students, I strongly believe in the underlying tenets of the approach. Implementation can take up to six weeks at the beginning of each school year with each new group of students.

The first six weeks of school are used to teach and reinforce the routines and procedures of the classroom. Both the teacher and students create rules together and practice them through role-play situations. The classroom community engages in community building activities such as creating table names and finding similarities among classmates. The teacher introduces materials through Guided Discovery and the children practice how to use them. Each day begins with a Morning Meeting that reinforces community building and

reviews academic concepts. Academic Choice is introduced around the second month of the school year.

My beliefs about No Child Left Behind (NCLB) are both positive and negative. NCLB has established that children meet proficiency standards that can be determined by each state. Expecting proficiency sets the bar high for learners which is a good thing. It also brings attention to using data to inform instruction. I think these are positive results of NCLB.

Conversely, expecting that all learners will be proficient in specific curricular areas is unreasonable and in fact, unachievable. Additionally, the results of the tests that are used to measure proficiency are frequently used by news media and the public to make negative judgments about teachers and schools that do not provide a full picture of the challenges that these teachers and schools are facing when educating learners. Issues such as cultural differences, language barriers, learning disabilities, family structure, poverty and transient populations are not factored into the judgments made by uninformed reviewers. Frequently a single test score is the only factor used to determine if a school is adequate or if a teacher is highly qualified.

In order to meet these proficiency standards, many teachers are being forced to use curricular programs and assessment programs in addition to their regular teaching load. Teachers find they are spending time teaching to a test, testing and teaching to another test rather than using what they know about the learners (from above mentioned data) to make curricular decisions. These are issues that frustrate me about NCLB. These beliefs about NCLB, both positive

and negative, certainly impacted my decision to pursue this research topic and perhaps influenced how I viewed the data that I collected in terms of empathy regarding implementing multiple curricular approaches and an overabundance of testing learners.

## **Participants**

The participants in the study were teachers selected from elementary schools within south central Pennsylvania that have made a commitment to the use of the Responsive Classroom® approach. A list of school districts in Pennsylvania representing all regions in the state, urban, rural and suburban districts and serving varying socio-economic populations who are currently using Responsive Classroom® as their social and emotional learning curriculum was obtained from the Office of Child Development and Early Learning. Due to limited resources and other costs associated with the research, a decision was made to restrict the cases to the south central region of the state.

Two approaches were used to identify participants. An initial contact letter was sent to the 14 principals of buildings in south central Pennsylvania self-described as using Responsive Classroom®, explaining the project and the need to interview classroom teachers. The principals were asked to send a *Survey Monkey* link to the approximately 220 K – 3 teachers in the schools (see survey in Appendix A). Eleven teachers from five districts responded to the survey. The request was sent to principals during the first weeks of December which may have hindered the response rate.

The ten *Survey Monkey* questions were used to gather baseline data such as demographic and professional data. This information, particularly the number of years using RC and willingness to participate in an interview were primary screening questions. From these data, the participant field was narrowed to those teachers who have implemented Responsive Classroom® strategies for at least 8 –10 years. The survey responses were sorted according to number of years using RC continuously, type of school district (urban, suburban or rural) and willingness to participate in interviews with the researcher. Of the 11 respondents, two teachers met the screening criteria. Only one teacher (Participant #3) responded to a phone request to participate in the interview.

Secondly, a snowball sample was used to identify teachers who fit the criteria through word of mouth suggestions from fellow education professionals. Merriam (2009) explains that a snowball sample is “perhaps the most common form of purposeful sampling. This strategy involves locating a few key participants who easily meet the criteria you established for participation in the study” (p 79). Participant #1 was identified by a teaching colleague of mine after I explained the purpose of my research. After initial contact, this participant agreed to be interviewed. Participant # 2 was also identified by a teaching colleague. This participant suggested Participant #4 because they had worked together in the same building. Participant #5 was also identified through a teaching colleague whom she had taught with in a different elementary school. Participant #6 was suggested during the interview with the teacher who

responded to the *SurveyMonkey*. These teachers had worked together in a different district.

Hoping to achieve maximum variation in the sample, gender and graduate education levels were considered among participants who have continued to use Responsive Classroom® strategies in the era of No Child Left Behind accountability and scheduling demands. Table 1 provides a picture of the six case study participants in terms of characteristics that were important for the study. Each participant will be profiled individually in Chapter 4.

**Table 1-1 – Participant Data**

<i><b>Participant</b></i>	<i><b>Years teaching</b></i>	<i><b>Years implementing RC</b></i>	<i><b>Type of district (self-reported by teacher)</b></i>	<i><b>Gender</b></i>	<i><b>Grade level</b></i>
Elsa	24	12	Urban	F	K
Mary Ann	25	22	Suburban	F	3
Summer	24	12	Rural	F	Learning Support
Peggy	28	17	Suburban	F	1
Colin	17	~10	Rural-Suburban	M	1
Kim	12	8	Suburban	F	K

**Table 2-1 – School Data for Each Participant**

The results ([www.education.state.pa.us](http://www.education.state.pa.us)) in the following table are specific for the teacher's school not district.

<i><b>Teacher</b></i>	<i><b>PDE Designation</b></i>	<i><b>AYP Status</b></i>	<i><b>% Students Proficient or Above in Reading (3<sup>rd</sup> grade)</b></i>	<i><b>% Students Proficient or Above in Math (3<sup>rd</sup> grade)</b></i>	<i><b>% Students eligible for free lunch</b></i>	<i><b>% Students eligible for reduced lunch</b></i>
Elsa	City: Small	School Improvement II	53.8	63.3	71.6	4.6
Mary Ann	Suburban: Midsize	Met	86.4	85.5	27.4	3.5
Summer	Rural	Met	81.0	83.9	25.6	5.6
Peggy	Suburban: Midsize	Met	83.6	93.2	39.5	6.9
Colin	Town: Distant	Warning	66.1	75.2	38.9	5.9
Kim	Town: Fringe	Met	81.4	90.9	16.0	3.7

### **Data collection strategies**

Using the Penn State Institutional Review Board protocol, all documents were submitted for approval. IRB approval was granted on 12/10/2012 . The next step was to contact the participants to arrange the interviews.

Seidman's (2006) three interview series was used to gather information from the participants. The purpose of the interview is to gather the stories of the participants in their own voice and reflecting phenomenology, understanding the meaning they make of their experiences. This approach to inquiry utilizes open-ended questions. Each subsequent interview builds on the information and details shared by the participant in the previous interview.

### Interview One – Focused Life History

How did the participant become a teacher? A review of the participant's life history up to the time s/he became a teacher. The interview protocol can be found in Appendix B.

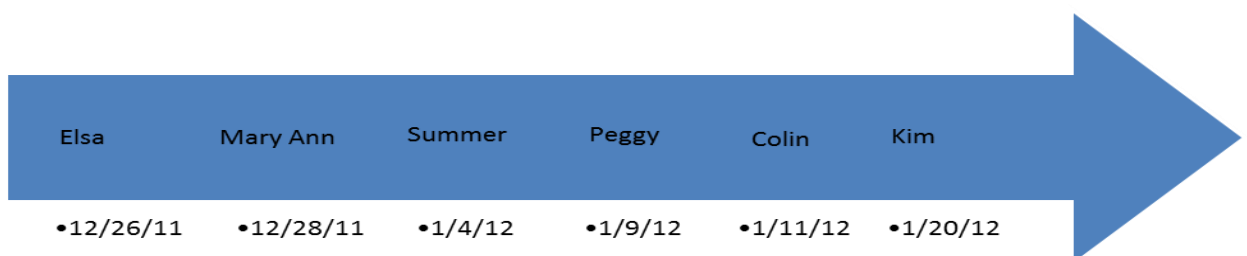
### Interview Two – Details of the Experience

What Responsive Classroom® strategies are being used by the participant? What type of training did the participant receive in Responsive Classroom® ? Has the implementation of these strategies changed over time? The interview protocol can be found in Appendix B.

### Interview Three – Reflection on the Meaning

What does it mean for the participant to use Responsive Classroom® strategies? Given what the participant said in interviews one and two, how does s/he understand or explain his or her use of Responsive Classroom® strategies? The interview protocol can be found in Appendix B.

### Figure 1-1 – Interview Timeline



The time line shows the dates for the initial interviews with each participant. A second interview was held one to two weeks later depending on the teacher's schedule (the final second interview was held in early February). Emails and



phone calls continued with participants through the middle of March as more information was needed to flesh out the interviews.

Initial contact with each participant was made via phone to explain the interview process. An explanation of the three interview process was given and a meeting place was arranged. The interviews were held in a convenient meeting location for the participant such as a coffee shop (Participants 1, 2 and 6) or the teacher's classroom (Participants 3, 4 and 5). Following informal conversation to develop rapport with the participant, each interview began with the participant signing a consent-to-participate form. Next, I reviewed the sections of the interview and collected basic demographic information. Interview one and two were typically completed within about 30 minutes and were conducted at the same meeting. Interview three, conducted at a different time, usually lasted about 45 minutes.

Each interview was transcribed soon afterwards using *DragonSpeak* software. Additional questions emerged from review of the transcriptions. These were asked in the second interview session. As participant profiles were developed and shared with my advisor, he suggested additional questions or areas that needed more attention. For example, the daily schedule was requested via email from all participants following the face-to-face interviews. Several participants were contacted via email or phone and asked to give specific examples of how they implemented strategies such as Guided Discovery or Academic Choice. Since Participant #1 was the pilot run of the questions, more contact was needed with her to obtain more detail. Some of these

questions included asking for more detail about a specific strategy or what a concept, such as acceptance, looked like in the participant’s classroom. These questions were asked in subsequent participant interviews. The overall time frame for data collection began in late December and concluded in mid-March.

**Table 3-1 – Collection strategies**

Participant	Interview #1	Interview #2	Phone Call	Email
Elsa	Demographic, Seidman 1 & 2	Seidman 3, additional questions from transcript review	Multiple calls to clarify details	Multiple emails to clarify details
Mary Ann	Demographic, Seidman 1 & 2	Seidman 3, additional questions		3 with follow-up questions
Summer	Demographic, Seidman 1 & 2	Seidman 3, additional questions		1
Libby	Demographic, Seidman 1 & 2	Seidman 3, additional questions		1
Colin	Demographic, Seidman 1 & 2	Seidman 3, additional questions	1	1
Kim	Demographic, Seidman 1 & 2	Seidman 3, additional questions		3

**Data analysis**

The information from the surveys and interviews was transcribed using *DragonSpeak* software. Using horizontalization, (Merriam, p. 26) the data were initially examined and treated with equal value and importance. First, each

participant's information was interpreted and analyzed to create an individual participant's case. The written document contained the basic demographic information acquired from the survey or interview as well as responses to questions asked during the interview sessions. As each participant completed the three interviews, information was added to the individual case for that participant. Additional questions were asked via phone or email conversations. At the final meeting with the participant I explained that I would be generating a participant profile representing them with information gathered from the interviews. The final document was a synthesis of the information collected from the interviews, emails and phone questions. This report was sent via email to the participant for member check. I asked each participant to carefully review the report to be sure that I had included the important information and had represented each participant accurately. Several participants, responding via email, made minor grammatical changes, but the essence of the report was deemed to be accurate.

Next all the completed profiles were reviewed to uncover the essence of the experience for the participants. Participant responses for each question in each section of the interview were recorded in table format to compare responses. A theory or understanding of the information began to emerge as the cases were reviewed together. The color-coded responses related significantly to the specific questions that were asked. These findings are shared in detail in Chapter 5.

The next step was to take the key ideas from the interviews and place them on notecards. In this format, I was able to manipulate the ideas to uncover

categories that resonated with the participants, revealing either similarities or differences among participants. These larger categories were represented by several themes. Detailed explanations of these findings are shared in Chapter 5. Additionally, connections to the literature that strengthen the understanding of the individual cases and the total study as a whole are outlined in Chapter 5.

### **Credibility and Trustworthiness**

Thick description was used throughout the report of findings. The voice of the participants is evident and well-represented to be sure the interpretation is grounded in the data and not the interviewer's personal perspective. The integrity of the interviews was carefully preserved. The participants stories were recorded, transcribed and returned to each teacher for member check to assure accuracy of each story. Finally, the use of multiple participants provides trustworthiness to the data presented. Bracketing strategies included minimizing talk during interviews so as not to influence responses; adjusting the interview protocol as each interview proceeded; and reviewing interview transcripts to be certain that the emergent themes come from the participants

## **Chapter Four Participant Profiles**

This chapter will introduce the six participants of the research study. Each participant has been given a pseudonym for confidentiality. The six teacher participants were interviewed using Seidman's three interview protocol. The transcribed interviews were edited to create the following teacher profiles. Each teacher was given an opportunity to correct/edit the profile as part of the member check process. All respondents confirmed that the profiles accurately represented their stories. Each profile includes a section of demographic and background information and a section that answers the four research questions.

### **Elsa**

Teacher #1 ("Elsa") has been teaching in the same South Central district for 26 years. She has taught 1<sup>st</sup> grade, extended day Kindergarten, and is currently teaching in a full day Kindergarten. Elsa has dual certification in Elementary and Early Childhood Education and a Master's degree in Elementary Education.

Elsa teaches in an urban district with about 50% of the children throughout the district receiving free lunch. She is one of three K teachers in the building. Elsa has a class size of 25 children this year. The class size fluctuates between 18 and 25 depending on enrollment. She has a full time para-professional in her classroom.

In her current situation, Elsa is expected to use Response to Instruction and Intervention (RTII), a systematic approach to improving targeted skills aimed at meeting benchmark levels of achievement. She also uses Scott Foresman reading (basal) and math curricula. She is also expected to use Project READ

which uses concrete examples and multi-sensory experiences to support reading instruction, DIBELS Next (Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills) which are a set of short procedures used to assess and regularly monitor the development of early literacy and early reading skills and Foss Science, a hands on approach to science instruction and thematic units incorporated into reading, when possible.

The only specialist that works with Kindergarten is the art teacher. The classroom teacher must provide instruction for library, music, PE and computer.

Elsa's daily schedule looks something like this:

8:15 – 8:45 – RTII Student Services meeting (for teachers on Friday only)  
8:50 – Arrival, breakfast  
9:10 – Morning meeting  
9:40 – Project READ intervention groups (except one day per six day cycle when children have Art)  
10:30 – Finish Morning Meeting – Begin Scott Foresman Guided Reading (Social Studies Intervention)  
11:40 – Lunch  
12:10 – Recess  
12:40 – Literacy Activities  
1:30 – Math  
2:30 – Teacher-led PE, Computer, Library or Foss Science  
3:00 – Snack, pack up  
3:15 – Bus dismissal  
3:30 Walkers dismissal

Elsa began her career three months into a school year when the district decided to add an additional 1<sup>st</sup> grade classroom. “I started as a long-term sub. All of the other 1<sup>st</sup> grade teachers could choose the children from their classrooms that they wanted to be in the new class. You can guess the kind of class I had that year! Everybody gave me their challenging kids.” This long-term substitute position turned into a contract position the following year.

I taught for 17 years in 1<sup>st</sup> grade, 10 of these years as part of a continuous progress, multi-age, total inclusion team known as the Primary Team.

There were four of us the first year of the team. None of us had tenure, so we didn't really feel like we had a choice about joining this new team. We had kids in Transitional first, first and second grade. We also included all of the special needs kids in those grades. The next year, we had two first grades, a second and we added a third. We had all of the special needs kids in those grades on the team. We really tried to work with the kids according to their needs, not their assigned grade level.

The Primary Team started to dissolve when the administration decided to use scripted curricula like Reading Mastery and Saxon Math. We weren't able to meet the needs of the kids in the same way. So, I transferred to a different school and taught extended day Kindergarten (K) for 4 years and ½ day K for a year. I worked with another teacher in the extended day K program. I liked being able to collaborate like I did on the Primary Team. Now I am teaching full day K in a different school [in the same district].

Elsa believes the most satisfying aspect of her career is seeing the children learning. "I like watching children start learning letters and sounds at the beginning of the year and being able to read by the end of the year." She also appreciated her time working on the Primary Team.

It was so satisfying to work with children according to their needs rather than their assigned grade level. Children with learning challenges were given extra time to learn the skills they needed. We could group children

according to their needs, so I might have had 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> graders in the same class who needed to learn the same skill. We could work with smaller groups of kids because we had 2 para-professionals and the learning support teacher along with 4 classroom teachers. All the kids were part of the Team.

Elsa indicated two specific disappointing aspects in her career. She is frustrated by the lack of parental involvement in the classroom and by the perceived lack of district administrative support for teachers and principals.

I know that most of the parents are working but I would like to hear from them. I had a class two years ago where everyone was willing to use email. Parents would send messages and questions. This year, I don't hear from the parents. I don't see them. They don't support the kids doing their homework. I know these kids would be making more progress if the parents would be more supportive. The parents need to get clearances to work in the classroom. They are expensive, but the district doesn't help to pay for them. They also make the parents take a class before they can be in the classroom.

Elsa believes that every child can learn, no matter their background or learning style. "I've seen it all through teaching, but most especially on my time on the Primary Team. We were really able to see and document growth for every child then." She feels that she is not currently able to achieve because of her class size.



The first research question of the study addresses the pressures primary grade teachers (K-4) perceived as a result of No Child Left Behind (NCLB). In Elsa's case the focus on using Response to Instruction and Intervention (RCII) through Project READ has created pressure trying to implement Morning Meeting.

We start Morning Meeting and then it's time for some of the children to leave to go to their Project READ intervention groups. They're gone for 30 minutes. I need to do my Project READ groups at that time, too, since it's a building schedule. I try to complete greeting, News and Announcements and sharing before their groups. We try to finish the activity when everyone is back, but their [the children's] focus is gone. It's almost like I should start all over again.

Over the past 10 years, Elsa has found that it has become more difficult to complete MM at one time mainly due to the building RTII schedule. Initially, [in the early part of her career] the district expected the first 30 minutes of the day to be blocked out for morning meeting. Now, she finds a different directive taking precedent.

When I first started doing Morning Meeting, it was an expected. We were supposed to block out that time at the beginning of the day. Now, the time issue made me rethink how I can make Morning Meeting work at all. I want to do it, but I need to follow the building schedule for Project READ. I decided to split it up so we at least do it every day. I have to choose a really short greeting and we sometimes omit sharing because of the time issue.

The district mandates to use the specific curricula mentioned may or may not be in response to the accountability measures of No Child Left Behind. The expectations to use them within the building schedule have had an impact on Elsa's decision to implement Morning Meeting as intended by The Northeast Foundation for Children.

She describes her approach to using RC over the last 10 years as a way to create a positive classroom environment. She doesn't feel she has the time to do the strategies the way she was initially trained to do.

Morning Meeting gives us the chance to start the day in a positive way.

And like I said, the kids treat each other more respectfully, even though it's hard to fit in. The best thing about the whole school using it is that it's everywhere the children go. They have the same expectations, the same routines and language all day.

Elsa believes the impact of Responsive Classroom® on her children, especially Morning Meeting, is huge. "I can set expectations for appropriate behavior and it's a time to build rapport between me and the children. It gives me a time to hear them talk and to talk to them that I don't have at other times of the day." She mentioned several times that the children use the skills that they are learning.

I feel the demand to be teaching skills. I can review them by putting them in the News and Announcements and still use Morning Meeting. Children can answer questions on the board. We do our daily fix-it sentence on the

board. Several children can make the changes to the sentence and be actively involved in the process.

Elsa indicated that children showed changes in their ability to self-manage their behavior after implementing RC.

The children practiced the rules every day. They knew what the expectations were. One of our rules was, 'Be respectful.' We talked about what that looked like and sounded like. They were more aware of how to treat each other respectfully. They also realized there were logical consequences for their behavior. For example, if they didn't finish their homework, they needed to finish it at morning work time.

Elsa has had to reconstruct her implementation of Morning Meeting based on the curricular mandates of the district. Even with the dissonance of wishing to conduct Morning Meeting within a single time frame, she sees the benefits of continuing to use this strategy through her children's behavior and the time she can use to actively engage her children in reviewing skills. Morning meeting appears to be the only component of the Responsive Classroom® Approach that Elsa is able to implement consistently.

### **Mary Ann**

Teacher #2 (Mary Ann) has been teaching in a South Central Pennsylvania school district for 20+ years. She began her career teaching for two years in Maryland. She has taught 1<sup>st</sup> grade, 2<sup>nd</sup> grade, 3<sup>rd</sup> grade and Learning Support in her current district. She has also looped from 2<sup>nd</sup> to 3<sup>rd</sup> grade with a class of students. Mary Ann has dual certification in Elementary and Early

Childhood Education and additional certifications in Special Education, Reading and Educational Leadership.

Mary Ann teaches in a suburban district. She describes her students as middle-class, but explains that there is socio-economic diversity throughout the district ranging from poverty to wealth. She is one of three 3<sup>rd</sup> grade teachers in the building. Mary Ann has a class size of 22 children this year. The class size is typical. She has a para-professional in her classroom for 30 minutes per day.

A typical day in Mary Ann's classroom looks like this:

Bell rings at 8:40, students come into the room to get unpacked, answer morning question, finish work or read to self...also mingle

9:00 Announcements

After announcements: Special Class such as PE (most days)

9:50 return from special and begin math

10:35 recess

10:55-11:30ish finish math

11:30-12:00 morning meeting, current events, calendar

12-12:30 begin language arts

12:30-1:10 recess and lunch

1:10-1:25 read to self

1:25-3:20 language arts (shared reading, writing, guided reading), content area integration

3:20-3:30 Read Aloud

3:30 Wrap up and pack up to go home

Mary Ann is expected to use district indicators aligned with the state standards to design her curriculum and instruction. She is not "bound by textbooks." She is given freedom and autonomy in lesson planning. She develops lessons that incorporate technology and social learning.

We have a curriculum with indicators of what we have to cover, but we can do it in a way that we feel best meets the needs of the kids.

Whenever I am able to make lesson plans, I'm able to make sure there's a lot of collaboration a lot of community kind of a thing.

Mary Ann's school has met AYP. The district uses the DRA II and district-created math and writing assessments in addition to PSSA tests to monitor student progress.

Mary Ann believes there are several aspects of her career that are highly satisfying.

Probably one of the best professional experiences I've had was when I looped [from 2<sup>nd</sup> grade into 3<sup>rd</sup> grade]. I could go into the classroom knowing the students, and knowing their needs. And some kids you know at the end of the school year, you feel like your work is not done with them. So it was really nice to have that extra time with them. I really liked it. It's satisfying to me when I see children engaged in what they're doing in and the 'ah-ha' moments. I also really like to work with other teachers as well. So collaborating to make learning even better in teaching even better is satisfying. I collaborate with my grade level, and we have a lot of team meetings with reading specialists. Thanks to Twitter for example, I found this guy who is from New Zealand, and we teach geography. We collaborated on a geography project. We sent questions back and forth, we sent care packages, and we got to Skype.

Mary Ann joked that a disappointing aspect in her career is not being able to use the bathroom at any time. Then she seriously responded about children who need that extra help. "When I feel that I have totally exhausted [my options]

and I have done everything I know to work hard for kids to get what they need. And it's cutting through all of the red tape, that type of thing.”

Mary Ann believes that the Responsive Classroom® philosophies reflect her own beliefs about education. She believes that a strong and safe community is necessary for children to learn.

I think that building a really strong, caring community with high expectations is of utmost importance. You know, building a place where kids feel safe they feel comfortable to learn and comfortable to make mistakes and the teacher feels the same way.

She thinks it's important to educate the whole child “academically, socially, and emotionally. It is important to me to reach each and every child as well as connect with their families.”

Mary Ann has been fortunate to work in a school system that has adopted Responsive Classroom® district-wide three years ago. Although she was initially trained by a principal, she has now received the full RC training from the Northeast Foundation for Children (NEFC) trainers. Although she is not feeling pressure from the mandates of NCLB, Mary Ann is challenged to continue to implement RC in a way that improves her practice. She notes that she is glad to work “in a place where I can grow and feel okay if [I] stumble along the way.”

Mary Ann explains how RC is less of an “add-on” to her day. “Now it's more natural, and now there are more components of it that I use. I started out with just the morning meeting, because that's all I really knew about. And so

now, it's very natural. It's just part of the way that me and my colleagues think. It is just really, really ingrained.”

She also believes her approach to teaching has changed as a result of using RC.

I remember when I first started teaching, I expected the kids to do their own work. I wanted them to come with the right answer - what I felt was the right answer. You can come up with a multitude of answers, not for 2+2 but you know what I mean. There are a lot of different ways to think of things. It's really neat whenever someone will think of something and I say, 'I never would've thought of that.' So it's a paradigm shift. You are with other people, you will learn from others. So I think that is part of the Responsive Classroom® thing, too. There are a lot of different ways to think of things. It's really neat whenever someone will think of something and I say I never would've thought of that. There's a learner in the teacher and teacher in the learner. It's enmeshed.

Clearly Mary Anne has adopted the RC principle that asserts that the greatest cognitive growth occurs through social interaction. Mary Ann's decisions relate to how she is establishing her instructional groups. She believes that it is essential to "make sure there's a lot of collaboration, a lot about community kind of a thing

Mary Ann found as she learned more and implemented more strategies that behavior issues lessened.

When I first came to this district, of course I didn't know about Responsive Classroom®. So I was using the language that was not explicit language, and I was just starting morning meeting, and not kind of knowing where I was going with that.

Mary Ann affirms that ongoing training and support have impacted the children's behavior. "So as I got more training and a deeper understanding, I did notice a change. The behaviors, and they're still times, because you know, we're people, but they're not full-blown angry. It makes for a calmer, more enjoyable workspace."

She has also noticed that there has been a gradual change as the children in her school have been exposed to RC since Kindergarten. "It's just part of the way that me and my colleagues think. It's not an extension of what I do in the classroom; it is what I do in my classroom. It helps me to manage students, gives them a voice and is integral to all activities, especially the teacher language."

Mary Ann has been continuously supported in her implementation of RC, initially by her principal and later through collegial discussions, faculty meeting presentations and book studies. Now that RC is a district initiative, she feels additional support from her administration and colleagues.

Mary Ann began using RC when she first came to her district and was trained informally by her principal. Since then she has continued to embrace and expand her use of RC, especially since the adoption of the approach by her



district. She has not had to make decisions regarding implementation based on time or NCLB pressures. Rather, RC has become an integrated part of her practice, and she has reflected on her use and how she could continue to improve her implementation. She has learned that it is important to have “high expectations, but doing it in a way where people feel respected. You know, you can teach with dignity.”

### **Summer**

Teacher #3 (Summer) has been a teacher for 24 years. She has taught in two counties in central Pennsylvania. She is currently working as a learning support teacher for children in grades K, 1, and 2. She is dually certified in Elementary and Special Education. She also has a Master’s degree in Specific Learning Disabilities.

I started out with the Intermediate Unit in a multidisciplinary classroom. I had them and I taught in [a central PA] County. And because of the transportation, I tended to get a conglomeration of different learners. When the districts started taking back their classes from the IU I became a learning disabilities teacher K-6 in [a] school district. The following year I was offered a developmental first grade class so I could do some preemptive type service and rescue kids. I did that for three years. Then I moved to an instructional support teacher position and did that for two or three years at [that district]. I then transferred to [another] school district. I was then a life skills teacher for three years and then I was able to

transfer to a learning support Kindergarten and first grade position. I did that for four or five years.

Summer taught half-day Kindergarten in that district until they opted to pilot a full day Kindergarten program which she taught for four more years. After teaching remedial math, another district opened a full day Kindergarten program. She taught that for 3 years and is now in a learning support position working with K, 1, and 2.

Summer has specific curricula she is expected to use with her children. Summer also notes the assessments she is using. "I do MAPS which is district-wide, progress monitoring of their IEP goals. I do curriculum-based assessment. I do observation notes, that kind of thing."

Summer notes several aspects of teaching as being satisfying.

The children's progression of skills, and when they realize that they know it and you can tell by their countenance...when you have a child who's really struggling with learning, and you really brainstorm and think of all the things that you can do chipping away and then you discover something that clicks for them. That's very satisfying. It's really not doing lesson plans. It's really not doing IEP's, not doing progress monitoring. It's really the kids.

Summer says the least satisfying part of her career is when programs are started and given lots of attention for several years and then fade into the background.

Summer believes “all children can learn. They may learn differently, but they can all learn. I believe all children are worthy beings who deserve respect and honor whether they are giving that respect or not. I believe we all learn differently.” Summer feels she is generally able to put these beliefs into practice “because they're good things. They're right things. Kids are deserving of those things.” She feels she been able to put her beliefs into practice through her entire career.

Summer began to use Responsive Classroom® because she was asked by her district to attend training. “Our assistant superintendent read something that it helped to improve scores, responsibility of students, morale, and the whole 9 yards. She had money through the bullying program, and it fit the description for that for a grant and she was able to send a few of us. I was game to learn anything. I fell in love with it and implemented it in my Kindergarten classroom.”

After completing Level I and Level II training, Summer enrolled into the trainer’s program in 2009 wanting to become a Responsive Classroom® trainer. She was teaching full day Kindergarten for the second year in her current district at the time. Her language reflects the depth to which RC has been integrated into her daily teaching.

Responsive Classroom® for me is a way of doing class life. It looks a lot different for me this year because I'm a resource person. When I was in the classroom, everything hinged on it. So it was in all aspects throughout the entire day.

Summer believed that she made a connection to the philosophies and that made it easy to implement. “I believed in the beliefs and the structure of Responsive Classroom®. It just seemed natural to provide the opportunities, very blatant explicit opportunities for children to practice those principles as well.”

Summer has needed to change her implementation of Responsive Classroom® because of her current teaching assignment. As a Learning Support resource teacher, she is working with several groups of children throughout the day. She is also supporting a first year teacher’s implementation of RC by planning the weekly topics for Morning Meeting and modeling in the classroom when possible. Summer’s strong connection to the underlying philosophies of Responsive Classroom® and her certification as a trainer have allowed her to continue to implement the strategies, but she has had to modify this use to work in other teacher’s classrooms during the last two years.

During the time Summer was using the strategies in her own classroom she found that she needed to make changes in her teacher language. This made implementation of Responsive Classroom® challenging.

The whole idea of reinforcing kids for things that they were doing and that's what they're expected to do was a paradigm shift for me as well. I used to thank them for everything. But now I ask them to think and feel and I'm putting the responsibility of the learning back on them. I gained more control because my community of learners began to take ownership of their own learning and their learning environment. They began to take pride in their learning, their work and their accomplishments.

Summer also noticed changes in her students.

Their language - they were very aware if kids were not adhering to the rules because they had taken pride and understood them and so I felt like in many regards I can just allow children to handle things. And because we had models if we had a problem and we had done some role-playing we have modeled how you go about approaching a child in a respectful way. A caring, assertive way with empathy. They were able to do it. Five-year-olds, at their own level, pretty smoothly, in a caring way.

Summer also notes that she has expanded her parent contact to build relationships. "Some of the habits I've broken in being more deliberate and establishing rapport with parents to becoming more of a partnership. Having habits die is a tough thing. You have to be aware of them. I think the training has made me aware that this might not be the best thing."

Summer's decisions are influenced by her current position as a resource teacher as well as her additional training through the Northeast Foundation for Children. "Responsive Classroom® for me is a way of doing class life. It looks a lot different for me this year because I'm a resource person. When I was in the classroom, everything hinged on it." Her experience as a mentor and trainer helped her to build on what teachers are already doing in their classrooms.

Summer thinks she has become more of a risk-taker over the last 8-10 years. She is willing to try new ideas and allows herself to make mistakes.

When I first began to delve into RC I only 'played' with several components associated with RC. I wanted to really get a handle on

morning meeting, rule creation, and my teacher language. The following year I then added logical consequences, refined student sharing in morning meeting and continued to work on my teacher language. The following years I jumped right in and gained a handle on interactive modeling, guided discovery, problem solving techniques and academic choice options at the Kindergarten level. I tried to be slow in my rate of acquisition but to be honest I wanted to do it all and I wanted to do it well from the start. I did force myself to be reflective with each component and really think about ways to make it better. I believe for myself because I went slow and steady I gained confidence with what I had in place and thus was able to try new parts/pieces and see the responses from my students.

Summer explains that her risk taking behavior is evident in her interactions with students.

I was very open with them about how I don't like to make mistakes. 'But I made a mistake, boys and girls, and here's what happened and look I made a change. Do you think that mistake was a good thing? To have that freedom, to show that to learners is powerful.

Summer has had a change in her teaching assignment that has impacted her ability to implement RC, but she continues to model and mentor teachers using them daily in her school. Her decisions regarding implementation were imposed by her role as a resource teacher, not as a result of the directives within No Child Left Behind. She has noticed changes in her teacher language, in her

students' behavior and in her own beliefs about teaching as a result of using Responsive Classroom®.

### **Libby**

Teacher #4 (Libby) has been teaching first grade for the last 18 years in the same central Pennsylvania school district. Libby has also taught Kindergarten and remedial math at the middle school level. She has a K-8 certificate with a concentration in Early Childhood Education. Her Master's degree is also in Early Childhood Education. She earned both degrees from Shippensburg University. She has an additional 60 graduate credits beyond her masters.

Libby is one of seven first grade teachers in her building. She has a class size of 21 which is a typical size. She has no para-professional help unless she has a Therapeutic Support Staff (TSS) worker in the classroom working with a specific child.

Libby explained that the economic level of most of her building is upper middle class. She thinks maybe one or two of the children in her class qualify for free or reduced lunch. She identifies her district as a suburban district.

The district writes its own curriculum, but it is aligned with state standards. This is a district-wide curriculum. There are no mandated textbooks.

We have our own reading strategies that we've created that are expected to be taught and comprehension strategies. We do very much in house in this district through committee work and things like that. We are piloting *Words Their Way* this year in first grade, second grade and third grade.

Science and social studies are integrated into language arts. The district provides one Foss science kit on solids and liquids to be completed in first grade. Writing is assessed three times a year with the same prompt and rubric. Math is assessed using a district created instrument three times a year as well. Her school is making AYP.

Libby's daily schedule looks like this:

9-9:30 – Morning Meeting  
9:30-10:15 - Phonics and Handwriting  
10:15 - Recess  
10:30-11:15 - Guided Reading  
11:15-11:30 - Mountain Math  
11:30-12:10 - Recess and Lunch  
12:10-12:20 - Quiet Time  
12:20-1:00 - Shared Reading  
1:00-1:40 - Music, Art, Phys. Ed., or Library  
1:40-2:25 - Math  
2:25 - Recess  
2:40 - 3:20 - Writing  
3:20 - 3:35 - Pack Up and Ending Circle

Libby feels watching the growth of her first graders throughout a school year is a very satisfying aspect of teaching. She also appreciates the relationships she can build with families.

This time of the year right now (January). The growth you see between now and the end of the year in first graders is phenomenal, in all areas academically, socially, and emotionally. When they come to you in the fall, they still need so much handholding and so much support. And when they leave you in the spring first-grade especially, it is an amazing year [to see] where they end up. I've made some really nice connections with families. There are some families that I've had four of their children.



That's very gratifying that families come back to you and want you back. It may not be a daily thing in first grade, but certainly by the end of the year and see what you have accomplished and feel very good about it. And that you have made a positive impact on those children. When I teach I'm not just teaching reading, writing and math. I am teaching the child. So it's as important to me to help these children prepare for life as far as their emotions and their social skills.

Libby is frustrated by what she calls the “political part” of teaching.

“Constantly fighting for funding, constantly fighting for recognition of the hard work that we do, not being respected by the people that make the decisions at the state level and the federal level. Just the overall feeling in this country of a lack of respect for teachers.”

Libby's most important beliefs about teaching and learning focus on children's ability to learn and the impact of high-stakes testing.

I believe all children can learn, but they don't all learn at the same rate and you shouldn't expect them all to learn at the same rate. I do believe that all people learn in different ways. As long as you're doing a variety of things throughout your day, throughout your week and throughout your month, I think you will address everyone's best learning method.

And yet once again, going back to that political view with No Child Left Behind and high-stakes testing, the powers that be expect them all to be there at the same time. And I think it is so detrimental to our students to

have that expectation. You can't assess the whole child at the paper and pencil level. There is so much more to them than that. Every child is gifted in some way. Everyone has their gifts. Some children may never do well with that paper and pencil, but that doesn't mean that they haven't learned and can't be a valuable member of society if given the right opportunities to do so.

Libby has been using the Responsive Classroom® Approach for about half of her teacher career.

So I would say a good 15 to 17 years ago is when I first learned about it and added to it and did more with it. When I actually went to training and got certified in RC I and RC II was in 2009 and 2010. But my previous building where I was is where the principal was, who brought this to the District and kind of informally trained us and we all read books and did things together before we had the real training.

Libby was introduced to Responsive Classroom® by a former principal. This principal expected that the teachers implement Morning Meeting. "I didn't know anything about it, but I was told you're going to have Morning Meeting and this is how you're going to conduct it. And that's what I did." The principal would take a few minutes at a faculty meeting to model a greeting or an activity. Other teachers who had attended RC training would also model ideas at in-service meetings. She has since attended full RC training through NEFC.

Libby's decisions regarding Responsive Classroom® have focused on how she implemented the strategies with her children. Her district has adopted

the RC approach. All the teachers are using it, although they have various years of experience with its implementation. “It’s as important to me to help these children prepare for life as far as their emotions and their social skills.”

She also focuses on building community. “The first change I made [after training] was getting rid of my desks and getting these tables so we could do more group work, less of an ‘I/me’ situation and more of an ‘us’ situation.”

Libby notes how her classroom management changed since her introduction to Responsive Classroom® . “I had gotten rid of the sticker charts and the card system that people use and I have gone to more logical consequences as a type of classroom management. I really like that.”

The entire district faculty read the *Power of our Words*. “This is when I really started to be more mindful of my language with students. I started using more of the reminding language, and it really does make a difference. You can really avert a lot of problems if you have somebody remind how it is we are going to do this.”

Libby noticed changes in her children when she began implementing Responsive Classroom®.

After a while, when you listen to the children they start to sound like you, they start to use your language. One of the children was crying because he made a mistake and I heard the children at his table -I didn't even have to intervene- all around him saying it's okay, we all make mistakes. It's not a problem. You'll get it right next time. They were dealing with it. They

were taking care of it. They were taking care of someone else in the room, and he pulled himself together and he could go onto the next thing.

Libby also changed her belief that she needed to be the sole decision-maker and in control of everything at all times. She feels that she is now more of a mediator in the classroom.

It's about them learning how to solve their own problems. I don't need to say, Susie go sit over there and Sally go sit over there. I can say to them. Okay tell me about the problem, and they both get to talk. How do you think we can solve the problem? What do you think might be a better choice next time? They are solving the problem. So I'm still there and I'm still the authority of the room, but they are coming up with a solution to a problem instead of me telling them what the solution will be.

Libby feels a stronger commitment to using Responsive Classroom® now than she did previously. She starts with a blank classroom, provides community materials, teaches expectations to the children, uses Hopes and Dreams to create rules and implements Logical Consequences.

Along with changing her teacher language, Libby has given herself permission to use the first six weeks of school to set routines and establish expectations.

Probably the most difficult thing is giving yourself permission to take those first six weeks of school and teach those procedures and behaviors. You want to jump in with the academics. It's killing you not to get your DRAs done. It's killing you not to jump right in with those academics. That's

something I had to make a conscious effort to do, to give myself permission to relax and take the six weeks. And once I did it for a year or two, I saw how valuable it was. Now if you told me I couldn't do it I would fight you. But that was very difficult to do. I was always one of the first people to have my DRAs done and have my groups started and ready to go. Relaxing that was really hard for me.

Libby shared that her greatest new understanding about Responsive Classroom relates to the children.

Children are competent. They are very good teachers. They are most often kind. They can come up with really good solutions if they have the opportunity to do so. And when they are really involved and engaged in their learning that's when their learning takes place, when they're really trying to solve a puzzle or figure something out. They do really well working together. They learn from each other more than they learn from us.

Libby explains Responsive Classroom® as “creating a community where everyone feels safe enough to take risks or taking the risks that they need to take to learn and grow. To make mistakes without worry of negative consequences and that is behaviorally as well as academically.” She has been able to implement RC without pressure from the district to conform to a certain curricula or number of minutes spent on an academic topic. Responsive Classroom® practices and principles permeate her entire way of approaching teaching. She

has made changes to her implementation and thinking as she has learned more about the approach and expanded her understanding.

### **Colin**

Teacher #5 (Colin) has been teaching in the same district for 17 years. He has a bachelor's degree in elementary education and a Master's degree in early childhood education. He has taught first grade in two different rooms in the same building. He also looped for one year with the same class into second grade. Colin said it was his best year teaching because "the parents were happy, the kids were happy, I was happy. But we hit a wall of opposition from anyone not wanting to change at the time. I thought [looping] was a great concept."

Colin's class size this year is 21 children, smaller than a typical size of 23. He has no paraprofessional help in the classroom. He self-describes the district as rural/suburban and that the children in his building fall in the low or low middle class, socioeconomically. 55% of his class receives free or reduced lunches.

Colin used Responsive Classroom® approximately 10 years ago but has forgotten much of the terminology and needed reminders of what the strategy names meant. He is currently using the Guidance approach as directed by the district, however some of the components of Responsive Classroom® are evident in his classroom.

I know I'm into having kids move around, talk and discuss. All of the rules are stated in a positive way. And just up until last couple years I used to have the kids come up with all the rules. I used to have them come up

with examples and discuss it. Nowadays, we don't discuss it. I just have them write it down. But that comes from the guidance approach.

Colin explains that the district is in the process of writing curriculum. He has been trained in Developmentally Appropriate Science, Health and Technology (DASH). They have a scope and sequence for language arts. He does not use the Scott Foresman basal-based reading program adopted by the district.

Basals don't reach all kids at their learning levels. They all have their own abilities and their own style. I like to have it more open-ended, or they can work at their own ability and with their own style. Everyday Math, I like. I can still let everybody work on their own needs at their own pace. The games are great. I can work with that. We have science and social studies curricula. Things are changing. It's all about the test.

His building achieved the goal of Adequate Yearly Progress last year.

Colin's schedule looks like this:

8:30 – Greet children at door, Morning message board, morning responsibilities  
9:00 – Clean up, Pledge, schedule review  
9:05 – Language Arts, Guided Reading, Writing, Literacy Centers  
10:10 - Recess  
10:30 – DIBELs Groups (groups are composed of children from all five 1<sup>st</sup> grade classrooms)  
11:00 – Teacher and student sharing  
11:15 – Lunch  
11:50 – Handwriting  
12:00 – Read aloud, Super Reader and Reading log  
12:40 – Special or All About You person of the week  
1:25 – Math  
2:40 – Recess  
2:55 – Complete agenda, read aloud and closing discussion  
3:10 - Dismissal

Colin notes that his teacher preparation program was different than what he encountered when he entered his first teaching position.

My preparation in the mid-80's, was very different from what education was when I started teaching (after raising his family). Even 15 years later education had changed from what I was prepared for. I was trained in a traditional manner. That was before the computer era. By the time I did get into teaching, I had never seen, and I didn't know what a big book. So I've learned in the trenches sort of, lots of workshops and graduate classes. And I feel like I have a sense for doing what's right for kids. I think I have a different philosophy from everyone else in this building. Everybody accepts me for what I add to this building, and I accept everyone, but you go with what your gut feeling tells you. Is it working or isn't it working. If it's not, get rid of it.

The most satisfying aspect of teaching is focused on the children. "Kids learning. It's all about kids. When a kid achieves something and the light bulb goes off, that's what makes it worthwhile. And when they can outright claim that achievement; the, 'now I understand' or 'guess what I did?'"

Colin feels that the most disappointing aspect of teaching is parent interaction with their children. "I wish parents enjoyed their kids. I do a lot of family involvement [activities] so I get to see what their family interactions are like. I'd really like to be a fly on the walls of the ones I don't get to see. They are usually the ones that are most challenging."



Colin believes that all kids can learn, and everybody's good at something and hopefully everybody gets along. He doesn't feel that he can put these beliefs into practice without obstacles. He feels he can be an obstacle to himself.

Sometimes I feel like I have 21 six and seven-year-olds at home. And maybe I feel like I get too close because of all the interaction I do during the day. They get to treat each other like brothers and sisters. And I think in the long run they remain friends after they leave. I have kids come back all the time to visit. They love when I pull the old photo albums down. Here's you in first grade.

Colin also expressed his concerns of the pressure from the district to meet testing goals. When talking about the curriculum he mentioned that "things are changing. It's all about the test." Colin's building is meeting AYP, but he expresses concern that the increasing expectations are going to overwhelm the children.

We've already raised expectations and the kids have already achieved a lot more than they have in the past and I just don't know how... everyone's going to break. The kids are going to feel the pressure; parents are feeling the pressure, teachers, administrators. Everybody's feeling the pressure. It just trickles down.

Colin was contacted to participate in the study through a snowball sample contact. He had used Responsive Classroom® in the past, but is no longer using the specific strategies. Colin remembers that his previous use of

Responsive Classroom® included Morning Meeting. He also referred to student self-control and responsibility.

I don't officially do the morning meetings anymore, but we do have discussions. We talk and we do a lot of sharing on a rotating basis. Some kids on their sharing day get to read their diary entry. Then we have personal sharing right after that. The kids get to ask a good question. Things like what, how or why. They know better than to ask you yes or no questions. I think all that stems from my experiences with Responsive Classroom®. The questions and the speaking part, the personal sharing. They get a lot of speaking opportunities. I have a lectern and a chair that I used for the diary reading. We put it right in the middle of the class and they read their diary. They know that they have to use loud voices, their sharing voices.

Colin does a lot to build community in his classroom. Children are frequently engaged in collaborative learning. He includes social meetings and problem meetings which he calls pow-wows. In a problem meeting, he will explain the problem to the class and ask the children to come up with solutions as a class.

Colin said he started using Responsive Classroom® because it was either a district or building initiative. They had a one-half day training workshop at the school. He isn't sure if the trainer was someone from the district or someone from the outside, such as the Intermediate Unite. He remembers the book from

the training. He really liked what was in the RC training book. He has had no additional training.

Colin's district's focus on assessment has impacted the children and how he makes decisions about his teaching.

I think socially and emotionally, emotionally probably the most. I think the kids actually feel the crunch. Not as much time to play. Constructive play sort of, at this age. I tell them as long as they're thinking. I'm good with that. Yes, kids do what we're expecting them to do most of them. Is it healthy? I don't think so. I think it's very unhealthy. They need time to grow. They are six and seven years old. There's plenty of time to be crunching on the numbers, making sure you're at this level, comparing yourself to all the other kids.

His implementation of curriculum has changed over the last 9 – 10 years because the district expectations for use of time are challenging and limiting.

How we should be using the time available down to the minute; language arts, study for the DIBELS testing, study for the PSSA testing. When I first started teaching math was 30 minutes. Now it's 70 minutes. Handwriting used to be important, now, it's not. I don't think they mind if we don't do it anymore and language arts is just really the big focus. 90 minutes a day”  
“Even on paper we're supposed to follow the basal and some of my colleagues do, which is okay. I don't know how they do it in 90 minutes. All of the things they're supposed to do in each lesson. I need time for the kids to interact in the morning, to get ready for the day. When I walk

through the hallways, a lot of kids are already at their desks as soon as they're unpacked. I give my kids time to interact, and it's their responsibility to get everything ready that they will need for the day. But they are interacting while they're doing it because talking is important to me. Getting some of them to be quiet afterwards... that's my biggest challenge.

He notes that expectations from the district have changed the way he implements Responsive Classroom®, including the new focus on the Guidance approach.

Colin explained what he is doing now and described his thinking and decisions.

My thinking hasn't changed. My beliefs haven't changed. I still think all those things are important, and I think since I keep my door closed, I can still do a lot of those things. The hard part is trying to appease the administration and the government with these tests, trying to do well there and still trying to do what I think is right for the kids. And then what happens is I'm hurrying everything instead of doing it right.

It's discouraging sometimes that we're moving in the direction we are. It's very discouraging. I don't let that affect how I teach, though. At the beginning of the day I have my happy face on and my different energies and it doesn't matter how I feel.

Colin thinks he saw changes in his children after he began using Responsive Classroom® . “It's a good way to communicate. I'm not a teacher who wants silence all day long. Yes, you may speak. Yes, you may move around.”

Colin has learned that children are capable of doing anything with appropriate expectations and instruction.

That kids are capable of doing it... what adults can do. Maybe not the moral judgment, and those types of things, but as far as allowing kids to do things they can do it. They are six and seven. They are capable of doing it. If they are having social problems, they can work it out. They might need guidance and direction. They can do it. I think sometimes we need to explain why you want to do something. Whenever I have a problem, I ask, what did you do? What are you going to do next time?

Colin appreciates that children are interacting, showing more self-control and taking more responsibility for their own behavior. “It just makes everything operate smoothly. Kids can solve their problems, and they are not coming to me.”

The district's changing expectations have been Colin's biggest obstacle. “Whether [the administration] bring[s] something in that is supposed to affect behavior management or curricular goals, it changes all the time. And I'm just trying to simplify everything that goes on.” His decisions have been influenced by district mandate to use the Guidance Approach. There is evidence that some of the philosophies about RC continue in his classroom, but his practice does not

reflect real integration of RC principles and practices. Colin agrees he would definitely use Responsive Classroom® again.

I would be back in full. I think I've become so efficient with my time. I try to use every minute of the day somehow. I try to make sure I make contact with every kid several times a day. We are working with a lot of individual assessments. It just makes everything operate smoothly. Kids can solve their problems, and they are not coming to me.

### **Kim**

Teacher #6 (Kim) has been teaching full day Kindergarten for eight years in the same central Pennsylvania school district. She is one of eight Kindergarten teachers in the K- 4 building. Prior to that she substituted, primarily in Kindergarten and also has taught preschool for three years. She has a bachelor's degree in Early Childhood Education and a master's degree in Curriculum and Instruction in Early Childhood Education.

Kim's class size is 20 middle- to upper-middle class children this year. This has been a typical class size since the district has had a grant to reduce class size. The funding for that grant is in its last year. She has four English Language Learners and one student with autism.

Kim has an aide with her for 45 minutes in the morning and 45 minutes in the afternoon to provide instructional support to all the children. She has paraprofessional help for the English language learners for 45 minutes each day, but not for the child with autism.

When Kim was asked to classify her district as rural, suburban or urban, she responded:

It used to be very rural as much of a farm community as our neighbor. But now they're turning all of our farmland into housing developments, we lean toward suburban but we're not close enough to urban. There are too many things between us and a real urban setting, but I guess I see us as evolving into suburban.

Kim listed the curricula they use.

We have Scott Foresman social studies, Harcourt story town for language arts and reading, Harcourt science and math. We follow the scope and sequence in the necessary sense that you know in Kindergarten, you teach letters. We use the big books. We use it to introduce reading strategies, and the like.

Her daily schedule looks like this:

8:45-9:05	Independent Math Activities
9:05-9:35	Kid Writing
9:35-9:55	Morning Meeting
9:55-10:15	Language Arts
10:15-10:30	Math
10:30-10:50	Recess
10:50-11:05	Language Arts
11:05-11:35	Lunch
11:35-12:10	Academic Centers
12:10-12:50	Math
12:50-1:05	Recess
1:05-1:35	Science/Social Studies
1:35-2:15	Shared Reading/Independent Quiet Book Time
2:15-2:45	Special (Gym, Music, Art)
2:45-3:20	Center Choice Time

Kim believes some of the most satisfying aspects of teaching are the hugs. She also notes how much change you can see in children especially in Kindergarten.

Teaching Kindergarten allows you to see them come in at so many different levels, and hopefully with good teaching and a lot of differentiation, we can get them into a narrower field of ability - diversity of ability. What I love is to see students who have been in preschool pushing academics since the day they were born and then having other students who have never left their mother, and then at the end of the year you see how much they've all grown and they are more on an equal playing ground to go to first grade. That to me is very rewarding work, to see such a huge amount of growth in one year in my students.

She also enjoys the unique challenges that occur every day. "I love that it is never the same day twice, that no year is ever the same. I love to embrace that still magical year, where they don't have to be taught to a test and they can just explore and learning is still fun in Kindergarten."

Kim is disappointed by the need to collect huge amounts of data, even in Kindergarten. She notes that her district administers a curriculum-based measure based on national standards and tests competencies in both literacy and math. This test is given three times a year, the first time during the first week in September.

Before we even have a chance to have them understand what Kindergarten is. Before they're used to the full day and used to who I am.



We have strangers... a SWAT team that comes in, made up of reading specialists, IST coordinator, math specialists, our Kindergarten aides are trained to give the test, and the principal. They [the children] are taken out, and the English language learners were not given the test in their native language. I absolutely can't stand it, but I know I'm not alone. I don't care what grade, no teacher likes testing, but in Kindergarten I think it's absolutely ridiculous.

She knows that this test is given in K – 3<sup>rd</sup> grades. She also indicates that she is frustrated that they are expected to use RTII (Response to Instruction and Intervention). Kim explained that they have not been given clear directions about grouping for RTII, but all the teachers have a specific time of day in which they work on a specific skill with a specific group of students.

Kim believes establishing community, teaching expectations, routines and how to use materials is essential prior to tackling academic content.

You can't teach them anything until they feel safe and valued in my classroom - they will learn, they will achieve. I will die on the mountain of spending the first six weeks plus of every school year, and it is six weeks plus in Kindergarten, because it's their first formal school experience establishing who they are in the classroom, who is in my community in my classroom, what are the routines in my classroom before I'm ever worried about how much academics or content is in my day. There is a lot ingrained into what I'm doing in the first eight or ten weeks of school. But I will not push academics before I have my other things established.

Kim has been using Responsive Classroom® strategies since her first year in the district. She believes “it means creating community. My main focus in using Responsive Classroom® is to create community in an environment to set the tone for my entire year of introducing them to formal education.”

Kim worked with a colleague who attended Responsive Classroom® training and brought it back to the district.

The District paid for anybody who wanted RC I to go to Philadelphia for the five-day training. There were 11 of us that went to that. And I, on my own, wanted to go to RC II training, but it wasn't widely offered, especially in this area. I had to travel to Massachusetts.

She completed the Level II training about four years after Level I. She feels that the most important support she had, other than her additional training, was the camaraderie between a colleague and herself.

Her modeling and her encouragement and bouncing ideas when got together for coffee and were talking about school and sharing ideas were a big support. We would get together right before each new month would start to dig through our files and give each other ideas. We were both constantly reading professional articles and books and sharing information with each other.

While Kim is one of the few teachers in her building who is continuing to use RC, most of the teachers have been trained and her administrators support her implementation of the approach. Her decisions about RC have focused on

improvement and making connections to her learners and their parents. For example, Kim is improving her implementation of Guided Discovery.

Guided discovery was hard. The first year, I think I did two. I felt like I didn't have time for this. I rushed through, because I felt like I had to get the academics done. I didn't take the time, and now I'm so much better about that. The first five-day week is when I'm like okay this is what we do. I don't do anything with scissors or glue until then, and then we get out things like Pla-doh, markers and other things like that. I tried to do [guided discovery] that first year on the first day with the pencil. And I just thought this is too hard and didn't understand it well enough to do it well.

Kim changes her implementation of strategies every year based on the children, “but sticks to the key components” of RC. She talked about how she begins to understand each child as a unique learner. “It's my job to observe and find their strengths in that beginning time with them so than I'm able to provide them experiences and learning opportunities. So they're going to maximize the potential they have to learn.”

Kim believes she has noticed changes in her students since implementing Responsive Classroom®.

The disposition of a child is in place before they come to you, but I think the fact that I do use Responsive Classroom® I have a lot less discipline issues. I have a lot less frustration at the beginning of the year than some of my colleagues. Some of them have only had a one day workshop, because they had been hired after they did that initial training. And so I

think in that respect, the more I use it, the more in depth I go. The longer I take each year at the beginning of the year, the better I feel the year goes. I can do more content, if I take the six weeks in the beginning of the year to teach them the routines. I can get them further in a year and they are doing more by the end of the year. Once we get into that routine and once the expectations are set, they are self-governing of how they maneuver through the day.

Kim's use of RC impacted how she thinks about parents and their parenting skills.

I thought I knew at all. I thought that because I had a child, who is difficult and because I was a teacher. I had to understand that everybody does the best they can with what they have and not everybody has the same thing coming into it. I have a much better relationship with families, and a lot more respect for families than what I hear some of my colleagues saying. I think those are really the changes that have taken place in me. I'm much more accepting of who people are. The biggest change was going from 'they don't have a clue' to 'they do have a clue but don't know how to get there'.

Kim's thinking about her beliefs has also changed.

I always believed that every child could learn. I used to think that it was my job to get them all reading by the end of Kindergarten and academics is the only way they were going to get a job or keep a job. There was one direct way of teaching academics and allowing them to absorb that

information. Now, academics will come. Responsive Classroom<sup>®</sup> principles are so much more important. Without them academics don't come nearly as easy or as well, as they come when they are happy and engaged and have ownership of what they're doing in that room.

Another of Kim's changes related to the children. She changed her focus from direct-instruction, academic driven learning to focusing on happy, engaged learners.

I used to think that it was my job to get them all reading by the end of Kindergarten and academics is the only way they were going to get a job or keep a job. There was one direct way of teaching academics and allowing them to absorb that information. Now, academics will come.

Responsive Classroom<sup>®</sup> principles are so much more important. Without them academics don't come nearly as easy or as well, as they come when they are happy and engaged and have ownership of what they're doing in that room.

Kim has learned that RC is not an all or nothing approach. Initially she felt she had to jump in with both feet in order to implement it well. Now she knows she can improve and enhance her practice. She revisits her Morning Meeting book every August in order to refocus her approach. "It does become more natural when you do it on a daily basis, but that doesn't mean you don't need to go back and reflect and relearn."

Kim's final comments related to slowing down and enjoying the process.

I have a job and I have responsibilities, and I used to get so caught up in making sure that all my t's were crossed and all my i's were dotted. Now I feel like 'slow down and enjoy the ride' and let them be who they are. Who they are becoming is more important than what they can spit out on a test at the end of the year. I only get one chance to give them a good first impression of school when they're with me, and if I slow down, and I enjoy it, they can slow down and enjoy it with me.

Kim's decisions regarding implementation of RC have been made based on her own observations and reflections. She has noticed changes in the children's behavior and in her own beliefs about teaching, about parents and the process itself. She has not related any impact from the pressures of No Child Left Behind.

## Chapter Five

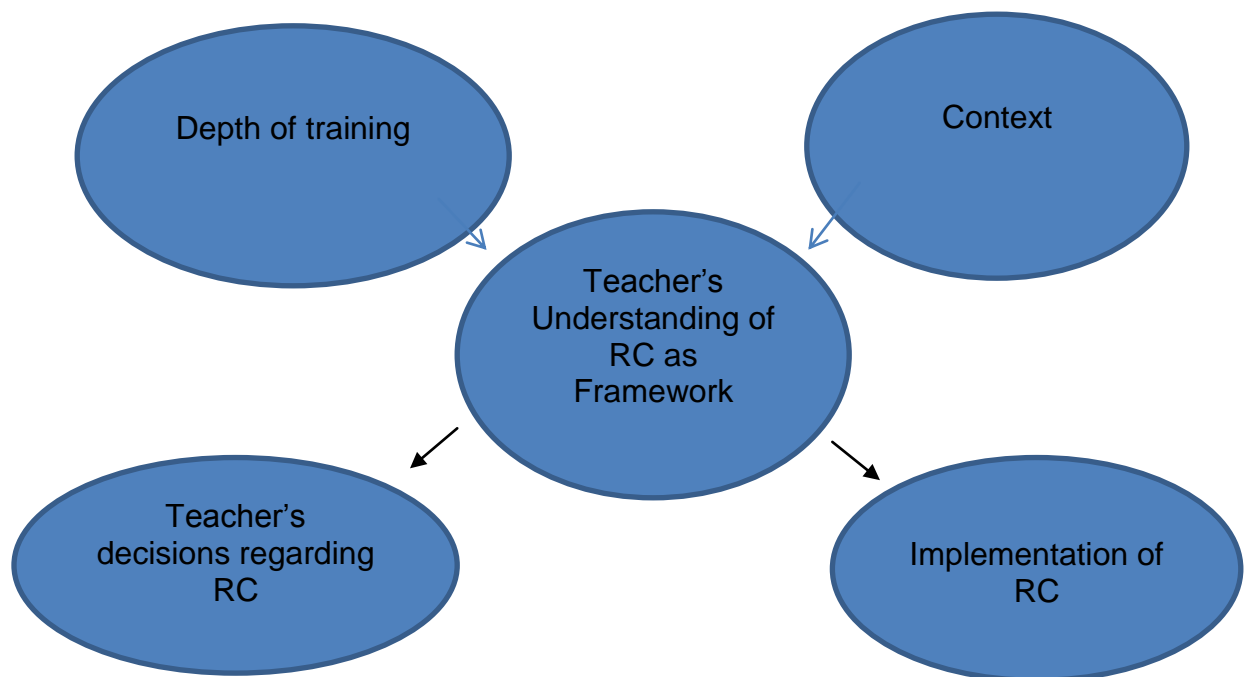
### Findings

“In a rush for academic accountability schools have placed too much of a priority on academic content, ‘time on task’, test taking and basic skill development without setting a context for this accountability. Academic excellence and accountability are absolutely valid and appropriate goals that will be extremely difficult to realize unless students and teachers experience intrinsic reasons for achieving this goal” (NEFC, 1994, p.2).

As is true in many qualitative studies, the actual focus of the inquiry can change as the researcher follows the lead of the participants. In this particular study, the inquiry process began with the intention of understanding how NCLB and the era of accountability had impacted the use of the Responsive Classroom® (RC) approach by veteran primary teachers. Observations in classrooms around south central Pennsylvania and discussions with teachers had suggested that teachers felt pressure to adjust classroom time to meet specific academic needs. As I began the study, I believed that this pressure might impact the time needed to effectively implement The Responsive Classroom® (RC) approach. The story that developed from the teachers suggested their understandings of and perceptions of the meaning and value of the RC approach were more influential on implementation than external pressures. Though NCLB and changes in curriculum and assessment had impacted the implementation of RC for some of the teachers, the teachers did not perceive in general that the value of the RC approach had been diminished. Examining the lived experiences of these teachers and reporting through their voices provided greater insights and understanding of their challenges, their decision-making, and the changes that they have made to their practice.

The ideas that unfolded through the analysis of the teachers' stories include a variety of interconnected ideas. Figure 2 (below) provides a visual representation of the interrelationships among these ideas. The individual teacher's understanding of Responsive Classroom® approach was the central phenomenon that was uncovered through the interview process. The teacher's individual contexts as well as the depth of training in Responsive Classroom® that each teacher had experienced impacted the teacher's understanding and use of that approach. The teachers' understanding and perspective regarding the Responsive Classroom® approach then informed their decision-making and implementation.

**Figure 2.1 Interrelationships of Ideas**





## **Influence of Context on Teachers' Understanding**

While the teachers in the study work in rural, suburban and urban districts, teach children from a variety of socio-economic backgrounds and work in grade levels K-3, they all work within a school context and culture that can ultimately impact the use of RC. The significant elements within the contexts of the various participants that interacted with the decisions related to implementation of the Responsive Classroom® approach included curricular approaches and initiatives, the focus on assessment, the daily schedule, administrative and collegial support, and parental/family support. As the data analysis process unfolded, it becomes clear that Colin and Elsa's experiences tell one story while the other four teachers tell a separate story.

*Curriculum* - The analysis of the data indicated that multiple curricular programs and assessment tools are used across the participants' experiences. Summer particularly struggled with the ever-changing approach to instruction in her district.

I would say when we start the district-wide initiative, and it seems like they put a lot of money and effort into it and it fizzles out within a year or two. And you think why? That's frustrating. An additional thing is when you get too many things, whether it is Learning-Focused and Responsive Classroom® and early risers and all the other programs that go on, that becomes overwhelming.

Although this frustration did not have a direct impact on her decision making regarding implementation, it illuminates one of the challenges she experiences as a result of curriculum decisions.

In Elsa's case, the district has determined that all classroom teachers will implement RTII and Project READ. The building principal created a schedule to ensure that these curricula are used daily. The result of this schedule is Elsa's decision to divide Morning Meeting into two parts.

Colin no longer uses Responsive Classroom® strategies because he is expected to follow the Guidance Approach. He also feels that the curricular time frames would not allow him to effectively implement the strategies that he remembers. He does indicate that he would use RC again if he could.

Elsa's and Colin's reports that they have had to adjust their implementation due to curriculum demands resonate with Jennings and Rentner (2006) who in their multi-year review of the Center for Education Policy (CEP) found that "schools are spending more time on reading and math" (p. 110). These district curriculum mandates clearly impacted the implementation of the RC approach for Elsa and Colin on a daily basis. Both teachers were interested in implementing Responsive Classroom® more completely but were hindered by the restraints placed by curricular decisions made by their administrators in response to their understandings of the pressures of NCLB.

*Assessment* – Jennings and Rentner (2006) also found in their review of CEP reports that children are taking many more tests as a result of NCLB (p 111). All teachers mentioned some form of assessment as an important

contextual factor. Some teachers use both district-created and state measures. Libby talked about high-stakes testing.

And yet, once again, going back to that political view with No Child Left Behind and high-stakes testing, the powers that be expect them all to be there at the same time. And I think it is so detrimental to our students to have that expectation. You can't assess the whole child at the paper and pencil level. There is so much more to them than that.

Kim is frustrated about gathering large amounts of data in Kindergarten, particularly in the first week of September. "Even in Kindergarten, there is a huge amount of data collection that I feel is not only a waste of time and energy but is nowhere near developmentally appropriate for Kindergarten students to have to undertake." Kim is adamant about testing in Kindergarten. "I absolutely can't stand it, but I know I'm not alone. I don't care what grade, no teacher likes testing, but in Kindergarten I think it's absolutely ridiculous."

Do Kim and Libby's concerns influence their decisions regarding implementation? I believe that although they have both articulated these concerns, they are both maintaining a balance of academic and social learning in their classrooms.

*Administrators and Colleagues* - The role of the school administrator includes recognizing best practice, providing professional development to support best practice while simultaneously advocating for teacher autonomy, and meeting individual student needs (Devers and Carlston, 2009). Many of the participants mentioned administrators and colleagues in their interviews. The

Northeast Foundation for Children, home for the RC approach, supports positive relationships among the adults in a school context. “Meaningful and lasting change for the better in our schools requires good working relationships. Children are always watching.” (Wood, 1999, p.1). Most teachers felt supported by their administrators and colleagues.

Libby finds her administration and her colleagues to be very supportive.

I think to have administration support you is huge. They made sure we had the training they made sure we had the resources. Our superintendent and assistant superintendent are on board as well, which really helps when the people above you are supporting what you're doing. And also having your colleagues, right next door, if you have a problem that you can't solve talking about it at collaboration time, what would be a Responsive Classroom® response to that? How do you think I should handle that? We do that all the time, we bounce ideas off each other.

On the other hand, Kim feels that she is not supported by her colleagues who do not use Responsive Classroom® at level of implementation she does. “My colleagues can be very critical. If you look different, if you're in any way complimented for being different, you might as well have ostracized yourself from the lunch room.”

Colin also mentioned that he feels as if he is a lone wolf at times. He notes that his principal accepts his approach, but he does not work collegially with his grade level partners. “I pretty much take pride in standing on my own two feet. I'm told that's unhealthy.” As Colin is the only male teacher in the study and in

the building in which he works, one might question whether Colin's lone wolf approach may be a gender-related approach. Could Colin's total abandonment of the approach be because he is male? Many women are used to a societal role that asks them to make accommodations and sacrifices in response to the needs of their families. As a result many women educators look to make accommodations when approached with a change that they cannot wholeheartedly endorse. Could it be that Colin chooses his own path as a result of his gender?

*Family Connections* –Christianson and Havy in Zins et al (2004) posit that “the effect of the home on children’s learning is strong: many families foster values, attitudes and behaviors that are correlated with learning at school (p. 64). How families choose to engage in the school and context of the classroom also registered with participants.” Kim admitted that she had been very critical of parents in the past and thought she knew it all. She recognized that as she developed respect with and for her children, she needed to do the same with the parents. “I had to understand that everybody does the best they can with what they have and not everybody has the same thing coming into it.”

Summer talked about how her ability to create relationships with parents changed as she gained a deeper understanding of Responsive Classroom® through her trainer’s certification. She has become more “deliberate in establishing rapport with parents to becoming more of a partnership.”

Elsa mentioned that she is challenged by not seeing or having communication with her parents this year. Colin does a lot of family involvement

activities outside the classroom. I do Saturday field trips to national parks, because I'm an advocate for saving national parks. We meet at a location and carpool down to a park, and I'll give them a tour and we'll do all kinds of cool stuff. So I do get to understand the families.”

Libby feels that explaining Responsive Classroom® to parents can be challenging. “Trying to explain it to parents because they're used to the way they were taught or the way they are teaching if they are teachers. And it's actually been teachers that I've gotten more questions from than other parents. Usually, once they see it they understand it.”

The teachers noted that these various elements within the context of school may influence their stance or decisions regarding implementation of RC. While these elements were noted as challenges to the teachers, the only element that had a detrimental impact on implementation of RC was curriculum. Both Colin and Elsa needed to change (or eliminate) implementation of RC based upon the schedule imposed by the district's choice of curriculum.

### **Influence of Depth of Training on Teachers Understanding**

The Responsive Classroom® approach is a holistic framework for creating appropriate learning environments that includes a variety of strategies that are tied together by the seven principles identified previously. Among the specific strategies that are components of the RC approach are Morning Meeting, Guided Discovery, Academic Choice, Hopes and Dreams, Logical Consequence, Interactive Modeling and Teacher Language. Responsive Classroom® training levels I and II introduce participants to all the components and strategies of the

approach, however, it is stressed that each teacher can use the pieces that work best in the individual classroom. The depth of implementation of the approach can be assessed by looking at both the strategies that are actually implemented as well as examining the degree to which the teacher adheres to the seven principles of the framework. This section of the chapter examines the use of specific strategies while the following section focuses on the teacher's understanding of the Responsive Classroom® approach as a holistic framework or philosophy.

Elliott (1995) noted the elements needed to successfully implement the RC approach in classrooms.

The most frequently identified elements by both parties [teachers and administrators] were teacher training or staff development and time – time to learn from others and time to implement what had been learned. In addition to these central elements, both parties indicated that administrative support – moral and material – was needed by teachers (p. 35).

The depth of training the participants in the study received ranged from a half-day in-service to advanced professional development that led to accreditation as a trainer for the RC approach. Those providing the training also varied. All teachers participated in training as a result of an administrative request or district mandate. One participant received training 20 years ago and has recently been retrained as the district renewed its interest in Responsive Classroom®. The four teachers who are most invested in using RC currently;

Mary Ann, Summer, Libby and Kim, have all received at least two full weeks of training directly from the Northeast Foundation for Children. The two participants who are less invested in wholesale implementation of the RC strategies, Elsa and Colin, received less training, and it was delivered by other teachers or Intermediate Unit personnel.

All participants are using Morning Meeting in some derivation. Two participants are using limited additional strategies such as guided discovery and rule creation. Four participants, those with the most training, are using most of the strategies suggested by the Northeast Foundation for Children.

The two teachers who are using limited strategies in the classroom did not receive the full week training offered by the Northeast Foundation for Children. Elsa initially received training in RC in 1989 when the building where she was working adopted the approach.

I think it was the whole building who were trained, but I was working with my Primary Team colleagues, so I know that we had it. We had a trainer come up from Baltimore. She taught us mostly about Morning Meeting and Rules and Consequences. The Primary Team did all of those things. We learned about Guided Discovery, too.

She received additional training from Intermediate Unit trainers in 2009. "When I moved to this building, they were using it, so I got training again. It mostly focused on Morning Meeting and Rules and Consequences again." Elsa currently uses Guided Discovery at the beginning of the school year to introduce her students to materials that will be used in the classroom. She did not use



Academic Choice in the past and does not use it now. She used Hopes and Dreams during her time on the Primary Team, but doesn't now. Hopes and Dreams were used to create the rules in the past, but the district has now provided two main rules for the children: Stay on task; and Comply with adult requests. She did not use Logical Consequences in the past and does not use them now. Instead Elsa uses a system of numbers on cards that indicate which rule has been broken for record keeping purposes. There are specific consequences related to each rule.

Colin's memory of training was a half-day session delivered by another teacher or an Intermediate Unit trainer. He recalls receiving the Level I training book, which includes information about Morning Meeting and creating Rules and Consequences. He is not currently implementing RC as outlined by the NEFC, but he makes efforts to allow children to share in some format during their morning group time and to work collaboratively throughout the day. He also notes that he continues to use a parent newsletter.

Mary Ann had a principal who introduced her to Responsive Classroom®, specifically Morning Meeting, during her first few years teaching. Over time Mary Ann has attended some summer hours of RC training provided by the district. Recently, she has attended a five-day training within the district.

She gradually implemented components of Responsive Classroom® over a period of several years beginning with Morning Meeting and Hopes and Dreams and Creating Rules. She then included Guided Discovery as well as Interactive Modeling, Teacher Language and Academic Choice. Mary Ann

currently uses these RC strategies. She is proud that in her lesson plans she can “make sure there’s a lot of collaboration, a lot of a community kind of a thing.” Mary Ann clearly adheres to the principle that cognitive growth occurs through social interaction.

Libby also received her introduction to RC through a building principal. She focused mostly on Morning Meeting and Rules and Consequences. She received Level I and II training from the NEFC in 2009 and 2010. Now her implementation of RC at the beginning of the school year includes direct instruction of all routines and materials in the classroom.

At the beginning of the year the first six weeks are sacred to me, as it is to any Responsive Classroom® teacher. That is when you teach the students everything. The smallest, minutest procedure is taught and practiced and we practice some more

Next, she uses Hopes and Dreams to create the classroom rules. She continues to use Guided Discovery throughout the year and uses Teacher Language daily, along with Morning Meeting.

Summer’s implementation of RC is unique because of her current teaching placement; however, her previous experience using RC provides insight into her use of the strategies as related to her training. Summer attended Level I training in 1999. Her focus was on Morning Meeting, Rule Creation and Logical Consequences, and Teacher Language. After Level II training she brought on Guided Discovery, Academic Choice, and refined some of the other practices such as sharing during Morning Meeting.

Kim attended Level I training with several colleagues from her district, but chose to attend Level II training on her own both from NEFC trainers. She begins each year by using a shortened version of Morning Meeting.

From the beginning of the year I start right off the bat with morning meeting. A very shortened version of morning meeting. We just say good morning and a quick share and everybody goes around in a circle and shares their favorite color. We do a fun learning song and a very brief morning message. It is pretty much the same every day.

Next she uses Hopes and Dreams, Rule Creation and Logical Consequences, and Teacher Language. Kim uses Guided Discovery of her materials and begins implementing Academic Choice about midway through the academic year. Kim's emphasis during her daily interactions is to use her language and actions to model problem-solving and independence of her learners. She will have class meetings or individual conferences for behaviors as needed.

These stories illustrate that in addition to the influence of district factors the depth of training relates to the degree to which teachers are implementing the specific RC strategies in their classrooms. Elliott (1995) found that "teachers trained in all six components of the RC approach consistently reported using the foundational component, Morning Meeting, significantly more frequently than their colleagues who have only been trained to use the Morning Meeting" (p34). The two teachers with the least training use the fewest strategies and are in districts where administrative mandates appeared to limit their implementation

whereas the teachers who have experienced more in-depth training are using a wider range of strategies throughout the day.

### **Teacher's Perspective and Understanding of Responsive Classroom® as a Holistic, Philosophical Framework**

According to Elliot and Gresham (1990) seven important principles guide The Responsive Classroom® approach. This list is provided on page 38. When integrated, these principles create a holistic framework for thinking about the academic, social and emotional environments in a classroom. The information gleaned from each teacher's story provides information about how these principles are integrated into their classrooms.

The depth of training teachers received seems to have exerted a significant impact on the teacher's overall perception and understanding of the Responsive Classroom® as an integrated classroom approach that permeates the classroom as a whole as opposed to being a set of individual strategies. Some teachers seem to regard RC thinly, as a set of strategies while others seem to have found a more comprehensive, philosophical connection. The depth of understanding of RC as a holistic approach surfaced in three specific dimensions: the way in which the teacher talked about Responsive Classroom® generally, the manner in which the teacher conceived of Responsive Classroom® as a strategy for helping children learn to behave appropriately, and the teacher's description of the impact of Responsive Classroom® on his/her outlook on teaching.

*Verbal Responses regarding RC in General* - The manner in which the teachers talked about RC during interviews gave one significant indication of the degree to which they view RC holistically. For example, Elsa related the term Responsive Classroom® closely with the strategy of Morning Meeting. During the interview when mentioning Responsive Classroom®, she typically talked about Morning Meeting. When she began implementing RC initially, she felt challenged to adjust her thinking to a new approach.

RC changes the way you think about control and discipline in the classroom. I don't do well with change. I had to take time to get used to it. I get set into routines and I have a hard time moving out of those. Teaching other skills [social] was new and scary.

Elsa needed to be prompted to mention using Teacher Language. "Yes, I do use that. I should really go back and review the best way to do it. I ask children to remind me what they should be doing. Is that teacher language? It's been a long time since we talked about those terms." Elsa is working in an environment where the building is using a modified Responsive Classroom® approach. It is clear that her administrators and colleagues are not talking about and using the terms related to the strategies.

Colin noted again that he is no longer using RC, but referred to the sharing component of Morning Meeting and his belief that children need to have time to talk and speak in public. He felt it was a good way to communicate and work together.

I know I'm into having kids move around, talk and discuss. So I think so, all of the rules are stated in a positive way. And just up until last couple years I used to have the kids come up with all the rules. I used to have them come up with examples and discuss it.

He also noted being in control of oneself as a part of RC he remembered. Again, Colin's "lone wolf" attitude is evident. He follows his own path and uses what he believes is best for children without the full implementation of the approach.

On the other hand, Mary Ann described Responsive Classroom® as a belief system and a philosophy that reflects her own beliefs about teaching and learning. Mary Ann attended a five day training and felt that the philosophy was very "commonsense-ical."

I think that building a really strong, caring community with high expectations is of utmost importance. You know, building a place where kids feel safe they feel comfortable to learn and comfortable to make mistakes, and the teacher I feel the same way. Working in a place where I can grow and feel okay if you know, you always stumble along the way. So yeah, a strong, caring community.

Summer talked about Responsive Classroom® as "the hub of everything – a way of doing class life." Although she is not currently able to implement it in her position as a resource teacher she notes that her initial implementation in her Kindergarten was easy because "I believed in the beliefs and structure of Responsive Classroom®. It just seemed natural to provide the opportunities,

very blatant, explicit opportunities for children to practice those principles as well.”

Libby notes that she was one of the first people in her current school to use RC. “I continued using it even though I didn’t have to because I saw the value in it. I saw the value in Morning Meeting and Guided Discovery and so forth. She listed concepts that connect to the RC philosophy; “student centered, whole student, collaboration, self-control, intrinsic motivation.” Libby works to establish a feeling of community in her classroom. She uses tables, shared materials and caddies. She wants to establish a safe place for everyone to learn. She seeks to validate their competency and ability to work independently.

We want to create this community where everyone feels safe to take chances and it's okay to try. And it's okay to make mistakes. I really work on helping them to understand that they are competent people can become even more competent and even though they are very small, there's a lot they can do for themselves.

Kim notes that she believes that Responsive Classroom® is about creating community and helping children to feel safe and valued. She also notes the ongoing effect of using RC for herself and her children. “The longer I use it, the better it works. The more positive effects I see and the more effective I am as a teacher. Not as Responsive Classroom® teacher, but as a teacher.” Kim used to think that

It was my job to get them all reading by the end of Kindergarten and academics is the only way they were going to get a job or keep a job.

There was one direct way of teaching academics and allowing them to absorb that information. Now, academics will come. Responsive Classroom® principles are so much more important. Without them academics don't come nearly as easy or as well, as they come when they are happy and engaged and have ownership of what they're doing in that room.

*Responses connecting RC and Behavior Instruction* - A second dimension of thinking about classroom life that surfaced among the teachers in terms of their depth of understanding of the RC approach focused on the role of RC in helping children learn to behave appropriately. Those teachers who had a more surface level understanding saw RC as a set of teaching strategies that could be used systematically as tools to help individual children learn to behave as the teacher wanted them to behave. Those teachers who had a deeper conceptual understanding saw the RC approach as a system designed to help children learn to control their own behavior by participating in a community where they felt a sense of belonging and could connect their own behavior to its consequences not only for themselves but for the community as a whole.

Elsa, who has minimal training and seems to focus on the strategies of RC notes the children are able to self-manage and recognize the rules and consequences.

The children practiced the rules every day. They knew what the expectations were. One of our rules was, 'Be respectful.' We talked about what that looked like and sounded like. They were more aware of how to



treat each other respectfully. They also realized there were logical consequences for their behavior. For example, if they didn't finish their homework, they needed to finish it at morning work time.

Elsa's response regarding the use and impact of the Rules and Consequences strategy addresses the step by step approach to implementation such as practicing and reinforcing the rules. The consequences while logical, do not address the use of respect and working as a member of a community. Children learn what is expected behaviorally of them as individuals, but they do not feel connected to others through a sense of community. Since Elsa is feeling the pressure to implement multiple curricular approaches, the need to self-manage behavior may help children to focus on academic work as suggested by Rimm-Kauffman.

Colin finds that children are capable of behaving appropriately when given the opportunity to be responsible.

Kids are capable of doing it... what adults can do. Maybe not the moral judgment, and those types of things, but as far as allowing kids to do things they can do it. If the kid can do it, the kid's going to do it. We'll be doing a junk box project and the kids will make the mess. I have parents in there who will start cleaning up and I have to say no. Let them do it. They are six and seven. They are capable of doing it. If they are having social problems, they can work it out. They might need guidance and direction. They can do it. I think sometimes we need to explain why you

want to do something. Whenever I have a problem, I ask, what did you do? What are you going to do next time?

Colin's response begins to move closer to a sense of working out social issues and he uses questions to help children to think about the choices they are making as individuals. He seems to have faith that children are capable of making good choices about their own behavior but does not give a clear example of how they are working with each other in a respectful community. He also does not explicitly outline his decision-making related to children's capability

Mary Ann finds that her implementation of RC helps discipline take care of itself.

I've had some different kids with different kinds of backgrounds. That probably in a traditional setting, it would have triggered them more. So, I think that that has made the classroom and the use of teacher language and the use of dignity and making kids feel like they belong and its okay to make a mistake and allowing them to experience natural consequences. It has actually helped and it makes sense for kids. You don't lose recess, because you were talking in the hallway, which doesn't make sense.

Mary Ann's discussion of the impact of the classroom environment and consequences for behavior related to a deeper understanding of the philosophy of RC. She talks about dignity and allowing children to make mistakes as a learning experience rather than a punishment. Her focus is on the child's learning as opposed to the teacher using a particular set of teaching strategies. Clearly student learning and teaching strategies are connected, but for those with a

surface level understanding of RC, the teaching strategies are in the foreground while for those with a deeper conceptual understanding student learning is foregrounded. Her decision to continue to use teacher language and experience natural consequences is an insight that supports her children's social and academic learning.

Summer noted that the children changed their use of language and ability to self-manage as she implemented Responsive Classroom®.

They were very aware if kids were not adhering to the rules because they had taken pride and understood them and so I felt like in many regards, I could just allow children to handle things. And because we had models if we had a problem and we had done some role-playing we have modeled how you go about approaching a child in a respectful way. A caring, assertive way with empathy. They were able to do it. Five-year-olds at their own level pretty smoothly in a caring way.”

In Summer's classroom, she decided to empower the children to resolve their own conflicts. The result was that children had begun to use the social skills which are the heart of the Responsive Classroom® approach. They had practiced being caring, assertive and empathetic and were able to use these skills independently. Thus, Summer was helping her students to understand what it means to be a member of a community where each individual is accepted and where conflicts must be resolved in ways that maintain the sense of community.

Libby feels the biggest change she observes in her students is when they start to sound like the teacher, using supportive, positive language. They are learning how to solve their own problems.

Children are competent. They are very good teachers. They are most often kind. They can come up with really good solutions if they have the opportunity to do so. And when they are really involved and engaged in their learning. That's when their learning takes place when they're really trying to solve a puzzle or figure something out. They do really well working together. They learn from each other more than they learn from us.

Libby's example mirrors much of what was evident in Summer's classroom. Her decision to model and support the use of appropriate language encouraged the children to use their social skills independently to solve problems and to do so in a respectful way. Libby and Summer are hoping that the development of social skills will enhance their students' ability to function positively as members of caring communities. The focus is on the community developing the tools and skills to manage itself as opposed. Clearly a related but much more complex task than having each student focus on controlling only his/her own behavior and much more in tune with the notion of RC as a philosophical approach as opposed to a set of strategies.

Kim indicates the children are "more self-governing. They're more independent. I'm able to do a lot more of the 'have to' academics, and I still have time to have fun." She expands further about the children's ability to show self-

control. “They know what to do and you're not constantly backpedaling and stopping everything because they're so flustered and confused or so disrespectful and don't have self-governing factors for work time that you have to stop and go.” Kim’s description of their independence reflects her belief that children can work and deal with situations on their own and her decision to allow them to do so. She identifies how the children’s ability to manage themselves allows for her to address academics again reinforcing Rimm-Kauffman’s statement.

Teachers’ decisions reflect their commitment to including social-emotional learning within the academic curriculum and to building strong, self-governing classroom communities. “The more a child practices self-discipline, empathy and cooperation, the stronger the underlying circuits become for these essential life skills” (Goleman, 2008, p. 1).

In these examples, Colin again reflects less of an understanding of the basic tenets of RC than Mary Ann, Libby, and Summer. These three teachers address more than a basic implementation of a strategy to address individual student behavior. They are interested in establishing and maintaining a whole classroom approach to learning how to manage one’s own behavior and to function as part of a community. Their intent is to have a broader and more significant impact on the children. Rimm-Kauffman(2006) reported that “only when children know how to manage themselves and their interactions with others are they free to focus on the academic challenges that lie ahead of them” (p. 3).

*Responses related to RC as a Holistic Framework* - A third dimension in which the individual teacher's depth of understanding of RC as a holistic framework or philosophical approach as opposed to a set of strategies was the degree to which the teacher reported that his/her outlook on teaching had been changed by the use of Responsive Classroom®. Elsa stated that the biggest obstacle she has found in using Responsive Classroom® over the last few years has been the time to make it work. "Other than Morning Meeting I can't really take the time to do the strategies like we first learned them." Generally, Elsa's interview responses indicated a focus on implementing the strategies, trying to accommodate the use of multiple programs as mandated by her district, and did not address an ongoing use of the philosophy throughout the day as an important emphasis which is also reflected in her decision to change her implementation of Morning Meeting. This decision might be another reflection of the lack of training that Elsa has received.

Mary Ann recalls her early years of teaching and how her approach has changed.

I expected the kids to do their own work. I wanted them to come with the right answer that I felt was the right answer. And I think a lot of this is also what I've learned about comprehension. Like I tell the kids poke around you. You're not in a bubble or not by yourself. You're not on an island. You are with other people, you will learn from others. So I think that is part of the Responsive Classroom® thing, too. You can come up with a multitude of answers, not for 2+2 but you know what I mean. There are a

lot of different ways to think of things. It's really neat whenever someone will think of something and I say. I never would've thought of that. So it's a paradigm shift. There's a learner in the teacher and teacher in the learner.

Mary Ann's change in thinking reflects that she is responsive and respectful of what the children bring to the classroom. She recognizes that they are all members of the learning community.

Summer notes that she loves challenges. "It makes everything new and exciting." Implementing RC was a challenge that helped her to evolve as a teacher. "I was really focused on curriculum strategies and creating them. I'm able to be more observant - being able to understand the whole child differently." Her decision to focus on the children embraces the tenet of RC that reminds practitioners that knowing the children who we teach is as important as knowing the content we teach.

Libby found the biggest impact of implementing RC was a personal change in thinking regarding the first six weeks of school.

The most difficult thing is giving yourself permission to take those first six weeks of school and teach those procedures and behaviors. That's something I had to make a conscious effort to do, to give myself permission to relax and take the six weeks. And once I did it for a year or two, I saw how valuable it was. Now if you told me I couldn't do it I would fight you. But that was very difficult to do. Relaxing that was really hard for me.

Libby's decision about using the first six weeks of school to teach routines and expectations is a struggle for many teachers implementing RC. The first year a teacher takes the necessary time to teach routines and expectations, s/he finds that the academics can be taught successfully and completely. It's a leap of faith that Libby has discovered she is willing to take.

Kim has decided to keep looking to find ways to reach every student again embracing the same principle as Summer.

I'm constantly looking through books for ideas and getting different ways to use hands-on experiences to help children develop a better sense of numbers or using a strategy that helps them learn letters, always evolving, always trying to get my bag of tricks growing and growing and growing. So that I don't become stagnant and say this is how I do it. And this is how it's going to be. I don't ever want to be that teacher.

She has also decided to focus on her own professional development by working with a colleague from another district. She also takes advantage of the information provided by the Northeast Foundation for Children. "I read their newsletters, and I always look on their website for newer books on how to do different things. I'm constantly reading."

"Teacher decisions about curriculum priorities and their beliefs about the importance of social interaction and the role of children's needs, feelings, interests, and freedom of choice affect the type of experiences and relationships the children have at school" (Ray et al in Bowman and Moore, 2006, p.13). Mary Ann, Summer, Libby, and Kim use Responsive Classroom® as a complex,



integrated approach to teaching and learning. They articulate a support and understanding of the philosophical and conceptual bases of RC. In contrast, Elsa and Colin don't appear to have embraced the philosophical basis of RC. It appears that they see it as a set of strategies to be implemented rather than a more conceptual approach to teaching as a holistic activity. Their level of understanding of the approach most likely interacts with the pressures within their contexts to minimize the use of the RC approach within their classrooms.

Calderhead (1984) asserted that there may be constraints to decision-making regarding change. These constraints including physical and ideological contexts may be out of the teacher's control. Each teacher who participated in the study has made some change to the implementation of RC. Elsa and Colin have had to make negative changes, while the other four participants have expanded or enhanced their use of RC. Elsa and Colin have had to reduce or eliminate their use of Responsive Classroom® due to contextual pressures. These participants are working in schools that have not met AYP. Their administrators are focusing on improving test scores in order to meet AYP. These teachers have to accommodate the demands of the district and attempting to implement RC as they are able. Their changes could also be due to an understanding of RC as a set of unrelated strategies rather than a comprehensive approach to teaching social and academic content.

Mary Ann and Libby both talked about how their thinking about teaching has changed. This thinking embraces their deeper understanding of an all-encompassing approach to using RC. Summer and Kim talked about how they

have changed their implementation and its impact on them as professionals. Their changes also reflect a deeper understanding of the underlying philosophy of Responsive Classroom®.

This analysis reveals that there are two stories. Elsa and Colin are working in contexts that are impacted by the pressure to meet AYP, little or no support to use Responsive Classroom and have received less training for Responsive Classroom®. They have been impacted by NCLB in an indirect way that has dictated curricula that they are expected to use in order to improve their schools' test scores. The other four teachers are working in districts where Responsive Classroom® has been adopted for the entire district or in Kim's case is approved for her to use. They have conversations regarding implementation and are supported by their administrators. These teachers have also experienced a more intense level of training that has allowed them to develop a more philosophical approach to using RC.

## Chapter Six

### Summary

“The foundation of this [Responsive Classroom®] approach is that a clear social curriculum, one in which students are taught appropriate skills and supported in practice, can build a classroom community where both high social and academic goals are attained” (NEFC). The findings from the recent CASEL study illustrate the usefulness of the Responsive Classroom® approach in combination with academic study.

These skills include recognizing and managing our emotions, developing caring and concern for others, establishing positive relationships, making responsible decisions, and handling challenging situations constructively and ethically. They are the skills that allow children to calm themselves when angry, make friends, resolve conflicts respectfully, and make ethical and safe choices. (CASEL, 2012)

Using a case study design, with a phenomenological perspective, this research focused on a sample of primary classroom teachers (grades K – 3<sup>rd</sup> grade) in south central Pennsylvania who are currently using and have been using Responsive Classroom® strategies for an extended period of time. Their perspectives provide insight into their use of Responsive Classroom® strategies.

Initially the focus of the study was to determine if the mandates of No Child Left Behind were impacting teacher’s use of Responsive Classroom®. The research questions that guided this study were: (1) What pressures have primary grade teachers (K-3) experienced as a result of No Child Left Behind (NCLB)?

(2) Have teachers changed or adapted their classroom practices to continue to use Responsive Classroom®? If so, in what ways? (3) Why have these teachers made the decisions they have made in their implementation of Responsive Classroom®, and (4) How do these teachers perceive the impact of changes, if any, in their implementation of Responsive Classroom®?

My own experiences observing in classrooms around the state indicated that teachers might be struggling with time and curriculum mandates implemented in their schools as a result of No Child Left Behind. The research on No Child Left Behind indicated that reading and math were being given top priority in classrooms and that other content areas as well as social skills were given limited or no instructional time. The benefits of the Responsive Classroom® Approach include increased academic performance, improved social interactions and a stronger sense of community within the classroom. How did teachers use RC in this era of NCLB and its mandates on time and curriculum?

The participants in this study were chosen using specific criteria. Principals at schools using RC were emailed a request to forward to their teachers. Teachers were asked to complete a *SurveyMonkey* questionnaire. Respondents to the *SurveyMonkey* were then screened according to the number of years using RC (needed at least eight - ten), taught Kindergarten through fourth grade and were willing to participate in an interview. Teachers who met these criteria were contacted to participate in the interviews. Additional participants were identified using the snowball strategy. All the selected teachers

taught in south central Pennsylvania counties. Two teachers worked with Kindergarten children, two teach first grade, one third teaches grade and one is a special educator.

Basic demographic information was collected using a survey housed on *SurveyMonkey* and direct interviews with participants. Siedman's three interview protocol was used with each of the participants to gather information about their teaching history, their current teaching situation and their use of the Responsive Classroom® approach.

The story that emerged from the interviews with the teachers had much more to do with the teachers' understandings of and perceptions of the value of the RC approach than it did with the impact of No Child Left behind. Though NCLB and resultant changes in curriculum and assessment had impacted the implementation of RC for some of the teachers, the teachers did not perceive in general that the use of the RC approach had been significantly impacted. Those teachers who were impacted the most by external pressures also demonstrated the most surface level of understanding of the Responsive Classroom® approach and had received the least amount of training.

As noted above, the research predicted a finding that teachers had to limit or adapt the Responsive Classroom® strategies that were being used as a result of the external pressures they might be experiencing. The curriculum adopted by each school district such as the Guidance Approach, Response to Instruction and Intervention or frequently changing curricular programs impacted how teachers made decisions about RC. Some teachers mentioned gathering large

amounts of data or using state and district tests as an ongoing part of their contextual pressures. Teachers had mixed reactions about support from administrators and colleagues. Relationships with parents were noted as positive, challenging or improving. These contextual issues had some differential impact on the implementation of RC.

It is possible that the teachers in this study were less influenced by external pressures such as time mandates resulting from NCLB because the schools and districts involved had adopted and supported the RC approach and were willing to allow teachers to plan their schedule to include times for Morning Meeting and other strategies. Teachers who are using this approach independently of the school or in schools who are trying to meet AYP may find more challenges with scheduling. Could it be that in classrooms that working with older elementary children who are taking PSSAs there is more pressure on academics and less time for intentional instruction of social skills? It is also possible that schools that are not achieving Adequate Yearly Progress would provide different examples of external pressures and constraints.

The depth of training the participants in the study received varied. There appears to be a connection between limited training, depth of implementation of RC and limited investment in the overall philosophical connection to Responsive Classroom®. Some of the teachers (who received limited training) in the study saw Responsive Classroom® as a set of strategies rather than a comprehensive approach to teaching in the elementary classroom. These teachers who had less depth of training focused more on using limited strategies to influence

appropriate behavior through the use of rules and consequences. This limited level of implementation indicates that their overall view of teaching and learning had not been impacted by the Responsive Classroom® philosophy. This notion of Responsive Classroom® as a set of disconnected strategies runs counter to the findings in the CASEL study (2012) that suggest the RC approach is designed to apply and integrate SEL to academic content areas and promote change in teaching strategies.

Those teachers who experienced the two-week training directly from NEFC trainers or who have had multiple levels of training in the Responsive Classroom® approach appear to have embraced the holistic, philosophical understanding in their classrooms and used this framework as an underlying belief system that connects teaching and learning throughout the day. These teachers also use RC as a way to develop a sense of community and worked on social skills within this community. As a result, they use many more of the strategies such as Academic Choice in an integrated way as opposed to using isolated strategies or techniques. The depth of implementation and integration of strategies indicates that their basic ideas about teaching and learning had been influenced by the RC philosophy.

For example, Elsa had limited training in RC twice during her tenure. She is currently using two specific strategies: Morning Meeting and Rules and Consequences. She has planned that her Morning Meeting time is scheduled in such a way that RTII interferes with the flow of the strategy. She develops rules with the children and has them create “looks like, sounds like” charts but uses an

external system of unnatural consequences in connection to the rules. In contrast, Kim, who also teaches Kindergarten, uses the first six weeks of school to teach expectations and routines. She develops expectations through the initial process of Hopes and Dreams followed by modeling, review, and reinforcement. She also has the children draw pictures of what these expectations look like in the classroom. She uses Morning Meeting daily as well as a great deal of teacher language throughout the day. She uses Guided Discovery, Interactive Modeling and Academic Choice when appropriate throughout the school year.

The integrated approach to the implementation of the Responsive Classroom® social and emotional curriculum appears to be closely aligned with the findings of the study by Weissburg and Durlak (2006) quoted in Chapter 1. They found that programs that have been used over several years and are fully integrated into the curriculum, rather than an add-on instructional approach, are those with the best outcomes.

The finding of this study that the degree of implementation of the Responsive Classroom® approach is connected to the level of training that the participants received is supported by other research on the impact of professional development. Depth of training can be specifically related to research on professional development. “A comprehensive professional development program enhances teacher quality and represents a major vehicle that schools use to upgrade their capacity to influence positive student achievement” (Villarreal, 2005, p.1). Many current approaches to professional development focus on a “hot topic” in the field and are addressed in single day



in-service sessions or as add-ons to the regular school day. “The kind of high-intensity, job-embedded collaborative learning that is most effective is not a common feature of professional development across most states” (Darling-Hammond et al., 2009, p. 4).

In Cooper’s (2005) review of research on effective professional development, ongoing professional development over time is emphasized as being needed to accomplish the goals of the training. Teachers also need coaching and support while applying what they are learning. This again cannot be accomplished in a drive-by or single day session on a topic.

Joyce and Showers (2002) also support this assertion in their work. First, they identify potential outcomes from effective training including knowledge or awareness of new information and theories, positive changes in attitudes toward self (teacher), children and content, development of specific skills and transfer of the training including executive control. Executive control is “the level of knowledge that generates consistent and appropriate use of new skills and strategies for classroom instruction” (p. 71). Teachers cannot develop this executive control without a significant amount of time dedicated to the theory, skill or practice.

They also identify the components needed for effective professional development. These components are presentation of theory, demonstration of the strategy or skill, initial practice in the training and feedback about their coaching. Other sources (Cooper, 2005; Darling-Hammond et al., 2009; Villarreal, 2005) indicate that additional characteristics of effective professional

development should include teacher collaboration and problem solving, should build strong working relationships among teachers, should be intensive, ongoing and connected to practice, should take place in an active environment and should focus on both district and student achievement goals. “Collaborative professional learning is a powerful way to ensure great teaching for every student every day” (Hirsh, 2009, p.11). This type of detailed approach cannot be accomplished in a “one-shot” workshop setting.

Generally, the teachers in this study have found a way to continue to implement the Responsive Classroom® approach within challenges of context, including schedules, administrators, colleagues and parents. The analysis of the interviews did not find that teachers are unable to implement RC due to the accountability and time demands of NCLB. Significantly, the teachers who were concerned about time were still able to implement the approach at some level. The participants have had varying levels of training in the Responsive Classroom® approach, and they implement the strategies in differing ways that appear to relate to their training and their understanding and perspective of RC. Those who had received the least amount of training were most heavily influenced by external pressures.

### **Implications for practice**

Since limited connection was found to related issues of No Child Left Behind, Responsive Classroom® could be used in other classrooms in order to support both academic and social learning of children, especially for children in grades Kindergarten through four. It might be that districts who are educating

low-income populations and are struggling to meet AYP are using more scripted curriculum, redundant assessments and rigid time schedules as a way to increase achievement. Unfortunately, these districts are missing out on using an approach that has been proven to improve both social and academic skills. From the perspectives of the teachers in this study, it is evident that they are all willing to continue to use the Responsive Classroom® approach to teach both social and academic skills. Having used Responsive Classroom® myself and seeing and understanding the benefits of implementing this approach, I would highly recommend expanding the use of RC to more classrooms.

Responsive Classroom® training might be offered in teacher education courses or to all those who are interested in the approach. “Teacher educators must be aware of public policy and prepare their teacher education students to balance best practices with federal and state mandates” (Devers and Carlston, 2010). Summer states, “If I were a college professor, I would start my class with a class meeting.” Teaching pre-service students about the components of the approach and demonstrating the strategies will allow students to gain a more complete understanding of the approach. By exposing pre-service teachers to the approach, more teachers will be aware of Responsive Classroom® and advocate for its use in classrooms and schools. This exposure would still need to be followed up with Level I and II RC training.

Libby also wants to be able to share her knowledge regarding Responsive Classroom®.

I wish everyone would try it. I wish everyone would have the opportunity. When I retire, what I'd really like to do is go into the city school district and work with young teachers. I toyed with the idea of becoming a facilitator and going through the whole thing. But it's huge. They're people in and out of your classroom all the time. I just wasn't sure I wanted to go down that road. I would just like to take my experience for what it's worth and use it to help a new teacher get started the right way so that she doesn't spend half of her career picking things up. I would like to be able to volunteer someday, and I've got all this knowledge and all of this experience.

Information about effective professional development can be gathered from this study to use with other programs. The approach used by the Northeast Foundation for Children to train teachers in Responsive Classroom® utilizes many of the components suggested as necessary for effective professional development. During each one-week training the participants receive theoretical background about the approach, observe demonstrations of the strategies, and practice new strategies with peer and instructor feedback. Joyce and Showers (2002) outline what is needed for specific professional development objectives to be achieved. If knowledge or skill attainment is the goal, multiple components are needed in the training. If transfer to the classroom is the objective all four components (theory, demonstration, practice and peer coaching) is needed.

Coaching and mentoring is a significant piece needed to support professional development. An important component of the RC training model is

that teachers are provided with mentoring support from a practicing teacher as they practice new strategies. “A large and dramatic increase in transfer of training- occurs when coaching is added to an initial training experience comprised of theory explanation, demonstrations and practice” (Showers and Joyce, 2002, p. 77). Summer’s current position is to provide mentoring support to the teachers implementing RC in her school.

Teachers are given enough theoretical and information, demonstration and practice, mentoring support and time in RC training to begin to internalize the philosophy and to continue to use the strategies independently of the initial training “honeymoon” for multiple years. Teachers also feel confident making decisions about RC use that maintains the integrity of the approach.

A school-wide learning culture of collaboration and collective responsibility benefits the whole community. Stephanie Hirsch of Learning Forward explains that “PD [should be] ongoing, and it means teachers collectively sharing the responsibility for all students from grades to lesson plans – and that happens by implementing teacher teams that meet up regularly” (Stansbury, p. 1). Collegial support, even daily, informal discussions, builds this sense of collaboration and support. “A learning community values diversity and maintains a focus on the continuous enhancement of teaching for all members of the community” (Office of School Education, p. 8). Both Libby and Mary Ann noted how essential it is for them to be able to ask colleagues questions and to share information with each other about RC as part of a larger learning community. Mary Ann also talked

about how she developed her use of teacher language while participating in a building-wide learning group reading *The Power of our Words*.

Leaders in the school must provide support, develop capacity and create “conditions that are conducive for teachers to continually improve their practice” (Office of School Education, p. 7). Summer’s district has asked her to serve as a mentor for new teachers implementing RC. Libby and Mary Ann were both initially introduced to RC by principals and then provided enhanced instruction as the district adopted the approach. Elsa mentioned that her district at one time had a committee that met to discuss and problem-solve as RC was being introduced. It is important that leaders acknowledge and support that teachers learn in a variety of ways, have specific contextual settings and have diverse background experiences. These individual needs must be addressed to experience the potential impact of professional development activities within a school. Fullan (2009) posits that “successful organizations organize themselves to learn and problem solve all the time” (p. 47). Teacher collaboration combined with an enriching and supportive school environment can realize improvement for the school as a whole.

Change can be uncomfortable or teachers may resist the new information being presented. The focus on connecting all aspects of the classroom day with new knowledge or skills will take time and might be difficult for teachers. Using a collegial team approach is helpful because “teachers actively support each other to construct knowledge and develop pedagogies” (Office of School Education, p. 9). Libby and Mary Ann have experienced the collegial approach and mention

the support of their colleagues. Colin on the other hand, felt like the “lone wolf” attempting to implement the strategies on his own without extended support.

When implementing new initiatives into a classroom or school, it is important to connect and integrate new behaviors into existing practices. By helping teachers to see the bigger picture, they are less likely to focus on thinking about the new information as add-on strategies (like Elsa and Colin) than a way to improve and enhance the current practice as a whole. If professional learning is embedded in day-to-day teacher practice and culture of the school and system as a whole, external learning opportunities can complement the work already being done in the school. Professional development should connect seamlessly with actual practice in the classroom in order to support both the teachers and the learners (Villarreal, 2005).

Garet (2001) suggests that “activities that are linked to teachers’ other experiences...and encouraging of professional communication among teachers appear to support change in teaching practice” (p. 936). Teachers can make connections to the new information and consider it in the context of the existing school day with supportive colleagues and administrators. Unfortunately, this type of approach is not common in United States schools.

Finally, in-depth training should occur over time. Yoon et al (2010) found that on average, effective professional development programs were characterized by about 49 hours of training. Training should be provided by experts who can help teachers understand and implement the strategies beyond the theory. This multi-level approach will help teachers to resist the pressure to

avoid or ignore using the strategies that were the focus of the training. Using an extended time frame, providing theory, demonstration, practice and support and focusing on an active professional development environment with an exchange of ideas and an explicit connection to the bigger picture of the school environment is the preferred model for teacher learning. This approach should be used anytime classroom implementation is the goal.

### **Suggestions for Future Research**

The present study points to the need for further research in the areas of implementing Responsive Classroom® and the understanding and decision-making processes of the teachers who use it. The sample size in this study was small, so a study interviewing more participants would be useful to extend the questions to more participants in a larger geographic area. The study was also limited to those teachers who had used RC for at least 8-10 years. Since no clear connection was made to limiting RC implementation because of the time mandates as a result of NCLB, teachers who had used it for a shorter number of years could also be included in the interviews. In addition, the study was limited to interview data. Subsequent studies that are better funded could include opportunities for observing in teachers' classrooms and collecting artifacts to complement the information provided through interviews

Secondly, a larger group of teachers chosen from the same school or school district could be studied. By holding the school and district context steady, it would be possible to gain greater insight into the finding from this study that



suggests that depth of training may be the more critical factor. The results within one school context would be more specific to individual teachers.

In addition, expanding the scope of participants to include teachers from more diverse contexts or from school not making Adequate Yearly Progress might yield different results. Since it is likely that the pressures to improve test scores are much more significant in those settings, one could again examine whether depth of training provides resistance to external pressures or not.

Additional studies might also look at the school as a whole as the unit of analysis as opposed to looking at the individual teacher as the unit of analysis. IF it were possible to identify two schools within the same context, one that has embraced RC and a second that has not done, it would be possible to begin to understand the potential positive effects of school context on implementation of the RC approach. Conversely, schools or districts which have consistently supported Responsive Classroom® implementation may yield similar or additional data.

Another approach would be to purposefully increase the number of male teachers included in the study. This would be an opportunity to investigate more completely whether gender is a variable that impacts accommodation to constraints and pressures placed on educators.

Irrespective of context, further research with a large sample of teachers from across various types of contexts regarding the impact of the depth of training in Responsive Classroom® that teachers receive and how it is related to implementation in the classroom would provide additional support for the theory

promoted within this research. The results of this research support the need for longer and more intensive professional development in order to make the change lasting and meaningful.

### **Limitations of Study**

One of the limitations of the study was the small and centralized number of participants in the sample. The initial number of participants who responded to the survey request was smaller than expected and the number was further reduced based upon number of years using Responsive Classroom®. Snowball sampling limited the variety of contexts from which participants could be found. A greater number of survey responses could have included more diverse contexts among the participants.

Only one source of data was used to gather information. The data available were limited to the interview responses. This resulted in thinner description than might have been available using other sources of information such as observation of the specific contexts of the teachers. Engagement with the participants was limited to the interviews and follow up emails. Seidman's interview protocol was reduced to two interviews rather than three. The lack of observation in the participants' contexts also limited the researcher's understanding of the school contexts in which the participants taught. Prolonged engagement with the participants, and a greater variety of data might have provided greater richness to the study.

Another limitation of the study was being a novice at the interview protocol. While the interviews followed the same format, the interviews were less

expansive than might have been true with a more experienced interviewer. While the interviewer did go back to the participants for additional data when needed, greater skill on my part helping the participants to elaborate during the interviews would have enriched the study with deeper and more direct philosophical understanding of each participant.

## **Conclusion**

There are many challenges facing primary classrooms in this era of accountability and high-stakes testing. While the results of this study did not directly answer the initial research questions but instead led the research in a new direction that was valuable. The teachers in this research, who used Responsive Classroom® in a holistic, philosophical way, are willing to do what is necessary to make the approach work for their children and themselves. Kim says, “it gets better with age.” The more the teachers engage and believe in the approach, the more it becomes a natural way of working with children to teach social and academic skills.

## Appendix A

### Survey to Identify Participants

How many years have you been teaching in your current grade level?

Is your degree in Elementary or Early Childhood Education?

Do you have a Master's degree? In what area?

Do you have other graduate degrees? In what area(s)?

What is your class size this year?

Is this class size typical for this grade level?

Do you have any para-professionals? How much time per day/week?

Are you currently using any Responsive Classroom strategies in your classroom?

Have you used Responsive Classroom strategies in the past?

How long have you (or did you) use Responsive Classroom strategies?

What is the economic level of most of your students? Is this the same throughout the district?

Would you classify your district as rural, suburban or urban?

Are you willing to participate in one-to-one interviews with the researcher?

## **Appendix B**

### **Interview 1- Focus on Understanding the Teacher's History and Beliefs in**

#### **General**

1. Tell me what led you to become a teacher
2. Can you describe your initial preparation to become a teacher?
3. Please tell me about your career to date as a teacher? ( e.g. where have you taught, students you taught, etc.)
4. What are some of the most satisfying aspects of teaching as a career for you?
5. What are some of the least satisfying or disappointing aspects of teaching as a career for you?
6. Can you talk about some of the most important beliefs that you have about teaching and learning?
7. What are some of the factors that influenced the development of those beliefs for you?
8. Do you feel like you are generally able to put those beliefs into practice? Why? Why not?
9. Describe your current teaching situation. (e.g. students, curriculum, school, community, etc.)

## **Interview 2- Focus on Responsive Classroom Approach**

1. When I use the term “responsive Classroom approach” what does that term mean to you?
2. Can you please talk about ways in which you use the RC approach in your classroom? Or If you were in some other teacher’s classroom what would you look for to tell you if that teacher was implementing RC
3. What led you to decide to use the RC approach?
4. What kind of preparation/training/staff development did you receive initially concerning the RC approach?
5. Describe any training/staff development related to RC approach that you have participated in since the initial preparation? What other support was provided?
6. Describe how you first went about implementing RC? What made it easy? What made it difficult?
7. Did you see any changes in your classroom or students after you started implementing RC? ( If so, describe)
8. Has your implementation of RC changed over the last 8-10 years?  
Describe how.
9. What led to the changes in the way that you implement RC?
10. Can you please talk about any effect that the changes in your implementation of RC have had on you, your students or classroom?

Additional questions

### **Interview 3 – Focus on Changes in Implementation In RC Approach**

1. Looking back on the 8-10 years where you have been using the RC approach, how would you describe that process?
2. Can you please describe any changes that have taken place in your thinking about RC over the last 8-10 years.
3. Can you please describe any changes in your beliefs about teaching that have occurred as a result of your implementation of the RC approach?
4. What supports have you found in implementing RC?
5. What obstacles have you found?
6. If you were going to describe the process of implementing RC over the last 8-10 years to another teacher, how would you describe it? Could you suggest a metaphor or analogy that would help to illustrate that process?
7. What have you learned as a result of implementing RC for the last 8-10 years?

Additional questions

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## EDUCATIONAL HISTORY

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2013            The Pennsylvania State University  
*Doctor of Philosophy, Curriculum and Instruction*

1987            Indiana University of Pennsylvania  
*Master of Education, Early Childhood Education*

1986            Indiana University of Pennsylvania  
*Bachelor of Science, Elementary Education*

## PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

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July 2010 – Present    **Shippensburg University**  
Assistant Professor, Department of Education  
Second Grade Master Teacher, Grace B. Luhrs University Elementary  
School (GBLUES)

June 2008–July 2010    **Pennsylvania Department of Education**  
Early Childhood Advisor  
Office of Child Development and Early Learning

July 2002– May 2009    **Elizabethtown College**  
Assistant Professor/Lecturer/Adjunct Professor  
Department of Education

June 2000 –June 2002    **Berks County Intermediate Unit**  
Early Childhood/Elementary Learning Resources Consultant  
School Services Division

1999 - 2000    **Lebanon School District**  
Continuous Progress Teacher

1998-1999    **Pennsylvania State University**  
Graduate Assistant  
Department of Curriculum and Instruction

1990 – 1998    **Lebanon School District**  
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1987 –1990    **Lebanon School District**  
Transitional First Grade Teacher