Early Reading Intervention in Toronto Classrooms:
The Programs, The Professionals, and The Pupils

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Abstract

This research study will provide a deeper focus on early reading intervention (ERI) programs. The purpose of this study is to determine what components of an ERI program are necessary to ensure reading success for the students involved. Through a qualitative study that focused on three teachers who have experience working in Toronto classrooms with different ERI programs respectively, the data for this study was collected via one face-to-face interview with each of the participants. Existing literature was reviewed and this study was aimed to provide a focus on ERI programs in a Canadian context. The findings of this study report on a variety of components including the roles of the professionals, the multitude of teaching strategies utilized, the role of parents, and the various approaches to assessment. Next steps for both the research community and within the parameters of the field of education have been outlined, as well.
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Chapter I: Introduction

Introduction to the Research Study

Reading is one of the foundations towards higher learning, so it is no surprise that we must foster reading skills in children at a young age. But what happens when young children experience difficulty in acquiring the necessary skills for reading such as fluency and phonemic awareness? This is where early reading intervention programs come in. Early reading intervention programs have been accepted as part of a necessary installment in today’s education so as to aid in the prevention of any failure to learn in our students. However, it was not until recently that more of an intended focus on early reading intervention programs started to appear in the existing research and literature. Furthermore, the research to date is mostly based within the United States or other international countries; this is to say that there is limited research, if any, based within Canada. With that being said, this research study will be adding to that newly forming body of research and literature and basing it within a Canadian context.

Purpose of the Study

It was said best in that “it is not the act of intervening but the components of an intervention and the way in which the components are combined and organized for maximum effectiveness” that matters most (Lyon & Moats, 1997; Torgesen, 2005; as cited in Reynolds, Wheldall, & Madelaine, 2011, p. 172). The purpose of this study is to examine early reading intervention programs in Toronto school classrooms. This study will look to uncover the elements of an early reading intervention program and what makes it successful, ranging from the resources needed, the roles of individuals involved, and the students it applies to. This study will be an important addition to the educational community as it is based within a Canadian context and will provide that closer look in today’s early reading intervention programs. Furthermore, it will look to provide today’s teachers with usable strategies and approaches
towards reading intervention so as to foster an educational community of young learners who achieved the skills necessary for future success in the school system.

Research Questions

The research question that I will be exploring is what elements and/or components are necessary towards creating a successful Early Reading Intervention (ERI) program. The following sub-questions will inform this study:

1. What are some different approaches to ERI?
2. Who is involved in the implementation of ERI programs?
3. What is the role of those involved in the implementation process?
4. How is progress made by students accounted for in ERI programs?

Background of the Researcher

My interest in this topic stems from a personal life experience; when I was in kindergarten, I was involved in speech therapy as I could not orally pronounce my ‘s’ sounds properly and thereby could not read any words that involved the ‘s’ sound. Following my time in speech therapy, I was eventually able to pronounce and read the ’s’ sound correctly. As I moved on in the schooling system, by the time I was in the second grade, I was above the expected reading level to such an extent that my teacher was assigning me different readings than the class. To this day, reading and oral language are some of my strongest areas.

I account my later success in reading and oral language to the early intervention I received in my speech when I was in kindergarten. With this, I knew I wanted to focus on early intervention as it is a topic that essentially hits close to home for me.

In terms of research, I have had some experience in this field. During my undergraduate career at Ryerson University in Early Childhood Education, I was enrolled in and completed a
two-part course on Research Methods. Within this course I conducted a research study with 3 of my peers; we focused on current homework policies that are in effect in Toronto District School Board (TDSB) classrooms, whether or not they were being followed based on the TDSB policies, and how parents and teachers personally felt about the policies and subsequent practice. This study on early reading intervention will be my first independent research study.

Overview

Chapter I of this research paper includes a general introduction to my topic and the purpose of this study. It also states the research questions and how I came to be involved in this topic, study, and research in general. Chapter II will provide a literature review of a variety of scholarly journal articles that relate to the topic of early reading intervention and fit within the subheadings ‘Elements of Consideration for an ERI Program’, ‘Individuals Involved and their Roles’, ‘Qualifications for Inclusion in an Early Reading Intervention Program’, ‘Types of Early Reading Intervention Programs’, and ‘Effectiveness of Existing Programs’. Chapter III explains the overall methodology aligned with this research study, which includes the procedure, instruments of data collection, participants, data collection and analysis, ethical review procedures, and limitations. Chapter IV reports the findings for this study, including a variety of themes that emerged and specific statements made by each of the participants to exemplify the finding. Finally, Chapter V concludes the study by drawing final implications and discussing recommendations for further practice and research moving forward. References and a list of appendixes follow at the end.
Chapter II: Literature Review

Elements of Consideration for an Early Reading Intervention Program

There are many aspects of an Early Reading Intervention (ERI) program that must be taken into consideration upon creation and throughout implementation. Reynolds, Wheldall, and Madelaine (2011) report on such components and state that it is “important to ensure that the essential components of an early literacy program are featured” and taken into account (p. 172). This would include elements such as the total time allocated to intervention, the duration of each session, group size, who delivers instruction, training for instructors, instructional materials, assessment and monitoring strategies and resources, and group management techniques (Reynolds et al., 2011, p. 172-173).

Assessment is one very important element when discussing ERI programs as it is crucial towards the identification of “students who are having difficulties [with reading] before the effects of failure set in” (Reynolds et al., 2011, p. 185). The tools used for assessment need to be reliable towards identifying students who are struggling with acquiring their early literacy skills (Reynolds et al., 2011, p. 186). In their research, Menzies, Mahdavi, and Lewis (2008) state that ongoing assessment (p. 73) throughout the duration of an ERI program is important, alongside the initial diagnostic assessment.

Menzies et al. (2008) speak to the importance of creating a balanced literacy program within the ERI program, which would include the addressing of “phonological awareness, language development [and] comprehension” (p. 67). In their research, they also found that “the support of many of the school’s resources” (Menzies et al., 2008, p. 74) was a crucial element; for example, the use of school funding to implement an ERI program as opposed to relying on outside grants was a huge factor towards the implementation of such a program in one particular school (Menzies et al., 2008, p. 75).
Even more than the logistics of setting up and implementing ERI programs comes the factors of support. Hawkins (1985) mentions the need for supportive efforts of concerned parents and any given school as a whole (p. 196) while Menzies et al. (2008) state that the support and “high degree of collaboration” between teachers is one element required for ERI programs (p. 75). The research that will follow in this study will be looking to account for who is involved in the creation and implementation of ERI programs, to any degree, and therefore may report on the support of individuals who are essentially on the outside.

Finally, another crucial element to take into consideration towards the creation and implementation of an ERI program is the importance of staying within decent time frames. Le Fevre and Richardson (2001) found in their research that the importance of time frame boils down to allotting enough time to implement the intervention, enough time for program heads to support the implementation, and ensuring that these allotted times are not overloading teacher’s individual schedules (p. 492). Essentially, it is a balancing act where it becomes “the notion of keeping things moving at the desired pace while also allowing time for teachers to develop trust and confidence in themselves and the program” (Le Fevre & Richardson, 2001, p. 493).

Individuals Involved and Their Roles

The implementation of ERI programs calls for a variety of different individuals to be involved in different ways. Le Fevre and Richardson (2001) focused their research around the role of the facilitator, which could also be referred to as the staff developer (p. 485). The role of the facilitator in an ERI program includes “consulting closely with teachers, observing in classes, modeling practices by working with students, videotaping the classrooms, [and] engaging in extensive dialogue with the teachers” (Le Fvre Richardson, 2001, p. 484). According to one facilitator, they reported seeing their role as the person who organizes and communicates progress between the school and the program developers; they also reported to be a source of
quality control on both “how the program is being implemented and the training of the staff” (Le Fevre & Richardson, 2001, p. 489). Another facilitator saw themselves in a leadership role in terms of resources, expertise, ideas, vision, and advice (Le Fevre and Richardson, 2001, p. 490). Le Fevre and Richardson (2001) also report that other facilitators saw themselves as the co-learners with the teachers and staff and as a source of support in terms of selecting and providing resources and diagnosing and creating action plans (p. 490-491).

Teachers, of course, play a huge role in terms of their involvement in ERI programs. Reynolds et al. (2011) make it a point to mention in their research that “students achieve better results when instruction is delivered by classroom teachers” (p. 182). However, it is important to note that having said teacher educators specifically trained to implement interventions is preferable, as aligned with and according to existing research (Reynolds et al., 2011, p. 184). Alternatively, Nicolson, Fawcett, Moss, Nicolson, and Reason (1999) found in their research that having teachers who were not reading specialists and had little experience of special needs techniques implement an ERI program worked in the students favour and, as an added bonus, proved to be more cost-effective (p. 58).

Menzies et al. (2008) outline the teachers role in ERI programs to include assessing the students needs and planning and delivering instruction based on what they assess (p. 67). A teacher’s role in ERI programs also includes becoming familiar with instructional approaches and strategies and knowing when it is appropriate to use them (Menzies et al., 2008, p. 67). In addition to all of the aforementioned roles, Le Fevre and Richardson (2001) explain the role individuals play in regards to advocating in terms of ERI programs and what they stand for; this includes advocating for students with literacy learning needs and advocating for teachers and the political nature of their role in terms of decision making and the like (p. 489-491).
To ensure that teachers can fulfill their role, as it is a substantial one in terms of ERI programs, Menzies et al. (2008) also report that there must be enough support given to teachers during implementation of the programs. This would include collaboration time with colleagues, coaching and multiday trainings (Gensten & Dimino, 2001; Kamps & Greenwood, 2005; as cited in Menzies et al., 2008, p. 68). In their research, Menzies et al. (2008) found that some teachers were given support through literacy coaches who helped “examine [the teacher’s] own understanding of teaching reading” (p. 68).

Menzies et al. (2008) also found that principals, paraprofessionals, and special education resource specialists play a role in early reading intervention, as well. In one particular case study of a school, the principal showed their support by shifting around priorities in the school and allocations of the school budget to accommodate for an ERI program (Menzies et al., 2008, p. 74). Paraprofessionals were used to assist in the learning reading groups that occurred in the classroom while special education resource specialists assisted specifically with those students who were on individual education plans (IEPs) (Menzies et al., 2008, p. 70). This research study hopes to speak to these external supports to determine what is deemed necessary and what is actually available for ERI programs in Toronto schools.

**Qualifications for Inclusion in an Early Reading Intervention Program**

ERI programs are targeted towards “students who fail to demonstrate ‘adequate skill growth’” (McAlenney & Coyne, 2011, p. 307). The National Centre for Educational Statistics (2004) also states that “early and intensive reading intervention must be a priority for schools…that serve at-risk populations” (as cited in Menzies et al., 2008, p. 67). Typically, these intervention programs are made available to younger students somewhere in between the second semester of kindergarten to the end of the 2\textsuperscript{nd} grade (Torgesen, 2005; as cited in Reynolds et al., 2011, p. 180). However, through their own research, Reynolds et al. (2001) make it a point to
mention that “interventions should be provided as soon as assessments show that crucial skills have not been acquired at key points in the early years” (p. 180), thereby giving no actual timeline but rather intervening before it is too late.

McAlenney and Coyne (2011) explain that young students are “identified [for inclusion in ERI programs] through low performance on screening measures of early skills that are predictive of later reading achievement” (p. 308). Scarborough’s (1998) study narrows it down to children who lack ability in their letter name knowledge and phonological awareness (as cited in McAlenney and Coyne, 2011, p. 308) while McAlenney and Coyne’s (2011) study adds young children who cannot complete “basic text-reading tasks and assessments” (p. 308) to be eligible for ERI programs.

**Types of Early Reading Intervention Programs**

Le Fevre and Richardson (2001) claim ERI programs to be viewed as a “unit of change” and thereby should be implemented at school level (p. 484); they outline ERI programs that fit this belief in their research. ‘Success for All’ is an ERI program that functions at the school level, focusing on schools with a large population of students who are considered to have a low socio-economic status (Le Fevre & Richardson, 2001, p. 486). This ERI program goal is to ensure success in reading and language arts skills for the entirety of the school by providing a “standardized program, comprising several components for implementation across grade levels” (Le Fevre & Richardson, 2001, p. 486). Another school level ERI program is the ‘Reading Recovery’ program in which they work with children who have been in school for a year and who have been identified to have reading and writing difficulties; their aim is to accelerate the children’s rate of progress so they can catch up to their peers (Le Fevre & Richardson, 2001, p. 486). Menzies et al. (2008) also found in their research another ERI program which fit within the
framework of the school curriculum, “drawing on validated research practices to design and implement [the ERI program and] minimize reading difficulties in the first grade” (p. 68).

ERI programs can also function at the classroom level, as Le Fevre and Richardson (2001) go on to find in their research, such as through developing a quality, balanced literacy program. Le Fevre and Richardson (2001) also report on ERI programs which function at the district level, such as through the building of a solid K-3 team. This research study will be open to report on ERI programs that function at any level, be it the district level, school level, or classroom level.

All of the programs mentioned, be it at any given level, hone in on literacy approaches and strategies that revolve around “phonological awareness, phonics, fluency, text reading, vocabulary, and comprehension” (Reynolds et al., 2011, p. 174); these are re-affirmed by the National Reading Panel (2000) who state that the five critical areas for beginning reading instruction are “phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension” (as cited in McAlenney & Coyne, 2011, p. 307). Menzies et al. (2008) add to that list, finding that ERI programs also include phonemic awareness, decoding, and guided reading.

McAlenney and Coyne (2011) report on the tiered instructional approach which they define to be an approach to ERI during which “student progress is continually monitored and the intensity of instruction is modified based on measures of skill growth” (p. 307). With this approach, McAlenney and Coyne (2011) explain that Tier 1 would assess student’s responsiveness to general classroom instruction during which they would be measured for poor performance and growth (p. 314); Tier 2 would then call for intervention that is high quality, intensive, and performed in small groups (p. 307).

Similar to the tiered approach, McAlenney and Coyne (2011) report on what is called ‘Dynamic Assessment’ which “assesses what a child might be able to do given differing levels of
support” (p. 315). This is to say that students are tested while being given increasingly supportive prompts and cues as needed; their final ‘scores’ are based on what level of support was required for them to reach the right answer (McAlenney and Coyne, 2011, p. 315). This approach to ERI allows for immediate access to intervention, although has proven to be more complex and timely.

One final ERI program that is included in the research by Nicolson et al. (1999) is termed the ‘Interactive Assessment and Teaching Reading Programme’ through which meaning, phonics, and fluency are aspects that are considered and addressed (p. 50). All of these ERI programs are implemented in small groups, if not immediately than eventually. This is to the teacher’s benefit as working in small groups proves to be less labour intensive, but simultaneously works in the children’s benefit as it shows no significant difference in gains when working one-to-one, which is more timely (Richardson et al., 2011, p. 182).

Effectiveness of Existing Programs

Menzies et al. (2008) report that “early identification and treatment is the most effective course of action for the prevention of learning disabilities in reading” (p. 67). The success in terms of effectiveness of these ERI programs is determined by looking at the student’s progress in reading achievement (Le Fevre & Richardson, 2001, p. 496). In regards to the ‘Interactive Assessment and Teaching Reading Programme’, the ERI proved to be effective as Nicolson et al. (1999) found that 40 of the 62 students participating in the program ended it in the 90th percentile or better for their age (p. 60). Menzies et al. (2008) found in another ERI program that, where initially 35 students were classified as below basic based on the results of an initial reading assessment, only 3 remained within that classification upon completion of the intervention program (p. 74). Further than the statistics and the numbers, Le Fevre and Richardson (2001) state that “supportive participant attitude” is crucial towards to the success of any given ERI
program (p. 492). This research study looks to report on how ERI programs are accounted for in terms of whether or not they are deemed as being effective and successful.
Chapter III: Methodology

Procedure

The nature of this research is a qualitative study. It explored the participants meaning and understanding of the topic at hand. It is foundationally based first on the existing literature surrounding early reading intervention programs. From there, through this study, the research has branched out to collect information from the participants.

For the purpose of this study, I have interviewed three certified teachers who have past and current experiences working struggling readers in an ERI program. My initial contact for all participants was made through an external teacher who I have had my own personal experiences with; this is to say that two separate teachers introduced me to my three participants for this study. After introducing myself and my intended study and explaining the parameters of consent and anonymity through email to my participants, I met with each of them at everyone’s best convenience. During our meeting, I conducted a one-on-one interview with each respective participant that ranged from 25-35 minutes. Each of these interviews were recorded, with permission, and then transcribed by myself in the days following.

With the information gathered through these interviews, I have analyzed the data I have collected and the ways in which it has answered my research questions. By reading through my transcriptions and looking for common themes between all three participants, I was able to code my collected data into 5 major themes, all of which answer the research questions for this study. In the following chapters, I will delve into these themes by connecting both to the existing literature and by directly sharing quotes from my participants and ultimately share the implications that have arisen following the completion of this study.
Instruments of Data Collection

Alongside the initial data collected from the literature and presented in Chapter II of this report, informal interviews were the means of data collection for this research study. Following basic background information questions, such as what teaching experiences and/or experiences in the education system the participant has, they were also asked questions such as the following:

- In your own words, how would you describe what early intervention means to you?
- Is there anything you specifically with students who participate in early reading intervention that you feel truly works? Why do you believe it works? Can you give an example?
- What external supports do you feel are most important to have in order to implement successful intervention strategies and/or programs for early reading?

The complete list of interview questions can be found in Appendix A.

Participants

For the purpose of this research study, I have included three participants with very different experiences working within the parameters of early reading intervention. The criteria for selecting my participants was simply that each of them had some extended experience working in any type of ERI program within Toronto schools. For the purpose of this study, all participant names have been changed and pseudonyms will be used; the following is a brief overview of each participant:

Tracy

Tracy has 43 years of teaching experience, 34 of which are in Toronto and 9 years teaching abroad. In terms of classroom experience, she has always worked in kindergarten classrooms. In regards to early reading intervention, she is a certified and trained Reading
Recovery teacher which is the sole experience she has with early reading intervention. She is also a trained and certified Montessori teacher. Currently, Tracy is retired and volunteering in the reading interventionist role with Grade 3 students.

Nina

Nina has been teaching for 37 years. Her earlier teaching experiences had her teaching Italian part-time with students in kindergarten through to Grade 8. After some time, she worked as an Educational Assistant, working with students with special needs including a young girl who was completely blind. Currently, Nina is working as an Early Reading Interventionist with the ERI program, specifically in the pull-out role, with students in kindergarten, Grade 1, and Grade 2.

Becky

Becky is a recent Masters student graduate and has been teaching for 2 years. In her current teaching role, she is a part of both the Primary Grade Team, as she teaches reading and math for the Grade 1s and 2s, and the Learning Resource team, as her focus is more so on early intervention.

Data Collection and Analysis

I recorded each of my one-on-one interview sessions with each respective participant. Upon completion of the interviews, I independently transcribed the data verbatim, leaving out any interruptions that occurred during our meeting (ie. announcements, students walking in, etc). With the notes I collected and the transcripts I created, I began coding my data using a colour-coding method; according to the themes that I found through my data collection that was usually consistent between all three participants and at times consistent with the themes in my literature review, I coordinated a different colour to go with each theme. From there, I was able to highlight my transcriptions with the appropriate colour to determine which of the themes the
information I have collected corresponds to. Initially, I came up with about 9 themes from my data collection. However, upon further review and consulting with one of my professors in the Master of Teaching program, I was able to collapse some themes into others and will now be reporting on 5 themes in Chapter IV, most of which also include sub-themes. The themes and sub-themes for the findings in this research study are:

- Referring Students to the ERI Programs
  - Identification
  - Decision Making
- Accounting for Student Success
  - Consistent Tracking
  - Measuring Accuracy
- The Role of Those involved
  - Role of the Interventionist
  - Roles of Other Professionals
  - Role of Parents
- Resources
- Teaching Strategies
  - Reading of Texts
  - Increasing Phonological Awareness
  - Using Games
  - Pointing while Reading
  - Using Picture Cues
  - Transparency

Ethical Review Procedures

I have followed the ethical review procedures of the Master of Teaching program. I ensured that each of my participants understood the purpose and intended procedure of my research study and that any questions they had were answered prior to the commencement of their involvement. Furthermore, I ensured that their consent was given through the signing of the consent form (See Appendix B). During the one-on-one interviews, I informed and allowed the participants that they may ask questions as they see fit and choose to pass on any questions that
they do not feel comfortable answering. Furthermore, the participants were also given the opportunity to request any omission of answers they provided and/or the opportunity to change and provide a new answer to any given question. During and upon the completion of my research study, I made sure that no names were exposed and that pseudonyms were consistently used instead. Any data I have collected has been stored either on my personal computer or, if it is paperwork, kept in a binder in my home. The data that I have collected will only be shared with my research supervisor and each of my participants knew and consented to this prior to the start of any interviews. Upon completion of my research paper, I will ensure that a copy is made available to each participant.

Limitations

Although this study was meant to provide a focus on early reading intervention programs with a contextual background based in Canada, as there is limited existing Canadian research, it is limited to only the Greater Toronto Area, due to my current location. In accordance with this, the generalizability of my data may also be limited as it is based solely on selective Toronto schools, thereby making it hard to extend the findings to include all early reading intervention programs in Toronto, Ontario, or even Canada. Another limitation of this study is the time constraint as it was completed in under a year due to the demands of the Master of Teaching program.
Chapter IV: Findings

This chapter will report on the findings following the data collection portion of this research study. Upon completion of three interviews with three different teacher participants, the collected data has been coded and reported in this chapter within the following themes:

- Referring Students to the ERI Programs
  - Identification
  - Decision Making
- Accounting for Student Success
  - Consistent Tracking
  - Measuring Accuracy
- The Role of Those involved
  - Role of the Interventionist
  - Roles of Other Professionals
  - Role of Parents
- Resources
- Teaching Strategies
  - Reading of Texts
  - Increasing Phonological Awareness
  - Using Games
  - Pointing while Reading
  - Using Picture Cues
  - Transparency

Participant contributions have been quoted verbatim where appropriate and correlated to related existing literature. Where this chapter is a simple report of the findings, Chapter V will draw and explain possible implications and conclusions of the data that has been collected.

Referring the Students to ERI Programs

In order to implement a successful ERI program, there must be set ways both in which decisions are made and students are geared towards this suggested intervention. The participants in this study discussed how to identify the students who are in need of reading intervention and support and how the identification process generally works. Further, they also added who is
responsible for making the final decisions in regards to which students require and will ultimately receive this specialized intervention.

**Identification**

Becky explains that she looks for students who are not making the expected progress in reading as determined by grade-level expectations. Based on regular daily teacher instruction, Becky looks for students who are not moving along in their reading at the projected rate for their age and grade. She explains this by saying: “So the ones who haven't been making progress, that are only moved up maybe one level, those are the ones that are going to be pulled for reading intervention.”

Nina uses this lens to identify students as well: "Last year he was improving slowly but was improving. This year, he's supposed to go faster and he doesn't at all." I said, "I don't know, something's wrong."

To determine this, Becky explains that reading assessments are used to identify these students as early as possible:

I did all of the reading assessments in Grade 1 and 2 at the beginning of the year and I flagged kids that were below where we would want them to be. Then, in terms of intervening, we've kind-of given the Grade 1’s a couple months just to see if regular teaching is going to help these kids and there's a group of about three who, starting next week, will be getting the same intervention program that the Grade 2's are getting.

Nina also explains that reading assessments are used to determine which students might benefit from reading intervention. With her ERI approach, Nina states that they look at the expected grade-level reading range in terms of levelled books: students who are at the lower end of the range are usually flagged for needing this type of intervention. She provides an example:

The kindergarten it's A to D. So when they pass D, they're ready in Grade 1. So this is Grade 1 reading. They have to be between E and K. Of course if they're E, they're very low, very very low, so they come to me the following year. If they finish Grade 1 with
E...they come to me. That's when the teacher knows something's wrong so they come to this intervention program.

Tracy approaches ERI identification in the same respect; with a different set of levelled texts, she pinpoints who might benefit from this intervention process by looking at which students are a fair deal below their expected reading level range, as she explains that the students she takes in at a Grade 1 reading level when they should be around the Grade 3 or 4 level.

**Decision Making**

In terms of the actual firm decision of which students will receive this intervention, Nina explains:

The resource teacher... is the one, with a group of teachers. I'm not even there when they decided these kids need it, they just came to me: "this is the people that we would like you to work with", and that's what I'm doing. I don't make the decision. They decide who needs this program and then bring them to me.

In contrast, both of the other two participants were directly involved in determining who they would be taking to work with in their respective programs. Becky explained that in her unique role, not only did she do the assessments herself but that she was able to become aware of potential students who would require this intervention a year before the actual decision to work with them had to be made because she is part of a team:

...I'm part of the Learning Resource team, and I'm also part of the classroom teams...that decision [who will be starting the program for Grade 2 students] was made in conjunction with Nicole, the Learning Resource Specialist who oversees that, Lisa, the Grade 1 teacher, and then myself.

Tracy noted that where the classroom teachers were the first to suggest which students might require early reading intervention, it was her role to assess these children to ensure that the classroom teacher’s opinion was accurate.
Accounting for Student Success

The success of ERI programs is dependent on the success of the students involved. Various assessment strategies are used to appropriately account for the success of the students and, consequently, the success of the ERI program. When speaking with the participants, two main assessment approaches were made apparent and used by all three participants. These included the need for measures to track student progress on a consistent basis which further extended to assessing student reading accuracy.

Consistent Tracking

Becky uses running records to consistently track student progress. She also takes note of her observations as she works through different parts of the program with the students. She also frequently uses discussions and engages in conversations with students, which is another way in which she tracks their learning – she referred to this as having regular check-ins with the students.

Tracy added to this, as she explained:

Well you have to do a lot of tracking…You have to do testing…it's a lot of tracking. Testing but in a nice way, you know, so that the children don't feel intimidated…can they tell me what strategies they used…it's tracking, like writing it down. So with Reading Recovery you have a specific assessment to use with the running record then the DRA's…and it's daily tracking.

Nina also tracks her students’ progress and showed me the data displayed on a chart within her classroom. In her program, assessment is done every week.
Measuring Accuracy

All participants explained that assessing the students’ reading accuracy is what helped them determine whether or not they were ready to move forward either within the intervention program or move forward with regular classroom instruction and forego the intervention program altogether.

When asked about the assessment strategies used, Becky explained:

…the accuracy is what I'm really looking for. So, if I have what I think is an independent level and they're only reading it with 93% accuracy then I've got them at too hard of a level and I have to bump them back a bit.

In terms of these ERI programs, the measure of accuracy that the participants were referring to was that of the commercialized measure through each of their given programs. For Becky, when a student reads a given text, accuracy is determined by the amount of words a student reads correctly compared to those read incorrectly. Nina also relies on accuracy in her assessments, an example of which she explained when asked about her assessment strategies:

…if the kids read a book, and they make only 3 mistakes in the whole book, that means they are ready for the next. If the students read the page and in the page it's 3, 4, 5 mistakes, it's too hard for the students. That's how I evaluate, how I bring the students ahead. To go to the next level they have only to miss 3 words in the whole story. That's it. And sometimes you even, if you see the way they read, if they go "uh, uh...", even if they read but they read with that speed, that means they're not confident, they're not really ready, no…When you see that they can read with speed and they only have 3 mistakes, they're ready for the next level.

Role of Professionals and Parents Involved

The work of the facilitating interventionist and other professionals contribute in important ways towards the creation of a successful ERI program. Each of the participants took the time to explain not only their own roles as an interventionist, but also the roles of other
professionals and the role of parents, all of which are involved in the students’ journey through early reading intervention.

**Role of the Interventionist**

Tracy said that it is important to be in constant communication with the students’ classroom teacher so as to ensure that the skills students are acquiring within the ERI program are being supported within their individual classrooms. Where Tracy acknowledged that she is a teacher in her own right, she goes further to explain her role as a consultant: “…you certainly have to be a consultant to the classroom teachers, in supporting them. Once you've taken a child for that reading support, you have to get back into the classroom to see what they're doing in the classroom and whether the teacher is supporting the needs of the child.”

Becky also explained that part of her role as the ERI specialist is to be the communicator between the other professionals involved: “I also need to be the one that's relaying this [information] on to Nicole [Learning Specialist] and on to Lisa [Grade 1 teacher] or Chris [Grade 2 teacher] about their kids. And then if any other supports would be necessary or if they needed other things then I could contact [Nicole] and she'd be the one to set that up.”

Similarly, Nina stated that she frequently communicates with the classroom teachers. She expanded on her role as being that of an advocate for students, at times, speaking up to get them the help that they may need: “We know, I know that something's wrong with that girl. But I say [at the meeting], why last year was the first time she was making progress and now it's been 3 weeks and it’s at the same level? So I need to know, I need to recommend it to the meeting, bring it to the staff meeting and see what's going on, if somebody can test this girl. And they did.”
Nina continued, taking a different approach to describing her role as she explained the attributes that a professional in this role must possess: “When we teach these kids in this program, with special needs kids, kids, that some kind of disability of learning, you have to be really a special person, a caring person…a person with a lot of patience because it doesn’t matter what kind of program you have, it’s the way you deliver the program…I have the passion and I have the patience.”

She goes on to explain that sometimes it means going above and beyond the parameters of your expected role, as she spoke about her experience teaching a blind student and how she worked to becoming certified in Braille:

So I was learning Braille by myself. And then at one point the instructor that was coming to teach her Braille, he got upset, he says ‘you can't do that, that's my job.’ I said, ‘Yeah but she needs the work now and I understand that you cannot give it to her because you have to come here, teach her Braille, and then translate the work from English writing in to Braille.’ I said ‘I understand that you need time. You have to go back to school but I'm here. I'm willing to learn Braille and make sure that I write everything she needs right away that day and give it to her.’ And that’s what I did.

Becky was in a unique role at her school. She explained that she works with small groups in a pull-out program, consistent with her role as an interventionist within the Learning Resource Team. She also works with students within the main classroom where she plans the literacy and reading portion for Grade 1s and 2s. In this inclusive setting, she still acknowledged herself to be “the one who’s leading the intervention process with these kids.”

Roles of Other Professionals

To ensure the overall success of any given ERI program, all participants noted the importance of collaborating and receiving varying levels of support from the other professionals who are involved in the reading intervention process.
For Tracy, the Reading Recovery program called for a variety of different professionals. For one, she spoke about the teacher trainers who were there to teach the interventionists, like herself, the different strategies of the program. She also spoke about the creator and originator of the program, Marie Clay, and how her role would be to go into the schools as a Reading Recovery coordinator and observe and supervise what was happening in this ERI program.

Beyond the Reading Recovery program, Tracy explained the role of the school principals to sometimes be that of a mediator between interventionist and classroom teacher:

If the classroom teacher is having problems you need the support of the principal to make sure that the teacher does make those changes and you try to do it in a diplomatic way. But if the classroom is not reading everyday then the children who are at risk are going to lose out, big time. So you need someone to say, ‘well, in your program you have to read with the children every day’, especially at a Grade 1 level. So you need that principal or vice-principal to supervise that, if it's not happening.

Tracy and Nina mentioned that principals had to be supportive with time-tabling. Nina expanded on this as she explained that it was the role of the staff, including the principal, to be supportive. She said, “The staff here at [my school], big support. First of all because they gave me this class and if I need anything, anything, they give it to me. I don't ask for much but whatever I ask, they are there for me. Like they even give me a prep, like this time, this is my prep.”

Nina expanded on her answer, explaining that the classroom teachers play an important role:

Teachers always help. Always we talk with the teachers - what can we do, what do you think about this? Yeah, we talk with the teachers and even with the resource teacher. We always work together. Especially the librarian too, she introduced this program to me and always, especially at the beginning, I'll say, "Amy, what do you think if I do this? How about if I would do that?"
For Becky, the central professionals who play a role as a support in her ERI facilitation are the Learning Specialists within her school:

Nicole and Julia, I would say. So I don't know if you've met Julia but she's going to be Nicole's counterpart in January when she comes back from maternity leave so she'll focus more on K-3 and she's got her reading specialist and a lot of expertise in that so she's definitely someone who I've kind-of bounced ideas off of and spoken to. Certainly, Nicole as well -- we often meet about the kids we're working with and just kind-of discuss strategies and what might be working, what we could try differently. So those are kind-of the main ones that I would rely on.

Role of Parents

Parents need to be partners in the early reading intervention process in order to ensure that their children receive maximum support throughout. Becky spoke to the fact that part of the parents’ role is to be in the loop of what is happening within the ERI program and she gave an example of how she stays in communication with her students’ parents: “…we're partners in this and I find that parents are really, really appreciative of the work that I'm doing. I send e-mails out just to let them know 'I'm going to be pulling your kids out 4-5 times a week, this is happening, just thank you' and stuff like that.”

Tracy added to this idea of communication as she explained how it has to be like an open-door policy with parents: “You've got to get them on your side and…they see that you're working hard and that the children are working hard…and you want them to feel comfortable in coming in and asking questions you know, and keeping in contact.”

Nina explained that she stays in communication with the parents to encourage and remind them of their own roles in this ERI process:

I call the parents from here with my cell phone with the students here. If they don't do the reading, right away I call the parents. Right away. I call the parents, I say, "Look, I'm here and I want to help. But I need your help. If you don't help me, we won't accomplish the goal we want to accomplish with your daughter or your son. I need your help, we have to work together."
All participants explained that the main role of the parents is to be supportive by getting involved and reading at home with their children. Becky explained: “The books that we read are always sent home and the expectation is that the parents are reading with them every night. So they got these books coming home, they need to be reading them with their child every night.”

Tracy also sends books of an appropriate level home with the students in her program.

Nina summed up the importance of having parents do their part at home as she stated:

The role of parents is to get involved. They have to get involved and they have to work with the kids at home. They have to. If they don't get involved, no way, in 9 weeks you will not accomplish the goal, no way. Because they need my help and they need their parents help. Without them, I don't think without them I can't do it...[my student], she really tries her best, but she cannot do it alone, she needs somebody there to help her with the reading...she needs the parents and she needs me...But that's the parents role, they have to get involved, they have to work with the child. I always say that to them and to the child too: "You have to go home, you have to read, you have to play the game with your mom, that's why I do all this work, not just to give it to you, you have to use them".

Resources

To ensure the success of an ERI program, facilitators require access to certain resources to support the work that they are doing. Each of the participants explained different resources that they rely on to implement their ERI program.

Nina explained that she relies on an Early Reading Intervention book that equips her with certain reading strategies that her students needed to learn. She also explained that she goes out of her way to create games to reinforce the basic strategies that she teaches. Students can play these games with her during their intervention time and can take them home to play with their parents, as well. Nina found that using these games worked well to support her students learning.

In contrast, Becky explained that while the Fountas and Pinnell levelled books are essential, she also uses other sources for her teaching: “Fluency passages I've gotten in the past
through Reading A-Z, that website, and also, for the kids… I've downloaded books from there and used those. *Words Their Way* is the spelling program that we use.”

Tracy also sees the value in using the computer as a resource. She described a program that she recently learned of as a reliable aid for English Language Learners (ELLs):

It will take a topic and give you all the key words... so the computer program will give you a picture of the concept and a description of the concept and it will pull it all together for you. So, I'm hoping to be able to use that so that before I give them a book, say on ducks or mammals or whatever, that we can get some, some of these concepts of vocabulary that the child wouldn't normally know because they're from another country or they're speaking language as a first language so they haven't had that experience.

Consistent with Becky, Tracy also spoke to the use of sequenced, levelled books for the students to use in their reading. Further, Tracy referred back to her Montessori training and explained how the use of Montessori objects, being manipulatives to represent an object that she and the student might be talking about or might have encountered in their reading. The use of concrete objects presents no opportunity for misinterpretation on the child’s part; again, Tracy was specifically thinking about ELLs at this point.

**Teaching Strategies**

Facilitators of ERI programs use a variety of strategies that contribute to a successful program. Becky shared an interesting insight when initially asked about specific strategies that she uses in her intervention role:

I firmly believe that the types of things that you do when you intervene with kids, the teaching strategies, aren't that different than what you would use with any kind-of typically developing reader but they, for whatever reason, just need more of it. So it's kind-of an amount of time spent reading as opposed to doing something radically different.

All three participants acknowledged that spending the extra time with students is a big contribution to their success and that specific strategies were helpful. These strategies are
described in the following section; some strategies overlap while others were unique to the particular program and interventionist.

**Reading of Texts**

Both Becky and Nina emphasized importance of allowing for repetition when reading with students. Nina acknowledged this a few times throughout the duration of the interview, standing firm in her belief that repetition is key. Becky described a specific instance in which repeated reading benefited one of her students:

…there was one student that I worked with who really benefited from repeated readings of texts so I would get some levelled passages and she kind-of liked the self-competition. So I’d say, ‘you have a minute to read as much as you can, let’s track how many words you read correctly’ and then you would graph it and see how her graph has improved. So that worked for her.

Another aspect of text reading that Becky mentioned was the idea of using different levels of text within individual students’ abilities, meaning sometimes she goes to harder levels above their abilities and sometimes she uses easier ones: “…one day they'll get their instructional level text and we'll spend some more time working through that, and we do some word building and other things before that. Then, the next day, they'll read an easier text -- so it's two levels or three levels easier.”

Tracy also uses this reading strategy and explained both sides of it; for using easier levels with students, she explained that this helps students to access other strategies more easily:

…with some of these children I'm bringing them down to say, a level 8 or 9, so that they're learning those strategies so when they make a mistake here, and they're not going to make too many mistakes, but when they make a mistake at a level 8, an easy level, they're getting the strategies – ‘Oh, I got my mouth ready’, ‘I was thinking what would make sense’

On the other end of it, she went on to explain that using levels that are higher than the given student is expected to reach acts as a buffer for any potential fall-back that might happen
once they leave the ERI program: “...in Reading Recovery we were always told to get the children to Level 18, 19, or 20, this is in the Reading Recovery levels, way ahead of the other children because once they left you, they would fall back a little bit.”

Further to this, Becky explained the process of engaging the students in fluency practice by reading the texts out loud and practicing pacing among other reading strategies. She expanded on this and gave an example of how she works on fluency with her students:

For other kids...hearing themselves read is really powerful so with all of the kids, we record their voices reading and play it back to them – the Grade 2’s are kind-of making their own podcasts right now which is fun.

**Increasing Phonological Awareness**

Becky spoke to the importance of teaching phonics as she explained that, in her opinion, what it all comes down to is that the students need to obtain phonological awareness. She described ways in which she and her students work on phonics:

The phonological awareness piece is important. So in Grade 1, there’s some kids who were just working on segmenting sentences into words or looking at a work and breaking it into sounds or taking a simple c-b-c word and sounding it out and blending the sounds together.

Similarly, Tracy also relies heavily on phonics and focuses a lot of her teaching around breaking down the letter sounds. She noted that sometimes looking for and delving into word chunks is what the students need as a base moving forward in their reading. She also explained the complexity of phonics by vocalizing the slight differences in vowel sounds throughout the interview and expanded on her teaching strategy to help students navigate these complexities:

... there's such a slight difference with a, e, i, o, u that they have to match the picture to the letter. So when this child was coming down the stairs I'm saying ‘Okay, go a-e-i-o-u, apple-a, envelope-e, insect-i, octopus-o, umbrella-u’. And they have to go over and over it. So it's, this is a Montessori idea but it was used with manipulatives so you had the actual apple so that the child cannot misinterpret the picture, so they had the actual object.
Further to this, Tracy also spoke to the strategy of sounding out and noting the different spelling variations of certain word chunks so that students are aware that sometimes one sound can be represented in two letters. She gave an example, explaining that the combined sound of “-er” can be represented in different words in different ways such as through the words *hurt, her,* and *colour.*

**Using Games**

Nina spoke to the usage of games in her programs and how it helps the students become engaged in the intervention process. Becky also shared this view as she explained that for the younger students, such as the Grade 1 students, the game-based approach is usually the one she takes. Nina expanded on the effectiveness of this approach and gave a specific example of a game:

> Then to reinforce them with games...this is all games that I prepare for the kids and this is all the games that I prepare for them to take home to play with the parents. The game especially it really works. It really helps the kids because they concentrate. They have fun, they concentrate. It works...Snap, concentration, sliding word, and word list...And every time they play they have to get 50 points for a prize...when they reach another 50 points they get another prize. You have the prize box here and you know, they choose. And they really like to play because they see themselves moving ahead.

**Pointing while Reading**

Nina and Tracy described how pointing while reading was a strategy used by beginning readers. They helped students to learn other strategies and move away from this one. Nina explained this progression:

> At the beginning, I say to them ‘I want you to point to the words’ at the beginning. And then let's say the following week I say, ‘yes, now you point the words but I want you to, your finger has to move all the time and your mouth has to follow the finger because you need speed.’ So at the beginning I introduce that, but after one week I said no. Now I want you to point, yes. But your finger has to move, it cannot stop. The finger has to move and your mouth has to move with your finger.’
Tracy also shared her experience in working through this reading strategy with one of her students:

So with one of the little ones today, she's still pointing. She's pointing very quickly and I said to her ‘it's okay to point, but it might be faster if you don't point.’ I said, ‘I’m not asking you to stop pointing yet, but if you feel comfortable in doing that.’ And I said, ‘when you're not pointing, you can, when you're reading fast and you're getting ready to turn the page, get your hand over there to turn the page so that you can go more quickly.’ And so she tried that today and she stopped her pointing. So it's letting them know, you know, everything that's involved in reading. Letting them know what they have to do and how to get there.

Using Picture Cues

Both Tracy and Nina instruct their students to look at the picture cues while reading.

While Tracy explained that this is a strategy the students’ need to be aware of and readily use, Nina gave a specific example of how this teaching strategy might sound or look:

The picture give away the word maybe that they don't know. If there is a picture, if it's the word…baby. There's the word baby and they don't know the word baby, I say 'okay, look at the picture, what do you see in this page in this picture, something that start with a B? Look, something that starts with a B.' Because I don't tell them right away, they have to look. ‘Well, this is a baby.’ ‘What word did you, what's this one? Look at that word, what word is it?’ ‘Oh, this is baby!’ 'look at the picture, you might find the words that you're looking for'

Transparency

Tracy was very adamant on equipping students with these reading strategies so that they would be able to independently use them. She explained why this is an important achievement:

…getting the children to describe the strategies they use to self-correct. And we've got to get them to say it… So helping them so that when they're alone they can figure it out themselves. And so the more you do that and the more the child is successful at doing that then they're far more fluent readers.

In order to do this, interventionists have to be very explicit in their teaching so that students are aware that the given strategy is one that they can continue to use in their reading. All
three participants spoke to the importance of making the teaching and learning in their ERI program transparent; making the students aware of why they are receiving this intervention and making them aware of any progress they are making or challenges they are currently facing towards progressing. Nina explained why it is important to, firstly, let the students in on why they are part of this intervention process:

That's another strategy that I come up with…sometimes you have to make the students know why they're coming here, in my opinion. Why they're coming here, there is a problem why. And we always have to say ‘it's a good thing; you like it that you come here one on one; you have the attention; I'm here for you; we're going to get there in no time.’ And that's what we do, we get there.

She continued with this theme of transparency, explaining how she keeps the students aware as they are working through the program:

And another thing that I do, I'm very honest with the kids. I say ‘this is where you're supposed to be but right now you're in kindergarten, but you're not in kindergarten, you're in Grade 2. We have all this to go through before you're a Grade 2 reader.’ And they're aware of the situation. They're aware like, ‘Oh, I'm almost there! I'm almost at Grade 2!’ And I think be honest with the kids. Show them their problem and how can they progress and how can they reach where they're supposed to read. They're following you…I have all this displayed, they know exactly where they're supposed to be.

Tracy added to this by stating how she makes her students aware of what she is doing, as the teacher, while they are doing the work in the program and the implications of doing so, for the students; for example, when students are reading to her:

…when I write something down, they know. And they'll say ‘well, what did I do wrong?’ and I said ‘no, I showed that you did a self-correction there’ so they're a little more comfortable when you're writing things down so that it's not so, you know, scary….And having the students aware that you're tracking so that when they move on, you let them know that they've done it. So when they get the idea that they know what level they're on, ‘well, when am I going to be at level 20?’ and I said ‘well, this is what you have to before you get to Level 20’, you know? So they have to be aware of their own progress and what they have to do to get there.
Becky also shared this view as she described what having transparency in the program does for the students:

And the kids themselves feel amazing about...I can see the change in confidence with them and they're seeing that the program and the work they're putting in is paying off and I'm very explicit with them, too. If they want to know what reading level they're at, I'm happy to tell them. And I talk to them about how reading is more than just a level because I don't want them to think that, you know, 'I'm just a Level 1 reader and that's all I am', but in terms of the text difficulty, I showed them how much growth they made and I think they feel really good about at that. And they know that they're going somewhere, because I think that sometimes they don't realise that the books are getting harder and that they're kind-of closing that gap.

Nina added to this notion of transparency by taking it a step further and explaining how she also ensures she makes the parents aware of what is happening in her program, linking it back to the importance of staying in communication with them and having them as partners in this process. She stated:

Make them aware of the problem, I do make them aware of the problem. I've been very very firm with the kids and I say to them "If I tell you that you have to do this at home, you have to do this, I can't do this by myself." The kids, I call their parents right away. "Tomorrow I'm going to start with your son and that's what I'm going to be doing. You're welcome to come here." The other thing that I do, I call the parents and say "I want you to come and see what I do with your child because I want you to continue at home." That one helps a lot because if you have good communication with the parents, the program works better because if they work at home, you work here, the child - between me and the mother - they [the students] have to do the job.

As a result of all of these findings stated in this chapter, it can be reported that the elements that are necessary towards creating a successful ERI program include using measures to determine which students should be referred to these programs; accounting for student success through different assessment approaches; contributions by many different professionals, as well as student parents; having access to a variety of resources; and being equipped and utilizing a multitude of teaching strategies.
Chapter V: Discussion

Drawing Conclusions

The goal of this research study was to determine what elements and/or components are necessary towards creating a successful ERI program by synthesizing perspectives of the teachers who work within these programs in Toronto schools. Research questions that guided this study included a look at different approaches to early reading intervention, at who is involved in the implementation process and their subsequent role, and how student success is accounted for within any given ERI program.

The participants shared their experiences and gave insight on their approaches to early reading intervention through the teaching strategies that they use. Becky and Tracy explained their intentional focus on phonics which was consistent with research (Reynolds et al., 2011), which found that phonics and increasing phonological awareness is a critical area for literacy programs, such as ERI programs, to be focusing on. When focusing on the reading of the levelled texts, the participants explained the importance of emphasizing repetition with the students. This aligns with Reynolds et al. (2011) research that noted “text reading” to be an important literary approach of which ERI programs should be devoting an adequate amount of time to (p. 174); this includes the concept of using repetition during these readings. The National Reading Panel (2000) includes fluency as one of the five critical areas for beginning reading instruction (as cited in McAlenney & Coyne, 2011, p. 307) which was an area of focus mentioned by Becky; surprisingly, however, neither of the other two participants spoke to the inclusion of fluency practice in their respective programs.

Both Nina and Becky explained that the use of games worked, especially with the younger students. While many other strategies were mentioned and common among at least two of the participants, it can be assumed that the approaches to early reading intervention are not
confined to or within a specific program, but rather rooted in the specific teaching strategies that are used.

According to the participants, their role in the ERI programs includes being a constant communicator with other individuals who are involved in the process, such as the classroom teachers. In their research, Le Fevre and Richardson (2001) acknowledge this part of the role, as well, as they state that the role of the facilitating interventionist includes “consulting closely with teachers...[and] engaging in extensive dialogue with the teachers” (p. 484). Furthermore, they also explain that the interventionist role includes advocating for students with literacy learning needs (Le Fevre & Richardson, 2001, p. 489-491). Nina’s approach aligned with this part of the research as she explained that her role does indeed include being an advocate for students who need the intervention. Nina also spoke to the qualities a teacher working in this role must possess as she explained that having passion for this career choice and patience to work with the students is key. This was an interesting finding as, in the existing research, the personality qualities of professionals involved in this field is never discussed and neither of the other two participants spoke to this aspect of the interventionist role, either.

Further to this, the participants explained that the participation of other professionals in the ERI process is a crucial aspect. Both Tracy and Nina emphasized how important it is to have a principal who is supportive in every possible way, which includes scheduling time for these ERI programs and stepping in when an extra level of communication is required. This is consistent with Menzies et al. (2008) research as they also reported that part of the role of school principals was to allocate time towards these intervention programs. Menzies et al. (2008) research also looked at the principals’ role to be more of a decision-making role that would ultimately support the facilitation of the ERI programs, such as through allocating budget money.
What is surprising about these findings regarding the role of other professionals is that, according to the participants, the roles of others seem to centre on being more of a support for the interventionist or being a part of the communication process. Upon the commencement of this research study, I had expected to find that other professionals were involved in the actual implementation of the reading intervention. Instead, it is now more apparent how much responsibility the interventionist holds regarding the implementation of these ERI programs.

Hawkins (1985) explained in his research the need for supportive efforts from the parents involved in the ERI process. In line with Hawkins (1985) research, the participants explained that parents are an integral part in the early reading intervention process because this helps to maintain consistency in the students’ lives by reinforcing that home-school connection. Through the participants’ emphasis on how crucial parental involvement is in the ERI process, it can be presumed that any approach and implementation of early reading intervention runs the risk of becoming ineffective without the active participation of the students’ parents.

Herold (2011) explains that “the assumptions and philosophies that teachers hold about teaching and learning underpin the way they encourage parents to engage with their children in successful reading practices” (p. 44). Interestingly, Baker (2003) reports that “56% of parents and 92% of teachers believed the parental role is one of support [while] 34% of the parents saw their role as teaching whereas none of the teachers thought parents should have this role” (p. 94; as cited in McNaughton, Parr, Timperly, and Robinson, 1992). Based on the input given by the participants in this research study, it can be assumed that these participating interventionists value the parents to be more than just a background support system as they each consistently explained that the parents of these students have to play an active role in the intervention process.
The participants identified two important approaches to assessment: daily tracking and measuring for accuracy by assessing for fluency and miscues through using tools such as running records and reading aloud with the students each session, among other tools and approaches. They felt that the main ways that students are assessed and that their success is accounted for in these ERI programs is through these two assessment approaches. The daily tracking explained by all three participants is harmonious with what Menzies et al. (2008) state in their research as they explain that the consistency of ongoing assessment throughout the duration of any given ERI program is an important factor (p. 73).

It is explained that running records help interventionists and those involved in the intervention process to gain a better understanding “about the reader’s monitoring of their own reading to construct meaning” (Goodman & Goodman, 2004, p. 621-623; as cited in Herold, 2011, p. 41). Furthermore, the use of running records and monitoring these miscues can also lead to self-awareness in the reader who will learn to start self-correcting, thereby indicating that they are successfully acquiring independent reading skills (Herold, 2011, p. 41). Alongside these assessment measures, Tracy spoke to the importance of readers being aware of their own strategies, such as the self-correcting that Herold (2011) notes. This proves to be an effective intervention in reading as it is noted that “helping children become strategic readers is a very powerful way to teach reading” (Hornsby, 2000; as cited in Herold, 2011, p. 43).

In Herold’s (2011) research, the view on early reading intervention is summed up best in saying the following:

“...there is a need to rethink how we define what constitutes a reading difficulty: if we can reconceptualise learning to read as a process of acquisition that varies in difficulty across the range of children we teach, then the difficulties some children have would be seen as normally occurring difficulties, not as some exotic disability. School instructional programs might then be more often designed with the expectation that many children will need access to large amounts of more expert, more intensive, and more personalized
teaching if they are to acquire reading proficiency alongside their peers” (p. 48; as cited in Allington, 2002, p. 279).

The participants share insight reflecting this idea as they all acknowledge that the students in these ERI programs are not immensely behind or disadvantaged and do not require radical intervention but rather just need and benefit from more personalized and intensive teaching. While Becky states that the teaching strategies are not changed but rather made more available to students involved in the ERI process through extended time, Tracy and Nina state that it is more about helping students early on before problems persist. With this, it is apparent that these interventionists are starting to adopt that mindset that these students just fall further on the continuum of reading difficulties. This can be seen as indicative of a potential embracing of these ERI programs so that they are more of an intentional inclusion in Toronto schools.

Reflection and Implications

As a teacher moving forward from this research study, I come away with a greater understanding of the process of early intervention in reading. As explained by one of the participants, essentially, it is not that anything radically different is happening in these programs, rather it is just that the students are being given more time to focus and grasp the concepts that are being taught. As a classroom teacher and through my experiences, I understand that a lot of work goes into a regular classroom so the intended intervention is necessary for some students, as that devotion cannot otherwise be given by the classroom teacher alone. With this, it is more realizing the value of having these programs that is the most important take-away point following the completion of this research study and understanding that giving these students the extra time in itself is what makes these ERI programs effective and thereby results in successful readers.
Further to this, each of the participants shared the importance of collaboration, especially with the classroom teachers. For myself, I now understand the value in collaborating with the professionals that cross our paths as educators. Even more, for the students involved in the reading intervention process, it is imperative that everyone works together so as to provide the most effective intervention possible. By doing so, the constant communication between professionals allows for more purposeful instruction by everyone involved.

Through my own experience in the school system, I have had the privilege of being on the receiving end of successful early intervention as within the two years following my intervention program, I was reading above the expected level for my grade. Coming away from this research experience, I am able to see a glimpse into the passion of these interventionists and the amount of time they invest into their practice. As noted by one of the participants, if you don’t have the passion and patience to devote the time needed to these students, then you cannot work within the role of an early reading interventionist. I believe beginning to understand the qualities of these interventionists was an interesting discovery in this research as it shows that there is more to this profession than the training and instruction.

More than anything, I have a firmer understanding of the importance of parents and family in the learning process. It has always known and believed that establishing a home-school connection is beneficial: Baker (2003) explains that having this connection to the home “puts teachers in a better position to reach struggling readers and children who are unmotivated by what they are experiencing in school” (p. 95; as cited in Gentile & McMillan, 1990, 1991; McCarthey, 2000; Sonnenschein & Schmidt, 2000). This research experience has added to this understanding; as explained by the participants, by reiterating what is happening in school, at home, students are able to mentally connect that this learning is just as important as any in-class
work and therefore deserves just as much time and effort from them as is being given by both their teachers and their parents.

For myself as an educator, I would aim to try to integrate the teaching and learning that is happening in these ERI programs into regular classroom instruction. I believe that students can often feel disconnected from their peers when they are involved in some sort of pull-out program such as reading intervention; with this, by working with the interventionist and integrating perhaps some of the games or teaching approaches into the classroom, students will see their learning reflected in their own classroom space. Additionally, it can be a means of extra support so that their learning is not limited to a certain amount of minutes or days per week.

In terms of the educational community, there are two main points that come out of this research study: collaboration with other professionals and collaboration with parents. I believe that this needs to be a focus in pre-service education as it is an integral part of the job description for any educator. It is understandable that collaboration will come with experience but I do believe that there can be a focus placed on it in teacher education; incoming teachers can learn proactive strategies towards purposeful collaboration, rather than just learning it through working sporadically on group projects.

Further Study

One of the participants mentioned working with English Language Learners (ELLs) and the difficulty that some of the reading intervention tasks presented for them. She explained that the ELLs may not have the schema to grasp certain vocabulary words so instead of being focused on the elements of reading, they focus on trying to wrap their head around this word that they have no personal reference to. Understanding the perspective of ELL students in these ERI programs and how they can be best supported would be a potential area of research that would be
extremely beneficial to the educational community, especially based within a multicultural city like Toronto.

Drawing on my own views mentioned previously about the potential disconnect that students may feel when they are involved in a pull-out program, I believe that that could be an area of valuable research. Understanding the potential socio-emotional effects of being involved in pull-out programs such as early reading intervention can give insight into whether or not the ways in which these programs are designed is actually helping students. With a growing interest and focus placed on mental health issues, I strongly believe this would be a worthwhile research area to pursue.
References


Appendices

Appendix A: Interview Questions

Hi, my name is Kira Ali. I am a Masters student at the University of Toronto. I am going to ask you a few questions related to early reading intervention. Everything in this interview is being recorded and may be used for future data collection. Thank you for taking the time today and being here. Before we start, do you have any questions?

Background Information

1) Can you tell me about your experience as an educator?
   - How long have you been teaching?
   - What grades have you taught?
   - What is your background in literacy and/or reading, in terms of your teaching?

Beliefs about Early Reading

2) In your own words, how would you describe what early intervention means to you?

Understanding and Experience with ERI

3) What is your current understanding and/or experience with early reading intervention programs/strategies/approaches?

ERI Within the School

4) What early reading intervention approaches are being undertaken in your school?
   
or
   What early reading intervention programs are you currently involved with at your school?
   - Who is involved in the decision-making to implement these programs?
• Who is involved in the actual implementation of these programs?

Process of ERI

5) How do you decide which students would benefit from and/or require early intervention in reading?

Strategies used in ERI

6) What teaching and/or learning is happening through the process of early reading intervention?

7) Is there anything you specifically do with students who participate in early reading intervention that you feel truly works?
   • Why do you believe it works?
   • Can you give an example?

Resources for ERI

8) What resources do you use to implement early reading intervention with the students? (ie. books, programs, technology, etc)

9) Who do you have available in terms of professional individuals, either from within or outside of your school, that help you to implement early reading intervention with the students? (ie. human resources)

10) What external supports do you feel are most important to have in order to implement successful intervention strategies and/or programs for early reading?

Roles in the ERI Process

11) How would you describe the role of yourself and other individuals who may be involved in the early reading intervention process?
12) What is the role of parents in the ERI process?
   - Do you believe parents are an important part of an effective ERI program?

Assessment in ERI Programs

13) How do you know if an early reading intervention program is effective and successful with the given student(s)?

14) What assessment and evaluation strategies do you use with individual students?
Appendix B: Letter of Consent for Interview

Date: ___________________

Dear ___________________,

I am a graduate student at OISE, University of Toronto, and am currently enrolled as a Master of Teaching candidate. I am studying early reading intervention for the purposes of investigating an educational topic as a major assignment for our program. I think that your knowledge and experience will provide insights into this topic.

I am writing a report on this study as a requirement of the Master of Teaching Program. My course instructor who is providing support for the process this year is Dr. Kim MacKinnon. My research supervisor is Shelley Stagg Peterson. The purpose of this requirement is to allow us to become familiar with a variety of ways to do research. My data collection consists of a 30-60 minute interview that will be tape-recorded. I would be grateful if you would allow me to interview you at a place and time convenient to you. I can conduct the interview at your office or workplace, in a public place, or anywhere else that you might prefer.

The contents of this interview will be used for my assignment, which will include a final paper, as well as informal presentations to my classmates and/or potentially at a conference or publication. I will not use your name or anything else that might identify you in my written work, oral presentations, or publications. This information remains confidential. The only people who will have access to my assignment work will be my research supervisor and my course instructor. You are free to change your mind at any time, and to withdraw even after you have consented to participate. You may decline to answer any specific questions. I will destroy the tape recording after the paper has been presented and/or published which may take up to five years after the data has been collected. There are no known risks or benefits to you for assisting in the project, and I will share with you a copy of my notes to ensure accuracy.

Please sign the attached form, if you agree to be interviewed. The second copy is for your records. Thank you very much for your help.

Yours sincerely,

Kira Ali

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Consent Form

I acknowledge that the topic of this interview has been explained to me and that any questions that I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I understand that I can withdraw at any time without penalty.

I have read the letter provided to me by Kira Ali and agree to participate in an interview for the purposes described.

Signature: ______________________________________

Name (printed): ________________________________

Date: ____________________