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## Teachers' Experiences Providing One-on-One Instruction to Struggling Readers

Meghan D. Liebfreund  
Towson University, [mliebfreund@towson.edu](mailto:mliebfreund@towson.edu)

Steven J. Amendum  
University of Delaware, [amendum@udel.edu](mailto:amendum@udel.edu)

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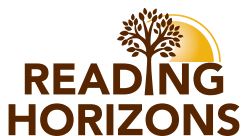


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## Teachers' Experiences Providing One-on-One Instruction to Struggling Readers

Meghan D. Liebfreund  
*Towson University*

Steven J. Amendum  
*University of Delaware*

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### Abstract

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This study examined the experiences of 12 kindergarten, first-, and second-grade classroom teachers who provided one-on-one intervention instruction for struggling readers within the general classroom context. Teachers were interviewed at the end of the project. Interview statements clustered into four themes: Managing One-on-One Intervention, Observing Student Growth, Acquiring Knowledge about Teaching Reading, and Discovering Specific Characteristics of Good Teaching. Results indicated that positioning the classroom teacher at the center of a reading intervention with support may be a beneficial form of professional development. Implications for research and practice are discussed.

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**Keywords:** reading intervention, professional development, one-on-one

Many students in U.S. schools continue to struggle with basic reading. According to the recent National Assessment of Educational Progress data (National Center for Education Statistics, 2015), more than one third of fourth-grade students fail to exhibit a basic level of reading achievement. In addition, students who experience difficulty learning to read typically fall behind their classmates in reading and other content areas (Foorman & Torgesen, 2001; Solis, Miciak, Vaughn, & Fletcher, 2014). As a result, students who struggle to acquire basic reading skills and strategies often require effective early intervention (Jones, Conradi, & Amendum, 2016; Morris, Tyner, & Perney, 2000; Wanzek & Vaughn, 2007).

One-on-one intervention can lead to a reduction in the number of students identified as struggling or learning disabled (Vellutino et al., 1996; Wanzek & Vaughn, 2007). The implementation of individualized instruction, in concert with professional development for the instructor, continuously show promise for students experiencing difficulties with reading (Amendum, 2014; Vernon-Feagans, Kainz, Hedrick, Ginsberg, & Amendum, 2013).

A current instructional shift is to offer early intervention through a three-tiered Response to Intervention (RTI) model (e.g., Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006; Gersten et al., 2008) that operates within the comprehensive Multi-Tier System of Supports. In the RTI model

of instruction, interventions for struggling students become more intensive as the student requires additional support to meet academic or behavioral goals. Usually, high-quality core classroom instruction comprises the first tier and the most intensive interventions, such as special education placement, occur at the highest tier. Instructional intensity is increased by using more systematic and explicit individualized instruction, increasing the frequency or duration of instruction, creating smaller student groupings, and utilizing instructors with greater expertise (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006). The need for smaller instructional groupings, and at times one-on-one instruction, to support struggling readers is fundamental to the design of the RTI model. Therefore, a need exists for classroom teachers to provide individualized instruction to close the learning gap for certain students, especially when additional resources for support outside of the general classroom may be lacking.

Some (e.g., Allington, 2006) have voiced concern that the three-tiered RTI model often utilizes different reading instructional programs at each tier of instruction. As a result, instruction may become fragmented and less effective than more holistic types of instruction in which the curriculum of the classroom is extended into the intervention. In fact, the coordination of classroom instruction and remedial services has the potential to improve and accelerate student learning to narrow the achievement gap (Baker, Fien, & Baker, 2010). Logically, classroom teachers are often in the best position to ensure such cohesion because they are knowledgeable about both grade-level curriculum and an individual student's needs.

Classroom teachers can increase student reading outcomes by implementing one-on-one instruction (Amendum, Vernon-Feagans, & Ginsberg, 2011; Vernon-Feagans et al., 2010; Vernon-Feagans et al., 2013); however, little is known about teachers' experiences while providing this instruction. When classroom teachers do provide reading intervention, they often receive additional training and support that may enhance their overall instruction (Broaddus & Bloodgood, 1999; Nelson-Walker et al., 2013; Vernon-Feagans et al., 2010); however, teacher experiences are often not reported in research studies (e.g., Amendum et al., 2011; Denton et al., 2010; Ferguson, Currie, Paul, & Topping, 2011). If classroom teachers are to provide intensive reading intervention in the classroom setting, a better understanding of their experiences in such a role is necessary. Ultimately, such an understanding will allow researchers and educators alike to facilitate effective professional development and school or classroom practices that support intensive, individualized instruction for the lowest performing readers.

The current study investigated the experiences of kindergarten through second-grade classroom teachers who delivered one-on-one Tier 2 instruction to their struggling readers. In contrast to traditional pull-out intervention services that often lack cohesion with core classroom instruction (Amendum, 2014; Woodward & Talbert Johnson, 2009), the classroom teacher-delivered intervention used here promoted coherence across contexts for teachers and students. This study highlights these teacher experiences and reveals supports that cultivated, and barriers that impeded, the implementation of this instruction by classroom teachers with their neediest readers.

### **Synthesis of Related Literature**

This section explores the research that grounds and supports the current study. As RTI becomes increasingly used in schools, a need exists for more intensive instruction for students not making adequate progress with regular classroom instruction (President's Commission on Excellence in Special Education, 2002). Decreasing group size remains a common way to increase the intensity of an intervention, and some students require one-on-

one instruction (Vaughn et al., 2009). Classroom teachers can be effective at implementing this type of instruction and can gain knowledge about reading development and research-based instruction through this process (e.g., Vernon-Feagans et al., 2010). Determining teacher experiences with this can guide future interventions and work in this area.

### **Response to Intervention**

Implementation of the RTI framework reflects a shift in how students with disabilities should be identified and instructed. RTI is an alternative to the IQ-discrepancy method of identifying a student with a learning disability. RTI focuses on documenting how a student responds to research-based instruction to determine the best supports and instructional placement for the student (Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act, 2004). This framework aims to reduce the number of students identified for special education and provide students with more effective instruction (President's Commission on Excellence in Special Education, 2002).

Multi-Tier System of Supports (MTSS) is a comprehensive framework focused on school improvement to ensure all students are learning and growing through data-based problem solving and research-based best practices. One component of MTSS is RTI, a schoolwide multilevel initiative focused on providing more intensive instruction to students by continually assessing students and placing them into higher tiers of instruction if they fail to make progress and experience success at lower tiers, thus providing students with more intensive supports as needed. Tier 1 focuses on high-quality core classroom instruction and is provided for all students. Tier 2 affords targeted supplemental instruction for students not making adequate progress or still performing below grade-level with Tier 1 instruction. This usually occurs in smaller groups. In Tier 3, students still not making adequate progress with Tier 2 supports are given more individualized, intensive instruction.

Often instruction is made more intensive by increasing the time students receive the intervention, changing the pacing, increasing student–teacher interactions, and/or decreasing the group size (Vaughn, Denton, & Fletcher, 2010). The study described here focuses on the experiences of teachers as they began to provide more intensive Tier 2 instruction to their struggling readers. The Tier 2 instruction used by classroom teachers in this study increased the intensity for students not making progress in small reading groups, which were a part of the core reading program. To increase the intensiveness of the instruction, group size was decreased to only one student to increase the number and quality of student–teacher interactions and tailor instruction to meet the needs of that specific student not making progress in the small-group instruction. Studies focused on the learning outcomes of instruction at the higher tiers have consistently found these interventions reduce the number of students in need of intensive support (e.g., Denton et al., 2013; O'Connor, 2000).

Based on interviews and observations of school personnel at five schools using RTI, several competencies were identified as consistently essential for implementing RTI (Bean & Lillenstein, 2012). Participants reported the necessity of understanding the reading acquisition process and how to deliver effective, research-based instruction. For RTI to work, teachers needed to learn the why behind their instruction. The ability to differentiate instruction was one of the cornerstones of effectively implementing RTI and one of the most challenging aspects. This required the support of principals developing schedules, allocating personnel, and providing resources to classroom teachers. School personnel also needed to collaborate and support each other as lifelong learners to best implement RTI and support student success.

## **One-on-One Instruction**

In addition to regular classroom instruction, struggling readers need high-quality supplemental instruction that can accelerate their learning (Jones et al., 2016). Students most at risk for reading failure require intensive, explicit, and (cognitively and emotionally) supportive small-group or one-on-one instruction that provides individualized scaffolding and feedback (Amendum, 2014; Amendum et al., 2011; Foorman & Torgesen, 2001; Vellutino & Scanlon, 2002). Effective teachers must make instantaneous multilevel decisions to appropriately scaffold struggling readers (Ankrum, Genest, & Belcastro, 2014), and smaller group sizes may enable teachers to do this more successfully.

### **Teacher as Interventionist**

Effective reading interventions should ensure a close match between student achievement, curriculum, and instruction (Barnes & Harlacher, 2008; Vernon-Feagans et al., 2013). The lack of continuity between classroom instruction and pull-out services may result in inconsistent reading instruction that confuses readers who are most at risk (Amendum, 2014). As the main instructor, the classroom teacher is often most knowledgeable of the curriculum and students' instructional needs. Therefore, they are often in the best position to provide reading supports. Also, meeting students' needs in the classroom reduces the stigma often associated with pulling struggling readers out of class (Woodward & Talbert-Johnson, 2009).

Early reading interventions employ a variety of personnel with different levels of expertise. These professionals range from highly trained and experienced researchers and licensed teachers to paraprofessionals, tutors, and volunteers (e.g., Buffalino, Wang, Gómez-Bellengé, & Zalud, 2010; Ferguson et al., 2011; Ritter & Saxon, 2011). Because of the expertise required to deliver individualized reading instruction, licensed teachers often provide more effective instruction than paraprofessionals and volunteers (Ehri, Dreyer, Flugman, & Gross, 2007; Slavin, Lake, Davis, & Madden, 2011). Certified classroom teachers may be more effective than other instructors because scaffolding in the one-on-one context requires knowledge of the task, student, individual learning differences, and the level and type of scaffolding needed (e.g., Ankrum et al., 2014). Since accelerating the progress of struggling readers and closing the achievement gap with peers is the goal of interventions, it is essential that expert teachers be used.

Studies where classroom teachers were recruited to deliver one-on-one instruction to struggling readers demonstrated positive results for students; struggling readers, with this support, reduced the reading achievement gap by making greater gains across the school year than their nonstruggling peers (Amendum, 2014; Amendum et al., 2011; Vernon-Feagans et al., 2010). Furthermore, another study found teachers who used one-on-one instruction with struggling readers formed a relationship with each student that facilitated a deeper understanding of the child's capabilities, and this resulted in the teachers offering increased feedback and encouragement (Broadus & Bloodgood, 1999).

### **Teacher Experiences With One-on-One Instruction**

Teachers who use grouping arrangements that offer opportunities to notice students' strengths and weaknesses are positioned to provide effective targeted instruction and are less likely to refer struggling learners to special education (Woodward & Talbert-Johnson, 2009). However, tensions may arise when teachers implement one-on-one instruction in the regular education setting. Teachers often view the delivery of one-on-one instruction as demanding or difficult and find whole-group instruction more feasible,

even though it may not be ideal for meeting individual student needs (Greenfield, Rinaldi, Proctor, & Cardarelli, 2010; Schumm, Moody, & Vaughn, 2000). Common challenges include scheduling the one-on-one time and the additional planning it involves (Broadus & Bloodgood, 1999). However, when the classroom teacher becomes an integral part of a Tier 2 reading intervention, training and support can be provided that may also enhance core and other tiers of instruction (Solari, Denton, & Haring, 2017). Interventions that use other professionals can fail to affect classroom practice (Shanahan & Barr, 1995). Notably, when the classroom teacher becomes central to the intervention, they develop expertise in reading processes and instruction that is essential to the success of all students.

As the number of students who struggle with reading remains constant and school funding continues to decline, more research is needed that positions classroom teachers at the center of Tier 2 instruction with support and on-going professional development focused on providing more intensive research-based instruction and responsive feedback to diverse students. Studies continue to demonstrate teachers can increase student learning outcomes by implementing one-on-one instruction with support (Amendum, 2014; Amendum et al., 2011; Vellutino & Scanlon, 2002; Vernon-Feagans et al., 2010); however, little is known about teacher experiences while doing this. Therefore, the aim of this study was to explore the experiences of kindergarten, first-, and second-grade classroom teachers as they provided Tier 2 one-on-one instruction to their struggling readers.

## **Methodology**

### **Study Context**

Participants were selected from two larger studies in which 44 teachers at two schools provided a classroom-based Tier 2 one-on-one reading intervention to students performing below grade level 3–5 days per week for 15 minutes each day over one academic year. Once a student receiving the intervention reached a level of proficiency in which they could be successful with regular classroom instruction (Tier 1), the student was transitioned from the intervention and a different student needing support transitioned in to receive the intervention.

The 15-minute intervention included three key components: familiar rereading, word study, and teacher-guided reading with sentence writing. An integral part of the intervention was professional development (PD), and teachers were provided with an initial 2-day PD by the authors focused on the practices included in the three main components, which included videos, modeling, role-playing, and practice with the instructional practices. Following the initial 2 days, teachers received ongoing and embedded professional development through individual weekly coaching sessions with an intervention literacy coach, which occurred during one of the weekly sessions while teachers provided the intervention. After the session, the intervention literacy coach and teacher would engage in a short (usually less than 5 minutes) debriefing session. In total, each teacher received around 26 hours of professional development throughout the year, including the initial PD and embedded coaching.

Teachers in the current study came from two urban elementary (K–5) schools in the same large, southeastern U.S. school district. School 1 consisted of 808 students that were 48% White, 31% African American, 14% Latino/a, and 8% Asian. Approximately 35% of the schools' students received free/reduced lunch, and 71.5% of students performed at or above grade level on the third-grade end of year state mandated reading assessment. School 2 consisted of 891 students that were 69.0% African American, 25.0% Latino/a, 2.9% White, 2.6% Multiracial, 0.4% Asian, and 0.2% American Indian. Approximately

67% of the schools' students received free/reduced lunch and 51.4% of third-grade students performed at or above grade level on the end-of-year state-mandated reading assessment.

The one-on-one intervention that provided the context for the current study was used in addition to the school district curriculum and instruction. The school district literacy curriculum was based on an RTI framework (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006). Tier 1 and Tier 2 instruction were both included in the general classroom using the Daily 5 and CAFE instructional format (Boushey & Moser, 2009a, 2009b, 2012). The goals of these curricula include having students read and write for extended periods of time, participate in focused lessons designed to build independence and stamina, and participate in differentiated instruction matched to individual needs. This daily format included (a) teacher delivery of two to three whole-group lessons for Tier 1, (b) individualized practice time and conferences with 6–12 individual students in Tier 1, and (c) teacher delivery of two to three small-group Tier 2 lessons. Students not profiting from Tier 1/Tier 2 instruction were pulled out of their classrooms for more intensive Tier 3 interventions by a specialized reading teacher. The one-on-one intervention that provides the focus for teachers' experiences in the current study was used by classroom teachers as an additional Tier 2 intervention for students displaying reading difficulty before referring students for Tier 3 intervention outside of the classroom.

### **Selection and Participants**

Twelve teachers were purposefully selected for the study. To ensure a representative and balanced sample, we selected teachers based on school, grade level, and implementation level. We selected six teachers from each school, and within each school the teachers selected represented the full range of grade levels (K, 1, 2) and implementation levels (high, medium, and low numbers of lessons), resulting in the final sample of 12 teachers. Teachers delivered varying levels of lessons based on how consistently they administered the intervention. Because the experiences of teachers who used the intervention more or less frequently may have been different, we grouped teachers into these three categories and ensured they were all represented in the sample. Within the groups of teachers who delivered high, medium, and low numbers of lessons, there was at least one teacher from kindergarten, first, and second grade (see Table 1 for participant demographics and number of lessons completed). The purposeful selection of these teachers guaranteed a manageable amount of data for analysis while also ensuring diverse teacher viewpoints were included.

### **Data Sources**

The primary data source consisted of a set of 12 classroom teacher interviews conducted in May upon the completion of the school year. Each semi-structured interview was conducted in a one-on-one setting, utilized open-ended questions that promoted dialogue (Moustakas, 1994), and lasted approximately 45 minutes to 1 hour. Each interview was conducted by one of the study authors. The overall goal of the interviews was to gain insight into the experiences of teachers delivering one-on-one instruction in their classrooms as a Tier 2 intervention. Interview questions focused on teachers' perceptions of early literacy teaching and learning, experiences with the intervention, instructing at-risk students, and the professional development process. The full interview protocol is provided in the Appendix. Of note, the first six interview questions provided the majority of the data analyzed here. Teachers were encouraged to speak openly and honestly during interviews, and additional probes were included for selected questions to elicit full responses. Moreover, we encouraged teachers to share by actively listening and using general prompts such as "Tell me more about that."

**Table 1**  
**Demographics of Teacher Participants (N = 12)**

<i>Variable</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>
Race		
Black/African American	4	33.3
Asian	0	0.0
White/European America	8	66.7
Other (including Latino/a)	0	0.0
Gender		
Female	11	91.7
Male	1	8.3
Teaching experience		
0–5 years	6	50.0
6–10 years	2	16.7
11–20 years	1	8.3
21–30 years	3	25.0
More than 30 years	0	0.0
Grade taught		
Kindergarten	5	41.7
First grade	4	33.3
Second grade	3	25.0
Highest level of education		
Bachelor's degree	7	58.3
Master's degree	5	41.7
Teachers from School 1	6	50.0
Teachers from School 2	6	50.0
Low number of lessons (median = 23 lessons)	4	33.3
Moderate number of lessons (median = 37 lessons)	4	33.3
High number of lessons (median = 68 lessons)	4	33.3

**Data Analysis**

Data analysis drew on the process used to study participants' experiences of a phenomenon detailed by Moustakas (1994). First, interviews were transcribed verbatim. Second, we read each transcript, highlighting significant statements that provided an understanding of the participants' experiences of one-on-one instruction. Along with a research assistant, we coded three transcripts to determine a common understanding of a significant statement. A statement (words, phrases, and sentences) was considered significant if it had direct relevance to teachers' experiences delivering one-on-one instruction. Finally, after we coded the three interview transcripts together to establish interrater reliability, the remaining nine transcripts were coded independently by at least



two of the researchers. Multiple coders were utilized to ensure all significant statements were identified and included in the analysis.

Once all transcripts were coded for significant statements, we worked together to open code significant statements through sorting the statements into themes called clusters of meaning (Moustakas, 1994). Overlapping statements were combined and repeated statements were removed. The clustered themes were used to develop textual descriptions of participant experiences.

## **Findings**

From the interviews with the 12 classroom teachers, 194 significant statements were extracted. Arranging significant statements into clusters of meaning resulted in four main themes with several subthemes. The four main were (1) managing one-on-one intervention, (2) observing student growth, (3) acquiring knowledge about teaching reading, and (4) discovering specific characteristics of good teaching. Although the main themes and their corresponding subthemes are presented separately below, they interact and inform one another. Figure 1 provides an overview of the themes and subthemes and may prove useful to readers. In this section, each theme is first summarized and presented holistically followed by a presentation of each subtheme.

### **Managing One-on-One Intervention**

Teachers focused on managing their students, instruction, and their schedules to provide one-on-one instruction. At times teachers experienced difficulty managing students not receiving one-on-one intervention, which resulted in high noise levels and teachers shifting their focus from intervention to other students in the class, which often led to a desire for instructional support and a scheduled time for the one-on-one intervention. On occasion, teachers viewed the interaction during one-on-one instruction as negative because it became a barrier to instructing or managing the rest of the students in the classroom. When teachers encountered difficulty managing the classroom, they often expressed a desire for an additional adult, smaller class size, or a small-group format (rather than individual). For example, one teacher stated:

I personally have a really hard time doing it [one-on-one instruction] when the other kids are in the room and it is loud. I know [it's] just 15 minutes. It's difficult to sit down one-on-one with a student in a quiet place and have the other students not have behavior issues and not be walking all around the room.... And I think if the classes were smaller... it will be easier to do more than what I have been doing (see Figure 1).

**Managing the class.** Teachers sometimes experienced difficulty managing the rest of the class while engaged in an interactive one-on-one lesson that required their full attention. Because of the intense concentration necessary for the one-on-one lessons, teachers expressed a desire for uninterrupted time to teach. To make this time, teachers planned an assortment of activities for the rest of the class to engage in during the intervention. These varied and included silent reading, word study activities, journal writing, literacy centers, and independent worksheets. Depending on the classroom, the activities either supported the ongoing core instruction or were “busy work” to fill the time.

Due to the focus required of teachers for one-on-one instruction, the desire for a quiet space to deliver the intervention was a frequently repeated theme. One teacher stated, “I think a lot of times it is just hard because... I like for it to be quiet and for us to be able to work really one-on-one and together.”

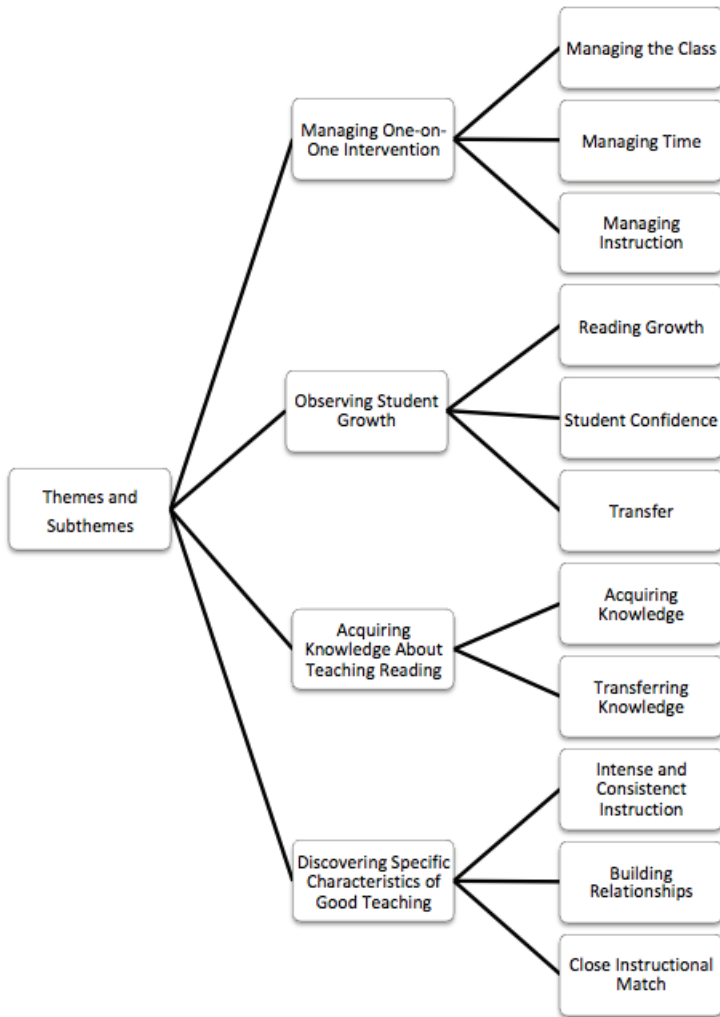


Figure 1. Themes and subthemes derived from the analytic procedure.

Because of difficulties managing the rest of the class as they typically completed independent activities related to the core program, several teachers wanted a paraprofessional or volunteer in their classroom during one-on-one intervention. One teacher reported, “It’s very difficult to do it [one-on-one intervention] unless you actually have a teacher assistant in the room or something. You know, a volunteer or something, because you really are working one-on-one and intensely focused with that one child.”

In addition, classroom management issues led teachers to desire a larger instructional group for the intervention. One teacher shared, “I don’t think for everyone you would want a group, but sometimes it would be easier to manage if you have maybe three kids sitting down and doing the same thing.”

Teachers could overcome issues related to classroom management by planning activities that students could engage in independently or securing another adult to assist

them with monitoring the class. And, notably, many of the teachers were able to successfully manage the classroom during intervention time. Often, these successful activities engaged students in meaningful tasks that were embedded in the day-to-day routines of the classroom.

**Managing time.** At times, some teachers found it difficult to pull students for one-on-one intervention because of the “overall schedule and planning” for the classroom. Teachers felt torn between their many responsibilities and providing one-on-one instruction. One teacher shared that the number of mandated assessments was often a barrier to providing one-on-one instruction:

I just wish that I could do it more. I mean, to be honest, maybe I only got it [one-on-one instruction] in maybe one or two times a week and it’s just hard because kindergarten—until they give us less assessments in kindergarten, which will never happen—it’s just hard to fit in.

Because the many other classroom teacher duties had the potential to become barriers to providing the intervention instruction, some teachers wanted a “sacred time that was always available.” Teachers felt that if they “had a set time...you could be guaranteed that it was going to be done.” In contrast, other teachers wanted the one-on-one time to be flexible. One teacher shared how a flexible time would allow teachers to make accommodations that enabled them to provide one-on-one instruction more. A few teachers wanted “the best of both worlds” by having both a set time and the flexibility to change it.

Although scheduling the 15-minute lesson was at times difficult, teachers who scheduled the time were motivated to continue the intervention. One teacher shared, “Because I have seen the success and I have seen how important it is, I find the time—sometime during the day to do it.”

**Managing instruction.** At times, teachers felt overwhelmed with the sole responsibility of providing reading intervention to their most struggling students, and sometimes they shared the preference for another adult to provide the intervention. Classroom teachers felt they may not have been equipped with the skills and instructional time to teach their lowest readers, sometimes expressing the desire for external supports from reading specialists. The coach who was a part of the embedded PD became an essential resource for teachers desiring more support and knowledge for meeting the needs of their most challenged readers. As teachers gained knowledge and assistance with effective reading instruction, they became less overwhelmed and more comfortable being a support to their neediest readers.

### **Observing Student Growth**

During one-on-one intervention, teachers often watched students make growth as readers. Teachers consistently expressed that they considered this the best part of the experience. Of note, the growth discussed in this theme was described by teachers from their experiences during the one-on-one instruction and not based on specific assessment data. This view is evident in the following quote from one teacher: “Just watching her from the beginning, where she didn’t even know her letter sounds, to now she can blend words together and blend letters to make words. It’s definitely the best part.” While discussing students’ growth, teachers shared how student progress in reading often led to increased student confidence that students could transfer to reading activities beyond the context and specific content of the one-on-one lessons.

**Reading growth.** Through the one-on-one instruction, teachers reported that students learned to independently develop skills and use strategies while reading. One teacher described her observations of a student:

Through the targeted one-on-one instruction, he finally got to a point where he was saying to himself, “That doesn’t sound right, you know. I need to go back and figure out what would make more sense and look at the sounds that are there and match.” Following, tracking with his eyes, and saying what he is seeing and matching those sounds—I think—were all really big things for him. He just needed that specific, very explicit instruction.

In addition to growth in skills and use of strategies, teachers observed students’ progress from prereaders to students that could read more complex and difficult text. Teachers attributed this reading growth to students not just learning skills and using strategies, but also figuring out how to apply strategies when reading a text. One teacher shared that her student “knows what to do with his knowledge now.”

**Student confidence.** One-on-one instruction enabled teachers to provide students with additional attention and instruction, which teachers reported led to student success and increased confidence. Teachers indicated that increased confidence also motivated students to read more on their own and that students looked forward to meeting with the teacher for the one-on-one lessons. Teachers stated that students would prompt teachers about the intervention sessions and ask them when they would be reading together each day.

**Transfer.** Teachers stated that students’ reading growth and their confidence gained during one-on-one instruction often extended beyond that context. As students gained confidence and skills, they began taking additional risks, and teachers reported development in other areas. For example, one teacher said:

So he just feels so much more confident about himself, and that has spewed out into everything. He has formed relationships with his peers. He is playing with them now. He is not by himself. And I even see it in writing.

Teachers also shared experiences when they required students to transfer their learning and apply it during other instruction in the classroom. Through the one-on-one instructional context, teachers became knowledgeable of the students’ abilities and drew on them in other lessons. For example, a teacher explained how knowing the strengths and knowledge of her intervention student helped her encourage the student to use and even teach others his new knowledge. She would tell that student, “Hey, you can show them [other students in the class] how to do this!”

### **Acquiring Knowledge About Teaching Reading**

As teachers learned more specific reading instructional strategies and gained experience using those strategies for one-on-one instruction, teachers’ knowledge shifted from declarative to procedural and finally, in some cases, to conditional. The more teachers experienced deeper knowledge of reading instruction, the more they often discovered what they did not know. This led teachers to the realization that teaching reading is difficult and complex. In addition, teachers became aware of knowledge they already possessed and could connect it to their new learning. Teachers often spoke about transferring their new or deepened knowledge into their small- and whole-group reading instruction. More specifically, teachers wanted to utilize their knowledge about word-level instruction, reading comprehension strategies, and ways to meet the needs of diverse learners.

**Acquiring knowledge.** Teachers indicated that the one-on-one intervention instruction with professional development and weekly coaching provided teachers with information about teaching reading that they did not possess. One teacher said, “I wish I had it [one-on-one intervention experience] in college so that I could have been doing it all the way from the beginning.” Another teacher shared how it helped her become a better teacher:

I still felt like before [one-on-one instruction] I was not really an effective reading teacher. I felt like it provided me with sort of the foundation of what I needed to be doing with those kids who were having trouble learning how to read.

Often, teachers possessed declarative knowledge needed for the one-on-one instruction, but the procedural and conditional knowledge gained through working one-on-one with a student was new to them. For example, one teacher knew about the practice of taking anecdotal notes, but through the experience of providing one-on-one instruction learned “what the heck to write down and why is that important and why are those connections not being made.”

As teachers acquired and deepened their teaching practice, they realized how difficult and complex reading instruction often is, particularly for struggling readers. This feeling was evident when a teacher explained, “I think the more I learn about teaching reading sometimes it seems like it gets more difficult.” Teachers also realized how much time high-quality instruction takes and how teachers must be very intentional and explicit in the instruction they provide to support a struggling reader.

**Transferring knowledge.** Teachers indicated that they utilized the knowledge they acquired through the one-on-one intervention instruction to teach reading beyond the intervention setting. Elements of the one-on-one instructional sessions were used to provide additional targeted instruction to meet the needs of specific students. In addition, teachers applied the knowledge they gained about teaching reading during the one-on-one context to their whole-group reading instruction.

### **Discovering Specific Characteristics of Good Teaching**

Classroom teachers’ experiences with one-on-one intervention instruction promoted and developed specific characteristics of good teaching that transcended literacy instruction. Specifically, teachers commented on the importance of intense and consistent instruction, cultivating relationships with students, and meeting specific student needs through a close instructional match.

**Intense and consistent instruction.** Through providing intervention instruction, teachers learned that students, especially those experiencing difficulty, need consistent instruction. One teacher reported, “I think the consistency of those routines for those kids that struggle—I think they really latch onto that.” Furthermore, teachers found that their instruction must be intense to see student progress. One teacher highlighted this experience: “I probably did the same thing 10 days in a row; you know, it seems like, but it took that.” Often, this intense instruction required teachers to continuously support students as they worked on the same skill for multiple intervention sessions.

**Building relationships.** The structure of the one-on-one instruction enabled teachers to build special relationships with students that provided “that extra nurturing, that extra love” that some students needed. The relationship was compared to that of “a mother and a child reading side by side” by one teacher because the one-on-one setting “just puts a positive note on reading.”

**Close instructional match.** Teachers discussed that by working one on one with students during instruction, they could better identify and meet the specific needs of individual students. The one-on-one instruction “shed some light on the benefits of being able to really focus on individual needs of students.” By identifying a student’s specific needs and designing intervention instruction to meet those needs, teachers were able to provide learning experiences matched to students. One teacher stated,

Being able to sit down and pick a word list that was specific for her or pick activities that were just for her, and you can tell she got the stuff because it wasn’t anything that was over her head or was too easy for her. It was just right and was what she needed.

### **Discussion**

While prior studies have shown the efficacy of classroom-based teacher-provided one-on-one instruction (Amendum, 2014; Amendum et al., 2011; Vellutino & Scanlon, 2002; Vernon-Feagans et al., 2010), the experiences of the classroom teachers providing such instruction are rarely reported. These experiences must be understood to provide teachers with the support they require to use this type of instruction. To address this gap in the literature, the current study highlights 12 classroom teachers’ experiences as they provided one-on-one instruction for struggling readers in the general classroom context. Participant interview statements clustered into four main themes. Each theme is discussed below as it relates to prior research, and then implications for future research and practice are explored.

### **Findings and Prior Research**

**Managing one-on-one intervention.** In the first theme, teachers shared their experiences managing their class, the one-on-one instruction, and their schedules. The intense focus required from teachers to work one on one with a struggling student often led teachers to seek additional support. For example, to help with classroom management, teachers sometimes expressed the desire for a smaller class size, a larger intervention group, or another adult to monitor the classroom. Other researchers have also noted that one-on-one instruction may be demanding for teachers and that teachers may find larger instructional groups more feasible even though such a group size may not be ideal (e.g., Schumm et al., 2000). Because of management concerns, teachers in our study, like researchers (e.g., Elbaum, Vaughn, Hughes, & Moody, 2000; Ross & Begeny, 2011; Vaughn et al., 2003), debated the benefits of one-on-one instruction compared with small-group instruction. Teachers sometimes felt that the tradeoff of a larger intervention group for a smaller classroom group would benefit overall classroom management and provide the intervention instruction to more students. Successful classroom management was an integral characteristic of instruction that supported learning for all students. By effectively managing the rest of the class while providing the one-on-one instruction, teachers were able to have more positive experiences and feel that the instruction was beneficial for all learners in the class.

Findings from the current study are similar to other studies of one-on-one instruction where teachers also experienced some difficulty managing their time and scheduling the instruction (e.g., Broaddus & Bloodgood, 1999). As a result, teachers’ views were mixed; most desired either a scheduled time to ensure the intervention instruction occurred or a flexible time that could be adapted based on the needs and circumstances of the instructional day. Prior research indicates teachers need support to effectively

differentiate instruction within the RTI framework (Bean & Lillenstein, 2012). Similarly, the teachers in this study often desired and requested support from school leaders with developing schedules to ensure the one-on-one instruction occurred, allocating personnel to support with classroom management, and acquiring instructional materials such as books and technology.

**Observing student growth.** The second theme centered on teachers' experiences watching students grow in their reading abilities and confidence. In addition, student growth transferred outside of the context of the one-on-one lesson into other content areas and instructional formats. These findings echo prior studies that reported quantitatively that struggling readers, with one-on-one support, can make large literacy gains and reduce the need for more intensive support at higher tiers of instruction (Amendum, 2014; Amendum et al., 2011; Denton et al., 2013; Vernon-Feagans et al., 2013). The current study adds to these findings by relating teacher-reported experiences of this growth. In addition, teachers described student growth in important areas such as confidence and motivation that are essential to literacy success but typically undocumented in quantitative studies.

**Acquiring knowledge about teaching reading.** In the third theme, teachers reported that they deepened their knowledge about teaching reading by facilitating one struggling student's development as a reader during one-on-one instruction. Teachers moved from declarative knowledge about reading instruction to procedural and even conditional knowledge that enabled them to effectively implement instruction that was responsive to individual students' needs. Teachers implementing the RTI framework often note they require a deeper understanding of the reading acquisition process and the why behind their instruction (Bean & Lillenstein, 2012). Contrary to the current study, interventions that use professionals other than the classroom teacher often fail to affect classroom practice (Shanahan & Barr, 1995).

Conversely, this study highlights the changes to classroom practice that teachers reported due to their involvement in one-on-one intervention. Teachers' stated their knowledge about literacy teaching and learning often transferred outside of the context of the one-on-one intervention into core and other remedial instruction (Solari et al., 2017). Positioning the classroom teacher at the center of one-on-one instruction that provides PD can enhance teacher knowledge and core instruction, a primary goal of MTSS and RTI. Teachers were able to draw on their knowledge of students and the instruction that occurred in the classroom and the one-on-one intervention to plan and implement seamless instruction. Unlike traditional pull-out intervention services that may lack continuity across contexts and could confuse struggling readers (Amendum, 2014; Woodward & Talbert-Johnson, 2009), the intervention in the current study promoted cohesion across contexts for teachers and students.

**Discovering specific characteristics of good teaching.** The final theme related to the attributes of good instruction, especially for learners who had trouble. These attributes included intense and consistent instruction, a close instructional match with a student's needs, and the importance of building relationships. Overall, teachers require knowledge on how to deliver effective, research-based instruction (Bean & Lillenstein, 2012). Teachers reported building strong relationships with students that enabled them to focus on the strengths of struggling readers instead of on deficits (Broaddus & Bloodgood, 1999) while providing high-quality instruction.

### **Implications for Research and Practice**

The findings from the current study have important implications for both research

and practice. Future research should focus on several areas. First, this study demonstrates that having classroom teachers serve as the interventionist for struggling students in Tier 2 is both feasible for teachers and beneficial for students. A need exists for more intervention studies that utilize the classroom teacher to further investigate the practicality and benefits of such instructional interventions. In addition, future studies should measure both student and teacher growth to document the effects of classroom-based intervention on both teacher pedagogy and content knowledge, as well as student learning, including affective measures of constructs such as self-efficacy and motivation. Second, researchers should further examine different types of classroom-based interventions, including variations in instruction and group size. Using varied study designs, particularly those with treatment and comparison groups, will provide additional context to the literature on classroom-based intervention. Finally, future studies should focus on diverse participants and contexts. It is possible to examine the effects of advanced teaching degrees in reading, years of experience, core instruction, and other factors to determine their influence on teacher experiences providing this type of instruction.

For instructional practice, teachers stated that assistance with classroom management would support effective implementation of one-on-one intervention instruction. While a second adult focused on classroom management might be helpful to teachers, steps should be taken to assist teachers with management because additional personnel may not be feasible given the structure and financial situation of schools. Instead, teachers would benefit from strategies and support for planning engaging classroom routines students could complete independently, since this is essential for effective instruction.

In the current study, teachers were also concerned about scheduling intervention sessions during their instructional day. Scheduling decisions may need to be made intentionally at either the classroom or school level to ensure consistent implementation. Of note, teachers also had concerns with managing the one-on-one instructional time. Some felt the intervention placed them as the primary—and at times only—resource for struggling readers. Therefore, schools should still employ a literacy coach and/or reading specialist that can support teachers and students. Overall, making one-on-one instruction part of the school culture and expectations can support the implementation of such an intervention.

Classroom-based intervention can also provide teachers with high-quality, job-embedded professional learning. In the current study teachers received weekly job-embedded coaching and debriefing with an intervention literacy coach while delivering the instruction with a student. Teachers often described watching these students grow as the best part of the one-on-one instructional intervention. Through this experience, teachers learned about literacy acquisition and the instructional supports required. In addition, when teachers saw the positive effects of their instruction, they were motivated to continue the intervention and persist through the challenges. Thus, positioning the classroom teacher at the center of an intervention can support both student and teacher growth. Interestingly, with the classroom teacher as interventionist, the application of that professional learning provided a positive influence on students.

### **Limitations**

As with all studies, the study presented here has limitations. First, this study included only two schools that both used the same intervention and professional development program. The specific teachers interviewed, the school context, the students, and the intervention used influenced the experiences of teachers reported in this study. These experiences cannot be separated from the context in which they were situated,



which limits the generalizability of the study. Second, teachers were interviewed by the same researchers who provided them with professional development and materials for the intervention. While this may have increased the comfort level of teachers to share information, it may have also influenced their responses.

### Conclusion

In today's primary classrooms, teachers have many responsibilities, including providing effective Tier 2 instruction for their students who struggle with reading. The current study described the experiences of kindergarten through second-grade classroom teachers who delivered one-on-one instruction to their struggling readers, and it highlighted both strengths and barriers related to the implementation of this intervention instruction. Through these instructional experiences, classroom teachers were able to provide intensive, one-on-one Tier 2 instruction until students were prepared for success in regular classroom instruction. The experiences of classroom teachers documented here highlight the complex and challenging process; however, students and teachers left the intervention having experienced positive change, likely due to the combination of conducting intervention instruction and receiving embedded professional development.

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**Appendix**  
**End-of-Year Interview Protocol**

1. Tell me about your experiences with [this intervention].
2. What is the best part of [this intervention]?
3. What would you change about [this intervention]?
4. Do you think your students benefitted from [this intervention]? If so how? If not, why not?
5. Would you use [this intervention] again?
6. Did you learn anything from working with [this intervention], or was it stuff you knew?
7. How do you think children learn to read?
8. How do you approach teaching reading?
9. Do you expect all of your current students will learn to read by the end of this school year (or read on benchmark in first or second grade)?  
IF NO—How come? What prevents them?
10. Do you typically expect to have students in your class you consider to be “at risk”?  
IF YES:
  - What does “at risk” mean to you?
  - How is/is teaching an “at risk” student different than teaching a child who is not “at risk”?
  - To what extent does your instruction impact your students who are “at-risk” and your students who are not “at risk”?IF NO:
  - What is “at risk” and why do you believe your students are not in this category?
  - To what extent does your instruction impact your students?
11. Anything that I didn’t ask that you want to tell me?

### **About the Authors**

Meghan Liebfreund is an assistant professor in the Elementary Education Department at Towson University, where she works predominately in the Graduate Reading Program. Meghan's research focuses on better understanding and supporting students who experience difficulty with reading, especially in the area of comprehension. Formerly, she taught diverse learners as an elementary classroom teacher.

Steve Amendum is an associate professor in the School of Education at the University of Delaware, where he teaches undergraduate and graduate courses on literacy research, instruction, and development. His research areas include early reading intervention, reading development and instruction for English learners, and effective classroom literacy instruction. Steve is a former K–2 classroom teacher and literacy coach.