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### Publication Date

2011

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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA  
RIVERSIDE

High School Reading Intervention in the Special Education Classroom

A Dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction  
of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

Education

by

Vanessa Anne Goodwin

June 2011

Dissertation Committee:  
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2011

The Dissertation of Vanessa Anne Goodwin is approved:

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Committee Chairperson

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## ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

High School Reading Intervention in the Special Education Classroom

By

Vanessa Anne Goodwin

Doctor of Philosophy, Graduate School of Education  
University of California, Riverside, June 2011  
Dr. Rollanda E. O'Connor, Chairperson

Providing reading intervention for adolescent students is a complicated process. Multiple factors specific to high school settings affect the process, including: curriculum selection, designating a class period (core or elective), identifying students, allocating highly qualified teachers, and choosing effective strategies. Confounding these variables is the influence of non-academic skills that are also frequently deficient for students with learning disabilities (LD) such as organization, independence, self-advocacy, and self-esteem.

This study investigated practices for teaching reading to high school students with special needs through a Tier 3 core-replacement English-language Arts (ELA) program at 2 high schools and within the context of district planning. Qualitative methods were used, including observation, interview, and document review. Although reading intervention is defined legally in terms of NCLB (2002) and IDEA (2004), what is meant by “reading intervention” in schools and classrooms is continually made and remade by participants. Special education practitioners negotiate, prioritize, and adapt practices with a sometimes startling rapidity that is tied to the influence of IDEA and NCLB, and also local factors,

including district and school policies, understanding of their role, and student-teacher interactions.

ABC and XYZ High Schools were located in Mission School District in southern California. Mission employed an RTI model to provide reading intervention (Fuchs et al., 2007). Reading difficulties are a substantial concern for older students and there is not a strong a literature base for this population (Denton et al., 2008) or about Tier 3 interventions (Vaughn et al., 2011).

Mission purchased a scripted program for use in high school special education classrooms. Results indicated that there was great variety in how special education teachers defined their many roles and how they allocated class time for: 1) use of the scripted curriculum, 2) preparation for high stakes tests, and 3) addressing IEP goals. Teachers in the study tended to adapt the program to fit their classroom practices rather than changing their teaching behaviors to align to the script. Implications for school districts include problems associated with lack of fidelity of program implementation in public school settings. Even with fidelity procedures in place, teachers' buy-in to the program and their own prioritizing of the roles of special education teachers strongly influenced how classes were conducted.

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ABC and XYZ High Schools were located in Mission School District in southern California. Like many high schools throughout the nation, they have fallen under Program Improvement (PI) provisions of No Child Left Behind (NCLB, 2002). If the school teams are unable to improve student scores on high stakes accountability testing they might face the threat of corrective action, such as alternative governance and replacement of administrators and faculty.

The Special Education Departments at ABC and XYZ High Schools have been serving students with special needs for the last three decades in primarily self-contained classrooms. Students who have been identified for special education were assessed by a multi-disciplinary team, including a school psychologist and special education teacher, to determine relative strengths and areas of need. Services to support each student's specific educational needs were agreed to through an Individual Education Plan (IEP) meeting. This process mirrors how special education has been done in many schools across America since the Education of All Handicapped Children Act of 1975 stipulated that states develop and implement policies that assure a free appropriate public education (FAPE) to all children with disabilities (PL 94-142, 1975). The high schools in Mission conducted business as usual for students in special education programs until 2006 much as they always had, and similarly to schools across the nation. After both high schools entered PI in 2006, and in the wake of district-wide reform to implement a multi-tiered intervention system for all struggling readers, the Special Education Departments at these high schools needed to adapt to new laws, new district policies, and find ways to reinvent themselves.

ABC and XYZ High Schools and their host school district were grappling with the same dilemmas as many other high schools in the nation. What is special about special education? What are the goals educators hope to meet by providing services to students with special needs? Should special education focus on remediation of deficit skills, or work to compensate for students' weaknesses in order to gain access to grade-level content that will be assessed on high stakes tests? What curriculum should be taught? Should it be the same as or different from curriculum for typical students? How will instruction differ from the general education setting? How do educators prioritize and make decisions about how to best meet the diverse needs of its special education population?

Surprisingly little agreement is voiced regarding answers to these seemingly fundamental questions in the field of education (Baker & Zigmond, 1995; Fuchs & Fuchs, 1995). One possible reason is that special education is governed by two different federal laws, each espousing different principles and ideals. These two laws are sometimes at odds with each other and can act as mutually exclusive forces. Each law prioritizes aspects of student need based on unique ideological principles, aiming at different outcomes that direct the educational landscape for students. Special education practitioners must identify, navigate, and negotiate their role in the slippery slope between what each of these two laws demands of special education programming, what kinds of curricular choices are made to meet these demands, and how teachers and students actually enact curriculum in the classroom.

The first law, No Child Left Behind (NCLB, 2002), governs the entire education system. It is designed to close the achievement gap by ensuring that *all* children attain minimum proficiency on content standards set forth by each state and evaluated through high stakes testing. Student outcomes are measured by state accountability testing with consequences for individual students, the schools, and the school district if adequate progress is not made each year. NCLB designates services designed to address students' academic achievement during their K-12 school years. NCLB interprets the needs of all students, with and without disabilities, as roughly equivalent; acquisition of minimum proficiency on reading, writing, and math skills. School personnel are responsible for ensuring that all students meet a basic level of academic proficiency.

The second law, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 2004), oversees special education specifically. IDEA, by its very principles, rejects a "one size fits all" approach. Through the development of an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) each *individual* student's needs are addressed through a process of specific assessment, description of present levels of performance, and goals that are designed to target student deficits through services stipulated by an IEP team and with consensus of a group of stakeholders. Outcomes for students extend beyond the K-12 school-aged years. IEPs must include goals that undergird not only success during school, they also must facilitate transition into the post-secondary world of work, higher education, vocation, and life skills. Educational programming is intended to identify each student's areas of deficit and to provide strategic instruction, remediation, and compensatory strategies to ameliorate the effect of disability and to increase student success.

A significant concern that is central to both laws is increasing students' reading abilities. Increasing reading proficiency is aligned to purposes established by each law: closing the achievement gap (NCLB, 2002), and targeting student deficits (IDEA, 2004). At first blush, interventions to increase reading skills would appear to intersect these two laws. NCLB stipulates use of scientifically-based practices to target the essential components of reading instruction for all students (NCLB, 2002). Intervention to remediate reading is also a top priority for allocation of special education services. As many as 5 -10% of school-aged children have a learning disability (Kavale & Forness, 1998) with an estimated 80% of those demonstrating significant difficulties in reading (Lyon et al., 2001). IDEA 2004 in fact recommends use of a Response to Intervention (RTI) model in the general education setting, based upon research-supported practices, to help identify students suspected of having a learning disability. Teaching students to read, it would appear at least superficially, is one educational goal in which both governing laws, NCLB and IDEA, have common ground.

In Mission School District, leadership committees began the process of adopting a multi-tiered RTI model to provide reading intervention for all struggling readers. A 3-Tier model for RTI is described by Fuchs and colleagues as including primary intervention (Tier 1), pull-out supplemental intervention (Tier 2), and intensive tertiary intervention, often denoting special education or core-replacement services (Fuchs, Compton, Fuchs, Bryan, & Davis, 2007). Much of the literature has focused on Tier 2 supplementary interventions and on students early in their education (grades K-3). However, reading difficulties are a substantial concern for older students and there is not

as strong a literature base for this population (Denton, Wexler, Vaughn, & Bryan, 2008). The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) reported in 2007 that 69% of eighth graders were unable to comprehend grade level reading as they embarked on high school careers (NAEP, 2007). There is also much less research that addresses Tier 3 intervention, the most intensive level for students with significant reading difficulties (Vaughn et al., 2011). The practical problem that Mission leadership faced was one with which many high schools contend; finding ways to intervene with their most struggling readings at the Tier 3 level. Although there are few guidelines for reading interventions for older students, consequences for students and school districts are dire, and districts struggle to put workable policies in place.

Providing reading intervention for adolescent students is a complicated process. Multiple factors specific to providing intervention in the high school setting affect the process of teaching reading, including what content is taught (curriculum), where and when instruction is to take place, how students are identified for intervention, who teaches reading, and with which strategies. Confounding these already complex variables is the sizable influence of non-academic skills that are also frequently deficient for students with learning disabilities (LD) such as organization, independence, self-advocacy, productive peer and teacher relationships, and low academic confidence and self-esteem. Social skills deficits, such as these, adversely affect learning for students with LD not only during school, but lifelong and in multiple adult settings (Pierson, Carter, Lane, & Glaeser, 2008; Scanlon, 1994). Educators are faced with the dilemma



of organizing and executing programs, prioritizing learning needs, and attending to the multi-faceted, complex learning process of teaching reading to struggling students.

This study investigated practices for teaching reading to high school students with special needs at the classroom level through a core-replacement, Tier 3 reading model, and within the context of school and district RTI planning. Although reading intervention is defined legally in terms of NCLB (2002) and IDEA (2004), what is meant by “reading intervention” in schools and classrooms is continually made and remade by the participants in classes, schools, and the school district. Special education practitioners negotiate, prioritize, and adapt practices daily in the classroom with a sometimes startling rapidity that is tied to not only the influence of IDEA and NCLB, but also local factors, including district and school policies, teachers’ understanding of their role, and student-teacher interactions. Geertz explains that qualitative methods attempt to investigate the work done by participants, including daily interactions, symbolic forms used for communication and to perpetuate and develop knowledge, and interpreting (and reinterpreting) historical patterns of meaning. This work is done both locally, in this case the classroom and school, and also within the wider context of meaningful structures, in this case, the school district and in response to federal law (Geertz, 1972). Qualitative methods are appropriate for this study.

### **Teaching Reading**

Helping students acquire adequate reading comprehension skills during their K-12 school years is a substantial concern for all educators, and especially problematic for

students with LD. According to Mastropieri, Scruggs, and Graetz (2003), reading is the major problem area for most students with learning disabilities. In fact, 90% of students with learning disabilities demonstrate significant difficulties learning to read (Lyon, 1996; Vaughn, Levy, Coleman, & Bos, 2002). Without intervention, difficulties can persist throughout the lifespan and have a negative impact on future success in the workplace and higher education settings (Faggella-Luby & Deshler, 2008).

The majority of research being conducted with struggling readers, many of whom carry an LD label, is conducted using a Tier 2 pull-out RTI model, with younger students, and with an experimental or quasi-experimental design. These studies have contributed to the fields of research and practice. We now know, for example, that use of an RTI model for teaching reading, based upon identifying students who are struggling academically, providing intervention that targets deficit skills, and using ongoing progress monitoring data to determine whether adequate change is being made in performance (Gresham, 2007), can have strong, positive, and lasting results in the early elementary years (Gresham, 2007; Vaughn, Wanzek, Linan-Thompson, & Murray, 2007; Vellutino, Scanlon, & Lyon, 2000). With each finding, however, new questions emerge. For example, the preponderance of studies are conducted with early elementary students, often in kindergarten or first grade (Sanchez, 2010). Far fewer studies have been conducted with older children and less is known about effective reading intervention in the middle and high school settings (Denton et al., 2008). Meta-analysis findings suggest that research using an RTI model for older students is limited and positive results tend to be less conclusive the older students get. Elementary students show greater gains than

middle school students, and middle school students show greater gains than high school students (Scammacca et al., 2007).

Most reading intervention studies use an experimental design to determine the most effective intervention methods needed to effect significant gains, including: choice of curriculum (what to teach, or content), teaching methods and strategies (how the content is delivered), and how much time needs to be dedicated (intensity, including frequency and duration). Intervention itself is often delivered as a pull-out service in place of or in addition to classroom instruction so that curriculum, amount of time, student responses, and teaching strategies can be controlled and treated as variables, and delivery can be monitored for reliability and fidelity.

### **Intervention Decision-Making**

Intensity of intervention, including frequency (how many times a week) and duration (how long each session will be), is one of the most critical variables when designing intervention for maximum efficiency (Faggella-Luby & Deshler, 2008; Roberts, Torgesen, Boardman, & Scammacca, 2008). Many studies conducted with younger, struggling readers use a pull-out method for intervention. In other words, students are pulled-out of their regular class, ideally during non-reading instruction, and provided with direct instruction individually or in small groups by a trained interventionist. Studies with pull-out designs for younger students repeatedly demonstrate that interventions in reading can and do affect core reading skills for young children when given for substantial length (time per each tutor session) and adequate

duration (weeks or months). For example, Vaughn and colleagues reported positive outcomes for both high and low responders in 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> grades in relation to duration of intervention (Vaughn et al., 2007). High responders were those students who made adequate gains when provided with direct pull-out intervention for 10-20 weeks and could continue with classroom instruction alone. Low-responders, those whose gains were below study parameters, received additional, expanded intervention in second grade for 50 minutes a day. Although low responders did not meet all grade-level criteria, they demonstrated substantial gains over the control group (identified as at-risk by the same criteria, but who received no intervention). Positive effects were also demonstrated by Torgesen and colleagues after intensive tutoring, again, delivered through pull-out (Tier 2). One key factor attributed by the authors to the success of this reading intervention was that tutoring was provided during times of the day that did not conflict with regular reading instruction, thereby adding instructional time for reading tasks (Torgesen, Alexander, Wagner, Rashotte, Voeller, Conway, et al. 2001).

Determining how and when to deliver reading intervention in the high school setting presents some unique challenges. Elementary classrooms are generally organized with a single teacher instructing multiple subjects throughout the day. While instructional time is always valuable, coordination with a single teacher who has primary management control over the daily schedule might be less challenging than attempting to do so at the high school with six and sometimes seven teachers each only having the student for 40-55 minutes a day.

Making scheduling even more difficult, the majority of classes in high school are required for state-set minimum graduation requirements, and according to the California Department of Education (CDE), these “A-G” requirements are set for entry to the Cal-State and University of California school systems (CDE, 2010). Even replacing electives with intervention is problematic, as many schools include elective domains (i.e. practical or fine arts) as district-level graduation requirements and some satisfy A-G requirements. For example, both UC and Cal-State systems require a visual or performing art and two years of foreign language. Electives also provide potentially valuable vocational training, such as technology and cooking, and opportunities to learn a second language which might increase students’ later employability. Moreover, electives represent a class of the student’s own choosing. For students who struggle academically, these might be the only subjects in which the student attains success, and motivation is identified as a critical factor for teaching reading at the high school level (Torgesen et al., 2007).

Further, high school teachers are hired on the basis of subject matter proficiency as stipulated by NCLB (2002). In order to be highly qualified, teachers must fulfill subject matter competencies, which have become increasingly more demanding, and are hired to teach specific subjects. Also under NCLB, schools are held accountable for student performance in achieving subject-matter proficiency as part of Annual Yearly Progress (AYP) reporting. To address NCLB accountability, each state created grade-level content standards to verify that student progress is being made. The Standardized Testing and Reporting (STAR) program identifies students as Advanced, Proficient, Basic, Below Basic, and Far Below Basic (CDE, 2008) for reading and math in grades 2-

11 and is aligned to grade-level content standards (NCLB, 2002). Unique to the high school setting is the contribution of exit exam scores to AYP accountability reporting for schools. For example, students' scores on the California High School Exit Exam (CAHSEE) constitute 18% of total AYP scores. High school practitioners are progressively more pressured to intervene not just to increase reading skills, but also to provide students with content knowledge and test-taking skills that they will need to be successful on high stakes tests. There is growing concern that high stakes testing is not fair for struggling readers. By the time these students reach high school, years of accumulated poor reading have adversely affected their ability to access the scope and quantity of information that they need in order to succeed on state testing and to successfully complete the exit exam for graduation (Faggella-Luby & Deshler, 2008; Solórzano, 2008). Interventions for reading geared toward increasing high stakes test scores must also somehow compensate for gaps in prior knowledge.

High school practitioners are required to maintain compliance with the IDEA (2004) for students receiving special education services through an IEP. The purpose of special education is multifaceted. Students with special needs in the public school system must be included in settings with their typical peers as often as possible and also have an IEP with goals that address each student's unique educational needs. These goals address academic deficits, including reading decoding and comprehension, and also non-academic skills to bolster successful transition to adult settings after high school. Academic strengths and deficits are assessed using standardized achievement tests every three years for the student's triennial IEP meeting when continued eligibility for special

education services is evaluated. In the era of accountability, results from high stakes testing are also frequently used to evaluate student progress, as are informal anecdotal data and teacher-made assessments from classes. Reading goals may or may not be aligned with state standards for any specific age range, often depending upon local district policy. Reading goals address standards, but might be either written off-grade level and at the student's instructional level, or using a modified grade-level standard, for example addressing only part of a standard, substantially altering instruction, or modifying requirements for student product.

High school practitioners contend with several problems as they work to meet the needs of their students with special education services. Students with special needs may not have had the same opportunity to learn as their typical peers (Solórzano, 2008). Students taught by a special education teacher in a self-contained special day class (SDC) may receive instruction designed to address IEP goals. Although standards are addressed in SDC, it might not be in the same order or as comprehensive as in a general education class. Instruction and student product are differentiated in SDC and frequently this means that students with special needs take fewer tests, write fewer papers, and read fewer books. IEP goals also address non-academic areas (not based on an academic standard), including transition goals and the development of social skills to support success during high school and beyond into adult settings. Students with special needs who receive the majority of their instruction in the general education setting with typical peers still have IEP goals that are written by and addressed by a Resource Specialist Program (RSP) case carrier. These teachers have even less direct time with the students

they serve. Precious time that teachers have with students on their case loads during the instructional day or in a self-contained classroom must attend to a variety of tasks: remediate reading deficits, address each student's academic and non-academic IEP goals, and cover content required for high stakes tests that students in SDC might not have been exposed to, such as standards-aligned content, test-taking strategies, and essay writing.

Decision-makers are faced with dilemmas unique to the high school setting. They have to find the time during the high school day in which to provide intervention of adequate intensity (Roberts et al., 2008) that does not conflict with a student's required coursework for graduation or eligibility for college entry (CDE, 2010). They are expected to adequately cover standards-aligned content in order to sufficiently prepare students for state high stakes testing (NCLB, 2002) including in California a comprehensive exit exam (CDE, 2008), and allocate the scarce resource of highly qualified teachers to teach intervention classes. Intervention must address foundational reading skills that have been inadequately covered (Solórzano, 2008) and skills that might be deficient despite adequate instruction (Torgesen, 2005). For students with IEPs, there must also be time provided during the school day for students to work on their IEP goals with their special education case carriers. Intervention must prepare students who have been in self-contained classes to perform activities that they might not have had adequate opportunity to practice, but will nevertheless be tested on for high stakes tests.

The meaning of reading intervention, how it is constructed and enacted in a particular context (such as in a classroom with students, teachers, and curriculum) must be considered within the wider social context in which it operates, including the school



leadership and district-level processes for decision-making (Erickson, 1986). Inevitably, questions arise about how high school practitioners might contend with these various demands at the district and school level. Who makes decisions regarding allocation of scarce resources, such as which classes are negotiable within students' schedules, when and how intervention will be delivered, what curriculum will be used, and which teachers might be assigned to teach it? The underlying assumption in addressing these questions is that decisions are made intentionally by identification of a problem, careful consideration of alternatives, and evaluation of consequences of each alternative. Another, more daunting possibility arises when school decisions are investigated: are these decisions made actively at all? Cohen, March, and Olsen (1972) propose in a theory of organized anarchies that both public and educational settings are notorious for chaotic decision-making. Decisions, the authors suggest, are not process-oriented and deliberate, but rather a retro-fit after the fact of practices with the problems that they might be made to address.

Cohen and colleagues explain that decisions in organizations are not always organized processes, which might begin with a particular problem and systematically employ procedures to locate a solution. Instead, the authors suggest that "participants arrive at an interpretation of what they are doing and what they have done while in the process of doing it," (Cohen, et al., 1972, p. 2). The authors indicate that public and educational organizations are especially prone to fitting the description of an organized anarchy. Although the theory is discussed by the authors in terms of public institutions of higher education, it is also a useful tool for considering the decision-making at Mission

School District. The authors explain that the trash can model is a specific kind of organizational anarchy in which the interpretation or outcome of a problem results from several independent streams within the organization. For example, problems might be within or outside the institution. In this case, the district has several problems that operate relatively independent of each other, including: implement a multi-tiered RTI model to increase reading skills and increase high stakes test scores, while continuing to fulfill legal IEP requirements. These problems can be further broken down to issues that contribute to the complexity of each. For example, increasing students' high stakes test scores includes attending to gaps in prior knowledge, teaching test-taking strategies, and locating and allocating a scarce resource (time) to do so. Decisions must also be made about the nature of intervention. A multi-tiered RTI model includes three levels of intervention. How can classroom instruction be bolstered to increase student achievement in Tier 1? How will a Tier 2 pull-out intervention work in a high school setting with 6 and sometimes 7 different class periods? If a Tier 3 core-replacement is used for the most intense level of intervention, which program will satisfy graduation requirements and also be effective for increasing reading skills? District leadership must also design policies to select participants; including which teachers can have their assignment replaced or take an additional assignment, and selecting which students are to receive which Tier of intervention (including students with special needs). If the purpose of intervention is to increase test scores, then prior scores on testing are logical for identification. If, however, the purpose is to meet IEP goals and objectives, only students with IEPs would be selected. If the goal is to increase reading skills, assessment of both

opportunity to learn (Solórzano, 2008) and responsiveness to prior teaching (Torgesen, 2005) might be developed and used to identify which students need intervention.

This study reviews the processes that Mission School District leadership underwent to contend with these decisions. In addition to selecting Tier 2 intervention for elementary, middle and high school students, the district also adopted Tier 3 interventions that replaced core ELA instruction for each of these age groups. Several district departments were involved in negotiations for the selection of Tier 3 core-replacement, and each embarked on the selection process with different concerns. Ultimately in Mission, two core-replacement programs were adopted for high school ELA: one for students with special needs, and one for students without.

For adolescents with special needs, the special education leadership committee selected *Edge* (Moore, Short, Smith, & Tatum, 2008). Definitions of what *Edge* class was meant to accomplish were explored through interview of administrators and teachers. Teachers were also asked about how they prioritized their various roles in special education. Classroom observations and student interviews were conducted to examine what happened in *Edge* class for different teachers, and how that aligned or conflicted with how teachers explained their perception of what the function of their *Edge* class was supposed to be.

### **Choices about Formal Curriculum**

The National Reading Panel identifies five essential domains for effective elementary reading instruction: 1) phonemic awareness, 2) phonics, 3) fluency, 4)

vocabulary, and 5) comprehension (National Reading Panel, 2000), which are currently considered the building blocks for reading intervention. Curriculum for reading intervention for struggling readers usually begins with these building-block reading skills and manipulates them in ways suggested by experimental research (Roberts et al., 2008), increasing focus and time for various components regarded as deficit. Torgesen and colleagues provide a modified list of components appropriate for reading instruction with older students: 1) fluency, 2) vocabulary, 3) reading strategies, 4) background or prior knowledge, 5) higher level reasoning and thinking skills, and 6) motivation (Torgesen et al., 2007). A meta-analysis of reading interventions for older students by Scammacca and colleagues examined 31 studies using this list of components to attempt to identify the most critical for effective intervention (Scammacca et al., 2007).

Results from component studies such as those included in Scammacca and colleagues' meta-analysis (Scammacca et al., 2007) appeal to special education practitioners. These studies follow the premise that building a reading intervention is a sum of its parts. It might be compared to building a better mousetrap: first you identify the working parts (components) and then you make sure each is functioning at maximum efficiency. When all the working parts are in order, reading outcomes should increase. If it was as simple as building a mousetrap, then results of component studies alone would be appropriate to inform how to choose and implement intervention curriculum in public schools. However, reading for older students is a complex process (O'Connor & Goodwin, 2011) and as discussed in the last section, there are many factors that contribute to difficulties implementing reading intervention in high schools.

Review of the meta-analysis by Scammacca et al. (2007) reveals some of the pitfalls that high schools might encounter when implementing a component-design reading curriculum for use with older students. For instance, researcher-made measures yielded stronger effects than standardized tests. Researcher-made post-tests were aligned to the intervention itself, and were therefore a more direct assessment of what was addressed during instruction. Scammacca and colleagues also noted that there was variance associated with who delivered intervention and in which setting. Researcher-delivered intervention (pull-out from the classroom) yielded nearly twice the effect size as interventions conducted by teachers in the classroom. The authors suggested that knowledge of the intervention itself, participating in design, more extensive training, and greater emphasis on fidelity all helped to explain why interventions worked better in the hands of researchers (experts) over teachers (field-personnel). Another explanation might be that whereas teachers delivered reading instruction within the context of the regular school day, researchers delivered instruction as a pull-out, increasing intensity because it added instructional time for reading rather than replaced it.

A particular problem that public school practitioners face is determining how to ensure fidelity. Intervention treatments that are evidence-based are demonstrated as effective when the intervention is carried out per its design and consistently from case to case (Edmonds et al., 2009). In Mission this was a considerable challenge. Teachers “bought-in” to the *Edge* program with greater and lesser degrees of conviction. Especially teachers who had been working in the field for many years reacted negatively to the scripted-nature of *Edge*, a finding consistent with the literature about other scripted

curriculum (e.g. Achinstein & Ogawa, 2006). This study probed teachers' definitions of their various roles as special education practitioners and how they interacted with both the formal curriculum of the *Edge* program, and informal curricular choices associated with the practice of special education.

### **The *Edge* Program**

Many school districts purchase packaged reading intervention programs for older students to be used to supplement or replace ELA classes. Mission School District adopted one such intervention package: *Edge* (Moore et al., 2008) published by National Geographic/Hampton-Brown. The appeal of a packaged curriculum such as *Edge* is that it claims to attend to all aspects of reading intervention. The teacher's manual for *Edge* explains that it is designed to cover the component skills of reading comprehensively, is informed by research, is aligned with state standards, uses evidence-based practices, and includes content that students will be tested on for STAR accountability. A document review of *Edge* revealed that it is designed with fidelity in mind and is highly scripted, directing delivery for all elements of lessons day-to-day and down to the minute. Authors of *Edge* assert that it is comprehensive. *Edge* is aligned to states' ELA content standards, includes activities to motivate learners, provides explicit teaching techniques for reading comprehension skills, and covers the content knowledge that students will be tested on for NCLB accountability testing and exit exams (Moore et al., 2008). The *Edge* program provides a teacher-script, textbooks with fiction and nonfiction stories that are thematically tied, overheads (such as graphic organizers), a high-interest library of

grade-leveled fiction and graphic novels, student consumable workbooks, a computer program for fluency reading, and level mastery tests. The teacher edition includes margin notes that cue teachers to ask quick-check and probing questions. It is annotated and provides line-by-line suggestions of what teachers should say while delivering direct instruction.

There are two student workbooks that are consumable and so must be replaced for each new *Edge* class. The *Edge Grammar & Writing Practice Book* aligns to readings in the textbook. When new grammar instruction is given, examples on *Edge*-provided overheads and in the student workbook align to passages students are reading as a class so that examples use characters, themes, and examples from passages they have already read. The *Edge Interactive Practice Book* provides additional practice opportunities for unit vocabulary and strategies that have been presented in the textbook. These activities are again aligned to textbook readings.

In addition to workbooks and the text, *Edge* provides a computer program that students can work on independently called the On-line Coach. Students have their own unique login ID and can work at their own pace, beginning where they left off each time they log-on. Using the On-line Coach, students practice textbook selections for fluency. The entire passage can be read by the computer first, or students can begin reading themselves immediately. Students' voices are recorded and the computer indicates on the screen where in the passage students are. If a student inaccurately decodes a word, it appears in red text until it is correctly pronounced. If students need help, they can mouse-click on the word and the computer will pronounce it correctly and provide a

definition. Students can listen to their own recorded voice played back, although this is optional. The On-line Coach tracks progress on fluency passages and the teacher can access these data.

Daily assignments include preview of reading, vocabulary instruction, and direct instruction of strategic skills (e.g., predictions, underling key words, and connect to other stories). Writing practice is included in each unit, but is not done daily. Units also include options for independent and small group projects that make use of the high-interest library to enrich in-class activities. *Edge* can be used to augment ELA classes at the high school by only replacing electives, and it also can be used as a core-replacement ELA curriculum, meaning students take an *Edge* class instead of their grade-level ELA class.

Mission School District adopted *Edge* as an ELA replacement curriculum, and also opted to implement it per authors' recommendations, as a 2-period block class (Moore et al., 2008). Students in all three high schools who were assigned to the *Edge* class had one period that replaced their grade-level ELA class and one period that replaced an elective (that would otherwise be of their choosing). *Edge* includes four levels, which ABC and XYZ schools implemented differently. ABC High School assigned students to *Edge* levels based on their grade (9<sup>th</sup> = Level A; 10<sup>th</sup> = Level B, etc.) for the first year of implementation in 2009-2010, which was against the recommendation of the authors. The four levels of *Edge* are not aligned with grade level standards, but rather, *Edge* is designed with placement tests so that students, regardless of their grade level, test into levels based upon current functioning for vocabulary, reading decoding,



reading comprehension, fluency, and knowledge of components of English as a language such as parts of speech, sentence structure, and grammar (Moore et al., 2008). For the 2010/2011 school year, ABC adjusted its practice to two-grade level combination classes, with a 9-10 and 11-12 split. XYZ High School implemented the *Edge* program per authors' design both years. Students were assigned to an *Edge* level based exclusively on placement tests. *Edge* classes at XYZ might include students in grades 9-12 during the same class period.

There are four levels in the *Edge* curriculum. The Fundamentals level is written at a readability level equivalent to grades 1-3. Level A is at the 3-5 grade Level, B at 5-7, and Level C at 7-9 (Moore et al., 2008). This study included Fundamentals, Level B, and Level C classes. Students are tested at the beginning of the year and placed into an instructional level based upon a pre-test score. Students receive a Lexile score level (0-1300) and each level of *Edge* is rated with a Lexile range (for example, Level B is between 750L-1075L). The *Edge* package includes pre-tests for placement and gains tests for mid-year and end-of-year to evaluate progress. Each test administration takes approximately one hour and can be administered computer-based or paper-pencil.

Research data by an independent educational research firm hired by National Geographic/Hampton-Brown, SEG Research (2008), suggested positive reading outcomes for schools piloting *Edge* intervention. Gains were reported for students identified as "striving readers" based on standardized state accountability testing, including English Language Learners (ELL). Authors reported that "striving readers" included students with IEPs, but also stated that insufficient data were collected to

analyze outcomes for students with special needs separately. Classrooms piloting *Edge* for the study by SEG were selected to provide maximum consistency in curriculum content, and so included schools and teachers who had volunteered for participation. Fidelity was accounted for through inter-rater reliability measures conducted by the observing SEG research team. At the time of this paper, no independent studies have been conducted by research teams not affiliated with *Edge* publishers.

Although research data included in *Edge* review materials do not stipulate students with special needs as a target population for the package, the Mission Special Education Department selected it for use with those students. In fact, *Edge* literature advertises it for use with ELL students and students with special needs are not mentioned in any of the brochures used by sales representatives.

The *Edge* curriculum was reviewed for the study, including teachers' manual, daily script, handouts, overheads, and support data. This review was augmented with observations in the classroom with teachers and students in action using the curriculum. *Edge* (Moore et al., 2008) is based upon research that verifies the curricular components but fails to account for the interaction of teachers and students in local classrooms, the influence of school norms and expectations, and the impact of larger political structures such as interpretation of special education law at the district and state levels. Teachers who are actually teaching *Edge* classes are doing so from a variety of positions. For example, some of the special education teachers in Mission helped to select this particular program, but with differing notions regarding its use. Some special education teachers who are teaching *Edge* did not participate in selection at all, but rather have been

assigned to teach the class in place of another, preferred assignment. They have expressed some dissatisfaction with Mission School District administrators for what they perceive as a top-down directive. Fidelity of implementation of the *Edge* program across the district differed greatly from classroom to classroom and is discussed in the analysis below.

### **Informal Curriculum**

In addition to the overt academic curriculum, high school practitioners address a less formal (although equally important) curriculum that initiates students into the post-secondary world. High school is the launch-point for adult life and upon graduation students will transition into new settings with increased responsibilities, including universities, colleges, and the full-time workplace. Students will need to form and maintain relationships that operate by adult rather than adolescent rules. Although these social skills are not included in the content standards nor tested for on high stakes tests, they are part of the hidden curriculum that is addressed by schools but remains for the most part unstated. Jackson (1990) suggests that in order for students to be successful in schools, they must master not only academics (the “official” curriculum), but also the tacit rules of being a good student. He suggests that classroom life calls “for patience, at best, and resignation, at worst,” (Jackson, 1990, p. 36). Students who are successful in school have developed coping strategies to deal with frustration and mastered more obscure skills, such as when to keep their mouths shut even in the face of adversity, provocation, and their own desires and interests. Although this paints a stark picture, it is

important to realize that one of the most problematic features of the hidden curriculum is that it is just that -- hidden. Students with special needs require instructional strategies such as modeling, direct explicit instruction, corrective feedback, rehearsal, practice, and reinforcement in order to learn new skills and generalize use of them to new situations. These tacit skills are not official; they do not appear in grade-level standards. Social skills are rarely or inconsistently addressed by teachers in general education classrooms (Deshler, Alley, Warner, & Schulaker, 1981; Mastropieri & Scruggs, 1997).

For students with special needs, supports provided in high school, such as a special education teacher or case carrier (who writes the IEP and provides instruction for specific goals), the advisement of a guidance counselor, and transition services provided through an IEP, will disappear literally overnight upon attainment of a high school diploma and exit from special education programming. Students will face novel situations with increased expectations for individual functioning and social responsibility, and failure to meet these expectations can have severe consequences including loss of job or inability to be gainfully employed, failure in post-secondary academic settings, inability to access needed services, and social isolation (Mellard & Hazel, 1992; Scanlon, 1994). Students with LD, who are frequently struggling readers, have a high occurrence of social competence deficits, estimated as high as 75% and function approximately two-thirds of a standard deviation below typical peers on measures of study skills, social competence, adjustment, hyperactivity, distractibility, anxiety, and peer rejection (Kavale & Forness, 1996). Are intervention classes for students with LD, then, doubly obligated to provide not only essential reading skills and improved passage of high stakes tests in

preparation of post-secondary demands, but also provide direct instruction in critical social skills while students are still under the auspices of their K-12 public education? If so, what does that curriculum include? In which classes and by which teachers will that content be delivered?

Although perhaps less formal, curriculum to increase social skills that undergird successful transition into the post-secondary world is legitimate in special education and is in fact required by law for students with special needs. Special education teachers and case carriers develop social skills goals through an Individual Transition Plan (ITP). The ITP is part of a student's IEP beginning at age 16. As part of the IEP process, high schools are accountable for evaluating and reporting progress on goals to parents. Transition goals are based on formal and informal assessment including emotional/behavioral, cognitive, and adaptive skills (Blackmon, 2007). If a student is not making satisfactory progress or fails to meet a goal, the IEP team must provide additional assessment and instruction to support student success (IDEA, 2004). Transition goals are intended to prepare a student in the core domain areas: 1) Education/Instruction, 2) Employment, 3) Community, and 4) Independent Living (IDEA, 2004), beyond school and into adult life.

Insufficient social skills can have an adverse effect on students' opportunities to learn (Solórzano, 2008), impact their academic and social self-concept (Elbaum & Vaughn, 2003), and result in social isolation (Scanlon, 1994). Teachers tend to interact with students with LD as frequently as typical peers, but these interactions are characterized by behavioral corrections more often than academic content (Bryan &

Wheeler, 1972). Elbaum and Vaughn (2003) reported a reciprocal relationship between self-concept and academic performance wherein self-concept is damaged by academic failure, and low self-concept contributes to students' diminished academic self-expectations. Marsh and Yeung (1997) suggested that for high school students, self-concept affects students' schooling choices, including choosing challenging coursework and setting goals for the future. Lowered self esteem, such as external attributions of success and internal attributions of failure, problematic peer relationships, and teachers' perceptions of low academic behaviors (Kavale & Forness, 1996) adversely affect students with LD in gaining essential skills needed to successfully transition out of high school. Perceptions of low relevance of schooling for their lives, a sense of powerlessness in their own education and planning, and disconnection between classroom lessons and their plans for the future contributed to high rates of absenteeism and high school drop-out (Pierson, et al., 2008).

There are no provisions in either special educational (IDEA, 2004) or general education (NCLB, 2002) legislation that stipulate what specifically comprises social skills, or how and when they should be taught. In order to teach social skills, teachers rely on a haphazard array of lessons and goals that are typically born of experience rather than a formal, written curriculum. For a sense of what is meant by social skills, current research provides a more precise source. Although this research is publically available (although sometimes at a monetary cost for access), few teachers connect with the published academic research and there is a gap between research and practice. Information provided in the studies discussed below is not necessarily used in classroom

and school practice. Research does, however, provide frameworks that are useful for this study to identify which social skills are being addressed in high schools, and recognize how and when social skills instruction occurs day-to-day in the classroom.

Scanlon (1994) suggests a framework for specifying social skills for adolescents through identification of poor constructive communication skills. He demonstrated that teenagers with LD exhibited a range of deficits along a spectrum of constructive communication skills that negatively impacted relationships with peers and adults, limited opportunities to interact, and increased day-to-day problems in both academic and social settings. Scanlon lists areas of constructive communication that are often deficit in students with LD, including: asking questions, offering opinions, interpreting social cues, judging social roles, and deciding how to interact. Over and above the difficulties poor constructive communication skills represent during high school, Scanlon suggests that these deficits have powerful post-school consequences. Adults with LD are twice as likely to be unemployed or earn less and demonstrate higher-than-average rates of incarceration (Scanlon, 1994).

Mellard and Hazel (1992) review components of social competence especially relevant for older students with LD to support transition into post-secondary settings. Basing their work on concepts of social skills, adaptive behavior (Gresham & Elliot, 1987), independent functioning, and social responsibility (Gresham & Reschly, 1988), the authors delineate a specific set of skills that are often problematic for adults with LD as they enter the workforce, including: receiving feedback, following directions, carrying on conversations, appropriate greeting and leave-taking, listening, contributing to

discussions and negotiations, and self-advocacy. School-aged students with LD have demonstrated difficulties with equivalent skills in the high school setting, including: offering and receiving feedback, negotiation, problem solving, succumbing to peer pressure, conversational skills, making and maintaining friendships, following rules, and resolving conflicts appropriately (Schumaker, Hazel, Sherman, & Sheldon, 1982).

Although the skills linked with LD in high school overlap with social skills determined necessary to gain entry to and maintain successful employment, attention to these skills is often neglected in the high school setting (Pierson, et al., 2008).

In a 20-year longitudinal qualitative study of success attributes of students with LD, Goldberg and colleagues determined that stronger social skills were associated with students who had more successful adult outcomes. including living independently, stable employment, and positive relationships (Goldberg, Higgins, Raskind, & Herman, 2003). Following up with a cohort that attended a non-public special education school, the research team conducted extensive interviews with students several years after high school completion (n = 41, mean age = 32.1). At the ten-year follow-up, the authors statistically identified a set of non-academic skills that appeared to support adult success. At the 20-year follow-up, qualitative interview methods were used to investigate the nature of this skill-set. Participants who were judged more successful by the research team possessed traits such as self-awareness/self-acceptance of their disability, being proactive, demonstrating perseverance, having greater emotional stability, setting appropriate goals, and utilizing community social support systems effectively. These participants were interviewed extensively to try to understand how they achieved greater



successes in the above mentioned areas. For example, although high levels of perseverance were demonstrated by successful adults with LD, they also demonstrated application of “appropriate” perseverance and knew when to quit or break away from an unsuccessful endeavor. Interviews about the specific nature of employment and relationships suggested that successful adults with LD had “niche-picked” or selected employment and social settings that accentuated their strengths. The authors concluded that participants who were best able to recognize their strengths in addition to their limitations and make decisions based upon that knowledge tended to enjoy better adult outcomes. The authors recommended high school programming that explicitly instructed students in learning and developing strengths during their schooling, and for schools to intervene directly using a success-attributes framework to teach students how to compensate for social skills deficits.

Direct intervention for students with poor social skills supports transition to post-secondary settings in two ways. Increasing social and academic successes in the school setting improves students’ self-esteem, which in turn benefits academic self-concept and performance (Elbaum & Vaughn, 2003). Improvements in self-esteem of students with LD occur when they can function at adequate levels academically (Proctor, Hurst, Prevatt, Petschler, & Adams, 2006), have experienced real life successes (Palombo, 2001), and have developed a good understanding of their disability (Goldberg et al., 2003). Students who have achieved some successes and understanding of their disability are better positioned to be their own advocates as they progress within the educational system (Palombo, 2001).

Although definitions of social skills in K-12 public education and research are not aligned, there is consensus that students with LD need more than academic skills to succeed after high school. Social skills goals are included as part of a student's IEP (IDEA, 2004), however the primacy of academics as a focal point is both historical (Scanlon, 1994) and recently reinforced by No Child Left Behind accountability requirements (NCLB, 2002), which prioritize reading and math outcomes. Since the implementation of special education law in 1975, IEP objectives have tended to focus on academic outcomes over non-academic domains (Scanlon, 1994) even though considerable evidence suggests that adequate social skills are essential to both students' motivation and acquisition of new information needed to succeed in post-secondary settings (Wentzel, 1991). Especially in light of the demands of high stakes accountability testing established by NCLB (2002), special education high school practitioners face enormous challenges to meet academic demands, much less allocate scarce resources such as instructional time and personnel to develop and execute instruction to address social skills deficits.

How do high school practitioners working with students with special needs make critical choices about which goals to prioritize in the limited time allotted in a school day? So many components appear to be the most important. Students must know how to read. Reading is the most important way for students to access new information. Without basic reading skills, students will continue to fall farther and farther behind in content knowledge with a "snowball effect" impacting across-the-board performance (Hoskyn & Swanson, 2000). Additionally, both students and schools are held accountable

for high stakes testing outcomes for student knowledge of grade-level content. Clearly, then, teaching the standards must be most important. Yet, research demonstrates that for students with LD, social skills have a cascading effect not only on success in high school, but also adult outcomes. There is perhaps no other time to teach these essential social skills than when students are poised on the very brink of exit from the K-12 system. Should practitioners take advantage of these last school years to teach those skills that undergird success throughout the lifespan? High school special education practitioners are faced with a perfect storm, each learning factor affecting the others, each escalating with passing time, and all competing for scarce time and precious resources to create an almost untenable challenge to the success of students with LD. This study examines how special education teachers and their students work together in classrooms daily as they struggle to negotiate these many essential aspects of learning.

### **Teachers and Students**

Classroom encounters between teachers and students are influenced by how they define their roles and the ongoing interactions between them that create and maintain these roles in the classroom setting. Teachers' ideas about what it means to be a teacher directly influence both their pedagogical choices about planning and executing classroom instruction and how they interact with students on a day-to-day basis (Yoon, 2008). Working with a group of teachers and their students identified as ELL, Yoon examined how ELA teachers' viewpoints about their roles as educators were related to how they differentiated curriculum in their classrooms and what kinds of teaching

strategies they utilized. Yoon described a circular relationship of how students and teachers create and maintain positions in each classroom in the study. Students' perceptions of their power level were influenced by teachers' beliefs about their role in relation to ELL students, affecting levels of participation and engagement of students in class, thereby maintaining some teachers' negative perception of these students in their class. Yoon described this complex interaction using positioning theory, which is a framework that assists researchers in interpreting social interactions, including how participants position themselves and how, in social contexts, participants position each other (Harre & van Langenhove, 1999). Participants position each other both deliberately, as a teacher might when designing a seating chart, and in ways that are automatic and unconscious, such as when a student takes her seat facing front with a pencil out, tacitly assuming the role of student. In addition to conscious and unconscious positioning by participants, positions can be forced, such as the case in Yoon's study in which some teachers are described as limiting or excluding ELL students from classroom opportunities (Yoon, 2008).

Using a positioning theoretical framework (Harre & van Langenhove, 1999), Yoon identified through interview the attitudes of three middle school, ELA teachers about their roles in the classroom. Observations of classes were supplemented with discourse analysis of speech acts in order to identify instances of enactment of self-positioning and positioning by another (such as a teacher positioning a student). Yoon described three distinct roles with which teachers self-identified: teachers for general education students, teachers for all students, and teachers of a single subject. Based upon

these self-identified roles, the teacher participants differently described what they believed the role of a teacher should be in a classroom; including how students should act and what responsibilities the teacher had in implementing strategic instruction and differentiation.

Ms. Young, a teacher who believed that her role was to teach all children, chose multicultural stories and used strategies to include ELL students. Subsequently, the two ELL participants in her classroom were positioned by the teacher as included and positioned themselves as active members, volunteering answers and actively engaging in discussions. Mr. Brown believed himself to be a teacher of general education students. He selected content with an emphasis on American culture and used democratic instructional design, including empowering students to make key choices about classroom activities. However, the democracy described by Mr. Brown resembled the democracy as originally envisioned by American forefathers: limited to the majority. The ELL students were physically in his class, but Mr. Brown felt as though responsibility for direct instruction of these students belonged to someone else, and his duty fell to instruction of ELA standards to those students who already had mastery of English. Mr. Brown included strategies that actively included students in decision-making about class topics, activities, and their role in projects, but these benefits were only extended to students who were able to advocate for themselves independently. ELL students in Mr. Brown's class described themselves as present but not included. Finally, Mrs. Taylor positioned herself as a teacher of English. She described the sum of her responsibility as teaching, and only teaching, ELA standards. While she attended to the

academic needs of her students, her selection of teaching strategies was designed to attend exclusively to academic aims and she allowed students to fail without intervention by the teacher. If a student failed to do work or turn in an assignment, they were marked down without inquiry or investigation of reasons that might fall outside academics.

Yoon concluded that in each case, the teacher's view of their role in the classroom and students' perception of their power to be active participants in the classroom influenced how students and teachers interacted on a day-to-day basis in the classroom (Yoon, 2008). Although positioning might initially have been forced upon ELL students, the daily classroom interactions served to perpetuate positions and create expectations that students and teachers began to see as norms.

For the current study, teachers and students were interviewed about how they defined their roles in relation to the curriculum. Although the curriculum was formally fixed (the *Edge* script), how teachers viewed their roles as special education teachers and case carriers and how they prioritized their teaching goals were hypothesized to influence student-teacher interactions in the classroom, including switching of instructional strategies and content differentiation. Teachers were faced with the dilemma of needing to support their students with special needs in more than one way. Although the *Edge* class used a formal intervention curriculum for reading, it was also the time allocated for special education teachers to work directly with students on IEP goals that might include aspects of learning (such as social skills) that were not included in *Edge*. For example, teachers who believed that *Edge* is complete and sufficient might limit their instructional repertoire to what was dictated by the script. Teachers, on the other hand, who thought

that *Edge* alone was inadequate to meet the variety of needs of their special education students, might divert from the script and provide additional, informal instruction, such as enhancing teachable moments. Students, in turn, might respond to how teachers approach teaching and in some cases were given choices about curriculum and class activities, thereby influencing their classroom behaviors, such as participation levels and engagement in classroom topics. The current study followed a design suggested by Yoon (2008) to interpret classroom interactions between teachers and students as at least partially influenced by teachers' and students' viewpoints about their roles in the classroom setting. This design included both interviews in isolation of classroom interactions (during non-instructional times) and interviews immediately following classroom encounters. Classroom observations were conducted to help inform how students and teachers interacted in the reading intervention classroom setting.

### **Teachers and Curriculum**

It was surmised for this study that special education teachers in Mission School District have dueling roles. As teachers of students with special needs, they have one particular set of concerns, and as teachers for a public high school in the era of accountability (and as members of the community in which the school is located), they are also influenced by another set of concerns. How then, do special education teachers negotiate their role day to day and during instruction with a curriculum that has multiple purposes assigned to it? How do they define their roles and explain what the objectives are for *Edge* class? How do they interact in a classroom with students and the curriculum;

both the official scripted curriculum of *Edge* and the less formal, hidden curriculum of social skills?

To consider these questions, a framework that addresses the dual role of conflicting Discourses was used (Gee, 1992). Gee uses Discourse with a capital “D” and denotes a cultural rather than linguistic interpretation of the word. In his discussion of Discourses, Gee suggests that specific Discourses are “owned” and “operated” by a group of people and that the actions and interpretations of these members are considered to be sociocultural. That is, the ways in which people interact with each other, and the ways in which people interact with culture(s), are both included in Gee’s treatment of the term. Special education teachers negotiate between two Discourses almost daily.

On the one hand, the Discourse “teacher” includes assumptions and conventions such as teaching academics, helping students achieve proficiency on grade-level standards, and acting as a school team member in the collective goal of closing the achievement gap and meeting the demands of NCLB accountability by raising scores on high stakes tests. All students are important and disparity between high and low achievers must be addressed in order to provide an equitable school experience for all students. All students must be provided access to opportunities to excel, including access to four-year universities after graduation. These opportunities are granted through a public education that includes mastery of grade-level content and competencies, and are assessed through high states tests such as accountability testing for NCLB (2002) and CAHSEE.



On the other hand, special education teachers belong to a unique Discourse that operates within and around a different set of assumptions and conventions. As a teacher of students with special needs, a special education teacher is concerned with identifying each student's strengths and deficits, designing goals, and providing remedial instruction (not necessarily at grade level) to help students meet their educational needs. Students are each treated as unique, and the plan to address each student's educational needs, the IEP, is based upon each individual student's present level of functioning and is subject to consensus of a team that meets about that student and only that student. A student's deficits are considered not merely in light of school performance, but also as they impact that student's potential success beyond the classroom and in a variety of adult settings, including post-secondary education and also the world of work, access to community services, and the opportunity to form and maintain meaningful relationships. The skills needed for successful transition addressed in IEPs are not restricted to academics, but include a broad range of social skills that increase self-determination that will facilitate each student's ability to make decisions about their future and undergird success in multiple settings and situations.

Inherent in the tension between these two Discourses is the challenge special education teachers face trying to strike a balance between attending to the needs of *all* students through acquisition of grade-level content and performance on high stakes test, and attending to the *specific* needs of their students with special needs by providing remediation of deficit skills, academic and non-academic, that are needed in the K-12 years and throughout the lifespan. Special education teachers might explain how they

interpret their role in isolation (outside of the classroom) one way, and then interact with the curriculum and students, in the classroom, in ways unforeseen even by them. How the meaning of their role in the *Edge* class is made and remade can only be investigated through the complex interaction of teachers with the curriculum and students.

For this study, data were used to facilitate understanding of how teachers made determinations both consciously and in the context of the classroom about their sometimes conflicting roles (Discourses) and how they enacted those roles. Data were collected in three ways. Teachers were interviewed several times in isolation of classes, usually before and after school, at lunch, or during a preparation period, to investigate how they overtly defined their roles as special education reading teachers in the intervention class. Classes were observed to collect data about how teachers negotiated the *Edge* script with their students and in the context of daily learning. Finally, post-interviews immediately following instruction in class provided teachers with an opportunity to reflect on actual activities and encounters that happened in class during observation sessions, including use of teachable moments and deviations from the script.

### **Teachers and Students with the Curriculum**

Classroom level investigations reveal that interactions between teachers and students are also influenced by curricular changes. For example, Valli and Chambliss (2007) examined how changes in curriculum in two classrooms with the same teacher resulted in substantial changes in teaching strategies and student-teacher interactions. The researchers worked with one teacher, Ms. Gabriel, who taught two 5<sup>th</sup> grade groups of

students, both with ELA content, but each with a different objective. Valli and Chambliss suggested that decisions about curricular use and content exerted a powerful influence over meaning structures in the classroom; a comparison made more dramatic by the study of two classes taught by the same teacher over the same period of time. The authors suggested that an institutionally imposed goal for one of the classrooms, in this case, to increase scores on high stakes tests, influenced the interaction of the teacher, students, and content of reading instruction (Valli & Chambliss, 2007).

The researchers first observed Ms. Gabriel, a general education teacher, conducting her usual ELA classroom activities with her 5<sup>th</sup> grade class, including students who read proficiently, at basic level, and struggling readers, among whom were those receiving special education services and had an IEP. The second class included only those students identified by the school as struggling readers through accountability testing for NCLB (2002) with a higher proportion of students receiving special education services. In this supplementary reading intervention, these struggling readers received instruction designed specifically to increase test scores. The researchers broadly distinguished curricular differences observed in these two settings as child-centered for the regular reading group, and test-centered for the supplementary reading intervention group (Valli & Chambliss, 2007).

In child-centered instruction, Ms Gabriel did not focus on a single content standard at a time, but rather utilized multiple curricular approaches simultaneously to tie new information to students' prior knowledge, previous instruction, and across subject areas. Ms. Gabriel used different methods for selecting stories for reading and grouping

students in class. Some groups were formed homogenously and read books at their instructional reading level, focusing on specific standards instruction. Other groups were put together because of commonalities in their real-life experiences and read books thematically chosen to compliment topic and theme. For example struggling readers, many from single-parent households and from lower-socio-economic homes, read a book about a boy with real problems and studied vocabulary words that they themselves had identified as difficult. The mid-level or most grade-level typical group read a book that capitalized on grade level standards; in this case, science-fiction. Content in this group was thematically tied to risk-taking and included reading standards-aligned content and use of literary devices such as identifying conflict, setting, and characterization. The highest achieving group discussed complex topics, such as prejudice, and read books chosen in part because they typified the kinds of excellent writing that students would be expected to use in their own compositions, again addressing multiple standards at once. Instructional strategies were also adjusted to compliment groups. Whereas the most struggling readers self-identified difficult words and vocabulary as a central part of instruction, higher-achieving groups' instruction focused more strongly on discussion and writing skills. Students were seated in groups to work on tasks together at times, and individually to practice skills at others (Valli & Chambliss, 2007).

In the reading intervention group, however, content and instruction were both approached as “one-size fits all” and designed for the sole purpose of increasing test scores. Content was limited to packets that simulated test items and reading selection was based on similarity to expository passages found on accountability tests. Classroom

activities mirrored testing tasks such as identifying the main idea, sequencing of events, and connecting cause and effect. Ms. Gabriel's instruction with her intervention group stood in sharp contrast to her general education reading class strategies. Whereas instruction was tailored to meet the needs of students at different levels of achievement in her regular reading class, in the reading intervention class each day was the same. Ms. Gabriel used a script, and students performed tasks as delineated by the script. First, five minutes of vocabulary, followed by whole-class review of test items, concluding in evaluation of student responses. Students were seated individually and in traditional columns to maximize time spent on individual work. Whole-class review of daily work was made public, with the teacher asking each student in turn, in front of the class, what their answer was and correcting them when answers were incorrect. This method was rationalized by Ms. Gabriel as, first, being directed by the script, and second, being the most efficient method to increase students' learning because all students benefited from the correction each wrong answer. Voluntary participation in the test-centered class, perhaps predictably, fell off dramatically in comparison to the child-centered class. The researchers described changes in Ms. Gabriel as well, including a higher level of frustration observed in the reading intervention class. They concluded that, "activity goals and tasks designed solely for test-taking purposes seemed to have dramatically transformed the nature of classroom discourse and teacher-student relations" (Valli & Chambliss, 2007, p. 72).

The Special Education Department of Mission School District has adopted a scripted curriculum and the class is intended, in part, to increase scores on accountability

testing. Teacher instructional strategies and differentiation of delivery of scripted content are important aspects of reading intervention. Methods suggested by Valli and Chambliss (2007), including identifying and interpreting student-teacher interactions and use of strategic teaching methods, are both relevant to the current study of *Edge* classrooms designed to intervene for not only remedial reading skills, but also to increase test scores, just as Ms. Gabriel was attempting with her 5<sup>th</sup> grade struggling readers.

### **The Current Study**

Reading intervention has received much attention in the elementary setting with research that delineates best-practice approaches (National Reading Panel, 2000) with positive, sustained gains (Gresham, 2007; Vaughn et al., 2007; Vellutino et al., 2000). For high school-aged students, research supports intervention for readers who have received inadequate foundational skills instruction, and for those with reading deficits who continue to struggle despite adequate instruction, including students identified as needing special education (Torgesen, 2005). These gains, however, are smaller for older students than younger students (Scammacca et al., 2007) and intervention for older students must have greater intensity, frequency, and duration in order to demonstrate these gains (Roberts et al., 2008). Scheduling intervention of this intensity can be highly problematic in the high school setting. Intervention should also target a different set of skills than younger students might need (Denton et al., 2008; Roberts et al., 2008), including skills specifically stipulated in an ITP for students with special needs. Beginning at age 16, students with special needs must have specific instruction in a set of

skills intended to guide them successfully through transition out of high school. What works in elementary school cannot simply be employed at the high school level, when intervention might be needed most.

The majority of reading intervention studies have focus on Tier 2 pull-out delivery methods (Vaughn et al., 2011) and provide reading instruction in addition to instruction students receive in class (Gresham, 2007; Vaughn et al., 2007). Tier 3 intervention, which is the next, higher level and the focus of this study, has received less attention. High school is a time for students to do many things more than reading, writing, and arithmetic. Students have access to elective classes that provide academic opportunities (e.g. foreign languages, vocational opportunities such as cooking and computer science), and opportunities in the arts (e.g. drama, drawing, photography). Students also fulfill high school course requirements to obtain a high school diploma and perhaps transition to higher education settings. School leadership must be concerned with making sure that students perform well on high stakes tests for both the students' sake, as in the case of their high school exit exam, and also the school's ongoing well-being, to get and stay out of PI. When deciding how and when to intervene for reading in the high school setting, decision-makers face the dilemma of inevitably sacrificing some other important part of the high school experience.

Students with special needs present additional challenges for planning how class time will be used. Just as their typical peers, most students with special education services are required to fulfill the graduation requirements and perform on high stakes tests. They also have additional instructional goals through IEP programming that need

to be attended to and successfully met. IEP goals in academics are written using a California content standard; however, goals might be written modifying the instruction or student product for that standard, or be written off grade-level and at the student's instructional level. There is disagreement in the field about whether the intent of special education is to compensate for students' deficits and support them through the high school experience using accommodations, or whether the intent of special education is to provide remedial instruction for basic skills, such as reading (Baker & Zigmond, 1995; Fuchs & Fuchs, 1995). In this study, students with substantial reading deficits are being assigned to a core-replacement Tier 3 reading intervention class and they typically have goals that address basic skills in ELA. IEP goals also address another set of skills that are not considered academic and are not based on standards at all. Goals for students with special needs in high schools also must help students successfully transition out of high school and into adult settings. Many of the students at ABC and XYZ High Schools have social skills goals in areas such as communication, organization, and positive prosocial relationships.

For the early elementary student population, the rationale for reading intervention is uncontested and how to do it is supported by a body of literature, primarily derived from quantitative methods. For older students, results from quantitative studies have been less encouraging, suggesting how complex planning and executing reading intervention is in the high school setting. The demands of high school include not only reading skills, but also navigating required coursework for graduation, becoming satisfactorily prepared for high stakes tests, and learning essential skills for life after high



school. Teachers and students interact in class with the curriculum, both the official content of *Edge* and the hidden curriculum (Jackson, 1990), in ways that are influenced by the local and wider contexts of school and district (Erickson, 1986). All the while, teachers and students negotiate their roles in class, adjusting and collaborating in ways that they are aware of and unconsciously, that make and remake meaning about what is important and how they spend their time in class. Research on high school reading interventions for a special education population therefore must investigate participants (students and teachers), the curriculum (official and hidden), and delivery (what happens in class) to begin to understand how reading intervention is enacted in high school. While no easy answers can be found to these dilemmas, they are, nonetheless, the challenges that teachers in high schools face in the current era. This study is situated in a single school district and uses qualitative methods to investigate how administrators, teachers, and students attempt to negotiate these diverse and compelling demands. This research reflects how these distinct yet overlapping factors converge to complicate with whom, how, and with what prioritization reading intervention in high schools is delivered.

Although research findings have facilitated increases in efficiency for how reading interventions are designed, the majority of studies continue to ask many of the same questions, such as what, how much, and with whom intervention should be conducted, which fail to address how intervention might operate in the more authentic setting of classrooms and with teachers and students. Studies produce inconsistencies in findings that suggest reading is a complex, interactive process (O'Connor & Goodwin,

2011), and yet the majority of intervention studies continue to approach teaching reading as a sum of its constituent parts.

Quantitative methods are appropriate to investigate questions of frequency, distribution, and magnitude (Wolcott, 1995), as the majority of studies about elementary level reading intervention have done. The traditional psychological process-product model for research design posits that through manipulation of dependent process variables such as teaching strategies, frequency, duration, and content, differences in student learning outcomes, or product, can be correlated and causal associations might be discovered that inform how teaching reading can be made more effective (Bellack, 1978). These studies tend to be for a specific period of time, sometimes months, sometimes years. Outcomes tend to be determined through comparison of pre- and post- test scores, and variables to be tested are chosen in advance and controlled. Although results from these studies have furthered knowledge of curriculum (content), teaching (process), and student learning (product), at times inconsistent findings leave educational researchers with new “how” and “why” questions. Page (1991) suggests that process-product studies designed to examine a limited array of variables that control for all others in the hope of determining associations often ignore “irrelevant” data and attempt to explain outliers through interpretation and discussion. Page discusses research pertaining to tracking and curriculum differentiation and suggests that rather than attempting to control for data that do not fit a process-product model, the model may not be a match:

“However, discrepant cases suggest the inadequacy of the very units of analysis in process-product studies: High-, regular-, and lower- track classes may not be

so unequivocally distinguished as school labels suggest or as statistical manipulations require. Fundamentally at issue is an adequate theory of curriculum differentiation rather than apposite methods: The problem – as Ms. Mitchell and her ninth graders experienced – is figuring out *what* counts, not *how* to count.” (Page, 1991, p. 10)

Much like tracking, reading comprehension intervention is a complex interaction of curriculum, teachers, and students.

Reading intervention at ABC and XYZ High Schools is designed to perform many functions simultaneously. Decision-makers at Mission School District are hoping that *Edge* class intervention will increase test scores for school accountability (NCLB, 2002) and provide time for special education case carriers to work with their students with special needs, maintaining compliance with IDEA (2004). The special education teachers who have been assigned to teach *Edge* classes must prioritize instructional objectives to best utilize class time for teaching goals, including remediating reading skills, providing compensatory strategies so that students can gain grade-level knowledge, and addressing informal and hidden curricula that are particularly problematic for students with LD, such as social skills instruction. Finally students in the class and their interaction with the curriculum and their teachers influence how the classroom operates on a daily basis, as students, teachers, and the curriculum work together in ways that cannot be predicted or accounted for quantitatively.

In this study I collected data in classrooms and through interview with teachers, administrators, and students. I observed 5 *Edge* reading intervention classes and

reviewed curricular material including IEPs, *Edge* materials, and teacher-made assignments. The study is designed to provide insight about how teachers and students work together to negotiate different and perhaps conflicting purposes of the reading class both overtly and tacitly. How do teachers interact with students in their high school reading intervention special education class? What do they explain their primary objectives to be when they select and carry out lessons? How do teachers and students make sense of their own actions and choices? What kinds of encounters do teachers and students have in the classroom setting, and how might those be interpreted in light of the roles teachers and students assign themselves and each other, and their interaction with the curricula (formal and informal). The following research questions were used to guide data collection and for analysis:

1. What were the processes used by the local special education team, school leadership, and district decision-makers in determining and assigning the *Edge* curriculum for students with special needs at ABC and XYZ High Schools? How do each describe what *Edge* class is meant to accomplish? Do these interpretations conflict with each other?
2. How do teachers define, interpret, adapt, and make meaning of teaching choices in the classroom to address multiple functions, including 1) addressing IEP goals for academic and non-academic student need; 2) intervention for reading, 3) intervention to increase test scores.

3. How do students with special needs and their teachers interact with the official curriculum (the *Edge* script) and hidden curriculum (including social skills for successful transition) in reading intervention class?
4. How do student-teacher interactions influence classroom activities and encounters? What negotiations occur within and between participants (students and teachers) that account for how time is spent in class each day?

### **Methods**

In this investigation, I asked how differences in the priorities and attitudes of site and district decision-makers, students, and teachers influence classroom interactions of participants with the curriculum in the classroom day-to-day. Reading intervention does not begin and end in the classroom: it exists within the context of the culture of the school and district. Reading intervention enacted in the classroom was influenced by institutional decision-making by leadership at Mission School District. Ethnographic methods were used to investigate how students and teachers conduct intervention in the context of district culture in which they are members (Erickson, 1986).

### **Participants**

Mission School District was located in a southern California suburban community for which it was named. Mission was a culturally diverse community with many second and third generation immigrants from other countries. Approximately 33% of the students at ABC and 24% at XYZ had a home language other than English. Nine percent

of students at ABC received special education services and 4% at XYZ in the 2010/2011 school year. Demographics for ABC and XYZ High Schools are shown in Table 1. Mission School District, as is the case with many school districts, was struggling to increase its accountability report card ratings. Several schools in Mission were in PI, including both ABC and XYZ. Students in the *Edge* class at ABC and XYZ were all receiving special education services (special education eligibility categories are shown in Table 2) with a substantial overlap with ELL services.

Teacher participants were special education teachers designated to teach a particular level of the *Edge* class (distribution of levels are shown in Table 3). Students in the classes had received below basic or far below basic scores on California State Testing (CST) and also had an IEP and received special education services. Special education teachers for each class had students from their own caseload (those for whom they write and carry out IEP goals) and students from other teachers' caseloads. The *Edge* class period was often is used by other special education case carriers as a time to pull out students on their case loads for IEP testing, to address IEP goals, or for related services (i.e. speech and language) that are otherwise difficult to schedule.

Eight classes at two school sites were invited to participate in the study. Five classes at ABC and XYZ High Schools in Mission School District were selected. All five classes were self-contained (only students with IEPs) with 8 to 19 students enrolled. The five classes used various levels of *Edge*. Table 3 shows the distribution of *Edge* levels, grade levels, and enrollment numbers for the classes at ABC and XYZ for which the district collected data.

Two *Edge* Fundamentals classes were observed. The First was at ABC with Mrs. Castle in 2009/2010, the year that *Edge* was piloted with a small class enrollment (8 students only). A second Fundamentals class was observed in the 2010/2011 school year with Mrs. Belmont at ABC with enrollment of 18. Both were 2-period blocks with primarily 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> graders.

Two sections of Level B were observed. The first was at ABC with Mrs. Levy. This was the only class in the study that operated as a single-period only. ABC had more students with special needs than XYZ and fewer teachers proportionally, which created a scheduling conflict. Most other *Edge* classes at ABC operated as a double-block. There were 19 students, mostly 12<sup>th</sup> graders, in Mrs. Levy's class. At XYZ, Mrs. Delgado had a double-block of Level B with grade levels ranging from 9<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> graders and a total enrollment of 11.

At XYZ Mr. Paul's Level C class was also observed. His enrollment was 19 with a mix of 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> graders. All *Edge* classes at XYZ were scheduled for 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> periods. Although an additional Level A class at XYZ volunteered for participation, the overlapping schedules precluded it from being added as a study classroom.

## **Interviews**

Participants from interviews are shown in Table 5. In addition to teachers of all five observations classrooms, other teachers at each school site were invited to participate, with a total of 8 for the study. Thirteen students were interviewed, all from study classrooms. Students from each study classroom were interviewed except for Mrs.

Castle's 2009/2010 class as those data were collected last year. In addition, one school psychologist from ABC and six administrators at the Mission School District were interviewed.

Interview guides were developed based on recommendations by Swidler (2001) and used an open-ended, semi-structured interview design (Appendices 1 and 2). Although topics were provided, as Swidler suggests, questions were open-ended and flexible, with broad cues that narrowed to more specific questions as participants' answers dictated. Interviews were tape-recorded with consent of participants.

Interviews were conducted with teachers at several points throughout the data collection process. A basic interview guide for teachers and administrators (in Appendix 1) included topics such as background in education, how they defined special education, the role of special educators, benefits and challenges of *Edge*, perceptions of school structures and politics, ideas about what reading intervention was conceptually and at their school site, beliefs about high stakes testing, and the kinds of goals (academic, social skills, and transition) students on their caseloads had in their IEPs.

Teacher interviews were conducted in isolation of classroom activities and after observations of class sessions when possible. This approach was intended to allow teachers to consider their teaching objectives and activities both outside of the teaching context and immediately following it, with an opportunity to reflect upon their choices. Teachers were asked how they defined their roles as special education teachers, as suggested by Yoon (2008), with questions regarding how they planned and prioritized instructional objectives and strategies, their expectations of students, and their beliefs



about the specific curriculum they were assigned. Interviews following classroom encounters were designed to allow the teachers to reflect upon their actions and interactions with students in the immediate context in which they had made them, and how they made meaning of those encounters.

Students were invited to interview about how they perceived reading intervention in relation to the curriculum, the teacher, and the teaching strategies in class. Subsequent interviews followed observation of classes and were guided by the activities of the class on that day. For example, when the On-line Coach (the computer component of *Edge*) was observed during class time, students were asked specifically about their experiences with it. Students were interviewed regarding their plans after they graduated, and asked if they felt high school, and their *Edge* class particularly, was sufficiently preparing them for what came next. A Topic Guide for student interviews is in Appendix 2, and as suggested by Swidler, was also open-ended and used to promote discussion. When students introduced new topics or spontaneously expanded on topics that were not predicted, discussions often went in other directions.

### **Observation**

Classes were observed over two school years. Pilot data were collected for Mrs. Castle's class in 2009/2010. Approximately 20 class sessions were observed between November, 2009 and March, 2011, and additional classes were visited from March, 2011 to May, 2011. Mrs. Levy's class was observed for 14 class sessions. Mrs. Delgado's class was observed for 20 class sessions. Mrs. Belmont dropped out of the study after 12

observations because of a bereavement leave of absence. Finally, Mr. Paul was the last teacher added to the study, and his class was observed for 10 class sessions.

Classroom observations were tape-recorded and I took simultaneous notes. Given the nature of classroom activities, tape-recordings were most useful for review of whole-class instruction, but were less useful during small group work. Notes, on these occasions, were my primary method of data collection. Notes were transcribed the same day when possible, and tape recordings transcribed within three days. Analysis notes and reflections were added in brackets during each stage of transcription to assist in focusing subsequent observations and to add discussion items for interview topic guides. Observation notes and interview data were combined with tape-recorded data to increase specificity. Tape recordings were stored in a locked cabinet, and computer files were contained in a password-protected file.

Participant observer methods were used. I participated when possible in the social world of each classroom, and reflected on the products of that participation (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). In some classes, I led small groups during rotations. In other class sessions, I worked individually with students during seatwork for a part of the period. I attempted to not simply observe, but also tried to ascertain how and why students were doing what they did in the context of their own meaning-making (Erickson, 1986). As a teacher myself, I had the benefit of understanding some aspects of the classroom environment as an insider (talking the talk). However, it was important for me to be particularly careful of my own assumptions and beliefs that I brought with me into the context of these classrooms (Agar, 1996). It was critical to account for my own sense

of the culture of the classroom and my own pre-existing beliefs about reading, social skills, special education, and best-practice teaching strategies as these were part of what I used for conscious, and importantly, unconscious comparisons. I accounted for my own thoughts and biases through memos and bracketed notes.

Field relationships were established with teachers before classes were observed. I met with each teacher during a non-instructional time and explained the nature of the research and what participation would entail. During these initial meetings, we discussed how the teacher would introduce me. Teachers all introduced me as a student working on my Ph.D. dissertation. Two of the teachers, Mrs. Castle and Mrs. Delgado, asked me to talk to the class for a few minutes about my higher education experiences. The other teachers, Mrs. Levy, Mr. Paul, and Mrs. Belmont, introduced me without much expansion. Teachers interacted with me on different levels during instruction. When I was asked to participate in whole-class discussions, I did so. For example, Mrs. Levy often asked my opinion about a particular English convention when conducting grammar lessons.

Permission for classroom observations and interviews was agreed to using HRRB approved consent forms. Entering the field under the false assumption of neutrality sets up the researcher for falling prey to her own assumptions or ignoring valuable clues to the more subtle, implicit assumptions of the participants that are often obscured in “neutral” observation (Erickson, 1986). I explained my own history as a teacher and program specialist to participants and offered my opinion when asked for it during interviews and discussions.

## **Discourse Analysis**

Discourse analysis is described as looking at how actual instances of talk convey the things that people do in the world including “exchange information, express feelings, make things happen, create beauty, entertain themselves and others...” (Johnstone, 2002, p. 3). Discourse analysis, or a close-analysis of talk in the classroom, was used in this study to increase understandings of student-teacher interactions in the context of each classroom. I hypothesized that classroom instruction would be complex, influenced by both the official curriculum of the *Edge* script and also the less official curriculum of social skills, rapidly switching from planned academic instruction to improvised instruction of non-academic skills (such as social skills and transition topics), and a negotiated process that students and teachers engage in together on a day-to-day process. The process of discourse analysis includes tape recording, transcription, and line-by-line analysis of verbatim talk in selected classrooms or during interview. One close-analysis was conducted for each class. Repeated listening to tapes increased accuracy and helped to confirm that analysis was consistent with my initial impressions.

Analysis of discourse transcriptions used Mehan’s Initiation-Response-Evaluation (IRE) format (1979). This pattern has been demonstrated to exist in classrooms for over 40 years (Mehan, 1979). Although classrooms generally had an agenda or plan for the day, complex negotiations moment-by-moment during classroom encounters were spontaneous and demonstrated that roles were dynamic. Particularly in these classrooms, teachers needed to negotiate the official script of the *Edge* program and the

less formal but equally important task of addressing IEP goals in academic and non-academic areas. The nature of classroom interactions between students and teacher were also reviewed and patterns of deviations from the official script, including teachable moments and ways that lessons were appropriated in ways not intended by *Edge* authors, were especially important for analysis.

### **Document Review**

Written documents, including curricular materials, in this case *Edge* intervention and teach-made, lesson plans, IEP's, and cumulative student files, were reviewed for this study (Emerson et al., 1995). These resources were examined to inform how participants, including individual teachers, students, and district personnel, made decisions about what kinds of curriculum should drive instruction in the classroom, to ascertain student background information such as ELL and disability status and history, and to contextualize observation and discourse analysis data in relation to the official script of *Edge* and IEP goals.

### **Case Study Design**

Case-study design was used similarly to Yoon (2008); simultaneous observation of several classrooms and concurrent interviews. Data were collected locally, in just a few classrooms. Yin (2009) discussed different variations of case study design. This study was intended to review a new innovation; the *Edge* curriculum was introduced to a group of schools and teachers. Research questions 2-4 address how individual teachers

and students interpret and make meaning of their reading intervention classes in light of this new curriculum. In some cases, such as Mrs. Levy, Mrs. Castle, and Mr. Paul, the adoption of *Edge* required substantial changes to planning and executing class time. For the new teachers in the study, Mrs. Belmont and Mrs. Delgado, the *Edge* curriculum was the only way they had ever taught ELA. By reviewing multiple cases, patterns of similarities and differences were revealed in relation to this new innovation.

Stake (1995) describes the nature of case-study research as a search for understanding of complex interrelationships. For the study, several cases were used to attempt to describe the variety of contexts of *Edge* classes and to understand it from unique perspectives. Teachers in the study were selected to represent a broad range of experience (from first year to 18 years) and because of their varied reactions to the *Edge* program. I wanted to include teachers who fully endorsed the program as well as teachers who overtly objected to it. Each case in this study includes a description of teachers' perceptions and how reading intervention is approached in the classroom. Each has been analyzed in their own right in the following sections. Additionally, these cases were compared in relation to each other and inferences were made about why similarities and differences in how class time is spent might occur, and the nature of classroom interactions.

### **Coding**

As suggested by Stake (1995), case study data contributes to analysis through coded data and narrative review. Coding for this study was informed both by the

literature and by observation data. Changes to coding strategies were made during data collection based upon patterns that emerged. Codes for classroom observations are shown in Appendix 3.

Codes for classroom instructional strategies were initially suggested by a strategy developed for classroom observation by O'Connor, Bocian, and Swanson (2007). Instructional strategies were labeled to describe what teachers were observed doing in class. For example, did she initiate a topic with a single student or ask the entire class? Additions to these initial categories were informed by observations. For example, I added coding for the nature of the question, open-ended (with many possible responses) or closed (requiring a specific right answer), based upon early observation data.

It was hypothesized that *Edge* classes would also be a time used by special education practitioners for official IEP business. Interruptions to instruction were coded for IEP business, such as a student being called out for testing by a case carrier or school psychologist, versus school business. As technology emerged as a point of concern from several teachers in the study, interruptions caused by technology difficulties were added. General interruptions that contributed to understanding how class time was spent, such as students asking for directions clarification and behavioral management issues, were also collected.

Document review of *Edge* materials informed which kinds of lesson might be done in class that tied directly to the program. Additionally, the nature of the instruction, such as grammar, reading comprehension, vocabulary, etc., was coded and it was also noted whether that instruction was *Edge* or teacher-made.

Finally, other content was coded. Initially, this category was based upon the literature about social skills and study skills, such as Scanlon (1994), Mellard and Hazel (1992), and Pierson et al. (2008). Other areas were added based on research questions, such as addressing IEP goals and preparing for high stakes tests. This was also an area in which specific teacher themes were identified and occurrences noted throughout observations. These teacher themes emerged at different points of data collection. Some teachers had several themes that occurred frequently and in other classes, themes were not as pronounced.

## **Analysis**

### **Getting To *Edge*: Research Question One**

1. What were the processes used by the local special education team, school leadership, and district decision-makers in determining and assigning the *Edge* curriculum for students with special needs at ABC and XYZ High Schools? How do each describe what *Edge* class is meant to accomplish? Do these interpretations conflict with each other?

I sometimes felt as though tracking down exactly whose idea it was to implement a core-replacement curriculum, and specifically *Edge*, at Mission School District was tantamount to a great “who-done-it.” Whether it was artful misdirection, or if nobody really knew, might remain a mystery, but the end result was that no one stepped forward



at the district level to claim credit. Special Education pointed down the hall to Curriculum Services. Curriculum Services directed me to Pupil Services. Pupil Services sent me to back Special Education. Directors, coordinators, program specialists, department chairs, teachers, and even a secretary all had strong opinions about why a core-replacement curriculum turned out to be a good thing, but nobody seemed to be able to say whose great idea it was to get one.

As an aficionado of crime shows, I started where any fictional television crime unit might start: I followed the money. The money led to the intersection of three different district departments, each with an agenda to operationalize an RTI 3-tiered system at the high schools in Mission. Leaders in each of the district programs had distinct notions of what a reading intervention should be. All tended to agree that two levels of intervention were required: a Tier 2 level that would supplement classroom instruction, and a Tier 3, which would replace core instruction. There was disagreement, however, about who would be eligible for each level. Some viewed Tier 2 as an intervention for all students at-risk for school failure whether designated special needs or not. Some believed that Tier 2 should be reserved for general education students only, reasoning that students with special education services would be supported through that program and did not need to be included in Tier 2 planning. Likewise, planning for Tier 3 was problematic as some felt that core-replacement could be provided, again, as an intervention for all students, while others believed that there should be separate classes for students in the special education program and those who were not. To further complicate things, a portion of the budget had been provided through funds designated to

increase scores on high stakes testing, whereas other funds were general operation earmarked to implement reading intervention for all of K-12.

**Following the money.**

In July 2005, changes from the reauthorization of IDEA (2004) went into effect, including use of an RTI model for providing tiered support for struggling readers and also as an alternative method for identification of students with learning disabilities (Fuchs, 2007). Curriculum Services at Mission School District was the department that had been in charge of investigating and adopting successful Tier 2 and Tier 3 interventions for students of all ages across the district. They formed the Curriculum Services RTI Committee and began with elementary schools and young struggling readers (K-4). At the time, as program specialist Camilla Robinson explained to me, this was an exciting process but not a challenging one. The CDE had released a state-adopted interventions list that the committee was able to use to review literature, request samples, and visit other districts running the interventions (CDE, 2002). “That part was fun,” said Julie Merton, special education program specialist who served on the committee. “It was like a blank check. The next part was much harder.” Julie was referring to the process beginning in 2005 to adopt a curriculum for the middle school grades. Although the CDE had recommendations for reading interventions for grades 4-8, attitudes of faculty and administration at the school sites became a concern. A shock-wave of anti-scripted program sentiment had shot through the district office and schools in reaction to highly-scripted programs such as SRA/McGraw-Hill’s *Open Court*, widely adopted in 2002 by

elementary schools across California, and one of the first intervention curricula adopted by California (CDE, 2002). Local news stories of adjacent districts' adoption of *Open Court* particularly were airing regularly, and teachers in those districts reacted negatively to being provided a script. Resistance to highly-scripted programs is documented by Achinstein and Ogawa (2006) who describe teachers' loss of their sense of individuality and creativity. The Curriculum Services RTI Committee had to work within this new, hostile context to find a program to supplement and replace core instruction, and that teachers and administrators would accept. "It wasn't about what works anymore. Everyone had an idea, but it was only what they didn't want," said Julie Merton, describing the situation as increasingly political. "What they didn't want was *Open Court*." Although difficult, working with the CDE approved list, the district adopted *Read 180* (Hasselbring, Kinsella & Feldman, 2005) Stages A (grades 4-6) and B (grades 7-8) for pull-out Tier 2 instruction and *Inside* by Hampton-Brown for Tier 3 ELA core-replacement.

By the time the Curriculum Services RTI Committee turned their attention to finding reading interventions for the high school settings, patience and attention were both running thin. The committee had dwindled in size. Several members had moved onto new projects, and the two remaining program specialists and one teacher were fatigued by the lengthy review process. They were daunted at the prospect of beginning again. All had elementary roots and felt ill-equipped to select a high school package. To make matters worse, California had not (and still has not at the time of this study) adopted a state-approved high school reading intervention program, leaving the

committee with a blank check and no idea where to begin in acquiring Tier 2 and Tier 3 interventions for older students. To put it simply, there was funding in want of a product.

Meanwhile, across the district office, another department was contending with its own struggles to find the most beneficial way to spend the money. Funds were allocated to school districts in Program Improvement (PI) for intervention and remediation of students at risk for low performance on California State Tests (CST), which contributed to API and AYP for STAR reporting (CDE, 2011). High school test scores were of particular concern because students' scores on the CAHSEE constituted 18% of total AYP scores. All three high schools in Mission School District entered PI in the 2006/2007 academic year. The Pupil Services division of Mission School District was put in charge of implementing interventions to address accountability high-stakes testing shortfalls, including CST and CAHSEE intervention. Groups designated at-risk included high numbers of students in special education, and extra federal funds were allocated specifically for this target group. Pupil Services invited collaboration with the Special Education Department as a partner and scrambled to put in place systematic intervention to increase high stakes test scores in the high schools. They too had funding and were in search of a product.

A set of consumable workbooks were purchased that were designed to improve CAHSEE scores. Students in the below basic and far below basic categories on CST and those who had not passed one or both sections of the CAHSEE (ELA and math) were enrolled in an "elective" class by the guidance counselor until they made adequate progress. A sizeable number of students, including many with special needs, did not

make adequate progress, and ultimately repeated the class, with the same workbook, up to 5 semesters in a row. Pupil Services personnel reviewed the CAHSEE Intervention class model and opted to abandon it. The Pupil Services Department determined that the funds allocated for the disbanded classes could be put to better use with an approach that had a stronger evidence base. Rather than a semester-long class, specific high-stakes test intervention would be focused through intensive workshops at each school site, after school and on weekends, for low-scoring students in the weeks leading up to test administrations.

A new review of materials was initiated by the Director of Pupil Services, but this time by a smaller group, less a committee than a designee, who conducted a review and then reported back with a recommendation to the director and other program specialists. Pupil Services program specialist Timothy Lyon recommended for Tier 3 intervention that the district adopt the next level of *Read 180* (Hasselbring et al., 2005), Level C, intended for use with grades 9 and up, and the *Stretch* program from *Read 180*, which would be offered as an elective class for 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> graders as Tier 2 intervention. Two separate classes were created in the high schools (including both ABC and XYZ) for general education students: a single-period elective (*Stretch*) to be taken in addition to 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grade ELA as a supplement, and a 2-period block for core-replacement of 9<sup>th</sup> grade ELA (*Read 180*, Level C). Although the 2-period block was a core-replacement curriculum for 9<sup>th</sup> grade ELA, the *Read 180* program alone failed to meet A-G requirements as core-replacement for California standards. In other words, while students who had taken the *Read 180* class instead of 9<sup>th</sup> grade ELA could receive a

diploma from the school district at graduation, they could not use that class for admission to the Cal State or UC systems. So, although designated as a Tier 3 intervention, *Read 180* was not an appropriate intervention for students with aspirations to attend college. Additionally, special education teams at the high schools encountered resistance from school site administrators when attempting to enroll students with special needs into the *Read 180* classes. Guidance counselors at the high schools argued with special education case carriers that special education was a separate level of service, more restrictive and higher support than *Read 180* classes, and that students with special needs should not get seats in already over-crowded classes that were in place to serve general education students who did not have access to the same level of support. And so, although there was an official, adopted Tier 3 core-replacement curriculum for reading intervention, it was available and useful to only some.

Meanwhile, back at the district office, a small group within the Special Education Department, initially invited by Pupil Services but left to its own devices after the failed CAHSEE elective, reorganized and continued the search for a reading intervention curriculum that would benefit students with special needs. Bringing its own funding allocated by PI for the target group of students with special needs, a new committee was formed by the Special Education Department to select a program. The newly formed Special Education RTI Committee, including the coordinator of special education, the program specialist for the mild-moderate program, department chairs, and volunteer special education teachers, began to review Tier 3 intervention packages for core-replacement that would address substantial reading deficits for, as defined by Fuchs and

colleagues, “children chronically non-responsive to primary and secondary intervention [that] are viewed as requiring individualized, data-based, and recursive special education instruction” (Fuchs et al., 2007, p. 414).

The Special Education RTI Committee encountered several obstacles. First, Mission District School Board made recommendations to push for special needs students to be served in general education in higher numbers. This would mean a larger number of special education teachers at each high school site would need to be allocated to work collaboratively with general education teachers rather than teach their own self-contained classes. The committee also encountered political resistance at the district level. Pupil Services program specialist Timothy Lyon, who had recommended *Read 180* Level C and *Stretch* for the high schools, was working against the search committee because he favored *Read 180* over another replacement curriculum. One of the department chairs working on the committee expressed his frustrations during interview:

But then there was someone up there was married to *Read 180*, saying we have data your kids [students in special education] can be successful in *Read 180*. And I said great, how’s that affect the fact that you won’t let me place my kids in *Read 180*? We have one kid in all three high schools that’s taken *Read 180* on a fluke because he slipped through the cracks, and you have [an] official document that says you cannot place special ed. students in *Read 180* because they don’t make the progress. (Keith Hansen, INT)

Although these obstacles slowed progress, eventually the Special Education RTI Committee selected and purchased the *Edge* program (Moore, et al., 2008). There were those on the committee with concerns, but the committee agreed that it was the best option available on the market. In the following section, factors that contributed to committee members' final recommendation to endorse *Edge* are reviewed. Dissenting members' concerns are addressed as well.

### **Viewpoints about *Edge*.**

Keith Hansen, the Special Education Department Chair at XYZ, made a point that I heard repeatedly as perhaps the most consistent endorsement of *Edge* materials for use in special education ELA classrooms. Before there was *Edge*, Keith said, "We had kind of a mishmash of garbage basically hobbled together to teach English with and it was, it was terrible." Whatever else they disagreed about in terms of how the *Edge* program should be used in the classroom and what they hoped it would accomplish, every person I asked about *Edge* commented in context of what came before, and nearly every one with a clear message that what came before was a mess. As George Yang, the *Edge* program specialist and a former middle school SDC teacher put it, "We didn't have anything comprehensive. It was always just the teachers creating it, taking grade-level curriculum and modifying it for the student." Jennifer Castle from ABC High School argued to the Superintendent that while a push for more students to be included into the general education was a good move, "That still doesn't address the needs of the students that are self-contained because too long have we been hobbling curriculum together for those



kids.” Julie Merton, program specialist, described the scene of the Special Education RTI Committee meeting when they reviewed the *Edge* Program materials and decided that it was the one:

We were jumping up and down in here. ‘Can you believe it has this?’ and ‘Wow! Look at that!’ So if anybody has any complaints... I mean truly, we’ve had nothing. I’ve been in special education since the 1980’s and in all those years we didn’t have anything that was worth, you now, anything. (Julie Merton, INT)

Even Veronica Levy, an *Edge* teacher who fondly remembered the good old days of picking and choosing her own curriculum, grudgingly admitted:

*Edge* is designed to give [students] the skills they need to employ in order to make themselves look like an intelligent functioning adult. We want to teach them to understand what they read. They need to know what's going on out there. (Veronica Levy, INT)

Consistently participants who were interviewed for this study agreed that something was better than nothing.

Additionally, many participants pointed to a particular feature that made *Edge* stand out from the other curricular reading programs for high school students: “And it’s a book that looks like a high school book, for high school students. And they’re not doing little worksheets with little bunnies on it,” explained Julie Merton. Several participants referred to this attribution of face validity, or judgment based upon the appearance and a superficial examination to determine if an instrument (usually an assessment) does what

it claims to do (Linn & Gronlund, 2000), as a primary reason that they supported use of *Edge in Mission*. Julie goes on to explain that when they examined another front runner program, Sopris West's *Language!* (Greene, 1995), which had been used in the middle school program for several years, they discovered that it lacked "high-schoolness" or that certain something that would draw in and engage older struggling readers.

It's [*Language!*] very babyish. I could see how the kids would totally shut down with that one. It was embarrassing for them to even, you know, even look at. And it was boring. It was really boring. So I could see how that wouldn't be very exciting for high school students who struggle with reading. An even more boring book! [Laughs] (Julie Merton, INT)

The committee stumbled upon and exemplified what is identified in the research literature as a problem particularly pertinent for older struggling readers: motivation (Torgesen et al., 2007). In fact, the negative effects of reader disengagement intensify as students get older (Guthrie, Wigfield, & VonSecker, 2000). Research literature for older struggling readers often addresses text difficulty as a particularly challenging factor for getting and keeping students engaged in reading (see, for example a review by Gersten, Fuchs, Williams, & Baker, 2001), and suggests a particular challenge in intervention for older children lies in providing a text that is both at an appropriate instructional level and is also highly interesting to students. In other words, the text must be easy enough that students can be successful, and also be compelling enough for students to want to read it. Guthrie and Humenick (2004) delineated ways that students' motivation to read could be

increased through text selection, including using texts that are high in interest, support challenging content goals, support student autonomy, and increase social interactions among students related to reading. Julie Merton's remark above suggested that the committee determined that a text must be, first and foremost, interesting to high school students. In their estimation, this meant that even though it needed to be at a reading level appropriate for struggling readers (such as *Edge* provided with the 4 levels), it also had to "look high school."

Julie Merton went on to explain: "The *Edge* readings... they're interesting and they look like high school books. And some of them are... well, there are excerpts from Shakespeare. I think *Romeo and Juliet* is in there." Keith Hansen noted a similar experience when his class read *The Outsiders* in 2009/2010 in his Level A class:

[*The Outsiders*] was one of those leveled texts that had been tweaked a little for readability... When we did that, they wouldn't have ever seen that book before, and now they at least, you know, all the other kids have read that book. They can at least know when somebody is talking about that book and say, 'oh yeah, we did that in our English class.' (Keith Hansen, INT)

William Shakespeare's drama *Romeo and Juliet* was in the *Edge* textbook twice, in fact. Act II, Scene 2 actually appeared in both the Fundamentals text and the Level C text; the lowest (reading level approximately 2<sup>nd</sup> grade) and highest (reading level approximately 8<sup>th</sup> grade) levels respectively. So was *The Outsiders*. In the Level B text, S.E. Hinton's novel was adapted into a short play and the storyline was presented as 12 scenes on 15

pages. While text difficulty level had been scaled, the selection of both *The Outsiders* and *Romeo and Juliet* aligned with typical 9<sup>th</sup> grade ELA text requirements. Keith viewed this as a major advantage of the *Edge* program and counted it as one of his primary reasons for voting for it. His view was not universally shared.

Elizabeth O'Day was a Special Education Department Chair at one of the Mission high schools who served on the intervention selection committee. In addition to being a department chair, she was a Mission School District Distinguished Teacher, voted so by faculty, students and administration, and the only special education teacher ever to receive this honor in Mission School District. Elizabeth O'Day had been teaching in Mission School District for 18 years as a special education ELA teacher when she was invited to participate in the committee that selected *Edge*. Whereas Keith viewed abridged, readable texts that allowed exposure to grade-level titles and themes as a benefit, Elizabeth saw things differently. She explained:

So Fundamentals has a little thing about, I don't know, about six paragraphs, of *Romeo and Juliet*. So when I did that the first year -- I've been used to teaching the play for the last few years -- the students were excited, they were like 'oh, we get to read Shakespeare!' That was my clue and I was like, 'hey do you want to do the whole thing?' And so we did the whole thing. (Elizabeth O'Day, INT)

One of her students, Bobby, interviewed for the study, appeared to have made her point for her:

She actually got me through. I found it extremely hard, regular curriculum like that, just frustrating. But the one thing I did pull from it was I can probably talk about every detail in *Romeo and Juliet*. Just everything back down to a little penny. (Bobby, STU INT)

Bobby spoke with pride about his mastery over *Romeo and Juliet*. He did not dismiss it, or make light of it. In fact, he said that it was the hardest thing he did in 9<sup>th</sup> grade. He spoke of it with pride. Elizabeth O'Day claimed that the very experience Bobby described was what was missing from *Edge* abridged texts: "This is one thing I've said over and over... Even though the students may test into Fundamentals, it does not mean that they cannot, again, that they cannot do *Romeo and Juliet*." Elizabeth explained that, in her perception, conquering *Romeo and Juliet* had less to do with what students recalled about the play itself and was more about the value they derived from being able to say that they had read a complete Shakespearean play. "And so I think in everything that I do, whether I'm interfacing with the students or staff, I am trying to empower people with my language and how I treat them," Elizabeth explained as she struggled to convey to me why *Romeo and Juliet* was so much more than a play. Students, she said, left her class with their passions and dreams intact, with a sense that they could make their lives into what they wanted. Reading Shakespeare, for Elizabeth O'Day, had more to do with helping students realize that even the impossible was possible with enough hard work and determination.

In addition to differences between committee members, special education teams at the two high schools in the study, ABC and XYZ, each interpreted the *Edge* program

differently. Interviews and classroom observation data suggested that *Edge* classes at the two schools were designated for purposes assigned by each site, and were intended to accomplish site-specific tasks that were prioritized differently. While the two versions overlapped, there were also various points on which the two school site teams were in conflict.

**The way we do it over here.**

The special education teams at ABC and XYZ High Schools each had ways of implementing *Edge* that served what they perceived to be their students' particular needs. Interviews were conducted with two high school teams and 5 *Edge* classrooms were observed. Both schools had been recognized as a California Distinguished school several times over the last decade, the last time as recently as 2005 for ABC High School. Both schools, however, entered PI in the 2006/2007 school year. Schools were similar in demographics, but differed in overall size and Asian/Hispanic student populations (Table 1).

ABC High School was established in 1898 as the flagship high school in the city of Mission, serving nearly 2,500 students. Many of the teachers at ABC High School attended school in Mission as children and grew up in the community. Interviews indicated that teachers felt connected with the Mission community, tended to live within it, and had extended family that continued to reside there. Three of the teachers in the special education team at ABC High School had spouses who were either teachers for another school in Mission School District or had local community jobs such as working

for the city police department. Teachers, special education teachers included, at ABC were invested in the school's success more than just as it served their immediate interests; they were also connected to the neighborhood and invested in how students' performance reflected upon the school and community.

ABC had a mixed model for special education service delivery in ELA before they launched *Edge*. First, there was a collaborative model for addressing ELA academic goals, such as written mechanics, written expression, reading decoding, and reading comprehension. Special education case carriers wrote IEP goals that were based on grade-level standards so that students could be served in the general education setting with collaborative support from the Special Education Department. Collaboration with general education teachers was usually in the form of accommodations for student product and few, if any, changes to instruction. Special education teachers were assigned to work with general education teachers and visited the class or met with the teacher 2-3 times a week, and sometimes sent an instructional aide to work with students. IEP teams were also able to recommend modified instruction in a self-contained class, based upon the IEP goals, and if they concluded that a student would not be able to access the curriculum in the general education classroom even with collaborative support.

There were two types of self-contained classes at ABC before *Edge* was adopted. First, there were SDC classes that were taught by a special education teacher and geared toward addressing IEP goals that were based on substantially modified grade-level standards or off-grade level standards. For example, a 10<sup>th</sup> grade student might have a goal based on a 5<sup>th</sup> grade standard that targeted a more foundational writing skill, like

writing a paragraph, rather than grade-level expository essay writing. In addition, there were RSP self-contained classes, also taught by a special education teacher and intended for students who had IEP goals more closely aligned to grade level standards and might need in-class accommodations or slight modification to content only. For example, an RSP student might have a written expression goal that required a 5-paragraph essay (commensurate with grade level expectations) but included guided use of a teacher-made prewriting graphic organizer.

Over time, the distinction between RSP and SDC classes at ABC High School became less clear. “Scheduling interfered a lot,” reported Karen Mann, a school psychologist at ABC. “I was the SDC school psych., but I had kids all over the place. We had kids with ID [Intellectual Disability] and kids with SLD [Specific Learning Disabilities] all in the same class. And then there were kids out there that, they just weren’t ready.” ABC was a densely populated high school, and classes were very full. With special education teachers split between instruction of self-contained classes and time collaborating in general education classes, too few sections of self-contained ELA (SDC and RSP) were offered to support much diversity in students’ schedule. In addition, students’ placement in RSP or SDC level classes varied greatly depending upon their specific case carrier’s efficacy and expectations for their students. Karen Mann explained: “Like Jennifer, she really pushed her kids. But some of the other RSP case carriers, they didn’t even know where their kids were until October.”

Several members of the Special Education Department at ABC reported through interview that they felt that the collaboration/self-contained divide did not address the full



range of needs their students demonstrated. For example, students in the general education collaboration classes might require some remedial instruction on specific skills for reading and writing that were not being addressed by general education teachers, but were able to benefit from the majority of instruction. Conversely, some students assigned to a self-contained class had “outgrown” that setting but were not deemed ready by the IEP team for the leap to general education with only minimal support. The RSP/SDC distinction had lost much of its utility and self-contained sections more and more resembled each other in the variety of ELA goals that students had in their IEPs. Whereas RSP and SDC classes were meant to be geared toward different levels of student needs as conveyed by their IPE goals, all levels of IEP goals ended up lumped together in classes regardless of the RSP or SDC designation.

When invited to participate in the Special Education RTI Committee to investigate reading interventions, teachers at ABC were specifically interested in reintroducing a true continuum of classes that supported remedial reading needs while still providing opportunities to increase the level of academic rigor. At the same time, the ABC team reinvested its commitment to inclusion and transitioned a greater number of students to general education classes with special education collaborative support. As ABC began piloting *Edge* classes in place of self-contained classes for special education ELA in the 2009/2010 academic school year, students were also moved into general education with special education collaboration in unprecedented numbers. More than half of SDC periods were closed in order to free up special education teachers to work in the general education setting. Collaboration classes were revamped. Classes continued

to be taught by a general education teacher, and also had a second, fully credentialed special education teacher assigned to support students every day. The remaining students, those whose IEP teams had determined were not yet ready for general education collaboration classes, were assigned an *Edge* class based on grade level. Students were instructed in classes with same-grade peers. In the pilot year at ABC, *Edge* teachers were expected to run multiple levels of the program (Fundamentals, A, B, and C) with a same-grade group of students.

XYZ High School was established forty years after ABC, the second high school in the community, as a New Deal project by the Public Works Administration in 1938. XYZ was less connected with the city of Mission because students lived in three cities with XYZ acting as a hub. Students attended a different school district for elementary and middle school years, and then began at Mission in 9<sup>th</sup> grade because their home-town districts did not host high schools of their own. XYZ entered Program Improvement in 2006/2007.

While the XYZ special education team also wanted to increase the range of level of support for ELA available to special education students, the team also adopted a much more conservative approach to change. Both levels of self-contained classes (RSP and SDC) were offered at XYZ prior to adoption of *Edge*, but whereas these classes had lost their distinction at ABC, the integrity of the two levels held at XYZ. There was a clear division between where SDC ended and RSP began, driven mostly by the materials used in each. RSP and SDC levels were distinguished not by which students were assigned to

them as they were at ABC (based upon IEP goals), but rather by which curricular materials each used.

RSP classes used general education materials (textbooks and novels) that were checked out as class sets. Use of materials was problematic, however, because special education teachers had lower rank than general education. Special education teachers had “last pick” of materials each year, and were often forced to teach in an order dictated by availability of materials. As such, the RSP classes were out of sync with both the general education classes running the same curriculum, and with the district benchmark testing, which was based on pacing guides developed to maintain continuity between ELA classes in general education. In other words, students in RSP ELA classes at XYZ High School were held accountable to know the same materials as their typical peers at various check points in the year without having had the opportunity to learn or be exposed to the materials. The RSP teachers reported during interviews that they felt like second-class citizens at XYZ; performing a comparable job with identical materials, but with fewer rights and fewer opportunities for their students to be successful.

SDC classes were a separate level of self-contained class, differing from RSP because they used off-grade level texts rather than grade level. Keith Hansen, Special Education Department Chair at XYZ, reported that SDC classes used some discontinued high school materials, middle school texts, and a mix of intervention materials that teachers had brought with them from previous teaching assignments, such as *Language!* (Greene, 1995).

One major difference between the schools was in how they enacted ELA collaboration classes. The policy at ABC was to dedicate a special education teacher full time (5 days a week) to each general education class period in which students with special needs were enrolled. These teachers were presumed to provide sufficient support during class time for students with special needs to succeed. XYZ policy was to instead enroll all students who were in collaborative ELA classes to a “study skills” RSP elective class to get the support necessary to succeed. Although a special education teacher was not in general education classes with them each day, an Instructional aide was, and the Aide was also available to them during their RSP elective. Students were enrolled in the RSP study skills class with their RSP case carriers and in clusters based on which general education teachers they had. This period was dedicated to working with students on IEP goals, preparing for tests during key times of the year, and keeping students caught up on daily assignments in all their general education content area classes, including ELA. The proportion of students at XYZ served in collaboration classes was lower than ABC, as shown on Table 3.

When Keith Hansen, Special Education Department Chair at XYZ, was invited to participate in the committee to select a new reading intervention, he represented XYZ teachers’ main concern as needing quality and consistent curricular materials for use in self-contained classes. Although several of the discussions about how *Edge* would be implemented did not seem realistic, Keith described his agenda as being ruled by the critical need at XYZ for workable materials. Another department chair argued against purchasing *Edge* because she believed that the district’s expectation for student gains

were unrealistic. Keith described his response to her: “And I kept saying to her, you know it's not gonna happen, I know it's not gonna happen, but we need the materials so let's shut up and get the materials, and then we'll run it how we run it.” His mission, he explained, was to acquire those materials at any cost because that was what XYZ teachers perceived as the most critical piece that was missing from their program.

Differences between ABC and XYZ High Schools for the 2010/2011 school year are shown in Table 3. Notably, a smaller percentage of students with disabilities were enrolled in *Edge* classes at ABC than XYZ, in great part explained by the emphasis on the collaboration model at ABC. There was also a tighter cluster of *Edge* levels at ABC compared to more variety in *Edge* levels offered at XYZ. During the pilot year at ABC (2009/2010), teachers gravitated toward a specific level of *Edge* (usually Fundamentals, A or B) and tended to teach the level that they judged to be appropriate for the majority of students. Higher-level materials were used primarily to supplement instruction for students who required enrichment. The ABC team adjusted the program for 2010/2011 by opening class sections that included up to 2 adjacent grades, such as a 9-10 combination, or 11-12 combination. The ABC special education team continued to place a strong emphasis on keeping classes grade-similar, and so did not include more than 2 grade levels in any class. Teachers, however, were assigned a specific *Edge* level and were expected to teach only one level at a time; a noteworthy change from the pilot year. Clusters formed at the Fundamentals Level, grade equivalent 1-3, and the B Level, grade equivalent 5-7 (Moore et al., 2008) in the 2010/2011 school year. Differences in eligibility criteria and grade level distributions are demonstrated in Tables 2 and 4.

*Edge* was ultimately selected by the Special Education RTI Committee because it was the best option that satisfied the many participants' needs. Keith Hansen and Julie Merton backed the adoption of *Edge* because they recognized the need for a uniform and high quality ELA curriculum for use in special education classrooms. A portion of the funds used to purchase the *Edge* program was allocated to increase high stakes test scores for the sub-group of students with disabilities. Use of *Edge* was in part a solution to the problem of the high schools' PI status. *Edge* classes also replaced self-contained special education class periods, and many of the functions of these self-contained classes were shifted to *Edge* classes, providing a time when case carriers could address both academic and non-academic IEP goals.

Adoption of the *Edge* program became the solution to many different problems that were at least initially unrelated. As suggested by Cohen and colleagues, *Edge* classes operated as a trash can in which all the various problems of meeting IEP goals, teaching students to read, providing intervention to increase test scores, and teaching test-taking strategies were thrown (Cohen, et al., 1972). This study investigated the relative effects of assigning so many purposes to a single class period. The following sections portray how teachers and administrators described their perceptions of what *Edge* class was meant to accomplish. Teachers were also interviewed about how they viewed the job of a special educator, and how they organized their time to perform all those functions. Students were interviewed to investigate what meaning they assigned to *Edge* classes, and what they believed was the purpose of the class. Classroom observations were conducted to examine what happened during *Edge* classes in several classrooms and

compared and contrasted with teachers' explanations of their perception of the function of the *Edge* curriculum.

### ***Edge* in the Classroom: Questions Two, Three, and Four**

To address research questions two through four, classroom practices were investigated through both observation and interview. Each classroom observed was treated as a case, as suggested by Yin (2009). Teachers of each classroom were interviewed both away from their teaching assignment (during a preparation period, before or after school) and when possible, immediately following instruction. Each case is presented here, and each addresses research questions 2-4. For each case, the teacher is introduced with a brief history. Teachers' perspectives about special education practices, including the importance of IEP writing, teaching basic academic skills, and preparation for high stakes testing are discussed. Teachers were also asked to identify important aspects of both the formal (academic, and in this case, the *Edge* program) and informal curriculum, including how they teach social and study skills. Finally, teachers were asked to discuss the efficacy of the *Edge* program. Interviews with students, department chairs, and district administrators were also reviewed to triangulate evidence (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007).

Typical and notable classroom activities are described to exemplify how classroom interactions undergird, or conflict, with how the teachers explain their classroom plans. For each case, the way in which class time is actually spent, including specific teaching strategies and instructional organization, student-teacher interactions,

and the role of the Instructional aide(s), is reviewed. Each case is briefly discussed in terms of how these observations support or conflict with teachers' descriptions of their practices.

Following the cases, research questions are discussed separately to highlight key similarities and differences. In addition, inferences are made to explain patterns and anomalies. Although not all cases are discussed for each research question, all cases were considered for comparisons.

***Level B with Mrs. Degado.***

Mrs. Leticia (Leti for short) Delgado was a first year teacher, but it was not her first year in a high school special education classroom. Nor was she new to Mission School District. Mrs. Delgado had been an instructional aide at ABC for 4 years before deciding to go back and get her own credential and take a position at XYZ. She was in her first year of being the lead teacher when I visited her class. In response to how she chose to work in special education, she said "It was a funny thing. I wanted to go into psychology, because that's what I studied [undergrad]. I couldn't find a job after college. And I applied for the instructional aide position and I got it and loved it. Because it's teaching and it's using psychology."

It was easy to see that Mrs. Delgado used her background in psychology when teaching a class. She had a calming voice and while she certainly conveyed disapproval for certain behaviors in class, she never, not once during my visits, "lost it" outwardly. Mrs. Delgado's Level B *Edge* class was the most challenging I visited in terms of student



behaviors and classroom management, and she was the newest teacher. During interviews Mrs. Delgado referred less to choices that she had made about her teaching style and spoke more about what she was doing wrong and ways that she needed to change. For example, when asked about how she contended with having students in grades 9<sup>th</sup> through 12<sup>th</sup> in her class (the only class that I visited that had that span), she answered: “I have to work on that because I know that they are at different levels. My higher students, I still give them what I give my other students. And maybe that’s why they’re bored. And I have to work on that.” I responded by giving examples that I had seen her do in class to individualize the curriculum for both ends of the continuum, including use of an enrichment packet for students who finished early that was both rewarding and challenging (with activities such as meaning of colloquial phrases, practice with rhyming, work with synonyms/antonyms, etc.). She looked at me almost as if wishing what I said was true, but only shook her head when I was finished, and said, “I need to get better.”

Mrs. Delgado stressed that one of the most important roles a special education teacher has was to have a relationship with her students. She also spoke of her attempt to have a personal relationship with her students as something she needed to fix: “And I try to do that [build relationships] before actually doing the discipline. Which, maybe it backfired on me and I should have started with discipline and then made the connection.” Mrs. Delgado’s students, however, acknowledged that they felt personally connected to her. For example, Wallace was an 11<sup>th</sup> grader and one of the most challenging students in Mrs. Delgado’s class. I observed him openly defying her directions, swearing and

threatening students, refusing to complete work, ignoring, and even yelling at Mrs. Delgado when he did not agree with her. Wallace was sent to the dean by Mrs. Delgado and suspended for several days, and yet during interview after his return, Wallace suggested that Mrs. Delgado did something very right:

Ms. Delgado, I like that she understands, like we do stuff bad, but like, we're just joking around, but she knows. She gets mad, but she understands that we're just growing up and we're still maturing. Sometimes we get in trouble, but she understands. She has a great personality. She gets along with us. And that's what a teacher needs to be. Not just doing a job. She goes above the level. And that's what she does. And that's pretty good. And I don't have no doubts about Ms. Delgado. I know she's a teacher. You know? (Wallace, STU INT)

Mrs. Delgado was far more successful than she knew at reaching her students personally and making them feel genuinely cared for.

Mrs. Delgado viewed special education as different from general education in several ways. First, she explained that each student was a unique, one-of-a-kind individual. She believed that a label designation (such as autism or learning disability) did not tell a teacher all they needed to know. "I think everybody is different. And special ed. kids are special [chuckles]. They bring a sense of individuality... they are a little different, even if they have the same thing. Even students with the same disability group, it's different between them, or among them." Mrs. Delgado believed that an important strategy for teaching students with special needs was to incorporate choices.

For example, when grouping students using Lexile scores was unsuccessful, Mrs. Delgado allowed students to choose their own small-groups. She believed that choice making helped engage the students in their own learning. With the consent of the high school program specialist George Yang, she abandoned doing the textbook units in order and instead let the students choose what unit they would do next. That strategy was unique among teachers in the study. Mrs. Delgado's class was primarily composed of same-level-repeaters (in other words, all but two of her students had taken Level B the year before), which was also true but to a lesser extent for other *Edge* teachers. Mrs. Delgado, however, was the only teacher to adapt her teaching plan and to offer students the choice of repeating units again (Units 1-3), or moving to the end of the text to begin a unit they had not worked with before. Her students unanimously voted to work on Unit 5 first (including selections by Edgar Allan Poe), and Unit 7 next (including *The Outsiders*). "Just little choices," Mrs. Delgado stated during interview, "It makes them engaged."

Although Mrs. Delgado stated that she believed that instruction should be tailored to students' strengths and needs, department policy at XYZ was not conducive to individualizing instruction in *Edge* classes. The special education team at XYZ created a bank of ELA goals that were standards-based and aligned to the curriculum of several different classes, including *Edge*, *Read 180*, and general education. When a student at XYZ needed a goal, there was a bank that the case carrier chose from. Mrs. Delgado did not write goals, but rather selected from a pre-set list. Goals were aligned to the curriculum rather than individual student-need and IEP meetings at XYZ centered on

curriculum rather than students, which contrasted with her philosophy of special education. As a new teacher however, Mrs. Delgado followed the policies at XYZ to the letter. She taught *Edge* with fidelity to script and used IEP goals from the department-approved bank.

Specific preparation for standardized tests was not part of Mrs. Delgado's agenda. Review, she said, happened during the *Edge* curriculum. While she stated her frustration that students didn't always remember what they had learned during testing, she did not supplement classroom instruction with specific test strategies or reinforce *Edge* content that might be critical for state testing, such as academic language and expository essay writing. Mrs. Delgado did not designate class time to work specifically on social skills even though she identified students in her class as particularly needing help on skills such as communication and positive interactions. She noted that she would like "extra scripted support for teaching social skills in *Edge*" but appeared at a loss to plan or improvise instruction to address those areas around or beyond the script. Mrs. Delgado's class was a behaviorally challenging group. In addition to behaviors that were against school rules, many of the students' behaviors had ramifications for their later success. For example, several boys in Mrs. Delgado's class frequently made sexual comments and jokes (3-4 times a day during a 2-period block). These jokes were not aimed at Mrs. Delgado or the instructional aides (both women), but they were also not demonstrative of respect for others in the class, teachers included. Mrs. Delgado ignored sexual comments consistently, each and every time.

Mrs. Delgado stayed on script more than any other teacher in the study. While she stated that she valued student-choice, Mrs. Delgado bypassed student-initiated discussion topics that occurred spontaneously during lessons in order to steer the class back to the *Edge* lesson. More than any other teacher observed, Mrs. Delgado used the full array of *Edge* components (all four strands), used every group-initiated and student pair-share discussion question in the teacher's manual, and implemented with fidelity the district's procedure for small-group rotations for the majority of class time (minimizing whole-class directed instruction). Mrs. Delgado stayed on target. Student behavior was ignored to stay on target. Student questions were left unanswered to stay on target. Even when clarifying a concept, Mrs. Delgado used the text and only the text. For example, conducting a grammar lesson (teacher's manual in hand), Mrs. Delgado guided her students through use of the Present Perfect Tense. The *Edge*-provided overhead used a bi-directional arrow visual to explain how this tense fit in with others learned in prior lessons (Figure 1). Mrs. Delgado, as instructed by the script, used the arrow to place the Present Perfect Tense on the "earlier" side of the continuum, and to use "have rehearsed" and "has rehearsed" as the examples to demonstrate how to convert sentences into this tense. The grammar lessoned was thematically tied to the unit in the text that included a play (*A Raisin in the Sun*) and so all the examples involved aspects of putting on a play and stage directions.

Unfortunately, the verb "rehearsed" in the *Edge* provided example shown in Figure (1) was unfamiliar to several of the students. Although the word "rehearse" had come up in reading, it had not been explicitly taught. Mrs. Delgado began by asking if

anyone knew what it was. Peter raised his hand and attempted to explain, “To do it over and over to learn it.” Chris likened it to baseball practice. Mrs. Delgado, however, said that it meant to learn your lines for a play. To rehearse meant to practice for a stage production (activities thematically consistent with *A Raisin in the Sun*). She continued on with the first item under the “Try It” section and moved on with the lesson. Mrs. Delgado, by sticking to the script, missed an opportunity to connect the lesson to real-life experiences or to make the lesson more accessible by allowing students to choose alternative examples.

***Level C with Mr. Paul.***

Mr. Paul was a hard man to catch. In addition to being a special education teacher and case carrier, he also worked with the XYZ athletics department both as director and a coach. When I did finally catch him for a one-on-one interview, he was substituting for the auto-shop teacher during his conference period. We walked up together, directly from his 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> periods *Edge* block. About 5 of his students from the *Edge* class had auto-shop as an elective, so there were several familiar faces. Mr. Paul explained that some of his students also took auto for the Regional Occupational Program (ROP), so they had a fourth period class elective during the school day and then again in the afternoon, from 4:00 to 6:00, two days a week. The shop had 8 cars brought in by people in the community who appreciated the engine work for a nominal fee. As we arrived, the shop teacher gave a few directions to his class (about 11 students), handed Mr. Paul the roll sheet, and left for a district training. The students headed off to the far side of the

shop and raised a car to begin a transmission replacement. Mr. Paul and I sat in the opposite corner of the shop and began our conversation.

He explained that part of what he was able to do with his students at XYZ was because of the depth of his relationship with them. He had been working with his senior caseload since they were freshmen. He knew several of the students through the athletic department either on his own team, or through his role as director. He knew their families. He knew if they had a hard time with English. He knew their last three math goals, and whether his students had passed the CAHSEE. “I’ve gotten to know them really well throughout the years...I think the thing for me, that’s my key thing, is to try to find a way to connect to each of them.” That relationship and knowledge of his students came through during class as well.

Mr. Paul had an exceptional way of finding just the right way to connect students with what they were learning. In class he contextualized ideas using pop-media, such as describing the pain of being famous using Michael Jackson as an example. He illustrated the difference between “be-er” versus “doer” for an *Edge* discussion activity by comparing students in class, by name, who had jobs and those who didn’t. One student described how Mr. Paul assisted his group during a project when the members were not able to agree:

He'll want to hear both sides. And then he'll give us an example of what we are both looking for. And that will give us sort of like hints, a clue, of what we are both targeting for, and yet we're both on different paths. So, the way he explains it, it would clear our minds completely. Which is

pretty cool because I've worked with a partner, and we both look at each other, and we'll both be like, hi-five each other. Like 'we got it, we got it! Put it down! Don't forget it!' He makes it really easy and with his teaching the work comes easy. (Ishmael, STU INT)

As his student described, Mr. Paul seemed to have mastered the balance of giving just enough support, like the little bear finding the right porridge: not too hot, not too cold... just right.

Mr. Paul, also at XYZ High School, followed the same school procedures for IEP goals as Mrs. Delgado. Case carriers at XYZ selected ELA goals from a department-created bank that aligned to classes offered at XYZ. Mr. Paul did not have any particular opinion about this procedure and he did not question it.

Although Mr. Paul fully supported the adoption of the *Edge* curriculum for use in his special education ELA class, he described his beliefs about Tier 3 reading intervention as something that should be available to any struggling reader. He believed that the designation of "special education" should not differentiate services for students, but rather all students should be assessed to determine level of need and be provided with the appropriate level of intervention. In other words, he would have preferred to take the *special* out and simply talk about *education*: "I truthfully wish it wasn't called 'Special Ed.' because if you took that away, you probably would be able to service more kids across campus." Mr. Paul held that students -- all students -- learned uniquely, and that every student had something, at some time that was difficult to learn. All students, on the



flip side, could learn at varying degrees of comprehension with alternative forms and intensity of intervention. Mr. Paul explained:

... I think there are different ways to get to the point with an English prompt. There are so many ways you can express yourself that I think the more rigorous classes, although they are looking for something within their rubric, sometimes something outside of their rubric is going to give you the answer. We help kids get to that point. To get outside of the rules.

... And nowadays in society that's allowed. And the kids see that. (Isaac Paul, INT)

Mr. Paul framed the job of teachers as being about perseverance: “Will you always be able to get them to comprehend it? Maybe not 100% of the time, but you can try. And just keep plugging along. Try to find a way to get that information to them. To get them to comprehend it.” The job of a teacher, Mr. Paul affirmed, is to find ways to help students understand. The designation of special education was irrelevant. “I think there are several general education teachers who do the job we do. Because they understand the stress and the frustration.”

Students’ frustration and anxiety were, in fact, a large part of what Mr. Paul saw as the biggest problems struggling students had when it came to high stakes testing. “I don’t think there’s enough being said about the level of anxiety these kids are feeling on any test.” Although he did not set aside *Edge* class time for high stakes test preparation, Mr. Paul worked with the school when they provided an intensive workshop “boot camp” before each administration of the CAHSEE (fall and spring) and for CST in spring. He

was a volunteer teacher for the program, and provided support not just for students in special education, but for all students who had low test scores. Mr. Paul believed that students in his *Edge* class were making gains, but evaluating those gains was tricky. In his view, students were gaining needful skills and content:

Where you'll probably see more of the gains will be when you have a discussion with them, will be what kind of feedback they will give you. What kind of connections they can make and being able to activate that prior knowledge. Knowing that it relates. I think to me, that's big. But how do you do that on a multiple choice test? You can't. (Isaac Paul, INT)

As amazed as I was when we arrived at the auto-shop class and the teacher left the students to run the place while he was away, I realized that Mr. Paul was not so different in his classroom style with students in his *Edge* class. Mr. Paul was the senior-class case carrier (he wrote IEPs and supported all the seniors with special education services at XYZ), and he taught the highest level of *Edge*, Level C, which comprised seniors and juniors only, and the only Level C section offered at any of the schools in Mission. Mr. Paul was beginning Unit 5 of the textbook at spring break and had every reason to expect to finish the entire textbook, 7 units, by the end of the school year. He was the only teacher in the study with a reasonable chance of doing so (most of the *Edge* classes had completed 2-3 units before spring break).

Like Mrs. Delgado, Mr. Paul used *Edge* class for *Edge* activities. During class visitations, students read aloud from the textbook popcorn style, worked on grammar in

their workbooks, participated in whole-class discussions, and answered comprehension questions in the *Edge Interactive Practice Book*. In contrast to Mrs. Delgado, however, Mr. Paul used and developed teachable moments, off-script, to extend students' understanding of concepts in the *Edge* lessons. For example, in one lesson observed, students were required to compare and contrast authors' purposes for two short passages. Both were biographical, one about jazz musician Wynton Marsalis, and the other about gymnast Dominique Dawes. The essential question (thematic approach) for the unit was "What do people discover in a moment of truth?"

Mr. Paul: Stacy shared with us her moment of truth. If you will, lessons that you learned. (Kyle, can I have that please?) [He takes phone and puts in his desk]. [Continuing] Amanda, what do you want to be when you grow up?

Amanda: open a day care.

Mr. Paul: did you always know that or did you have a moment when you knew?

Amanda: [Considers for a moment]. I guess when I was working at the Boys and Girls Club. In the summer.

Mr. Paul: did you mean to have that experience?

Amanda: no. I just needed the money. [Class laughs.]

Mr. Paul: [To class] was her experience more like the jazz musician or the gymnast?

Class: [Choral] jazz musician.

Mr. Paul already knew Amanda well, having had her on his caseload and in his classes since she was a freshman. Amanda was a senior who had on-site workability services and spent part of her week working in a day care center after school. Mr. Paul knew when he asked his question that Amanda had applied to an early childhood education program for the next year at a local community college. He used his knowledge of her to connect her experience with the experience of the characters in the stories. He had developed and maintained a personal relationship with Amanda. When he asked her a personal question in class, he demonstrated mutual trust in which she could rely on the safety of the classroom to answer honestly, and he was confident that she would provide an authentic, serious answer to his question. He went off-script, but only enough to help the make critical connections between the story and students' own prior knowledge and real-life experiences that deepened comprehension of key ideas and concepts.

Mr. Paul's class was primarily teacher directed IRE format (Mehan, 1979). Although he did have students periodically break into small groups for discussions or debates, the majority of instruction was conducted with the whole class of 19 students. He asked a question, called on student volunteers or nominated somebody by name, and provided feedback after their response. Students were eager to volunteer in Mr. Paul's class, but he also called on students who did not frequently volunteer and during observations engaged every student in discussion at least once. Mr. Paul shared that while he liked the On-line Coach component of *Edge*, he tended to only use it when the computer lab was open so the whole class could do it together; different from Mrs. Delgado who used the bank of 5 computers in her class daily through small group

rotations. Although Mr. Paul used all *Edge* components, he did not use them as mandated by the *Edge* program specialist, who wanted students to meet in small-groups for the majority of class blocks.

***Fundamentals Level with Mrs. Castle.***

Mrs. Castle had been working in special education for seven years, and four of those for Mission School District. She began her special education career at a non-public school (NPS) serving students with emotional-behavioral disorders. She said that while working at the NPS she became increasingly disturbed by the over-representation of children of color at the school. As a person of color herself, she felt that the education system let her fall through the cracks and she shared that being a high school drop-out herself had influenced her decision to work at XYZ: “As a high school drop-out, I chose high school because I felt an obligation to support students that I could identify with.” Mrs. Castle described her viewpoint about education and specifically special education in terms of equity: not what it is, but rather what it should do for students. “...If students were given the academic and social coping skills during the school day, they could navigate the public education system and society after they leave school.” In a total of 5 interviews, Mrs. Castle used the word “advocate” more than 50 times, and perhaps it is the word that best sums up her beliefs about what special education teachers do; they advocate for students with special needs and teach them to advocate for themselves. Reading, she attested, was an essential skill for students to succeed in school and also,

critically, to transition into adult settings including the workplace and institutions of higher education.

Mrs. Castle believed that teachers must have high expectations for their students and help them become active participants in their own education. In her 4 years at ABC High School, Mrs. Castle began as a relatively new mild-moderate RSP teacher and fought her way to the role of department chair. I use the word “fought” deliberately because that best describes Mrs. Castle’s active overthrow of what she described as the political dynasty that had insinuated itself at ABC over the last decade. Department chair was, before Mrs. Castle, an honorific that was passed through unofficial nomination of the prior department chair of a new designee and a symbolic vote in which no other candidates ran. It was an institution that maintained the status quo. Each new department chair took possession of the scheduling documents; a binder of years of historical documents, from pages of hand-drawn charts to Microsoft Word and Excel tables. The special education system at ABC had traditionally designated three levels of special education for core subjects: SDC, RSP, and collaborative general education. SDC teachers taught SDC classes and had SDC students on their caseloads. RSP teachers both taught RSP classes and collaborated with general education teachers, and had students in these two levels on their caseloads. Scheduling for students was done the same way since the late 1980’s, with the procedures and responsibilities passed down from department chair to department chair.

When Mrs. Castle moved from NPS to public education at ABC, she spent a year getting to know the program and evaluating it. She felt she had no choice but to take action:

And it's not to malign people who have been in the profession for so long, because some of our more veteran teachers do have it together. But at least in my little corner of the world, that's like a badge of honor that allows you to be half-assed about the amount of service you're giving your students. (Jennifer Castle, INT)

She expressed during interview anger and disgust at the substandard education she was witnessing in both special education classes and general education classes in which students with special needs were being placed. "Because I feel like I witnessed intellectual child abuse every day I was there." So Mrs. Castle made a decision. Working with a school psychologist and an assistant principal, she launched a campaign to become the new department chair. For the first time in nearly two decades the election of a new department chair was more than just symbolic. Mrs. Castle ran against the established regime and won.

Mrs. Castle found herself at the center of a maelstrom. The special education program at ABC was in turmoil, and Mrs. Castle faced as tough a battle to bring her house to order as she had faced to get there. "And this is why I'm here. And it's ok to clean house to move people in line or to put them somewhere else, and I'm okay with that. Because I really feel like I have been participating in some child abuse, if you will.... Our kids are getting short changed." At the same time, Mission School District

decision-makers were looking for a change in special education processes district-wide. They were working toward implementing an RTI model at the high schools including a Tier 3 intervention while simultaneously emphasizing an inclusion-based model for Tier 1; one in which special education was more fully realized as a service rather than a setting. Mission School District directors were shopping for core-replacement programs for Tier 3 and concurrently pushing for more students with special needs to be included in general education classes. They enlisted the help of Mrs. Castle, who had rapidly gained a reputation in the district as a go-getter. Mrs. Castle found herself the new poster child for “the right way” of doing special education.

So they asked me when I got here. And of course, that was my first year as department chair. It was [superintendent] and [coordinator of special education]. I thought, this is the only opportunity I have.... They asked me how we got into Program Improvement...So I said if I have to beg, borrow, and steal from general education and we don't have access to their materials, how can you expect our students to perform? (Jennifer Castle, INT)

Mrs. Castle joined the Special Education RTI Committee at the district and gave input on the choice of *Edge* as a special education core-replacement curriculum. “We looked at all the curriculum they brought for us. [*Edge*] [was] the only curriculum that they gave us exposure to that addressed the four strands of literacy. And while there were different levels, it looked like a high school textbook.”



Mrs. Castle was one of the strongest supporters of the *Edge* curriculum of the various participants interviewed. She believed, whole-heartedly, that given a chance and strong teachers implementing it, the *Edge* program could and would make a sizable difference to the outcomes of students with special needs. Mrs. Castle explained the advantages of *Edge*. It looked “high school” and addressed the four strands of literacy, which she explained aligned to California state standards in reading (a variety of fiction and expository materials), writing (expression and mechanics), listening/speaking, and language (English conventions and vocabulary). It would therefore be an appropriate curriculum to support standards-based IEP goals that could target almost any student need in reading. *Edge*, Mrs. Castle affirmed, addressed CAHSEE standards at a primary reading level. In other words, it taught students what they needed to know to pass the exit exam, but did so at lowered grade-levels so that students with reading deficits could access and learn the skills and knowledge they would need to eventually pass the test.

In fact, the biggest thing wrong with *Edge* at ABC, Mrs. Castle suggested during interview, was the teachers who taught it. “The reality is that we have a couple of personalities that are picking and choosing what they want to teach. They are not doing it with fidelity to the program.” Mrs. Castle worked closely with Mr. Yang, the *Edge* program specialist for the district, to standardize classroom practices for all levels of *Edge*. They came up with a rotation strategy that used small groups to increase the variety of daily tasks, increase practice time of basic skills, and help keep students engaged. She explained that the student-teacher ratio for targeted tasks would be lowered by assigning specific tasks to be teacher-led, led by an instructional aide, or for students

to work independently on a computer. For example, although the teacher would provide initial instruction on grammar lessons, students could do workbook practice activities or writing tasks with an instructional aide. At the same time, another group of students could work in a small group on comprehension activities with the teacher, while yet another worked on reading decoding and fluency on the computers using the *Edge On-line Coach*. Groups would rotate 3 times each day, giving each student a chance to work with the teacher in a low-ratio group and also get daily practice at other reading tasks.

Teachers at ABC, however, were not buying into the small-group rotations format.

And there is such a resistance to the grouping! Because it's just easier to teach it to the whole group. But we teach special ed. If this is what you're doing in your classroom... they're just going through the motions... and I feel like if I have to say that to you and you don't already know you're going through the motions, then you're done teaching.

(Jennifer Castle, INT)

Mrs. Castle did not entirely blame the teachers at ABC for this inconsistency in implementation. She recognized that *Edge* was a curriculum that had “a lot to chew on” and perhaps more elements than a special education class could fully cover. That is where she saw that district leadership should play a role: “Can we not spend the time deciding what we think is really important and focusing on those skills? What are the reasonable skills that we know are embedded in the program that we really want to focus on?”

Mrs. Castle believed that teachers were the key variable to ensure students' success. *Edge*, while it needed to be done with fidelity, also required active, fully participating special education teachers doing what they do best; adapting the curriculum to meet students' needs. "We are in special ed. and we're going to have kids that invariably have different learning styles. That aren't going to have their strengths and weaknesses align. Under what circumstances can we teach [*Edge*] out of the box?" For example, Mrs. Castle felt that *Edge* required supplemental writing activities in order to fully prepare students to take the CAHSEE. She addressed that in her class by providing additional writing prompts that were similar to prompts found on the CAHSEE, and adding them regularly to increase practice opportunities.

Mrs. Castle also believed that as special education, *Edge* classes needed to include opportunities to help students develop as "active participants" in their education: to develop fundamental reading skills and also the necessary behaviors and social skills that would undergird success after high school. She maintained high expectations for her students and wrote IEP goals to address social and behavioral domains as well as academics. Mrs. Castle explained that she typically included a social or study skills goal to enable students to become "independent citizens" of the community, developing skills such as organization, asking for help, and explaining needed accommodations to a general education teacher. Although Mrs. Castle placed the most emphasis on basic reading skills for transition to adult life, she also used *Edge* class time to teach other essential skills that she judged were needed in adult life. For example, she supplemented

*Edge* curriculum with a teacher-designed presentation project, adapting *Edge* materials and using them outside the script.

After reading novels, students worked in small, heterogeneous groupings (unlike the homogenous groupings Mrs. Castle tended to use for *Edge* academic activities) and wrote “Character X-Ray” reports about a character. Each group was able to pick a book out of the *Edge* high-interest library and focus on a particular character. Groups selected from an array of real and fictional characters including Odysseus, Charles Darwin, and Medusa. At the conclusion of the project, they presented their reports to the class using a visual, a poster that they developed together to illustrate specific character traits based on an anatomical representation (Figure 2). Students were graded primarily on presentation techniques including body language, poise, eye contact, enthusiasm, and elocution. Mrs. Castle held her students to a high standard for presentations and while everyone received some positive feedback, she was also liberal in providing constructive criticism. Students were asked to compare their own presentations with those that they had seen using a teacher-made rubric that delineated focus skills, and then she asked specific questions about items on the rubric:

Mrs. Castle: So what I’d like to ask you is, were you able to notice some differences between your presentation and the presentation of another group? Did you notice...?

Nathan: You were right about people moving.

Mrs. Castle: [nodding knowingly]: “The sway.” The sway is the easier one to do because it’s not jerky. You don’t even notice you’re doing it unless you’re really paying attention to it.

Nathan: Another one – also looking at cards.

Mrs. Castle: [Global statement] Ok, now I’ll say this. For the most part you did okay. Some of you would read and then you’d look to the door or look somewhere else. You never actually made eye contact with the audience...What else? Let me ask you this. Did everyone introduce themselves and what they were talking about as they presented?

[Several students shake heads no.]

Mrs. Castle: Why? Why would you want to introduce what you’re talking about? Why would that be important?

Karl: It makes it clear what’s going to happen.

Although Mrs. Castle’s expectations were high, students did not fail to live up to them. For example, Melissa was a shy 9<sup>th</sup> grade student. During *Edge* classes, Mrs. Castle frequently called on Melissa and asked her to repeat her answer because she had mumbled or used a voice pitched too low to hear during regular class observations. Melissa’s partner was absent on the day of her presentation and although she initially panicked, Mrs. Castle turned it into a teachable moment (sometimes people let us down), and Melissa went on to stun both Mrs. Castle and I. Mrs. Castle ticked off each element of Amanda’s A+ performance after class with me, touching a finger for each item Amanda did well: “She spoke to her audience instead of reading her cards (I really

worked on that!). She made eye contact. She smiled. I heard every word she said. She smiled. Did I mention she smiled?” Mrs. Castle explained, veritably beaming.

Mrs. Castle supplemented the *Edge* curriculum substantially to shore-up both social skills that she deemed important and academics that she judged as lacking, including the Character X-Ray that she explained helped students to develop deeper comprehension of characters. Mrs. Castle’s Fundamentals class was a pilot class in the first year of *Edge* at ABC. Although she fully endorsed the small-group rotation, she shared that she was unable to use it very often because of the small class size. The majority of class time was teacher-initiated IRE format (Mehan, 1979), much like Mr. Paul’s. The *Edge* On-line Coach was also not available the first year which decreased format choices.

Mrs. Castle demonstrated during classroom visitations more deviations from the *Edge* script than either teachers Mrs. Delgado or Mr. Paul at XYZ, although during interview she stressed the importance of fidelity to the *Edge* program. Her approach was similar to Mr. Paul’s, in that she was willing to go off script to extend students’ comprehension, but she took it further. Whereas Mr. Paul introduced real-life experiences to illustrate concepts in *Edge* lessons, in Mrs. Castle’s class, students sometimes introduced topics that were unconnected to the lesson, but were current real-life experiences, and Mrs. Castle would allow these topics to develop and pursue teachable moments at the expense of time on *Edge* activities. Mrs. Castle frequently had items on the agenda that the class did not get to that day that would carry over to the next. In this respect, her actions in class contradicted her own stated beliefs about *Edge*.

Whereas in interview she emphasized that in large part, the purpose of adopting *Edge* was to increase consistency and quality of instruction in special education classes, she demonstrated during her classes a different set of priorities. Her teaching reflected a stronger emphasis on transition goals and social skills than fidelity to the *Edge* script.

***Level B with Mrs. Levy.***

Mrs. Levy had been teaching for 18 years. When I asked why she chose special education, Mrs. Levy laughed and said it was more like special education chose her. She began as a young teacher, newly married and fresh out of college with a degree in child development, hoping to work with early elementary grades, perhaps even kindergarten. Although interested in preschool, she knew that she would not be able to afford to make so little money, and wanted her summers off to begin a family of her own. There were no positions in Mission, her home town, and she had no desire to relocate. Mrs. Levy ended up taking a series of long-term substitute assignments at a K-8 schools in Mission School District. She had the opportunity to try out several grade levels.

I always wanted to be kindergarten I thought. Then I realized kindergarten was just not my cup of tea...I loved third grade. I loved fourth grade. Those were my favorite subjects to be in, those grade levels. Because they were not quite adults yet, but they were thinking more like regular people, like adult people. (Veronica Levy, INT)

Mrs. Levy described her choice to enter special education as a practical one. She applied for several district elementary positions, and regardless of being qualified and

having letters of recommendation, she was not able to secure a permanent position. Mrs. Levy described a conversation she had with a principal at a school she was working in regularly as a long-term substitute:

‘Veronica I’m going to give you a letter of recommendation but, you know, you’re Caucasian and I’m being honest with you’ ... and she said, ‘you know due to affirmative action I have to hire somebody who was Asian and you’re not Asian.’ ... She said if you want to be in teaching you should do something [else]. So that immediately put me into the special ed. program. I just decided I wasn’t going to deal with it. Because, you know, they need special ed. teachers just as much as they need regular ed. teachers, but more. ...And I figured, you know, what is special ed. anyway? It’s just good teaching. And I had no desire to be a bad teacher ... (Veronica Levy, INT)

So Mrs. Levy decided to go into special education. Her philosophy of teaching might be described as the cart after the horse. She took a special education position because it was the best practical option to secure regular employment and then sought the credential after she had the position. From there, she began to form views about what special education should be. Mrs. Levy explained that her sense of special education began when she was given license to work creatively with students to help them learn what they weren’t able to in general education. She liked the small class size. She liked the open-budget and making her own choices about curriculum. She liked that administrators were content to leave her and her class out of most school activities, such as testing schedules



and science fairs. She liked being free to make choices. Special education became a field in which she felt she was free to address the skills that she determined to be most important and use strategies that she judged as effective. Over time, many of those teaching strategies, including food incentives and movie rewards, came to be frowned upon in education. And while standards-based, grade level IEP goals had become the standard in the NCLB era (Stodden, Galloway, & Stodden, 2003), Mrs. Levy explained that this was something of an imposition upon her way of doing things: “And you know, we have to teach the standards, and there’s nothing wrong with wanting to teach to standards, but when the standard I need to teach to is a first grade standard, and I’m teaching 12<sup>th</sup> grade, it’s difficult...” Mrs. Levy also universally graded for effort over product, an increasingly unpopular educational philosophy (Munk & Bursuck, 2001). As she explains, “Rigor and special education is just really, really difficult.” Rather, Mrs. Levy felt that special education teachers should “recognize and [be] willing to give more credit, let’s say, towards effort even though the effort may not produce the correct answer every time...they have to be stroked a little bit more. They have to be rewarded.”

After serving in positions as both a special education resource specialist (RSP) and self-contained teacher in the elementary grades, Mrs. Levy was transferred to ABC High School. Although initially nervous about teaching at a high school, Mrs. Levy found it was actually a good fit.

... I was newly married, and I loved that I only had to teach one or two subjects at a time. Somebody else determined the period that they came up here. That when I had an issue with the kids, I had somebody I could

call, like a dean or a supervisor, or some place I could send them instead of having to leave them with me. (Veronica Levy, INT)

She taught history and English, and the other SDC teacher assigned to ABC at that time taught math and science. Each wrote IEP goals in their own subject areas, and when possible, both attended all IEP meetings and took turns running them. Mrs. Levy described this as an idyllic time in special education. She wrote goals that she knew would be addressed in her classroom and did not need to coordinate with other teachers. She was not restricted to standards-based academic activities and was able to conduct her classroom as she saw fit. Looking back, she explained:

It used to be fun. And it used to get kids excited because they had friends they could relate to. And they would come to class and know that their special ed. teachers would make them, I don't know, we used to make them happy. (Veronica Levy, INT)

Mrs. Levy described special education as being about personal rapport, forming connections with students, and teaching to students' needs. Although formal academics were certainly a part of that, Mrs. Levy explained that she wrote goals at whatever level a student needed. "The curriculum should definitely be a guide...I think it's just basically looking at their needs and teaching to their needs. Not just teaching the curriculum." Mrs. Levy explained that she did not restrict goals to ELA standards, but rather wrote them in areas that she perceived students had the greatest need. Mrs. Levy stated her assumption that knowledge and skills delineated in grade-level standards would be

addressed by the curriculum. Goals were meant to address student need, which was not the same thing.

Mrs. Levy described three categories of students with special needs. The first were those students who should be in collaborative general education classes because “the curriculum is more rigorous and everybody’s paying attention and nobody is goofing off... nobody is slowing down for them.” These students required very few goals because their academic needs were being met primarily by the regular curriculum. Mrs. Levy described this group of students as usually just needing help to pass standardized tests and needing goals that specifically helped remediate skills needed on the CAHSEE.

A second group of students with special needs belonged in a self-contained special day class (such as she had taught for many years): “I have a group of kids that need to slow, slow, slow, way, way, way down.” Mrs. Levy somewhat valorized this group of what she called SDC students, describing them as simultaneously having a strong work ethic and at the same time having substantial disabilities that interfered with their ability to access the curriculum: “The SDC kids tend to do more homework because they want to try. My SDC kids in that class, they know they have a deficit and they are really working on it.” This group of students carried labels such as Intellectual Disability (ID), or had significant learning disabilities that interfered with their ability to access the grade-level curriculum without modification. Mrs. Levy explained that SDC students typically did not take standardized tests without modification, and were identified on their IEPs as “CAPA” or “CMA” kids, referring to their designation to take modified or alternative versions of the CST for STAR accountability testing. These were the students

that Mrs. Levy suggested were most appropriate for placement in special education classes. This was also the group of students with which Mrs. Levy most enjoyed working. She geared her classroom activities to most benefit SDC students, strongly favoring curriculum that linked to life experiences, practical, and functional skills over standards-based academics. Mrs. Levy perceived this group of students as truly belonging in special education because there was something really wrong with them. They were the students who could not learn in the regular classroom.

Mrs. Levy also identified a third category of students with special needs. These students would formerly have fallen under an RSP designation at ABC High School. Their IEP team had determined that they were not yet ready for general education, and yet, their academic deficits were less pronounced than SDC students described above. Mrs. Levy perceived that poor motivation and effort contributed to a lack of academic success for these students. She expressed that she felt that while the SDC students in her opinion worked hard and put forth their best effort, RSP students were not as willing to work hard. For example, Mrs. Levy stated that her SDC students tended to complete homework more often, even if it was done at a lower accuracy level, and her RSP students who she felt should be able to complete the work, didn't complete assignments.

Before *Edge* was adopted, RSP and SDC students were each supposed to be assigned to different self-contained classrooms for core subjects at ABC, both with adapted curriculum, but at varied level. As noted above, the distinction between RSP and SDC classes had blurred somewhat at ABC. ABC teachers stated in interview that at least part of the impetus for implementing *Edge* was to provide a better continuum of

ELA to increase rigor. When *Edge* was adopted as a core-replacement ELA curriculum for students in the special education program, the residual divide between RSP and SDC was dissolved completely. The majority of students who were formerly in RSP classes were moved into the general education setting with collaborative support from special education case carriers. The remainder RSP students were placed in *Edge* classes. Mrs. Levy believed that district leadership made a mistake when the RSP/SDC distinction was eliminated and the *Edge* curriculum adopted.

And I have a group of kids that should be, they are truly RSP kids. They don't belong in the regular collaborative classroom, but they don't belong in the SDC environment. They belong in an environment where they could move it faster. Where they could have a bit more practice on oral reading, reading out loud. Where they can have more questions. Where they can be expected to accomplish more things. Where they'll go home and do... maybe they don't do as much homework because they're RSP.

(Veronica Levy, INT)

Rather than viewing *Edge* as a Tier 3 reading intervention which might ultimately be available to general education students as well as student with special needs, as Mr. Paul believed, Mrs. Levy regarded *Edge* classes as replacing the former special education model. Where there had been a distinction in levels, now there was only one. Mrs. Levy considered the implementation of the *Edge* program as an imposition that curtailed services rather than extending them. She believed that *Edge* was a replacement to a special education model that had worked just fine. If it wasn't broke, why did they fix it?

Mrs. Levy had taught SDC English and history at ABC High School for over 15 years. In that time, she had always taught what she characterized as SDC kids; those who spent the majority of their time in special education classes and, while they were hard workers, were also those with substantial academic deficits. When she began teaching *Edge* in 2010/2011, Mrs. Levy found herself for the first time with a mixed group, working with students who required strategies and lesson planning to address their academic problems and also low motivation, disengagement, and an unwillingness to work to their capacity. Mrs. Levy, however, taught her *Edge* class, comprised of both RSP and SDC students, in the way she always had.

Mrs. Levy placed a strong emphasis on skills that she believed would help support students transition into post-secondary settings and adult responsibilities. “I find one of the goals I give them is to be productive citizens.” She named voting, paying taxes, and going to work as positive outcomes for high school students. “I try to, when you’re in class, try to impress upon them that these skills, these skills we have are job skills or life skills. You know, you have to think for yourself. You have to go shopping for yourself. In economics, I have, we do a check writing unit.” Mrs. Levy believed that students needed “to stand up for themselves.... to participate in society. To know how to use basic computer skills nowadays. Because that is what people do. That’s how people get along and communicate.” Mrs. Levy stressed the importance of learning manners and respect in her class. She believed that students should have their cell phones off and put away. Hats and hoods must be removed. Academics had a place in her classroom too, of

course, but they tended to be geared toward the practicalities of adult life. “They need to be able to write a basic sentence. A paragraph. To be able to fill out a job application.”

Mrs. Levy reported that she typically wrote a reading comprehension goal and written expression goals on each student’s IEP. Her reading comprehension goals were tied to correctly answering who-what-where questions after reading a short passage, and her written expression goals tended to be for writing a paragraph and editing for mechanics errors (e.g. punctuation, capitalization, and spelling). Mrs. Levy had doubts about the adequacy of the *Edge* curriculum to teach reading comprehension skills. The stories in the *Edge* Level B, Mrs. Levy conveyed, were not “rich” and were too abridged to incorporate depth of meaning. “I’m not really sure that when we’re trying to teach main idea, there’s not a lot to support the main idea sometimes that you’re trying to get to.” The writing component was also insufficient in Mrs. Levy’s opinion. The formal writing assignment came at the end of each unit, and as she stated, “it could take me forever to get to the end of a unit. And so whatever writing skill they did learn is not there.” She believed that the curriculum lacked the amount of repetition that students with special needs require to learn and maintain skills and strategies. At the time of classroom observations, Mrs. Levy explained that she had only been using the *Edge* curriculum hit-and-miss and tended to not just supplement it, but replaced most of the writing assignments entirely. In March of 2011 she was completing the first unit of *Edge* Level B, a text that included 7 units. Most other teachers in the study had completed approximately 2-3 units by that point of the year. Only one teacher had completed as many as 5 units. No other study teacher completed as few as Mrs. Levy.

Mrs. Levy dedicated time in the *Edge* class to address alternative curriculum, including IEP goal areas and preparing students for standardized tests. While Mrs. Levy identified *Edge* as both a reading comprehension intervention and a written expression intervention (albeit an insufficient one), she stated her firm belief that the curriculum was inadequate to meet the needs of special education students to prepare for high stakes testing:

I think *Edge* needs more comprehension-type questions. They need to have even more multiple-choice, because that's the experience on the CAHSEE, and if *Edge* is supposed to be the core-replacement to help us remediate them to pass the CAHSEE, then they need to have practice questions. Everything they do needs to relate back to those CST and those CAHSEE tests. And yes, I know it's bad, teaching to the test that way. But isn't that how we are measured? It's the reality! But you got to do it. If I have to be judged on it, you know, who's going to teach anymore if teachers are suddenly, you know, they talk about directly correlating our pay with the progress students make. Well, I never want to teach special ed. anymore if the kids who can't be measured that way are going to be measured that way. I won't get paid. I won't make enough to survive. I'm barely making enough money to survive.

(Veronica Levy, INT)

Mrs. Levy went so far as to say that insisting upon a purely academic curriculum for many students with special needs was not only inappropriate, but bordering on cruel:



Why does everybody have to be in an academic college prep class? Why can't we have kids learn how to be a really good wood-worker? Why can't we have kids learn to be a really good plumber? We have a loss in the trades. And some kids work excellently with their hands. Why do they have to write an essay to be successful? Yes, you should read. Yes, you should be able to fill out a job application. Yes, a paragraph or two is necessary. There are some basic skills, even for the plumber. But do we have to make their lives miserable in the meantime? (Veronica Levy, INT)

A typical day in Mrs. Levy's Level B *Edge* class found most of the students in class and in their seats at the bell. There was an agenda on the board when students arrived. Mrs. Levy explained the activities for that day, and then she put up an assignment log on her overhead projector, which all students used to update their personal assignment logs in their class notebooks. Student notebooks were all the same. Each assignment was pasted to a blank page. Mrs. Levy did not like students to trim, so the pages did not fit perfectly, but each notebook in the room was in the same order, with assignments numbered identically and pasted back-to-front of each piece of paper. Mrs. T., the instructional aide, copied the assignment onto a poster and it was her job to make sure that anyone who was absent copied it when they returned.

Some students were assigned to work on the computer using the *Edge* On-line Coach, but there were only 5 computers in the class, so the majority of the students (14 to 17 on any given day) worked with Mrs. Levy for whole-class instruction. Mrs. Levy

guided the group, keeping each and every student together, making sure no one fell behind, or got ahead. She frequently used a “think aloud” strategy, providing the correct answer and modeling her process for arriving at it. Mrs. Levy ran a tight ship. Students were called by name more often to redirect back to task than to elicit a response. Mrs. Levy could be seen on any day of the week ignoring students who called out correct answers in favor of “catching” a student who had not been attending and putting him on the spot.

And yet, Mrs. Levy’s class ran smoothly. She introduced curriculum that she had frequently devised herself and that addressed what she perceived as students’ needs. When I began working with Mrs. Levy’s class, they were finishing a week-long lesson on paragraph writing. Students began with an authentic experience. They tasted sweet potatoes. A district-sponsored health program delivered a natural food to participating teachers’ classes three times a year, and demonstrated a tasty preparation. In this case, Mrs. Levy’s 5<sup>th</sup> period *Edge* class had the opportunity to sample baked sweet potatoes with butter. Using this common experience as a prior knowledge base, Mrs. Levy’s class researched the nutrition and history of sweet potatoes and wrote a five-sentence paragraph. As I joined them, students had turned in a final draft and Mrs. Levy was at the front with student work samples broadcast from her computer onto a TV screen. She modeled how Microsoft Word could be used as a spell and grammar check by executing those functions on her computer while students followed along. She read each sentence aloud, demonstrating self-questioning techniques to locate errors based on if a sentence didn’t sound right, or was awkward. Line-by-line and all together, one paragraph was

meticulously broken down; each word choice, punctuation mark, and grammatical structure evaluated. Mrs. Levy, a captain at her helm, steered the class unerringly to a perfect paragraph.

In this lesson, the *Edge* curriculum was tabled. In interview, Mrs. Levy explained that while she very much liked the *Edge* writing rubric for the upcoming unit writing activity, she did not feel that students were ready for it. In fact, she kept this lesson very simple. The objectives were written expression, written mechanics, and computer use for word-processing. Written expression and written mechanics were areas in which most of the students in Mrs. Levy's class had IEP goals. Written expression goals were for writing a 5-sentence paragraph (check). Written mechanics goals were for use of punctuation, capitalization, and writing complete sentences (check). In fact, several students also had transition goals for vocational use of computers for checking spelling and grammar (check, check).

Figure 3 shows the Editor's Checklist used in class for paragraph editing. Mrs. Levy guided the class through selecting each item.

Mrs. Levy: so what's the first skill that we should know – what happens at the beginning of each sentence?

Students: [mumbling]

Mrs. Levy: ALL first letters of ALL sentences always get capitalized – so is that a skill we should be able to use when writing? [Writes on overhead and students write on their handouts.]

Mrs. Levy controlled the topics discussed in class. Although she used an IRE format (Mehan, 1979), she rarely asked an open-ended question of the whole-group that she did not end up answering herself. On this day, a student attempted to introduce an item for the Editor's Checklist that was not an area that Mrs. Levy intended to cover. Although Mrs. Levy had asked for students to volunteer items for the checklist (Figure 3), she had a specific agenda and had pre-determined what kinds of items she wanted to include.

Kyra: they [the paragraphs] should have a thesis sentence.

Mrs. Levy: so the first sentence of the paragraph should be a main idea is what you're saying?

[Kyra nods]

Mrs. Levy: does it always have to be the first sentence?

Kyra: no...

Mrs. Levy: right... so let's go with that – the main idea could be farther down than the first sentence. The first sentence of every paragraph is...indented. [Writes on overhead.] Ok?

[Kyra nods]

Kyra found her idea transformed into one that Mrs. Levy had on the agenda. Although Kyra suggested a higher-level editing item (locating and confirming the presence of a thesis statement in each paragraph) Mrs. Levy shifted the item into a mechanics issue: indenting the first sentence of each paragraph.

The sweet-potatoes paragraph lesson had several objectives, none of which were part of the official *Edge* curriculum. Many of Mrs. Levy's curricular choices were

designed to address IEP goal areas and skills that Mrs. Levy believed were critical for transitioning into the adult world after high school. In this case, technological literacy was the learning objective. Much like Mrs. Castle, Mrs. Levy supplemented the *Edge* script in ways that she determined it was lacking, or even missed the mark. Unlike Mrs. Castle's class, however, *Edge* activities in Mrs. Levy's class were tacked onto the main curriculum; her own. While she did use *Edge* components, Mrs. Levy chose to use only those *Edge* components that she deemed to be useful, such as the grammar activities and the textbook for literature selections. The learning objectives that framed her class, however, were Mrs. Levy's, and she used the *Edge* program as a side-dish rather than the main course.

***Fundamentals with Mrs. Belmont.***

Mrs. Belmont had been a teacher for several years, but 2010/2011 was her first year in a special education classroom. She worked for 2 years as a long-term substitute, and another 2 years as a home-health teacher, providing instruction in students' homes though the district when they were unable to attend their neighborhood school. The *Edge* class was Mrs. Belmont's first class that was her own.

Mrs. Belmont, much like Mrs. Levy, said that the choice to teach in special education was a practical one. There was a position at ABC High School and she wanted full-time regular employment. She said that special education was a calling that she felt drawn to. Mrs. Belmont believed that she would be able to help students with special needs because she believed in them. "Most special students are exceptionally special and

can achieve beyond your expectations or beliefs about them,” Mrs. Belmont reported during interview. She viewed herself as a person who would be able to believe in students more than most, and therefore would be particularly successful at helping students perform beyond what most teachers might expect.

Mrs. Belmont spent time in class during the autumn and again in spring targeting skills that she believed would help her students perform better on high stakes tests. Using a CAHSEE intervention workbook, students practiced writing essays with prompts and taking practice tests for math as well as ELA. Although these were departures from the *Edge* curriculum, Mrs. Belmont believed that they were necessary deviations to address skills that the *Edge* curriculum neglected. She stated that the *Edge* curriculum lacked student models and examples of how to put multiple concepts together. She attested that in essay writing, for example, *Edge* Fundamentals (written at the 1-3 grade reading level) worked for developing the components of writing, such as vocabulary acquisition and grammar, but failed to provide students with the strategies needed to put an essay together, such as developing a thesis statement and using data sources to extract evidence that supported that thesis.

Mrs. Belmont wrote goals that she felt would challenge students academically. Working with the grade-level standards, she wrote goals that would assist students in their transition to general education settings and that she perceived as having application in higher education settings. Whereas Mrs. Levy wrote functional goals that addressed basic skills, such as paragraph writing, Mrs. Belmont wrote goals that tapped more complex processes. Mrs. Belmont frequently used the expression “kill two birds with

one stone” in her class. For example, when students worked on *Edge* unit vocabulary, Mrs. Belmont suggested that they use those words for their writing assignment as well. The writing assignment was based on interpreting poll data, collecting information about the class, and creating a bar graph, which would serve as a pre-write. Students, therefore, had to execute four separate steps in order to complete their vocabulary assignment: read and interpret the poll; collect data by polling the class; defining the vocabulary words; and finally synthesize concepts and novel words and write a meaningful essay.

Mrs. Belmont used *Edge* materials in class, but appropriated them for her own use. For example, the above example used a poll that was part in the *Edge* text in Unit 5. Mrs. Belmont, however, used it in her own way and to fulfill her own learning objectives. Although the *Edge* poll answered the question “Will fitting in during high school make you successful in the future?” and demonstrated a national polling sample of teenagers, Mrs. Belmont asked students in her class to poll each other about whether or not a fictional student needed to dress like everyone else in order to fit in at ABC High School. She asked students to collect the opinions of the three groups in her class and chart the result using a bar-graph format.

Mrs. Belmont explained that several students in her class had IEP goals that required use of data sources (including polls and bar graphs) in order to write an essay. She shared that the purpose of the class that day was specifically to address that IEP goal. She collected pre-writes and the essays to use as work sample evidence during IEP meetings to demonstrate that students had met the goal. Although the *Edge* text was used, Mrs. Belmont appropriated it for use in a way outside of the authors’ design. Mrs.

Belmont did not use the *Edge* text chronologically; rather she skipped around and used specific lessons out of order as they fit with her learning objectives. Although Mrs. Levy only sparingly used *Edge*, she maintained integrity to its design when she did so. Mrs. Belmont, on the other hand, commandeered parts of *Edge* lessons for her own purposes. In the example above, her purpose was to address an IEP goal.

Mrs. Belmont's *Edge* Fundamentals class used the small-group rotation design mandated by the *Edge* program specialist, and she was one of only two, along with Mrs. Delgado, to do so. However, Mrs. Delgado maintained group integrity. Each small group in her class had an assignment that day, and students consistently progressed through all three groups and were exposed to all three tasks. In contrast, Mrs. Belmont often overlapped group assignments. For example, although vocabulary sentence writing was a Group A assignment and Group B was to be working on writing fluency (timed writing in response to a provided prompt to practice for CST testing), Mrs. Belmont would "suggest" that students use the vocabulary words in their writing fluency essays.

Mrs. Belmont: all right. Look up here because I always use this term. I always say, you know, we're going to kill two birds with one stone. Why do I say that in the first place? What does that mean Ricky?

Ricky: it means why don't we do 2 things at once.

Mrs. Belmont: okay! All right. Like you mean –

Jessica: [cutting in] -- like texting and talking.

Mrs. Belmont: how did you think of that? That's a good example.

Jessica: I know [laughing].



Mrs. Belmont: but what about for group work? Peter. If I want to kill two birds with one stone in the assignment, what does that mean?

Peter: you can, have the same assignment.

Mrs. Belmont. okay. All right. Accomplish 2 things. At one time. I think I can, well look.... So you can do whatever you want, ok, but this is just an idea that I had, all right? These are your vocabulary words, right?

And you have to write an essay, all right? So [Group] A work and [Group] C work... if I'm going to write an essay I might as well use THOSE words in the essay.

In this instance, Groups A and C ended up with the same assignment, and yet Mrs. Belmont still cued for “switch” at the end of the first rotation. In Mrs. Delgado’s room the teachers moved at the switch (except the computer group). In Mrs. Belmont’s room, however, the teachers remained at the stations and the students moved, which added to transition time considerable (each transition taking about 5 minutes). In short, students stopped work and switched stations for up to 15 minutes a day even though they continued with the same assignment.

Another problem with Mrs. Belmont’s “two-birds” strategy was that tasks were too complex for students to complete independently. She also did not use the computers as a station, so although there were three groups, there were only two teachers (and the instructional aide was not always in the room). Mrs. Belmont instead used several student teacher-assistants, all of whom were also taking an *Edge* class, Level B, later in the same day with Mrs. Levy two doors down. These students, often the same age and of

the same peer group, were put in charge of a student group to assist with their academic assignment. In actuality, what ended up happening on most days was a constant battery of questions from students and student teacher-assistants to Mrs. Belmont to clarify directions and seek assistance. In Mrs. Delgado's class, three groups each had three distinct tasks that were matched to the level of teacher expertise. The groups led by the instructional aides worked on an assignment such as grammar or writing that they had received prior direct instruction on from the teacher, and Mrs. Delgado worked with her group on comprehension tasks that required more support. Mrs. Belmont's class, conversely, often did not end up completing the work assigned to even one group.

### **Research Question Two.**

2. How do teachers define, interpret, adapt, and make meaning of teaching choices in the classroom to address multiple functions, including 1) addressing IEP goals for academic and non-academic student need; 2) intervention for reading, 3) intervention to increase test scores.

Five teachers' classrooms were observed for this study, paired with interviews with students and teachers and review of classroom materials (*Edge* and teacher-made). Each teacher demonstrated unique approaches to the practice of special education and beliefs about students with special needs. Each teacher prioritized the various roles of special education teachers a little differently, although all agreed that the practice of special education included school system procedures such as writing IEP goals, preparing

students for high stakes tests, and also preparing students to embark on life after high school. All five identified basic reading skills as paramount. In addition, each addressed skills, to greater or lesser extents, that they considered requisite for students to be able to navigate society as fully functioning adults. What that meant practically for daily work in their *Edge* classes was interpreted a little differently for each teacher and is discussed in research question three (next section).

Among the teachers of the study, there seemed to be a relationship between years teaching and importance placed upon preparation during high school for post-secondary outcomes. Teachers who had been teaching the longest tended to place greater importance on preparing students for what would come after high school, through formal IEP goals, informal teaching objectives using *Edge* materials, and through deviations from the *Edge* script.

Mrs. Levy, having taught for 18 years, had strong beliefs about preparing students to become productive citizens. She wrote IEP goals that were the most removed from academic standards and more directed to ensuring students had basic skills she felt would be important after high school. IEP goals included basic writing, and also editing using a computer program, requiring students to maintain a personal planner to reinforce organizational skills, and generally a social skills goal for self-advocacy, such as asking questions appropriately. She used a large portion of time in *Edge* class to address basic skills. Several days at a time might be spent off of *Edge* lessons and on teacher-made materials designed to teach basic skills.

Mr. Paul, who taught for twelve years, the second longest of the study teachers, emphasized basic reading, stressed the importance of strong communication skills (verbal and written), and reinforced behaviors that supported positive relationships. Mr. Paul used *Edge* materials exclusively, but selected which portions to emphasize. For example, a strategy presented in the *Edge* Level C text, use of Cornell notes, was a two-page spread that was one of many strategies presented without particular emphasis. Mr. Paul regarded note-taking as not only a key academic skill in high school, it would also be critical for his students to be able to organize more complex and greater quantities of information after high school. When he was asked why he spent three days on note-taking even though it was a minor part of the *Edge* text, he replied: “Because again, nowadays you communicate via e-mail or whatever with your boss. I think that's important. So that they understand how to map out and organize what they're going to say, what they want to say, to get those key points” (Paul INT). One of Mr. Paul’s auto-shop students identified the unit on note-taking as something that he was already using outside of school in his work:

I found taking notes in Cornell-note format 10 times more efficient than doing it in my previous format, which was the ladder system, which was arrows down, and arrows over. And I found combining those two actually extremely effective. Not just in school, but in taking notes for all my bikes, or leaving notes for my cars or motorcycles, depending on whatever it was. (Zachery, STU INT)

Although Mr. Paul did not write IEP goals in areas outside of ELA standards, he identified that he prioritized organizational skills in how he planned instruction and utilized class time. Mr. Paul stated that while he used all the lessons in the *Edge* text, he did not spend equal time on all tasks. For example, he tended to use the On-line Coach (the computer component) of *Edge* less than scripted. He stated that the technology itself interfered, and he felt that class time could be better spent making real-life connections through discussion. While he did use the On-line Coach, he only did so when he was able to take his entire class to the computer lab and do it all at once.

Mrs. Castle, who had taught seven years (the third longest), dedicated time in her *Edge* class to enhancing comprehension and developing presentation skills, including eye-contact, poise, and elocution. She wrote IEP goals in these areas and required students to practice them daily during lessons. Mrs. Castle wanted her students to succeed in high school and beyond. She was very responsive to student-initiated questions when she thought that they were authentic (not simply intended to get off-task) and relevant (on topics she prioritized). For example, in class one day she suspended an *Edge* Grammar activity to capitalize on a teachable moment when a student asked her a question with real-life application. Michael wanted to know how much “talking right” would matter when he went out to get a job. Mrs. Castle turned off the overhead and sat at the front of the class and began a whole-class brainstorm and discussion of what a potential employer might look for and pay attention to during an interview. Students came up with ideas that not only included proper grammar use (the catalyst topic), they also discussed how to dress, making sure that they had shaved and brushed their teeth,

having a resume so that they would not need to try to recall dates, and making sure that they practiced with a friend. The grammar lesson was continued the next day. Mrs. Castle stated during interview that providing students with self-advocacy skills that would prepare them to be independent members of society was her most important function.

The newest teachers, Mrs. Delgado and Mrs. Belmont, spent more class time on pure academics, although their approaches were different. Mrs. Delgado used the *Edge* program with fidelity to script and stated that she felt that most of what students needed to know to cover the ELA standards was included in the curriculum. Although she stated that she felt social skills were important, she did not alter or supplement class instruction. In contrast, Mrs. Belmont spent a large portion of class time off-script working on IEP goals. Her goals tended to address pure academics and were based on grade-level ELA standards.

There was a marked difference between the teachers of each school in how IEP goals were written. At XYZ the Special Education Department collectively developed a bank of goals that aligned to each Tier of ELA instruction or intervention offered. When case carriers drafted IEP goals, they chose from a bank depending upon which level the student was assigned to: general education, *Read 180*, or *Edge*. Students at XYZ who spent the majority of their day in the general education setting (collaborative ELA or Read 180) also had an RSP study skills elective with their case carrier; a time to work on goals that aligned to their particular ELA assignment. Student goals were determined by their placement (or Tier) rather than their placement being determined by their goals.

ABC on the other hand developed goals for each student based upon their individual needs, which frequently included non-academic goals in areas such as study skills, social skills, and pro-social behaviors. IEP teams at ABC made placement recommendations at IEP meetings only after goals were approved and based upon the nearest approximation of which class level goals were most aligned. Placement, or Tier, at ABC, was determined by each child's goals. There was not an elective to support goals at ABC. With special education teachers assigned full-time to collaborative ELA assignments, it was presumed that goals for each content area would be addressed in class. However, goals often addressed skills not specifically covered by the core-curriculum, in either general education or *Edge* (as they were written case-by-case). Case carriers had a more challenging job at ABC and this was perhaps demonstrated by teachers at ABC reporting that they spent more time addressing goal areas in their *Edge* class than teachers at XYZ.

Although all teachers stated that teaching reading was the most important purpose of the *Edge* class, and each identified *Edge* as a reading intervention, remarkably little time was spent in *Edge* classes on reading. Two teachers, both of whom identified reading as critical and also the two teachers who used *Edge* with the greatest fidelity, spent the most time on reading tasks in class: Mr. Paul and Mrs. Delgado, both at XYZ High School. Teachers who spent the least time on reading in class, Mrs. Levy and Mrs. Belmont at ABC, were also the most off script. Mrs. Castle tended to approach reading as an all-or-nothing, with some classes devoted exclusively to reading, and others with no reading at all.

Mr. Paul's class was observed reading during each observation session. Students took turns as called upon, in "popcorn" style, reading both content (expository and fiction short passages) and tasks (discussion prompts and comprehension questions at the end of passages), typically aloud. Turns appeared to be equitably distributed between struggling and more proficient readers, with Mr. Paul providing more words as needed for struggling readers. Class time was roughly divided in half between verbal discussion and reading (one student at a time). Mrs. Delgado's students also spent time each day in class reading. In her class, students took a 25-minute turn on the computer station working on the On-line Coach each day. They read aloud each passage two times for fluency and listened to their own recorded voices. They could also hear the passages and comprehension questions read aloud to them by a computer-simulated voice.

At ABC I observed far less reading in *Edge* classes. Mrs. Levy read passages and questions aloud to students when they needed information. She used the On-line Coach one day of the week (students rotated through the 5 computers in the classroom for a whole period once a week) during observations; however, students in her class reported that they typically only used the computers for reading once every several weeks. Other times they used their turn on the computer for writing tasks. Mrs. Belmont also read most information aloud to students, although she did occasionally use *Edge*-provided compact discs so that students could listen to recorded passages and follow-along. Students were expected to read vocabulary definitions silently during group work.

Mrs. Castle tended toward an all-or-nothing use of class time for activities. She used several class periods for reading when the task of the day was reading. On days that



the class read a new passage, she used “popcorn” style reading and students took turns reading aloud, similar in style to Mr. Paul. Also similarly, she distributed reading turns equitably between struggling and more proficient readers and provided words as needed. A key difference between Mrs. Castle and Mr. Paul was in the frequency of reading tasks. When the assignment of the day was to read the story, Mrs. Castle spent the entire period reading with only brief quick-check type questions to make sure that students were on-task. During observations, typically one in five sessions was used for reading. The other whole class periods were dedicated to other *Edge* tasks such as vocabulary, grammar, and comprehension activities. For these tasks, Mrs. Castle read questions and prompts aloud to students.

Time spent in class to prepare students for high stakes followed a similar pattern to time spent on IEP goals at the school level. There was a division between schools: ABC teachers spending more time on preparation during class, and XYZ teacher spending less. This is attributable to the greater efficacy of the XYZ “boot camp” over the equivalent program at ABC. While both schools had an intensive workshop, used only in the weeks prior to CAHSEE and CST administration, the participation levels at each were substantially different.

The XYZ “boot camp” was before and after school on weekdays and was advertised better. XYZ teachers referred to it as “boot camp” and analogized it to a work-out routine. Students’ participation was rewarded by most of their teachers through extra credit points or public recognition (such as a poster on the wall of participants), or both. Many teachers at XYZ volunteered for the program, stating they were partnering

with students to increase scores. Some teachers only volunteered a few days, but a large overall number and variety of teachers were involved, including elective teachers such as the band teacher, art teachers, and athletics coaches.

ABC, on the other hand, had not achieved the same level of participation. The program at ABC was called an “intensive workshop” and was held on weekends rather than school days. Teacher participation was lower overall and limited to teachers of core-subjects ELA and mathematics. Although the program was advertised school-wide through guidance counselors and posters in school hallways, teachers at ABC reported during interview that they did not believe that teachers promoted the workshop very much in class. It was addressed through daily announcements; a part of daily school business. As such, ABC special education teachers reported that they felt that preparation for these tests fell to them as case carriers.

At ABC, Mrs. Belmont dedicated the largest portion of class time to high stakes test preparation. In addition to using CAHSEE workbooks in class for practice items about once a week, she regularly had students practice fluency writing for essay prompts that were similar to prompts found on the CAHSEE. Each student in her class wrote an essay based upon a CAHSEE practice essay prompt that she found online. Mrs. Belmont said that she tended to use the CAHSEE practice books to round a week out. She gave a test in the 4<sup>th</sup> period of her two-block class on Fridays and then use 5<sup>th</sup> period for CAHSEE practice tests for both ELA and math.

ABC teachers Mrs. Castle and Mrs. Levy also spent *Edge* class time preparing for CAHSEE and CST testing. Each explained that they only did so during certain times of

the year and based upon their unique classroom make-up. Mrs. Levy, for example, had mostly 12<sup>th</sup> graders in her Level B class in 2010/2011. These students, she explained, did not need to take CST testing (as STAR data is not collected for 12<sup>th</sup> graders), but several of them had not yet passed the CAHSEE. She spent time in class in fall and spring prior to each test administration to prepare students for both ELA and math content, depending on which section(s) they had not yet passed.

Mrs. Castle reported that she worked strategically in class on high stakes test preparation prior to test administrations, but focused on test-taking skills rather than content. She worked as a whole-group with her students to practice reading and interpreting specific test language. Mrs. Castle explained that she felt that students had not had sufficient practice with testing language in special education classes and she wanted to provide them with exposure to academic language.

At XYZ, neither Mr. Paul nor Mrs. Delgado spent class time preparing for high stakes tests. Mrs. Delgado stated that she felt that the content of the ELA standards, and the content of CSTs and CAHSEE tests, were covered by the *Edge* curriculum. Mr. Paul stated that while he felt that students needed additional preparation time, he required his students to use the “boot camp” at XYZ that were held immediately before test administrations. He volunteered for this program himself and said that he made participation mandatory for his students.

Teachers in the study indicated which functions of special education they placed the greatest priority on and were willing to spend time in *Edge* class addressing. For the most part, the two study teachers at XYZ, Mrs. Delgado and Mr. Paul, conducted their

*Edge* classes with greatest script fidelity. Their ability to do so was facilitated in part by XYZ school policies that made the need to spend *Edge* class time on other tasks irrelevant. IEP goals were pre-aligned to the *Edge* curriculum, so there was no reason to dedicate class time to individual goals. High stakes test preparation was attended to outside of class as a school function, allowing the XYZ teachers to focus exclusively on *Edge* lessons during class. As a result, the XYZ teachers spent more time on *Edge* curriculum, and this appeared to be related to an increase of time spent in class on actual reading tasks. Although Mrs. Delgado and Mr. Paul approached reading tasks differently, students in their class spent more time reading than in any of the classes at ABC.

Another way to analyze these findings is discussed in the next section. Although school policies at XYZ could be said to mitigate the need to perform other special education functions, such as attending to IEP goals in non-academic areas and preparing for high stakes tests, it might also be argued that teachers at ABC had less faith in the *Edge* program to sufficiently meet all students' needs. Research question three explored how teachers and students interacted in class with both the official *Edge* curriculum and the informal or hidden curriculum that attends to non-academic skills preparing students for success after high school.

### **Research Question Three.**

3. How do students with special needs and their teachers interact with the official curriculum (the *Edge* script) and hidden curriculum (including social skills for successful transition) in reading intervention class?

In order to account for how teachers and their students interacted with the official curriculum (*Edge*) and the unofficial curriculum (both academic and non-academic) teachers' perceptions about the *Edge* program itself were examined. First, as reviewed in the last section, what teachers believed to be important aspects of being an effective special education high school teacher contributed to how they interacted with the *Edge* curriculum in class. In other words, teachers were evaluated to determine whether or not they “bought-in” to *Edge*. Did they believe that *Edge* was sufficient to cover subject matter that they valued? If they placed a high priority on content that was not emphasized in the *Edge* program, they were more likely to improvise and extend teachable moments during class, deviate from script, and even plan whole lessons outside of the script in order to address skills that they prioritized.

As suggested in the last section, analysis of teachers' fidelity to the *Edge* script might be explained in part as a function of school policy. It might, however, also be explained as a function of their evaluation of *Edge* itself. Interviews with study teachers and other district teachers working with the *Edge* program revealed a broad array of attitudes about whether *Edge* was an appropriate Tier 3 intervention for use with students with special needs. The *Edge* program was designed for use as either a supplemental (Tier 2) or core-replacement (Tier 3) reading intervention program and specifically

marketed as an intervention for ELL students (Moore, et al., 2008). This alone was enough to convince some *Edge* teachers that the program was inappropriate for use with students with disabilities. Elizabeth O'Day, for example, who was on the Special Education RTI Committee and taught a two-period block of Fundamentals herself, felt that the vocabulary was a mismatch. Students tested into *Edge* levels based upon a Lexile score from a reading comprehension test. The majority of her students, she argued, struggled with reading comprehension substantially, and so tested into the lowest level, but had already been exposed to the lower-level vocabulary covered in the Fundamentals level. Although they required repeated and intense intervention for reading comprehension, the vocabulary selected for the same level reader was intended for emergent English speakers and was very basic; too basic for her students to benefit from. Another argument Elizabeth made was that the *Edge* comprehension activities were structured based on the assumption that students would understand relatively complex concepts, but that for students with special needs, often fluency and accessing the language itself were the challenges.

Maybe [ELL students] benefit, but then it's based on the English Language Learner need, not so much the learning disability. They think that if you read it out loud, then boom, they've got it. ...I'm finding the students really just can't work on much independently. And so we are either modifying it somehow or we're just walking them through, or dragging them through . . . we've just read this, and now were going to

reread it again, and then we're going to answer these questions in the margin." (Elizabeth O'Day, INT)

Elizabeth expressed that *Edge* was not a good fit for students with disabilities who struggled with all aspects of reading, not just decoding. She stated that she thought adoption of the *Edge* program for use with students in special education was a mistake. She felt so strongly about it, she shared with me, that she had considered leaving her teaching position of 18 years.

Other teachers shared Elizabeth's opinion that *Edge* was not a perfect fit for students with special education services, but came to different conclusions about the utility of the program in their classrooms. Keith Hansen agreed, somewhat, that the comprehension demands in *Edge* were unrealistic for students with special needs. When he discussed his 2009/2010 pilot *Edge* class, he made an observation similar to Elizabeth O'Day's, but differed in his view that the misfit made *Edge* unusable with students with disabilities:

[*Edge's*] comprehension questions at the end of each reading section are ridiculously, ridiculously hard. ... maybe ELL kids could get [it], but special ed. kids just aren't going to make that connection. So, at the end of the section every time I just, we just went through them. I didn't say here, you know, take this test, we're going to write these out. I said read it, think about it a second, everybody got it? Okay, here we go. Let's talk about it. ... And that was a big part of helping them understand. (Keith Hansen, INT)

Keith stated that working with the *Edge* program still required special education teachers to do what they always do; adapt and modify to make the lessons accessible for students with learning differences. Jennifer Castle similarly expressed her frustration that some teachers expected the program to be usable just as it was:

So my problem is that we were working with special ed. teachers that have this curriculum and want to teach it right out of box. But we are in special ed. and we're going to have kids that invariably have different learning styles, that aren't going to have their strengths and weaknesses align. Under what circumstances can we teach it out-of-the-box? (Jennifer Castle, INT)

Her perception, like Keith Hansen's, was that a part of being a special education teacher meant always individualizing curriculum, regardless of the source. Much like Keith, Jennifer felt that the core materials that the *Edge* program offered were such a substantial step up from what they had been using before, the reluctance of some teachers to modify as they had always done with inferior materials was outrageous.

At one point during data collection for the study, about midway through, I realized that I began to place teachers into categories in my thinking based upon my evaluation of their acceptance of *Edge*. I began to think about a group of teachers as “*Edge* Users” and another as “*Edge* Refusers.” It became important that before I moved on in collection and analysis of the data that I reflect upon my own beliefs and assumptions, as suggested by Agar (1996), in order to gauge my reactions and sympathies with the study participants. As I projected back to my own days as a high



school special education teacher I realized that I, in many respects, agreed with participants who had expressed what a benefit a complete and quality ELA package was compared to the lack of unified ELA materials before the district adopted *Edge*. I also came to the conclusion that I would likely grapple with many of the same issues noted by several participants. Specifically, it would be difficult to work with a scripted curriculum when I had become used to doing it my own way. Much like Mrs. Levy, I was satisfied with the level of creativity I brought to my own classroom and the relative autonomy I was granted in the school to get the job done my way. I agreed with Keith Hansen's opinion, in some respects, about what it meant to teach a scripted curriculum: "If you want to pay me to be a teacher, let me teach. If you want to pay someone to run a program, you don't necessarily need me." I reevaluated the dichotomous categories I had begun to assign teachers to when I referred to them, even in my own thoughts, as *Edge* Users and *Edge* Refusers.

A better framework for analyzing how teachers' interact with both official (*Edge*) and unofficial curriculum (transition and social skills lessons) curricula was one that allowed consideration of relative positions about teachers' perceptions of the sufficiency of *Edge* to meet all students' needs in a special education classroom. Gee's discussion of Discourses (1992) provided a lens for examination of the multiple roles that *Edge* teachers contended with on a daily basis in their classrooms. During classes, teachers switched back and forth between formal and informal curriculum. Some for the teachers in the study who switched most fluidly were also teachers who most strongly endorsed use of the *Edge* program in interview. For example, Mr. Paul stated:

I love the *Edge* program that we do. The text allows you to give them open-opinion, open-ended questions where, like you saw, it's like, hey, let's have a discussion about it. Everyone's opinion matters. We have a couple of kids that are very, very shy...I try to get them out of their shell, but there are probably some other issues there that keep them in that shell. But I've had some great responses from some of them. Sometimes you just have, it was the perfect day and the perfect prompt and they went for it. (Isaac Paul, INT)

Mr. Paul demonstrated through his remarks that use of *Edge* in his class was not for just a singular purpose. He did not simply use the text for reading. It was being used in his class both formally for students to practice reading, and also informally, to provide students a chance to practice oral communication and also the opportunity to offer their opinion and be validated in a safe environment to increase self-esteem. Mr. Paul identified all of these roles, teaching reading, working to increase students' communication skills, and forming strong and trusting relationships, as key functions of being a special education teacher.

Mrs. Levy, on the other hand, might be regarded as being less able to switch between Discourses (Gee, 1992). Mrs. Levy referred frequently to her preference for the way things used to be, when she was able completely able to make decisions about her educational practices without outside influences. "I think Special Ed. teachers are pretty intuitive about using those things. I think even before they 'forced' us to write our IEPs with standards instead of just, you know, we just knew what students needed." Mrs.

Levy had been teaching longer than any other teacher in the study. This is perhaps indicative of Mrs. Levy's style as a teacher. A phrase she used frequently in class, for example, was "one thing at a time." She ran class with all students together, doing the same thing and one thing at a time. Susie, a student in Mrs. Levy's class, expressed that everyone working together did not match her learning style:

I wish I could do more by myself. Because I really don't like doing things together. I like more of a, I'm more of a kind of a person who likes to go in a little corner and be quiet and do my own thing. That's how I was when I was little, and I never changed that. Because I like doing things on my own, basically. And doing it with the whole class doesn't help at all. Because it gets me distracted, easily distracted, and doesn't help me focus.

(Susie, STU INT)

Susie's remarks demonstrated inflexibility in Mrs. Levy's teaching style. Although Susie knew how she learned best, she was not afforded the opportunity to work alone in Mrs. Levy's class. Even on a day that Susie specifically asked to be allowed to sit alone when she returned to class from an emotional IEP meeting, Mrs. Levy declined. Mrs. Levy expressed during interview she has a hard time taking students' word for it when they say they already know something in a lesson:

And you know, the kids look at that word and say I've heard that word, so I know it. And I've had to go back through and say, 'Oh now, can you use it in a sentence? Do you know how to spell it? You know what other meanings that word has other than just that particular meaning? If you

can't answer yes to that, you can't say that you know it really well.'

(Veronica Levy, INT)

Mrs. Levy also tended to teach a single topic all the way through before switching. For example, 5 classes were spent in a row on Sweet Potatoes Paragraphs. Six days in a row were spent on *Edge* grammar lessons, doing the lessons from an entire unit back-to-back. It is perhaps not surprising that Mrs. Levy had difficulty adapting her teaching to include a new curriculum when *Edge* was adopted.

Mrs. Delgado also demonstrated difficulty switching between Discourses during observations. Mrs. Delgado, as mentioned, followed the *Edge* script with fidelity. She read each word and used each and every activity provided. She stayed on target. When students attempted to introduce new topics that were unrelated to the *Edge* lesson, Mrs. Delgado steered the discussion back and used only the *Edge*-recommended prompts. Whereas Mr. Paul used real-life examples to connect meaning for students for *Edge* content, Mrs. Delgado curtailed students from doing so. When David, a student in her class, tried to connect themes from *A Raisin in the Sun* to his own frustrations at finding a good job, relating himself to the character Walter, Mrs. Delgado listened, and then read the next prompt from the text without providing feedback. Another example that had perhaps more severe implications was Mrs. Delgado's refusal to intercede when the male members of her class made overt sexual comments and innuendos. She shared during interview that while the comments made her uncomfortable, she felt that the best course of action was to ignore them and continue with academic instruction. The ramifications of this behavior for the boys in her class, several of them juniors and seniors, as they

transitioned into adult settings, could be devastating. Several of them were seeking jobs outside of school, and several had multiple suspensions due to just these behaviors in other, general education classes. Over above the types of prosocial behaviors needed to be successful in the workplace or higher education settings, the possibility, at least, of sexual harassment charges were daunting. Mrs. Delgado missed an opportunity by staying on script to teach a critical social behavior. Staying on target also meant missing an opportunity to capitalize on teachable moments.

Mrs. Delgado's inability to switch gears and between the various roles a special education teacher might need to assume stood in contrast with Mrs. Castle. Of the teachers observed, Mrs. Castle set aside planned lessons more often than any other in order to capitalize on teachable moments. When a student offered a comparison of a disaster story they were reading to hurricanes in the south, Mrs. Castle put her *Edge* book down, sat at the front of the room, and began a discussion about social consciousness. The *Edge* lesson was resumed 10 minutes later, after the discussion about what it means to be a responsible citizen had run its course. Mrs. Castle, who endorsed the *Edge* curriculum completely and was one of its strongest proponents, was also the most adept at switching roles during the class as needed to perform the functions of an ELA teacher, a case carrier addressing an IEP social skills, or a mentor preparing her students for life after high school.

#### **Research Question Four.**

4. How do student-teacher interactions influence classroom activities and encounters? What negotiations occur within and between participants (students and teachers) that account for how time is spent in class each day?

Students and teachers interacted in each observed classroom in ways that were unique and ways that were uniform across *Edge* classes. As discussed in the previous sections, classroom interactions were influenced by teachers' perceptions about their role as special education teachers and also the sufficiency of the *Edge* curriculum to meet students' educational needs. In the former sections, these influences were discussed in terms of teachers' fidelity to the *Edge* script and their deviations from it. In some cases those deviations were planned departures to address alternative curriculum (such as Mrs. Levy's unit for writing paragraphs about Sweet Potatoes), and in some cases they were the expansion of teachable moments that occurred spontaneously (such as Mrs. Castle's impromptu class discussion about job interviews).

Additional factors influenced classroom interactions. District policy mandated that *Edge* classes be structured using both whole-class and a small group rotations schedule. Each classroom was analyzed in relation to how they adapted these procedures in class. Teachers reported that selectivity of *Edge* components, and especially exclusion of the On-line Coach, was in reaction to students' levels of frustration. Students' "buy-in" and prior experiences with *Edge* also influenced instruction. For example, teachers reported that whether students were repeating the same level contributed to how they planned lessons in the classroom, as well as the adaptations they made during class in

response to students' reactions and levels of engagement. One teacher in particular, Mrs. Delgado, also reported that allowing students to make choices about content affected her lesson planning choices.

George Yang was the *Edge* program specialist for Mission School District. As a former SDC teacher, he had experience with teaching student with special needs. He also worked as a Beginning Teacher Support and Assessment (BTSA) service provider, which is the California-state teacher induction program. He was assigned to new special education teachers and worked with them on BTSA activities to enculturate them to best practices in strategic instruction and curriculum adaptation for students with special needs. When the district adopted *Edge* for use with students with special needs, George was asked to work on special assignment for the first few years to increase fidelity across classrooms and work out any problems that might occur for use of the ELL-designed intervention with special needs populations.

George reported during interview that initially he thought that the *Edge* program would not require very much adaptation for use with students with special needs. He examined the lesson structure, how many lessons were included in a unit, and how many units there were in a textbook. He recommended a double-block for use in special education so that curriculum could be covered at a slower pace. All three high schools scheduled *Edge* classes per his recommendation. He also stipulated how class time should be used and visited *Edge* classrooms regularly in an attempt to ensure fidelity of mandated procedures. George wanted each *Edge* class to cover material consistent with the recommendations of program authors (Moore, et al., 2008). Each class would begin

with a whole-class conducted lesson including direct instruction on novel content. After that, the remainder of the block would be used for small-group rotations. George envisioned that students would have the opportunity to increase reading skills through research-validated methods every day. Students would work independently on lower-difficulty passages for fluency practice (e.g. O'Connor, Swanson, & Geraghty, 2010) using the On-line Coach, practice word study with an Instructional aide, and work on the more difficult comprehension activities with their teacher, using evidence-based strategies such as reciprocal teaching (e.g. Alfassi, 1998). George hoped to ensure that students were getting the greatest benefit from the *Edge* curriculum by using it per design and with fidelity across classrooms, a strategy supported by research (Edmonds et al., 2009).

George laughed with self-deprecation during interview. "It was a good plan" he said, "The best laid plans..." George explained and observations confirmed that the mandated class structure was not being used in most *Edge* classrooms. To begin with, very few teachers were using the On-line Coach every week, much less every day. Mrs. Levy and Mr. Paul both indicated that the technology was at fault. On days that she had planned On-Line Coach activities, during observations Mrs. Levy spent about 10 minutes per 55 minute class period coping with technology problems with the On-line Coach. "It would be different if I could just make the changes they need one time," she explained, referring to the program modifications she needed to make each time one of her students with articulation difficulties used the fluency program. Mr. Paul also indicated reactions of students were his reason for avoiding the computers: "The technology side is fine, but



it's not worthy of my trust. Not 100%. Because it fails me every now and again. And that part, if I get frustrated, they have to be frustrated.” Mr. Paul referred in interview not only to technical difficulties with the On-line Coach, but also his frustration with trying to give unit tests using the computers:

And the district is pushing the on-line assessment. I don't have time for that. I went in there [the computer lab] on three separate occasions. And the kids were going over the edge. And I was frustrated. And there's nothing you can do about it. So we just went back to the paper copy of the test. (Isaac Paul, INT)

Mr. Paul and Mrs. Levy had both nearly given up on using the On-line Coach. Mrs. Levy used the computers in her classroom each week, but typically had students do writing activities rather than *Edge* On-line Coach reading. Mr. Paul only used the On-line Coach when his entire class could go to the library.

Another example of teachers' selectivity of *Edge* components is exemplified by several teachers' deviation from district-wide policy for class structure and refusal to use the group rotations. Mrs. Levy, Mrs. Castle, and Mr. Paul ran classes almost exclusively as whole-class, teacher directed lessons. All three used IRE format (Mehan, 1979) during direct instruction to check for understanding and during open-ended discussions.

Mr. Paul ran his class as whole-group exclusively and excluded some *Edge* grammar and word-study independent practice activities that he felt were redundant. He reported during interview that he felt this style was a better match for his class:

There is stuff that I don't use. Absolutely. Because it could ruin your flow. Because if I need to, you know, go to an overhead to do this, or show a video on that, and all this, you're going to fall behind. Because then if your kids get it, why redo everything. But that's another thing. You have to know your kids. (INT Isaac Paul)

Mr. Paul said that in addition to activities that disrupted students' engagement, the sheer number of *Edge* components was overwhelming. He would have liked more explicit policies at the district level to guide how *Edge* should be conducted in class: "I think that it would probably be a good idea to create more guidelines because I think what ends up happening frequently is, hey you're going to teach this, and yet they don't give you a model that you can follow." In the absence of those policies, Mr. Paul excluded some activities and emphasized others to keep his students engaged during class.

Similarly, Mrs. Castle felt that the district policies were too vague given the multiple components of *Edge*:

It's a lot to chew one. It's a lot of things that are the elements of the program. Then, why aren't we getting the support that we feel we need? For someone [at the district] to say, '*these* are the standards that we need to address.' The curriculum is aligned to the CAHSEE standards, so we know we're hitting those standards. We don't have to guess. But then which ones of those standards... What are the ones that we really feel our students need to have? [INT Jennifer Castle]

Mrs. Castle did not use small-group rotations as described by George Yang at all. Each day Mrs. Castle ran the first period of her 2-blocks using whole-class DEI for novel material and IRE (Mehan, 1979) techniques to involve students. She also reported that she used approximately three-quarters of the activities in each unit. She chose in advance several strategies to emphasize, and excluded at least 1-2 reading passages that she determined were less likely to be interesting to students. About three times a week the second block of class was used for supplemental small-group projects that were not part of the *Edge* curriculum. Unlike switching for the rotations, as policy dictated, students worked for the entire period on projects.

Mrs. Levy also refused to use the small-group rotations as directed by policy. On Monday through Thursday, she had five students at a time (the number of computers in the classroom) rotate through using the computers, typically for writing assignments rather than use of the On-line Coach. She conducted whole-class lessons with the remaining students (typically about 15) for the entire period. While Mrs. Levy used the majority of the overhead grammar activities, students did not use the extension independent workbooks for grammar or word-study at all. Mrs. Levy explained that she needed to be able to ascertain minute-by-minute how engaged students were and to bring some back to task when they were not doing work. Whole-class instruction allowed her to do this spontaneously and in direct reaction to students' behaviors throughout the period.

The two remaining teachers in the study, Mrs. Belmont and Mrs. Delgado, both reported that they utilized the rotation format as mandated. Although superficially it

appeared that Mrs. Belmont did use the rotation design, actual class time tended to become improvisational in reaction to students' needs. A possible explanation for this was that small-group academic tasks were not optimally matched to students' instructional levels (Brophy, 1999). Mrs. Belmont attempted to run three groups when there were only two teachers, and relied upon a third group to work independently or with minimal support. However, work assigned to this independent group had not yet been covered, or was a complex, multiple-step assignment that students were not able to complete alone. For example, one day the work for the independent included reviewing grammar lessons and then completing activities in their *Grammar & Writing Practice Books*. This material, however, was new to them, and they struggled with comprehending the concept used in the lesson "When Do You Use an Indefinite Adjective?" Students, as a result, were off-task for much of the class period, throwing balled-up paper at each other, passing notes, and doing work for other classes. During interview Stephanie, a student in Mrs. Belmont's class, explained: "I don't know. It's too hard. I get confused. Mrs. Belmont's always saying to go try it. I tried it already!" (Stephanie, STU INT). Students working with materials who were not able to do work alone were often out of seat and went to whatever part of the classroom Mrs. Belmont was in to seek assistance. Several times during each class period a queue of students formed near Mrs. Belmont asking for help with their work. In reaction, on several occasions Mrs. Belmont abandoned group activities for the day and reverted back to a whole-class instruction format. Although students remained at their individual work tables (some facing away from the front), she directed their attention to the front of the

room and provided direct instruction about the task that was presenting a problem for students.

Mrs. Delgado was the only teacher who consistently used the rotation design, and students in her class worked in groups each day. Mrs. Delgado's careful planning was apparent during classroom observations. Group tasks were well-matched to instruction level. Mrs. Delgado was also the only teacher in the study who had two full-time instructional aides assigned to her classroom, which in part allowed her to conduct the small-group rotations with fidelity to design wherein the other teachers in the study could not. Mrs. Delgado provided whole-class instruction on novel content for about the first 20 minutes of each day. During small-groups, she led the most complex tasks, such as comprehension groups. She developed review tasks that were appropriate for use with groups led by one of her instructional aides, such as practice with the skills that had already been introduced during whole-class instruction that day. When using the On-line Coach, the other instructional aide was assigned to monitor students. This did not entirely alleviate interruptions to Mrs. Delgado's group because the aide was not well equipped to trouble-shoot technology problems. This second aide was also the least adept at classroom management, and Mrs. Delgado's task-matching was again illustrated by assigning her to the computer group, which tended to be highly motivating to students and required the fewest behavioral cues.

Mrs. Delgado was also unique amongst the teachers in the study because she offered students choices in the curriculum used in class. All but 3 of her 11 students were

repeating the same level of *Edge*, Level B, for the second year in a row. Mrs. Delgado approached George Yang to seek possible solutions. He had noticed the problem also:

This year... students are, just from what I'm hearing, students are not as excited about [*Edge*]. I think mainly due to the fact that many of them are repeating the same curriculum. And I can tell who the students are, they're the ones in class with their heads down, trying to take a nap or disregard the teacher completely. So there's a little less buy-in there.

(George Yang, INT)

They agreed that although she would continue to use Level B, she would offer the students in her class choices about the order the class would work on units in the textbook. The students voted on unit order and chose to do units that presented new material that they hadn't gotten to the year prior, and they also chose units with favorite literature selections, such as *The Outsiders*. Mrs. Delgado abandoned her planning and adapted her class instruction based on these negotiations with students.

### **Discussion**

Providing reading intervention to struggling readers in high school requires the negotiation of several dilemmas. First, when should intervention take place? Should it replace a core class that is aligned to content standards, or replace an elective that might address a vocational or high-interest area? Should it be focused on ameliorating risk by providing students with basic reading skills, or by improving high stakes test scores whose outcomes have consequences for both students and schools? For students

receiving special education services, educators must also consider the influence of non-academic skills that are also frequently deficient for students with LD, such as organization, independence, self-advocacy, and building positive relationships. What should a reading intervention include? What are the most critical skills to remediate in the final years of K-12 education in preparation for embarking on adult life? Educators face a sizeable challenge determining how to select and implement effective reading intervention for students with special needs in high school.

Research that demonstrates the efficacy of reading intervention has contributed much to what we know and how we design reading interventions in schools. We know that in order to be efficacious, reading instruction for older students should target 1) fluency, 2) vocabulary, 3) reading strategies, 4) background or prior knowledge, 5) higher level reasoning and thinking skills, and 6) motivation (Torgesen et al., 2007). We also know that intervention for older student must have greater intensity, frequency, and duration than general class instruction in order to be efficacious (Roberts et al., 2008). Research studies have contributed significantly to the body of research about struggling readers and how to help them. Much of that research is conducted with treatment settings that are controlled in order to assess dependent variables. Researchers design, conduct, and evaluate the efficacy of interventions with a high level of fidelity monitored by inter-rater reliability procedures.

Mission School District leadership adopted *Edge* (Moore, et al., 2008) for Tier 3 reading intervention, the most intensive level within a 3 Tier RTI model (Fuchs, Fuchs, & Stecker, 2010), for high school students with special needs. This study investigated the

relative effects of assigning multiple purposes to a single class period. Although purchased to take the place of ELA classes and to remediate reading skills, the curriculum was purchased in part with funds allocated to increase high stakes test scores. Use of the curriculum was offered as a solution in school board meetings when members asked how the district was working to resolve its PI status for the sub-group of students with disabilities. *Edge* classes also replaced self-contained special education class periods, in which case carriers had traditionally addressed IEP goals in both academic and non-academic areas. No alternative time was provided for these special education services to be delivered, and yet teachers at ABC and XYZ High Schools were required to maintain compliance with the IDEA (2004). *Edge* classes were the only setting left available in which case carriers could conduct special education functions. *Edge* class became a trash can that was meant to solve all the various problems of meeting IEP goals, teaching students to read, providing intervention to increase test scores, and teaching test-taking strategies.

Each problem that *Edge* class was meant to address can be viewed in terms of the two laws governing education in the United States. NCLB (2002) requires schools to demonstrate that all students have attained a minimum proficiency on high stakes tests, in California including CST and CAHSEE, for AYP reporting. Students, schools, and school districts suffer consequences when students fail to perform at a basic level for reading, writing, and math. Mission School District and both high schools in this study were suffering these consequences. ABC and XYZ High Schools were in Program Improvement. A part of the funding for *Edge* classes was in fact contributed by monetary



resources allocated for the high-risk subgroup of students with special needs to intervene for low test scores for AYP accountability.

As practitioners working with students with special needs, special education teachers in this study were also responsible for maintaining compliance with IDEA (2004). A student's IEP through IDEA addresses acquiring basic academic skills, similar to NCLB (2002), but each IEP is also unique, framed around the individual student's present level of need. IEP goals are intended to undergird success in each student's K-12 education and also reinforce skills they will need for successful transition into post-secondary settings, including the workplace, community, and educational settings. Therefore, IEP goals are not restricted to academic areas. They include non-academic areas, such as social skills, which are necessary for students to succeed after high school. Compliance with IDEA requires special education service providers to assess each student's present level of functioning, determine appropriate goals (academic and transition) that will benefit the student, and then determine in which settings those goals might be best addressed.

School differences between ABC and XYZ special education department policies and *Edge* classes illustrate the struggle with which participants in this study contended as they negotiated compliance with both NCLB (200) and IDEA (2004). A considerable difference between ABC and XYZ was in how each undertook IEP goals. Procedures for drafting goals at ABC were more aligned with IDEA principles. Evidence was considered, both formal (standardized tests) and informal (teacher made measure and anecdotal), in determining what a student was able to do and what the student's needs

were. IEP goals were highly individualized, written sometimes at grade level, sometimes based on modified content standards, and sometimes off-grade level, depending on each student's level of need. Then, and based on the goals, IEP teams made a recommendation for an ELA class that would be the best setting in which to work on those goals. For example, students with mostly grade-level goals tended to be placed in a general education class with special education collaborative support, whereas a student with highly modified or off-grade level goals might be served in a self-contained ELA *Edge* class.

Goals at XYZ high school were addressed differently. At XYZ, students were assigned to an ELA level, and then goals were selected from a bank that the department had compiled in advance, that matched the class. The XYZ special education policy was to match goals to placement rather than recommending placement based upon goals, which was non-compliant with IDEA (2004). They had adapted special education procedures in order to expedite the IEP process. Coordinating with Guidance Counselors, teachers assigned students directly into the level of ELA they believed to be appropriate, basing these decisions on similar evidence as ABC High School (formal and informal measures), but unilaterally without consideration by an IEP team. Students' ELA placement was decided before IEP meetings. The department chair at XYZ stated in interview: "We've found goals that either are measured by the tests, and we write [reading] goals that tie into the results we're getting more than tie into individual needs" (Keith Hansen, INT). Keith Hansen explained that focusing goals on skills that were being assessed on high stakes tests resulted in raised scores and increased consistency of

services. Each case carrier could concentrate on a few skill areas that encompassed all students' goals, rather than trying to find time to work with each student on their specific goals (as they did at ABC).

This school-based difference in IEP procedures is consistent with findings by Valli and Chamblis (2007), in which they attribute different instructional practices in classrooms to an institutionally assigned purpose. Valli and Chamblis reported that classes took on the nature of being either child-centered, in which curricular choices were based on the teacher's evaluation of each child, or test-centered, in which curricular decisions were made primarily in order to increase all students' scores on high stakes tests. In this study, the teachers at ABC might be said to follow IDEA-oriented policies, which were child-centered in that they are determined based upon each child's unique needs. XYZ, on the other hand, might be said to be NCLB-oriented, as the primary objective was to target ELA skills and content as much as possible that would appear on high stakes tests. Similar to the test-centered group in the study by Valli and Chamblis, curriculum was determined by the desired class outcomes (overall increases in scores) over individual student outcomes (meeting unique IEP goals).

A second substantial difference between ABC and XYZ at the school level was in how much reading took place in *Edge* classes at each school. Because *Edge* was adopted as a reading intervention and ELA core-replacement, it might be assumed that a large proportion of class time would be spent on reading tasks. At ABC, in addition to covering *Edge* content, teachers used the *Edge* period to address a wide array of goals (as each student had unique goals based upon their present level of functioning) and targeted

high stakes testing skills. Given the multiple functions the teachers at ABC spent on these other tasks, the actual time students in class spent reading was greatly reduced as compared to students in *Edge* classes at XYZ. Students with special needs at XYZ were enrolled in a Study Skills elective, a class in which they worked with their special education case carrier for a full period each day on goals. IEP goals were limited to only a few areas at XYZ, and importantly, high stakes test intervention was also effectively addressed by the school outside of ELA classes. The teachers at XYZ spent more time on the *Edge* script, and subsequently, more time on reading tasks in class. XYZ, through policy, enabled teachers to focus time in the *Edge* class to the *Edge* program. Because a separate time was allocated for work on IEP goals, and those goals were focused in just a few areas (department policy), and a separate time was dedicated to preparing students for high stakes tests (school policy), the teachers at XYZ did not face the same dilemma as teachers at ABC. This suggests the powerful influence that policy can have in facilitating fidelity to program, even given the complexity of the high school special education classroom.

Differences were not limited to school comparisons. This study investigated how special education teachers conducted a scripted intervention reading program, National Geographic's *Edge* (Moore et al., 2008), in their classrooms and in the context of their perspectives about the role of special education teachers, their students' needs, and their evaluation of the *Edge* program itself. Teachers and students were interviewed about how they defined their roles in the classroom and what they believed *Edge* class was meant to accomplish. Although the curriculum was formally fixed (the *Edge* script), how

teachers viewed their roles as special education service providers and how they prioritized their teaching goals were hypothesized to influence student-teacher interactions in the classroom, including switching of instructional strategies and content differentiation.

Findings indicated that there was great variation in how *Edge* classes were conducted, even when district policy specifically mandated how instructional time was to be spent and a program specialist was assigned to maintain fidelity. Ultimately, classroom practices were a stronger reflection of teachers' perspectives about what special education is and should be, and their own prioritizing of the most important content to cover in class. These perspectives, in turn, influenced their interactions with specific groups of students in classrooms.

Observations in classes at ABC and XYZ revealed that teachers tended to adapt the *Edge* curriculum to their fit their priorities about teaching rather than changing teaching behaviors to match materials and methods in the *Edge* program. Each in their own way, teachers shared some way that they had adapted *Edge* materials to fit their instructional practices. Mrs. Delgado's adaptations were global; she changed the order of textbook units to accommodate the students in her class who were repeating the same level. Mr. Paul modified classroom structure, using whole-group led discussion techniques over small group rotation and extending teachable moments that helped his students connect academic activities to real life. Mrs. Levy and Mrs. Castle each used *Edge* materials selectively, augmenting the curriculum with their own teacher-made lessons that targeted skills they felt were not adequately addressed by the *Edge* program.

And finally, Mrs. Belmont appropriated *Edge* materials and used them for her own instructional objectives linked to students' IEP goals.

Although there is limited independent research on the *Edge* program, document review revealed that it includes components that address critical areas delineated by Torgesen and colleagues (2007), and research-validated methods, such as fluency practice (e.g. O'Connor, et al., 2010) and reciprocal teaching (e.g. Alfassi, 1998). Teachers in this study, however, used teaching strategies in their classrooms that matched their own sensibilities, comfort-level, and experiences. Standardized implementation procedures recommended by researchers, based on fidelity to features believed to be responsible for a program's effects, are not necessarily followed by real teachers who use interventions in real classrooms with their own students.

A particular concern of teachers in actual classroom interactions was student motivation and engagement. Research literature suggests that motivation is a problem particularly pertinent for older struggling readers (Torgesen et al., 2007) and the negative effects of reader disengagement intensify as students get older (Guthrie, Wigfield, & VonSecker, 2000). Research literature for older struggling readers addresses text difficulty as a challenging factor for getting and keeping students engaged in reading (see, for example, a review by Gersten, Fuchs, Williams, & Baker, 2001), which suggests that a particular challenge in intervention for older children lies in providing a text that is both at an appropriate instructional level and is also highly interesting to the student. In other words, the text must be easy enough that the student can be successful, and also be compelling enough for the student to want to read it.

The *Edge* program provides repeated-reading fluency practice with high-interest, instructional-level passages through the On-line Coach, a computer program with which students can hear passages read by the computer, read aloud themselves with computer-provided corrections for decoding, and listen back to their own recorded voice. Nevertheless, several teachers in the study reported that they had discontinued use of the On-line Coach in direct response to their perceptions of student frustration. Difficulties with the technology was given as the reason by both Mr. Paul, who had difficulties with the computer program crashing, and Mrs. Levy, who found altering the software settings for students with articulation difficulties for each session strenuous and time consuming. A core feature of the *Edge* program, therefore, was excluded by these teachers, reducing the alignment with critical elements of reading intervention identified in the research literature (Torgesen et al., 2007). In other words, these teachers prioritized motivation, one of the six elements identified by Torgesen and colleagues, over fluency, also among the six essential elements.

Teachers in the study commonly complained that the *Edge* program did not seem to be a good fit for students with special needs. In interview, teachers noted that there were too many components to fit into even a 2-period block because the materials required modification and a slower pace than indicated by the script. Teachers stated that they had not received guidelines for how to select amongst all of the components, and selectivity was greatly varied from teacher to teacher. For example, Mrs. Delgado used all components and lessons in strict accordance with the script, proceeding even if there was low student comprehension. Mr. Paul excluded some activities that he

considered redundant, especially in word study and grammar. Mrs. Levy and Mrs. Belmont excluded writing tasks in favor of their own teacher-made materials. Mrs. Castle pointed out in interview that she felt it would be crucial for the district to provide guidelines to help teachers prioritize *Edge* components for subsequent classes. Several teachers also identified the complexity of comprehension questions as a poor fit.

Perhaps one of the most compelling difficulties that lies ahead for Mission School District is determining whether the *Edge* program will continue to be used with high school students with special needs. George Yang, the *Edge* program specialist, shared his concern during interview that Mission leadership might not opt to continue to use *Edge* in special education classes. He shared that Lexile scores had actually decreased from beginning of the year to midpoint (Table 6). He believed that given the cost of allocating teachers and replacing consumables, the program might be in jeopardy.

In order to evaluate efficacy of *Edge* with students with special needs, the desired outcome must be determined by Mission leadership. If, for example, the primary purpose assigned to the *Edge* class is aligned to NCLB (2002) and intended to increase scores on high stakes tests, then CST and CAHSEE scores would be the appropriate measure to evaluate efficacy. These were not being considered by the district. If, however, the primary function of the *Edge* class is to help students meet their IEP goals and receive services (aligned to IDEA, 2004), then achievement of IEP goals would be the appropriate measure. These were also not being considered at the time of this report. The district was using the assessment measures created by *Edge* authors (Moore et al., 2008), which include a test of reading comprehension and reports of student scores as a



Lexile. These tests are given at the beginning, mid-point, and end of year, and scores in *Edge* classes with special needs students had not demonstrated gains; as noted, they had in fact gone down overall.

Use of Lexile scores to gauge efficacy of *Edge* might be called into question based on their failure to demonstrate improvement on what *Edge* intends to accomplish. Further, as these assessments were not designed for a special needs population, the appropriateness of a gains approach for scores over time might be questionable. A study by Vaughn and colleagues (2011) that examined outcomes for eighth grade students in Tier 3 reading intervention (many of whom were identified as having a reading disability) suggested that while gains were not substantial within the treatment group over time, they were significant over the control group. It might be appropriate to reframe outcome expectations for the *Edge* program in Mission taking into account the authors' conclusion: "...The finding that without continued remediation comparison students' reading performance deteriorates provides a strong rationale for continued remediation in reading even for adolescents with significant and persistent reading difficulties and disabilities" (Vaughn et al., 2011, p. 8).

Study participants (n = 28) almost unanimously agreed that there were at least some aspects of the *Edge* program that they considered to be very good. All 13 students who were interviewed stated that they believed that *Edge* class was better than their ELA class the year before. All but one of the teachers interviewed felt that *Edge* had some component that improved classroom instruction, and all agreed that the overall quality of the materials was substantially better than the "mishmash of garbage" (Keith Hansen,

INT) that was used before. Perhaps not ringing endorsements... Inconsistencies within interviews by some participants revealed their own confusion about the program. Both George Yang and Jennifer Castle listed fidelity to the program as critical to efficacy. However, both, during the same interview, also indicated that they would adapt the curriculum to better meet students' instructional needs.

Teachers in the study were consistent in reporting that the dearth of teacher training and models for how to use *Edge* were great deterrents. Frequently teachers cited the absence of direction as a chief reason that they had not "bought-in" to *Edge*. Several teachers indicated that they felt that the district should put enough time into the program to really see if it would be successful. As Isaac Paul put it: "I think the district needs to stop the turn-over rate [of adopted programs]. They need to... they need to ... give things time. It's a four-level series. So shouldn't that mean it should be at least a four year trial run?" Teachers indicated that in order to "buy-in" to *Edge*, they would like guidelines from the district on which components to emphasize, and training in *Edge* would contribute to their feelings of competency running the curriculum.

### **Limitations and Implications**

This study used case-study design to identify and describe the challenges teachers in a small sample of classrooms contended with as they implemented the scripted program *Edge* with high school students with special needs. These results should not be used to make predictions for the overall population (Kirk, 1995). These qualitative data

provide a description of teachers' experiences when implementing a new curriculum within the context of the institution (Wehlage, 1981).

*Edge* was adopted and mandated from the district leadership level. However, how participants interpreted and executed their roles as teachers was within the larger context of district leadership's endeavors to comply with two governing laws: IDEA (2004) and NCLB (2002). Teachers also had their own unique experiences and perspectives about special education that influenced planned and spontaneous instructional strategies. The case descriptions in this study can be used to inform how special education teachers construct the meaning of their positions both in relation to their own direct procedures to be in compliance with laws (such as conducting IEPs as part of IDEA) and also district policy shaped to comply with these laws (such as mandating evidence-based intervention as part of NCLB). Finally, students and teachers in each classroom created and maintained classroom interactions that demonstrate the pitfalls and successes of implementing a scripted program such as *Edge* with special needs populations. The specific attitudes and experiences of these participants represent a spectrum that readers might recognize and hold analogous to their own experiences.

Although this study does not comprehensively describe or illustrate what it is to be a member of one of the sample classes, this study contributes to knowledge in the field of reading intervention practices. While we know that certain aspects of reading instruction are more effective than others, and that for older students providing intervention in the high school setting is particularly challenging, there has been little work exploring how intervention is specifically enacted in high school special education

classrooms. This study can assist researchers and practitioners to understand the complexities of planning and implementing reading interventions in the high school setting. Whereas quantitative research takes a far-view of intervention, this study investigated how participants worked together within the context of school and district policy, and described the complex interplay of students, teachers, and curriculum in the classroom (Erickson, 1986). These data can be used by researchers and district practitioners to improve reading intervention programs in high schools, maximizing on patterns of success as well as learning from aspects of this curriculum with which participants particularly struggled.

This study included one school district piloting the *Edge* program with students with special needs. *Edge* was designed for ELL and the research study that supports its use is first, specific to an ELL population, and second, funded by the publishers. A component analysis comparing *Edge* with other scripted, high school reading intervention programs and with critical components derived from research literature for students with special needs is recommended as a next step. This will assist in evaluating both the efficacy of *Edge* for use with students with special needs and also its sufficiency in providing evidence-based reading instruction consistent with best-practice methods grounded in research. Additional qualitative analysis of reading research in high schools and the important role that schools play in ameliorating or increasing student risk will contribute to the growing body of literature addressing high school reading interventions.

The implications for school districts and research are substantial. In only the second year of implementation, fidelity to the *Edge* script varied greatly from consistent

with program protocols to classes sometimes unrecognizable as *Edge* classes. The range of classroom teachers' enactment of the tension between NCLB (2002) and IDEA (2004) compliance suggest that Mission leadership cannot ignore *Edge* classes and hope that all will come out right. Cohen and Hill (2000) conducted a study of how teachers enacted math frameworks in California when they were first introduced, a case similar to this study in that teachers were faced with an innovation that required substantial changes in how they viewed and carried out their roles. Findings from Cohen and Hill suggest two relevant messages that apply to school districts introducing a new curriculum: 1) in the absence of training, teachers tend to adapt curriculum to their teaching preferences rather than attempt to modify their practices to address the curriculum; and 2) teachers' opportunities to receive training on an innovation positively affected their knowledge and classroom practices.

The *Edge* program, a new innovation introduced to teachers in Mission with little formal training, was being adapted in several ways by study participants. At the school level, each special education department made policy decisions that aligned more closely to one of the laws governing education in the United States. XYZ High School adopted policies that aligned with NCLB (2002) principles, whereas ABC department polices were more compliant with IDEA (2004). Individual teachers also made adaptations to the *Edge* curriculum through modification of content, teaching methods, and selectivity of which components to present. Messages about how to teach the *Edge* program were vague and sometimes mixed. Even the program specialist assigned to the *Edge* program

reported that while his role was to ensure fidelity, he himself would modify the *Edge* script were he teaching it.

When the Special Education RTI Committee reviewed and selected the *Edge* program for use as a Tier 3 intervention, the committee was disbanded and the members returned to business as usual at the district office and their respective schools. George Yang was recruited at the end of the pilot year to work with *Edge* teachers to increase implementation consistency and fidelity. He had neither taught the program, nor received training. Teachers in the study reported that they felt that they had received inadequate training. While George was available to support them, teach interviews suggest that he might not have been clear on the purpose of the curriculum himself.

Observations and interview data suggest that teachers were unclear about the official purpose of the *Edge* class they were assigned to teach. If the official purpose of the class was to be an intervention for high stakes test scores, then the frame is NCLB (2002). Student selection should be on the basis of CST and CAHSEE scores and evaluation of the program likewise. If, rather, the class was to be run exclusively with students with special needs, then compliance with IDEA is a better frame for implementation and evaluation of efficacy. When students are selected solely on the basis of receiving special education services, as they were in this study, then the reading intervention class would be more accurately described as a self-contained SDC class that is utilizing a specific reading program (such as *Edge*) with the understanding that special education often involves accommodations and modifications to curriculum.

Rather than be concerned primarily with fidelity to script, implementation of reading intervention with students with special needs should endorse and sanction use of curricular adaptations based upon students' specific educational needs as stated in IEP goals (which change from year to year). Teachers in Mission explicitly stated that their competence and effectiveness teaching *Edge* classes would be enhanced by a greater role on the part of district leadership in making decisions about how to use the *Edge* program with their students with special needs. Adaptations in class often demonstrated a continuation of entrenched beliefs and practices outside of mandated procedures for teaching the *Edge* class. In other words, district policy lacked the specificity to be useful, and in the absence of clear direction, teachers reverted back to or simply continued teaching as they always had.

Providing best-practice services for students with special needs becomes increasingly complex as students get older. In addition to academics, high school students must negotiate the bridge to adult transition; a particularly difficult task for many students with disabilities. These students require both academic support and help in developing a less overt set of social skills that will enable them to take on adult responsibilities and become fully functioning members of society. Practitioners working with students with special needs in high schools walk a fine line balanced between addressing academic skills, which students and schools are held accountable for through NCLB (2002), and the more amorphous role of increasing non-academic skills that are not addressed in content standards but are required by IDEA (2004). Special

educators' negotiations to remain in compliance with these two laws will remain an important challenge to consider in both research and practice.



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**Table 1**

**School Demographics 2010/2011for ABC and XYZ High Schools**

	ABC	XYZ
	n = 2,412	n = 1,784
Asian	47	70
Hispanic	46	25
White	4	3
African American	1	0
Other	1	2
ELL	33	24
Free-Reduced Lunch	66	59
Students with Disabilities	9	4

*Note:* Numbers represent percentages unless otherwise specified

**Table 2**

**Distribution of Special Education Eligibility Categories in *Edge* Classes at ABC and XYZ High Schools in 2010/2011**

	ABC			XYZ				Total	Percent
	1 Belmont	2 Levy	3	5 Delgado	6	7 Paul	8		
Learning Disability	12	10	16	8	4	10	10	70	61.4
Speech/ Language Impairment	6	2	1	1	2	3	1	16	14
Intellectual Disability		3			3		4	10	8.8
Emotional Disturbance		2	1	1		2		6	5.3
Other Health Impaired			2			4		6	5.3
Autism			1	1			2	4	3.5
Deaf/Hard of Dearing		1						1	.9
Visual Impairment		1						1	.9
<b>Total</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>114</b>	

**Table 3****Distribution of *Edge* Classes at ABC and XYZ High Schools in 2010/2011**

	ABC	XYZ
SPED Total	n = 196	n = 67
<i>Edge</i> Students	n = 58	n = 56
Percent in <i>Edge</i>	30	84
Percent in Collaboration ELA	70	22
Teachers Assigned to <i>Edge</i>		
Fundamentals (Grade equivalent 1-3)	2	1
A (Grade equivalent 3-5)	0	1
B (Grade equivalent 5-7)	2	1
C (Grade equivalent 7-9)	0	1
Total	4	4

**Table 4**

**Distribution of Grade Levels in *Edge* Classes at ABC and XYZ High Schools in 2010/2011**

	ABC			XYZ					
	1 Belmont	2 Levy	3	4 Delgado	5	6 Paul	7	Total	Percent
	FUND	B	B	B	FUND	C	A		
9 <sup>th</sup>	10			3	2		2	17	14.9
10 <sup>th</sup>	8			2	5		6	21	18.4
11 <sup>th</sup>		1	12	5	2	7	7	34	29.8
12 <sup>th</sup>		18	9	1		12	2	42	36.8
Total	18	19	21	11	9	19	17	114	



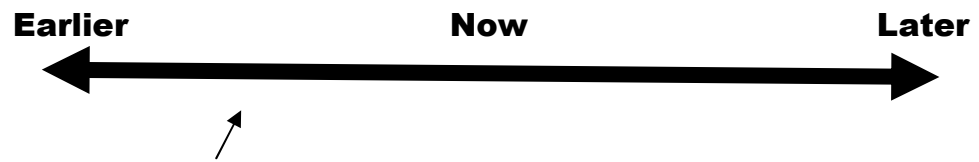
**Table 5****Study Participants**

	ABC	XYZ	Mission School District
Teachers (OBS + INT)	Veronica Levy Jennifer Castle Rosie Belmont	Leticia Delgado Isaac Paul	
Teachers (INT only)	Ralph Yeoman	Keith Hansen Elizabeth O'Day	
School Psychologist (INT only)	Karen Mann		
Students (OBS + INT)	Zachery (12) Ishmael (12) Bobby (11) David (10) Wallace (10) Robert (12) Amanda (12)	Kyra (11) Susie (12) Stephanie (12) Karl (10) Nathan (9) Melissa (9)	
Administrators (INT only)			George Yang (Program Specialist) Julie Merton (Program Specialist) Camilla Robinson (Program Specialist) Timothy Lyon (Program Specialist) Jim Bosley (Coordinator SpEd) Benjamin Dailey (Assistant Principal)

**Table 6****Change in Lexile Scores for *Edge* Students, 2010/2011**

		Initial (Fall, 2010)			Mid-Year (Winter, 2011)		
		Mean	SD	n	Mean	SD	n
ABC	1 Belmont	<b>439.06</b>	267.54	11	<b>558.64</b>	248.19	11
	2 Levy	<b>677.20</b>	283.72	10	<b>566.30</b>	285.61	10
	3	<b>626.82</b>	213.64	11	<b>655.27</b>	260.82	11
XYZ	4 Delgado	<b>764.89</b>	80.34	9	<b>689</b>	155.42	9
	5	<b>421.25</b>	122.50	8	<b>342.5</b>	75.55	8
	6 Paul	<b>971.39</b>	115.72	18	<b>957.78</b>	172.43	18
	7	<b>571.36</b>	47.54	11	<b>541.82</b>	139.18	11
Total		<b>673.33</b>	260.59	78	<b>655.85</b>	272.70	78

**What if a past action is still going on?**

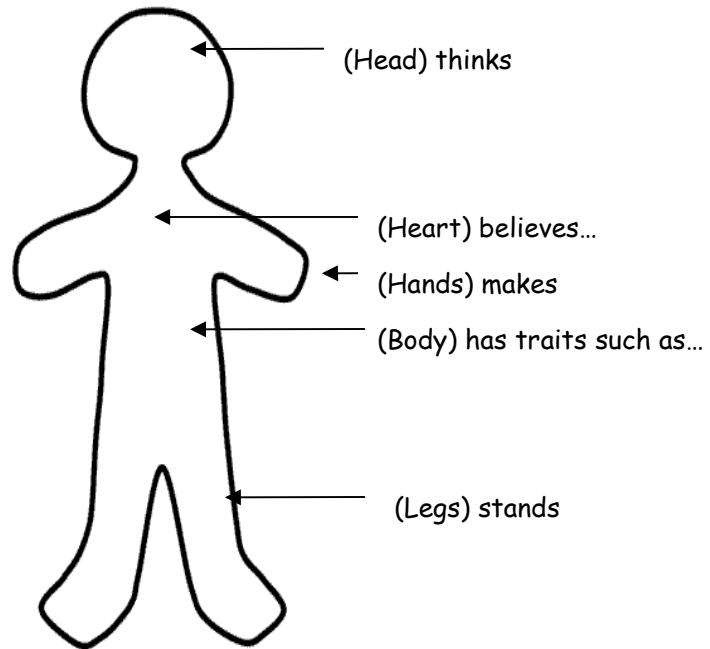


**Present Perfect Tense**

***I have rehearsed***

***He has rehearsed***

*Figure 1. Edge Grammar Overhead, Mrs. Delgado*



*Figure 2.* Teacher-Made Character X-Ray Project, Mrs. Castle

### Editor's Checklist

	Paragraph 1		
<b>Skills I know and want to practice:</b>			
1. Capitalize ALL 1 <sup>st</sup> letters of ALL sentences	Y		
2. 1 <sup>st</sup> sentence of every paragraph is indented	Y		
3. Period (.) Question Mark (?) Exclamation Mark (!) at the end [of each sentence]	Y		
4. The pronoun "I" is always Capitalized	N/A		
5. Can't = Can not      they're = they are don't = do not	N/A		
6. Complete sentences	N		
7. Capitalize Title	N		
8. Center Title	Y		

Yes = Y

N = No

N/A = Not Applicable

*Figure 3.* Teacher-Made Editor's Checklist, Mrs. Levy

## Appendix 1

### Interview Guide for Teachers and Administrators

#### *Background and special education teaching*

Quick history – in education & Special Education (SpEd)

- ◆ How long have you been teaching?
- ◆ Why did you choose to go into special education?
- ◆ Why did you choose to teach at the high school level?

What is your philosophy of special education?

- ◆ What’s “special” about special education?

Most important things you do as a special education teacher?

- ◆ Maybe 3...

What are the most important skills students in SpEd leave high schools with?

- ◆ What matters most to make it as an adult?
- ◆ Most critical skills for SpEd students to have to successfully transition?

#### *Tell me about the Edge*

*Edge* pacing guide – what are your thoughts?

What is your grouping scheme?

- ◆ Do you have permanent groups or do they change?
- ◆ What kinds of data do you use to group students?

What are the benefits of *Edge*?

- ◆ What works really well?
- ◆ What has gone really well?

- ◆ Give an example if you can.

What kinds of specific challenges have you had with *Edge*?

- ◆ What are the disadvantages?
- ◆ Give an example if you can.

Do you consider *Edge* a reading intervention? What else is it an intervention for?

- ◆ What actual kinds of lessons do you actually end up spending the most of class time on?
  - ◆ Reading? Writing? Literacy? Grammar? Vocabulary? Critical thinking? Comprehension? Etc.
- ◆ Is that about right, would you say, or are there other things that you think are more important?

How do you prepare students for standardized tests (STAR and CAHSEE)?

- ◆ Is *Edge* adequate or do you use other materials?
- ◆ If so, which materials?

What is missing from *Edge* that students with SpEd really need?

- ◆ How do you get them that information?
- ◆ What are some typical goal areas for students on your caseload?
- ◆ Are they aligned to *Edge*?
- ◆ How many students on your case load have an *Edge* class? Do any of them have you for their *Edge* teacher?

What question didn't I ask you that I should have?

## Appendix 2

### Interview Guide for Students

1. What about high school is hardest for you?

PROMPT: What kinds of classes are hardest? What about outside of classes?

2. What are the most important things that you've learned in high school?

PROMPT: academics and social skills

3. What are your best strengths?

PROMPT: academics and social skills

4. What things do you have the hardest time with?

PROMPT: academics and social skills

5. What kinds of things do you do in your *Edge* class?

PROMPT: What kinds of lessons can you remember? What others kinds of things do you do that are important to you?

6. What parts are most helpful? Do you use any of the things you learn in other classes?

PROMPT: What parts really stick with you? Do you get a chance to practice new skills in other classes?

7. What parts seem irrelevant [pointless]?

PROMPT: are there things that you do in class that just seem like busy-work?

8. What do you plan to do after high school?



PROMPT: education (community college, vocational/training school, college or 4-year University, work place)

9. Do you feel like high school has helped you be prepared for that goal [above answer]?

PROMPT: why or why not? What do you think that you need?

10. Do you think that you are good at getting along with others?

PROMPT: friends, teachers [bosses], parents

11. How do you think you'll do in a full-time job or at college [based on above]?

PROMPT: what do you think you'll need to work hard to learn?

12. What are you most worried about after high school?

PROMPT: friends, work, money, where you live, going to school, etc.

13. What is the most important thing that you think you still need to learn?

PROMPT: what do you think will really matter in the real world?

14. What do you appreciate most about your *Edge* teacher? How does s/he help you?

PROMPT: tell me some things that come to your mind when you think about your teacher.

## **Appendix 3**

### **Coding for Observations**

TS	Teaching strategies
DEI	Direct Explicit Instruction
WI	Whole-class initiation
SI	Single student initiation
CFU	Check for Understanding (Closed-ended Question)
OE	Open-Ended Question
M	Models
SCG	Scaffold Group
SCI	Scaffold Individual
P	Praise/Affirmation
EC	Error Correction
ESR	Extends Student Response
FB	Feedback (Other)
I	Interruptions to Instruction
IEP	SpEd/IEP Business (Called Out)
SB	School Business (non-SpEd) (Called Out)
LOI	Logistics IA
LOS	Logistics Student

BM Behavior Correction or Management

TO Teacher Organization (looking for materials, changing set-up. Etc.)  
(within class)

TM Technology Malfunction (within class)

ET *Edge* Type

WG Whole Group

SG Small Group

IG Individual/Seat Work

OC On-line Coach

AC Academic Content (E = *Edge* T = Teacher-made)

EQ Essential Questions

RD Reading Expository

RC Reading Narrative

AL Academic Language or Literary Terms

G Grammar

W Writing

V Vocabulary

O Other Content

SOS Social Skill

- LT Life Transition (Connects with post-secondary)
- STS Study Skill
- IP Interpersonal (non-content) teacher anecdote; asking about student's life, etc.)
- DP Directions/Procedures
- PK Prior Knowledge
- CL Connects with another lesson
- G Goal (Instruction to address IEP goal)
- TST Test Prep (Standardized – CST or CAHSEE)
- T Specific Teacher Theme

#### Social Skills (Examples)

- Negotiation
- Problem solving
- Peer pressure
- Conversation skills
- Friendships
- Following rules
- Resolving conflicts

#### Study Skills (Examples)

- Time management

Setting goals

Control environment

Note-taking

Attend to task

Main idea

Self-testing

Organization

Manage anxiety

#### Life Transition (Examples)

Connect to College

Connect to Workplace

Adult Relationships

Independent Living

Finances