

Guided Reading Strategies for Reading Comprehension

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

M.S. Literacy Education

Supervised by

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School of Arts and Sciences

St. John Fisher College

Fall 2010

Abstract

When students struggle with reading comprehension they are at a severe disadvantage. They do not retain what has been read and eventually become dissuaded by reading altogether. The purpose of this action research was to discover which guided reading strategies should be implemented to help develop comprehension skills. Educational professionals and theorists have determined that focused intensive instruction of reading strategies will improve reading comprehension. The methods used in this study included pre-reading strategies, during reading strategies, and post-reading strategies specifically modified to improve comprehension. Over the course of eleven weeks multiple lessons and activities were tailored and implemented to fit the needs of a struggling reader, pre-reading strategies were found to have the greatest impact on comprehension.

Guided Reading Strategies for Reading Comprehension

It is frustrating for students when they do not understand what they are reading. Furthermore, when a student struggles with comprehension they often lose their desire to continue to read, which is why educators should always be checking for comprehension throughout their student's assigned readings. Reading comprehension is essential to ensuring student literacy in many subject areas. It is imperative that a student understands as well as retains the information he/she is reading. When a teacher realizes one or more of their students are struggling with comprehension it is crucial that they develop and implement strategies to help alleviate these frustrations.

Comprehension is an integral part of learning; it is also a multifaceted process with many levels of understanding. Ideally students will gain a comprehensive understanding of what was read, but that is not always the case. It is imperative for educators to understand how a student interacts with text so that he/she can figure out which strategy instruction will be most beneficial. Effectively modeling and implementing strategy instruction is the best way for students struggling with reading comprehension to see how the process works.

Guided reading strategies are often used to help students who struggle with reading comprehension. Pre-reading, during-reading and post-reading strategies are combined to facilitate learning and enhance literacy. Through the implementation of guided reading strategies, students become aware of how print works (Kasten, Kristo, & McClure, 2005), and students struggling with reading comprehension are better able to create meaning. "In guided reading, teachers show students the "tricks of the trade," then provide focused support to help them become independent readers and writers," (Kasten, Kristo, & McClure, 2005, p. 286). Teaching guided reading strategies to students provides them with the tools to enhance reading

comprehension. By also focusing on Freebody & Luke's (1990) four reader roles, which exemplify pre, during and post-reading strategies, educators can help students with reading comprehension.

When a student struggles with unfamiliar vocabulary during reading, the need to focus on those unfamiliar words can hinder comprehension. By establishing familiarity with the vocabulary from the reading prior to delving into the text, students will not spend as much time focusing on unfamiliar words and more time will be spent on reading for understanding. It has been found that through the implementation of guided reading strategies, such as a pre-reading Word Splash that introduces more difficult vocabulary from an upcoming piece of reading, students struggling with unfamiliar vocabulary are then better able to create meaning. Using a Vocabulary Bookmark during reading will also allow students to identify and mark down any unfamiliar or unknown vocabulary words so that the teacher may work on those words with the student. Without implementation of various guided reading strategies, students who struggle with comprehension are at a disadvantage. This action research is going to examine multiple guided reading strategies with an attempt to discover which guided reading strategies are most beneficial to a seventh grade student's reading comprehension. By studying the work done by researchers in the field of education as well as through strategies performed with the student, specific strategies will be implemented with the student.

Theoretical Framework

Larson & Marsh (2005) provide several theories such as New Literacy Studies and Sociocultural theory, which stress the fact that every student learns differently based on his/her background. One examining literacy through Sociocultural-Historical Theory would

present, “a culturally focused analysis of participation in everyday life” (p.101), where “learning occurs, therefore, through participation in social, cultural and historical contexts that are mediated by interaction,” (p. 105). Literacy is found in every aspect of life and the need for appropriate and effective implementation of reading strategies to build literacy skills varies based on each student.

In an attempt to understand and make meaning of the world we live in, people engage in literacy activities for numerous reasons. Literacy is not just limited to oral and/or written language, it is all-encompassing. Learning is becoming more authentic and student-centered, and literacy is now seen as multifaceted. It is practiced daily through reading, writing, speaking, listening, and even when we use technology. Every day people participate in literacy events throughout even the most mundane of activities. Freebody and Luke’s (1990) definition of literacy is a “multifaceted set of social practices with a material technology, entailing code breaking, participation with the knowledge of the text, social uses of text, and analysis/critique of the text” (p. 15). To understand literacy acquisition one must first understand the developmental aspects of language and the sociocultural variations that influence this development. Language development must be looked at objectively from many different cultural perspectives in order to understand how one begins to learn and acquire literacy. Furthermore, a combination of cultural and linguistic variations must be meticulously dissected to fully understand the relationship of literacy acquisition to language development. Literacy is evolving, as are the approaches to teaching and the theories that support these approaches.

Sociocultural theory describes that learners are “active agents in taking responsibility for their learning and constructing goals and purposes for learning literacy” (Larson & Marsh, 2005, p. 132). Teachers need to communicate to students that beyond reading for entertainment

purposes, comprehension is the ultimate goal in reading. Reading for comprehension occurs throughout every facet of life. Reading occurs daily, even in the most mundane or usual activities, and New Literacy Studies, “helps us to understand that literacy learning does not simply occur in formal or informal settings, or in or out of school, but also occurs in-between in everyday interaction as tools for building and maintaining social relations,” (Larson & Marsh, 2005, p. 18). Freebody and Luke’s (1990) four reader roles, which maintain traits found in guided reading strategies, encompass the major components of reading while providing an opportunity for teachers to learn whether or not students need additional instruction and in which areas help should be considered. They explain that, “a successful reader in our society needs to develop and sustain the resources to adopt four related roles: code breaker (‘how do I crack this?’), text participant (‘what does this mean?’), text user (‘what do I do within this, here and now?’), and text analyst (‘what does all this do to me?’)” (p. 7). These roles, which parallel pre-reading, during-reading and post-reading strategies, encourage reading comprehension while offering assistance to teachers on each student’s individual needs.

Each student learns and acquires literacy differently; therefore, if a teacher is able to implement multiple guided reading strategies throughout the reading experience, they will promote student confidence in his/her reading abilities. It is important for educators to embrace student’s various learning styles. Keeping in mind that a student’s background strongly influences his/her literacy skills, teachers must remain flexible and choose whichever strategies will most benefit the student. Multiple guided reading strategies must be considered when students are struggling with comprehension. However, before concluding which strategies will help foster student literacy, educators must also adjust to the ever-changing definition of literacy.

Because literacy is ever changing, and because each student has a unique learning style, educators must carefully choose which guided reading strategies to use based on student needs.

Research Question

Considering that reading comprehension is crucial to literacy acquisition, this action research study asks, which guided reading strategies most successfully lend themselves to the development of comprehension skills in a seventh grade student?

Literature Review

Reading comprehension is imperative to a student's ability to successfully engage in text. It is the teacher's responsibility to ensure that students are effectively trained in multiple comprehension and reading strategies because students must apply multiple comprehension strategies to ensure accurate understanding. It would be great if all students could easily understand and utilize comprehension skills, and then use them appropriately in their reading, however, many students struggle with comprehension and teachers are held accountable in assuring students receive the strategies they need. It has been proven that students who possess prior reading strategy knowledge are better able to comprehend text, (McNamara, O'Reilly, Best & Ozuru; Magliano, Todaro, Millis, & Weimer-Hastings). When educators can include prior knowledge in instruction, it is always beneficial to student achievement. So, including background knowledge of comprehension strategies will help adolescents build comprehension skills. McNamara (2004) states that, "although reading strategically is important for comprehension, the amount of knowledge the reader possesses about the world and about the text content is also an important factor to consider" (p. 4).

Students who struggle with reading disabilities are sincerely in need of strategy instruction, (Manset-Williamson & Nelson, 2005, p. 61), that is tailored to specifically meet their needs. Because all students learn differently, and students with learning and reading disabilities particularly struggle with mastery of comprehension and reading strategies, it is essential to provide individualized, intensive reading instruction. Torgesen, Alexander, Wagner, Rashotte, Voeller and Conway (2001) determined through their research, “that one major task for the educational establishment is to find ways to deliver both the quality and the intensity of instruction that many children seem to require,” (p. 56). However difficult it is to incorporate the time necessary to efficiently instruct students with reading disabilities, finding that time is a necessary obstacle that educators must try to overcome. Duration and intensity of instruction is crucial to student development in comprehension strategies, without teacher guidance, reading achievement will only slightly increase, as Toppings, Samuels, and Paul (2007) confirm, “appropriate, effective implementation involves not only the monitoring of reading practice, but also implies action to guide the student towards successful comprehension” (p. 262). It is not enough to simply explain strategies to a student, one must ensure through reinforcement of the strategies, that the student knows how to properly use them.

Educators must take the time to build specific instructional plans based on individual student needs because strategy instruction benefits and improves student comprehension (Schorzman & Cheek, 2004; Dewitz, Jones, & Leahy, 2009). Not only is it essential that the strategies are created to fit student needs, but students should also be afforded choices and the time needed to successfully understand the strategies being taught. Block, Whiteley, Parris, Reed, and Cleveland (2009) point out that merely adding a little more time to “engage in traditional basal instruction is not a powerful enough intervention to significantly increase” (p.

278) middle school students comprehension abilities. It is not enough to simply teach comprehension strategies. Students who struggle with reading comprehension need instruction that supports comprehension strategies, domain knowledge, word recognition, fluency and motivation to read (Guthrie, McRae, Coddington, Lutz Klauda, Wigfield, & Barbosa, 2009).

A significant correlation exists between students who receive direct instruction and an increase in reading comprehension. Dewitz, Jones, and Leahy (2009) insist that comprehension instruction should always begin with direct, explicit instruction of strategies that focus on when and how individual strategies can be utilized throughout the reading process. Explicit instruction on guided reading strategies will therefore benefit students who struggle with reading comprehension. Furthermore, Dewitz, Jones, and Leahy make clear that comprehension instruction helps students to become aware of the cognitive thought processes during this process, which will enable them to strengthen their understanding of text and develop the required skills of proficient readers. So, if students who struggle with comprehension are taught the guided reading strategies, and then master the skills taught, they will become stronger readers.

What is the definition of comprehension?

Many definitions of comprehension exist. Sargent, Smith, Hill, Morrison, and Burgess (2009) define comprehension as, “the understanding of text” and it often times requires, “explanations, interpretations, applications, perspectives, empathizing, and self monitoring,” (p. 362). According to the Literacy Information and Communication System online (2010), “Comprehension is the reason for reading. If readers can read the words but do not understand what they are reading, they are not really reading. Good readers are both purposeful (they have a reason to read) and active (they think to make sense of what they read).” Manset-Williamson

and Nelson (2005) simply state that, “comprehension is reading,” (p. 61). However, poor comprehenders, “have significant deficits in reading comprehension despite normal or near-normal abilities in word reading,” (Catts, Adlof, & Weismer, 2006, p. 278).

If the universal purpose for reading is to understand and comprehend, and if comprehension is vital to generating meaning, then readers must be taught how to apply multiple reading strategies in order to be successful comprehenders. The focus of literacy trends needs to center on the needs of students, not on what is popularly being taught or focused on in other schools or classroom. Unfortunately, “literacy research and practice has shifted dramatically,” and now “people other than the leaders in reading are creating the literacy agenda,” (Cassidy & Cassidy, 2004, p. 25). Comprehension should be a very “hot” topic for multiple reasons mentioned previously. Educators are consistently attempting to discover the most effective and efficient comprehension strategies and means of teaching them to their students. It is even more important that educators tailor instruction to meet the needs of students with learning disabilities or reading disabilities.

Block et al. (2009) identify six major instructional approaches, which are often found in classrooms today, and those are the following: workbook practice, individualized schema-based learning, situated practice, conceptual learning, transactional learning, and basal readers. The most commonly used reading programs in the United States are the basal or core reading programs. The five most widely used core programs in 2007, according to Dewitz, Jones, and Leahy (2009) were the following: Harcourt Trophies, Scott Foresman Reading, McGraw-Hill Reading, Houghton Mifflin Reading, and Open Court Reaching. There are some adjustments made to these core-reading programs, however, not enough is done to ensure these programs

offer fulfilling content to struggling readers. Dewitz, Jones, and Leahy conducted an analysis on the five core programs mentioned above and their analysis yielded several problems:

First, the comprehension skills and strategies curricula are wide but not terribly deep. The structure of the curricula is often incoherent so that students and teachers do not know how skills and strategies relate to one another or how acquiring these sets of skills leads to becoming a better reader. Core programs should be educative for teachers and students, helping both understand how readers develop. Core programs do not provide enough practice to ensure that any given skill will be learned, and this probably jeopardizes the weakest readers in the room. Finally, the core programs do not provide sufficient support or scaffolding so that students can learn to use these skills on their own. (Dewitz, Jones, & Leahy, 2009, p. 121)

Block et al. (2009), looked at the effects of the most widely used literacy approaches in relation to how they affect comprehension. They found that the most successful approaches shared features of allowing student choice for guided reading texts, continuous reading of more than seven consecutive pages and 15-20 minutes of silent reading. Their findings support the theory that teachers must provide many opportunities for both independent and guided reading practice; it is also imperative to allow sufficient time for students to become comfortable, confident, and successful in using the comprehension strategies. Providing multiple opportunities for instruction is ideal, however, with state mandates it is sometimes difficult to offer a variety of instruction. Sargent et al. (2009), “examined the extent to which classroom teachers used mandated resources alone or still incorporated other forms of research-based comprehension pedagogy to meet varied student needs,” (p. 367). They found that 85% of their participants admitted they have some kind of mandated reading/literacy curriculum in their

school, however, most teachers, “do incorporate research-based methods to ensure the needs of all their students are met” (p. 367). Teachers are in fact utilizing research-based strategies along with mandated curriculum. The link between comprehension and success with reading is apparent; however, there cannot be a uniform statewide curriculum, not when all students learn at different rates. This is why it is up to educators to tailor their curriculum and reading strategy instruction to fit the diverse needs of their students.

Strategies and Approaches to Building Comprehension

Educators must rely on and implement multiple reading strategies to help students who struggle with reading comprehension. The process and/or experience of interacting with a text, requires readers to draw from a vast repertoire of strategies in order to make the most of comprehension. Skillful readers possess multiple reading and comprehension strategies, which enable them with the capability to read multiple kinds texts for various reasons. One comprehension strategy that educators have focused on is self-explanation. Both skilled and less skilled readers produce more relevant self-explanations after training in reading strategies (Magliano, Todaro, Millis, & Weimer-Hastings, 2005). The training educators provide in reading strategies must be modified to meet needs of students with learning disabilities. Students with learning disabilities particularly tend to struggle in content area classes (DiCecco & Gleason, 2002).

It can be difficult to implement strategies that will benefit the class as a whole. One strategy that has received considerable attention for being used during whole class instruction is Classwide Peer Tutoring or CWPT, (Mastropieri, Scruggs, Mohler, Beranek, Spencer, Boon, & Talbott, 2001; Calhoun, 2005) because it has been found that peer-mediated learning is an effective instructional technique for teaching reading comprehension to adolescents with reading

disabilities. It is also significant that educators teach students how to identify, understand, discuss and connect important ideas. Students must be able to engage in, “complex comprehension activities, such as constructing main ideas from texts, distinguishing these main ideas from less relevant details, and summarizing the main ideas, are recursive processes requiring readers to monitor and regulate their thinking as they read,” (Jitendra, Chard, Hoppes, Renouf, & Gardill, 2001, p.54). Comprehension should never be about just reading the book, but figuring out all the pieces of a text and understanding how those pieces work together. Jitendra et al. (2001) assert that, “main idea construction is a strategic process that can be enhanced by understanding characteristics of the text,” and “main idea comprehension is critical to becoming a skilled reader” (p. 54).

When focusing on reading strategies across multiple subject areas, Alger (2009) asserts that all teachers, regardless of content area, should be teaching reading. Learning comprehension skills across content areas is significantly more imperative for students with learning disabilities. A strategy used to help learning disabled children, with regards to content knowledge and expository text, is Graphic organizers. Graphic organizers “are one method that might achieve what text-books fail to do” (DiCecco & Gleason, 2002, p. 306), they represent relationships between key concepts from text visually. Many students with learning disabilities will benefit from the visual aspect of graphic organizers. Another method shown to have a positive influence on adolescents who struggle with reading disabilities is through combining strategies for linguistics, spelling, fluency, and comprehension strategies, (Calhoon, Sandow, & Hunter, 2010). Focusing on multiple aspects of reading, instead of simply comprehension strategies alone, helps struggling readers. Catts, Adlof and Weismer (2006) claim that children who struggle with reading comprehension also struggle with language comprehension. Alternately, a hypothesis

generated and tested by Cragg and Nation (2006) is that, “poor comprehenders’ writing skills are not compromised by inaccurate or inefficient spelling processes,” (p. 67), rather, the lack of writing skills is a result of a lack of comprehension skills. Therefore, it is important for educators to teach their students the required during-reading skills to help with difficult vocabulary.

SERT: Self-Explanation Reading Training

Students who struggle with reading comprehension need skill training in deciphering multiple kinds of text. “Understanding and learning from written material is one of the most important skills to possess in modern society. The importance of understanding text ranges from being able to decipher the “three easy steps” for setting up your computer to understanding the ever-dreaded physiology textbook,” (McNamara, 2004, p. 1), without these skills students are at a severe disadvantage. McNamara conducted research to address the need to improve students’ ability to comprehend and learn textbook material. The starting point of SERT is the self-explanation, which refers to “the process of explaining the meaning of text while reading” (p. 2). It is suggested that readers who explain text tend to understand and take more from the text. There are five reading strategies covered in SERT, they are the following: comprehension monitoring, paraphrasing, bridging inference, elaboration, using logic, and making predictions. Naturally prior knowledge can provide a foundation for the reader, and the more prior knowledge a reader has about the text content the easier it is for the reader to make connections between the new information in the text and long-term memory. McNamara (2004) compared, the performance of SERT participants who had received SERT-explanation and reading strategy to the performance of control participants who merely read aloud the texts during the training phase. What they found was, “as expected, self-explanation enhanced comprehension during

training in comparison to reading aloud. Prior knowledge was also related to comprehension scores during training” (p. 24). Conclusions from this research confirmed that SERT training “provided readers who would normally flounder when confronted with such a demanding text with the means to successfully construct a meaningful explanation and representation of it’s content,” (p. 24).

Research done on reading comprehension has found that a majority of the focus is placed on early childhood comprehension development versus adolescent comprehension development, (Chambers Cantrell, Almasi, Carter, Rintamaa, & Madden, 2010; Partin & Gillespie, 2002; Barth, Catts & Anthony, 2009; Calhoon, 2005; and Manset-Williamson & Nelson, 2005). Chambers Cantrell, et al. (2010) note the lack in adolescent research and point out that students need help building comprehension skills before they move forward and upward in grades, because there comes a point when strategy based interventions are no longer beneficial. Partin and Gillespie (2002) also point out that, “the literacy development of adolescents is just as important and requires just as much attention as that of beginning readers” (p. 62). It is not yet understood why adolescents who struggle with reading comprehension have not received the attention deserved to such an important deficit when studies have proven that the use of academic strategies influence reading achievement and differs based on age as well as even gender (Chambers Cantrell & Carter, 2009).

To further investigate the fact that adolescent comprehension needs more attention, Barth, Catts and Anthony (2009) researched a heterogeneous sample of 527 eighth grade students for the component skills underlying reading fluency. They state that, “many secondary students struggle to meet the basic academic demands of middle school and high school because they have not mastered basic reading skills,” and “while considerable attention has focused on

the key skills that beginning readers need to become proficient readers, far less attention has focused on the correlates of adolescent literacy and how to best teach adolescent struggling readers,” (p. 568). Early childhood learners are afforded the time and attention on comprehension strategies that struggling adolescents learners apparently require, yet children who develop reading disabilities at a later age do not get enough attention, (Mirak Leach, Scarborough, & Rescorla, 2003). Unfortunately, reading instruction that provides specific, direct, individualized, intense, remedial instruction, “is not typically made available to older students served in special education classes,” (Calhoon, 2005, p. 424). It is disappointing to discover that adolescents who need additional support are not always receiving it adequately. Calhoon (2005) asserts that, “without the effective implementation of remedial reading programs in special education classrooms, the number of older students with RD who fail in school and ultimately drop out will continue to rise” (p. 424). It is clear then that students who struggle with reading comprehension and lack of reading strategies necessary to become better readers, are at a serious risk of not only failure but also of dropping out of school altogether.

CORI: Concept-Oriented Reading Instruction

Multiple components contribute to low-achieving readers in the later elementary grades. Often times those students struggle with a variety of processes tied to reading comprehension, including motivation, fluency, word recognition, comprehension strategies, and domain knowledge, (Guthrie, McRae, Coddington, Klauda, Wigfield, & Barbosa, 2009). Considering that these components are moderately related, and each have an influence on reading comprehension, inclusive reading instruction across all components is likely to be most effective for students with such multiple reading needs. This correlation between low-achieving readers and their struggle with the reading components listed above is why Guthrie, McRae, Coddington,

Klauda, Wigfield, & Barbosa (2009) conducted a 12-week intervention for both low achievers and high achievers by comparing Concept-Oriented Reading Instruction (CORI) against traditional instruction (TI). They concluded that, “although reading comprehension depends heavily on content knowledge, few studies of instruction for low-achieving students have attempted to improve students’ subject-matter knowledge or its use in reading tasks,” (p. 195), which is why they conducted this study.

The investigators of this study used CORI, which “integrates support for motivation, fluency, content knowledge, and reading comprehension,” (p. 196), because its effects on low-achieving students specifically had not been investigated. The first step in conducting this study involved a professional development and training in CORI for the teachers participating. The student participants for the study included 156 fifth grade students from three schools in the Mid-Atlantic region. The study was conducted in a pretest-posttest design with two separate treatment groups, one group receiving Concept-Oriented Reading Instruction and one using traditional instruction.

For the students in the CORI group, the reading goals were consistent with district goals, including reading comprehension with an emphasis on comprehension monitoring and inferencing. There were five instructional practices implemented to support motivation, they were the following: conceptual theme of ecological communities, affording students control and choice, arranging collaboration for reading, supporting self-efficacy through text selection and student goal setting, and increasing interest through hands-on science activities. The assessments for both groups were given in September (pretest) and December (posttest). Instruction was provided daily in small groups of three to six students and the instructional approach for comprehension included teacher modeling, scaffolding, and guided practice in small groups.

Students in the CORI group also participated in other whole class instructional activities that were included in the CORI model.

One of the primary goals of this investigation was, “to attempt to increase reading comprehension among low-achieving readers using an integrated approach to instruction,” (p. 206). In most tests instruction using CORI was marginally or significantly higher than the TI group. They found that integrated instruction in the form of CORI enabled the low-achieving students to acquire word recognition and the students in the CORI group surpassed traditional instruction students on a measure of word recognition speed. The students in the high achieving CORI group also increased in word recognition in comparison to the TI group.

Even though there was enough evidence to show that lower achieving readers can perform better when provided the appropriate instruction, there were several constraints to the conclusions. All students were in the same grade level so the same results may not be expected from students in another grade level, the low achieving students in this study were not below a 2.0 grade reading equivalent, and without being provided with CORI professional development, it would be unlikely that the teachers could have provided this instruction easily.

Control, Intensity and Choice

The overarching theme consistent throughout this literature review maintained the influence of choice, control, and intensity of instruction on reading comprehension. As stated previously, providing students with the opportunity to choose what kinds of text they’re reading has a positive influence on their attitude toward reading which in turn positively influences reading comprehension (Block, Whiteley, Parris, Reed, & Cleveland, 2009; and Guthrie, McRae, Coddington, Klauda, Wigfield, & Barbosa, 2009). When students are offered choice it leads to a sense of control, and from control leads to a sense of ownership of his/her achievements. It is

also imperative to provide students with intense and focused instruction to ensure they fully grasp the strategies being taught.

To support reading motivation it is important to afford students with control and choice (Guthrie et al., 2009). Some educators worry that allowing a student to focus on his/her interests may not be the best method of instruction, (Compton-Lilly, 2009). However, providing connections between a student's interests and literacy instruction can provide students with a purpose for reading, which is the ultimate goal. Reading comprehension is most successful when "teachers match students' interests and their reading ability to ensure a successful reading experience," (Kasten, Kristo, & McClure, 2005, p.38). Therefore, offering choice while providing more focus on literacy acquisition will benefit all students in the long run.

Intensive instructional interventions produce more long-term quality results on a students reading comprehension, (Torgesen, Alexander, Wagner, Rashotte, Voeller, & Conway, 2001). Students will not benefit as greatly from instruction that is not both intense and focused, unfortunately teachers do not always have the extra time to focus on each individual student. Teachers need to find ways to include longer periods of time spent on reading strategies so that they can help their students significantly increase their reading comprehension (Block et al., 2009), and "longer time periods of silent reading of full-length class books (in specific instructional approaches) needs to occur more frequently in schools if more students are to experience significantly higher comprehension gains," (p. 277). Based on the findings from researchers in the field of literacy, intense, focused instruction that takes place over a longer duration of time is most beneficial to reading comprehension (Torgesen, Alexander, Wagner, Rashotte, Voeller, & Conway, 2001; Block et al., 2009; Dewitz, Jones, & Leahy, 2009; Calhoon, 2005; and Manset-Williamson & Nelson, 2005).

Conclusion

Comprehension instruction may initially seem like a daunting task to undertake. However, through strategic planning and research, many educators are successful in helping learning disabled students gain comprehension skills and strategies. As students progress through school the focus of reading shifts from learning to read, to reading to learn, and the need for comprehension of content knowledge and expository texts becomes greater. If students are not afforded consistent, specific, and intensive instruction, they are at a disadvantage. Many adolescents are slipping under the radar, transitioning from elementary schools to middle school without having acquired the necessary skills in reading comprehension. If educators can provide students with research-based instruction, they will eventually be able to utilize these strategies on their own. They will have the confidence and resources required to take on the complex and unfamiliar content found in expository texts.

Method**Context**

Research for this study was conducted over a period of eleven weeks at a library across the street from Kyle's home as well as at the St. John Fisher College. This study was done as a part of a tutoring program sponsored by St. John Fisher College. Kyle (a pseudonym) lives in a suburb of western New York in a house with his mother, father, brothers and sisters. He has a large family and even has nieces and nephews, however they do not live with him. The area in which Kyle lives is a nice neighborhood, which is located a short drive from his middle school. The socioeconomic status of Kyle's family is middle class.

Participants

Kyle recently turned twelve years old and is an African American male. Kyle is an average, energetic young boy who enjoys playing video games, watching television and movies, listening to music (mostly rap), and doing things with his friends and family. He says that he loves being an uncle and playing with his nieces and nephews. He is currently in seventh grade and is attending a middle school near his home. His parents agree that Kyle prefers tasks that are hands on, and he has trouble staying focused in classes where his interests are not stimulated. Kyle maintains a positive attitude towards learning and school, yet because he has a lot of energy he sometimes has a hard time remaining focused. Kyle is in seventh grade but reads at a sixth grade level. He struggles with strategies used to uncover unknown vocabulary, which tends to hinder his reading comprehension.

Researcher Stance

As a researcher, I will take the stance of an active participant observer where I will be actively engaged in teaching (Mills, 2011). This researcher stance, which allows teachers to closely monitor and adjust student activities accordingly, is the most common one for teachers to take (Mills, 2011). While fulfilling the researcher standpoint of an active participant observer I wanted to identify specific guided reading strategies that most helped my student with reading comprehension.

For this study I determined that I would work one on one with Kyle both at St. John Fisher College and at a local library near his home. It was extremely important to me that I learn more about the kinds of guided reading instruction that would most positively influence Kyle's reading comprehension. Through the role of an active participant observer, I was able to observe

each lesson and adjust instruction according to what I was observing. I wanted to promote Kyle's reading comprehension through his engagement with the text as well as through a variety of reading strategies, so I observed which strategies worked best with him, and which were less successful.

During my time as a researcher I am working towards my Masters in Literacy Education as a graduate student at St. John Fisher College. I currently hold a bachelor's degree in English with a Secondary Education certification from SUNY Brockport. From the ages of nineteen to twenty, I worked as a teachers aid in a middle school with children from the ages of ten through fourteen. My positive experiences in that position led me to pursue a career in education.

Method

During this study, I executed a variety of reading strategies with Kyle; and determine the benefits of each strategy. The study focused on multiple guided reading strategies: pre-reading, during-reading and post-reading, as a way to help reinforce Kyle's comprehension of written text. The reading strategies were taught by combining all three guided reading elements while reading a text. I observed how well each strategy worked for him and what benefits they provided in reading comprehension. Kyle and I had twelve sessions together and each session lasted for about two hours.

Each day that Kyle and I spent reading text, I implemented a pre-reading strategy to introduce the reading and try to bring in Kyle's background knowledge, a during-reading strategy to focus on the areas where he struggled with reading comprehension, and an after-reading strategy to reinforce and check for comprehension. Pre-reading strategies often included vocabulary from the text that Kyle was not familiar with or may have needed re-introduction to.

Other times a text or chapter was introduced by focusing on a main idea or incident from the text and I had Kyle generate his own opinions and experiences with such an incident.

For our during-reading activities I prompted Kyle to use post-its during reading to find questions he had about the text. Other times I wanted Kyle to use the post-its to make different connections to the text: text-to-text, text-to-self, and text-to-world connections. There were also times when I asked Kyle to use the post-its or a Vocabulary Bookmark to find the vocabulary we studied prior to reading, while also marking down vocabulary words he still did not understand and vocabulary words he wanted to use in his own writing.

Post-reading strategies were implemented often to reinforce the pre and during reading strategies. The post-reading strategies were also intended help to check for and solidify comprehension of the text. I used different comprehension questions, re-telling of the story, and outlining of main points from the story to check for comprehension. I even had Kyle perform part of a story because I knew he liked to get up and move around.

Quality and Credibility of Research

Throughout this research it was important to ensure the quality and credibility of the study. To help assure credibility of this study I applied multiple strategies. Throughout this study I worked with two “critical colleagues” who helped me review each step of the study. My critical colleagues analyzed the progress of the study from the beginning; it was beneficial to have the additional insight afforded by each of them throughout the process. I also implemented triangulation with this study. Triangulation is when a researcher uses multiple sources of data (Mills, 2010). I collected data and information using multiple approaches. In addition, I performed follow up interviews with Kyle to find out which strategies he enjoyed most and felt

worked the best. I collected all documents, student work, recordings, artifacts, and questionnaires (Appendix B and Appendix C) that Kyle had completed during our time together.

I also ensured transferability during my research. Transferability is the researcher's belief that everything is "context bound" (Mills, 2010, p. 104), and not to develop statements that can be generalized to larger groups of people. I collected data specific to the study to make multiple comparisons. Credibility, or the researcher's ability to take into account the complexities and patterns that present themselves in the study, as well as dependability, or the stability of the data (Mills, 2010), was also important to this study. I addressed some of the pre-reading strategies I had performed with Kyle and many of the post-reading strategies as well. My critical colleagues were also able review my data and provide useful feedback to my study.

Informed Consent and Protecting the Right of the Participants

Before beginning my research process I collected informed consent and protection of the rights of the participants. This study was a qualitative study where I worked one on one with Kyle. I gave both Kyle and his parents consent forms, which discussed the study and asked for permission and a signature to confirm authorization to perform research. It was important that the parents understand that, for this study, all names were anonymous and any identifying marks were removed from artifacts used during the study. All participants' names were replaced with pseudonyms and confidentiality was guaranteed to both Kyle and his family.

Data Collection

As previously mentioned, there were multiple forms of data collected throughout this study. I also had the opportunity to informally observe Kyle while working one on one to see how he responded to the strategies I was using with him. I wanted to be sure that the reading

strategies were beneficial to his reading comprehension. After most sessions I spent some time writing a reflection to highlight some areas of success and areas that needed more focus. I also wanted to get feedback from Kyle to see what was working best for him. I reviewed and analyzed all work done with Kyle to determine which reading strategies were most beneficial to him. Finally, I performed a final interview with Kyle to discuss what he felt worked best for him and what lessons he did not like.

Findings and Discussion

The multiple data sources used throughout this action research have revealed three consistent themes that have been successful in supporting reading comprehension. The three themes I found are the following: the positive impact of pre-reading strategies on comprehension, how during-reading strategies (which are most often self-implemented) help with comprehension by forcing the student to slow down and focus on the text, and attitudes about reading. These themes provided the backbone and foundation for my action research lesson planning and will also have a significant impact on my own lesson planning and teaching strategies in the future.

The Positive Impact of Pre-reading Strategies on Comprehension

There was a profound positive influence on reading comprehension through the use of pre-reading strategies with Kyle. Pre-reading activities that introduce both the themes from a book and the more difficult vocabulary from upcoming texts have proven to have a positive impact on Kyle's reading comprehension. Because many of the pre-reading strategies implemented with Kyle were intended to provide him with prior knowledge of the text, he was

therefore able to make a connection to the text before beginning the reading. Activating prior knowledge has been proven to help students who struggle with comprehension (McNamara, 2004; Jitendra, et al., 2001). Because prior knowledge activation assists struggling readers with comprehension, I tried to bring Kyle some background knowledge of all the texts we were going to read, as well as the vocabulary that he may struggle with while reading. I was able to determine which spelling patterns Kyle struggled with most during his read alouds and the elementary spelling inventory I used with him. These activities made it easier to determine which vocabulary words Kyle may struggle with in his guided reading text, thus allowing me to implement the pre-reading vocabulary lessons to help Kyle with his comprehension of the text.

Through the use of pre-reading vocabulary exercises, Kyle has shown significant improvement in his comprehension of text. Prior introduction to vocabulary that may cause Kyle some trouble during reading, resulted in less time spent where he was trying to figure out the meaning of words and more time spent reading for comprehension. When Kyle was provided multiple opportunities to gain familiarity with vocabulary from upcoming chapters, he was more confident in his reading abilities. Cragg & Nation (2006) assert that, to become fully literate, children need to move beyond single words and learn how to deal with text. The strategy I used most often with Kyle to introduce vocabulary from an upcoming text was the vocabulary note cards. To begin this activity I would pre-read through the text that we were going to be using in the upcoming lesson, I specifically looked for words that I felt Kyle might struggle with during our reading. The words used on the vocabulary note cards were chosen based on prior activities, such as an elementary spelling inventory, which emphasized spelling patterns that Kyle has struggled with, as well as through analysis of his read aloud activities with a focus on the specific vocabulary words he has struggled with. I asked Kyle if he thought learning vocabulary from

our guided reading text before we read was helpful and he said yes, so I asked why and he replied, “because it’ll tell you, like the words, like some of the hard words that you won’t understand,” (Personal Interview, 11/16/2010). This statement reassured me that I was using the right strategy by using vocabulary note cards with Kyle.

Vocabulary note cards are used by displaying a chosen word from our guided reading text on one side of the card, and the definition on the other side. I would show Kyle the word and then ask if he knows the word and/or what it means. Usually he was not familiar with the words I had chosen, so I would then go over the definitions with him and include examples that he would understand while also trying to use the word in a way that will have meaning to him. After going over the definitions of all the vocabulary words chosen for the particular chapters we were reading for the day, we would then review them one more time before reading the chapters that contain the words. I prefer to review the words a few times to ensure that Kyle gains a thorough understanding of the word. After reading, I would go over the vocabulary words with Kyle yet again, and then he would be instructed to write sentences using each word. Sometimes, to further solidify understanding, I would use the vocabulary words in a spelling quiz with Kyle. Using the vocabulary in multiple ways, and adding the spelling quiz would ensure that he not only understands what the words are, how the author uses these words, and how they can be used in sentences, but also that he is gaining an understanding of the spelling patterns of these words. My strategies were proven successful when Kyle accurately spelled the vocabulary words that we were working with on his spelling quiz, and when he could properly identify words that contained similar spelling patterns. Furthermore, Kyle could find the vocabulary words we were working on in his guided reading text, and then use those words to write his own sentences.

Other pre-reading strategies I used provided Kyle with an opportunity to make predictions and would facilitate thinking about the text before beginning reading (Appendix E), in turn these activities would also allow Kyle to have more confidence in his reading. Making predictions about an upcoming text provided Kyle with an opportunity to feel connected to the text prior to reading. I often used an activity called a Word Splash to introduce a short story or chapters from a book we were going to begin reading. The Word Splash would contain vocabulary words from the reading, as well as phrases, themes, or main ideas from the reading. I would then review each word, phrase, theme or idea with Kyle, and after looking at each word or phrase on the splash and ensuring understanding of each, I would then prompt Kyle to write a few sentences predicting what he thinks the reading will be about based on the Word Splash. After making a prediction Kyle would become curious about whether or not his prediction was correct. Because of his prediction he was more invested in the reading. Immediately following completion of the reading for the day, Kyle would then go back to his prediction (Appendix E) and write a few sentences explaining whether or not his prediction was correct, if he was surprised by what happened in the book, and then write a brief summary about what he had just read. Kyle's predictions greatly improved from the beginning of our sessions versus the end of our time together. Based on the research done in my literature review, I felt the need to focus on multiple aspects of reading to encourage Kyle's fluency (Calhoun, Sandow, & Hunter, 2010; Barth, Catts, & Anthony, 2009). Furthermore, helping students make connections to text prior to reading, in addition to helping them "improve sentence and text comprehension, students will be better able to comprehend connected text and read it fluently" (Barth, Catts, & Anthony, 2009, p. 586).

Another pre-reading activity I used with Kyle involved introducing themes from the text by asking personal questions pertaining to what is happening in the text. Introducing themes from the text prior to reading is just another way to facilitate thinking about the text prior to reading. For example, Kyle was about to read a story where a girl lost a necklace that was very important to her, so I introduced this text by asking Kyle if he had ever lost something important to him and how it made him feel. He responded with, “A long time ago I lost something and didn’t get it back. It made me sad,” (Field Notes, 9/14/2010). This strategy, which allowed Kyle to connect with the main character of the story before he even began reading, proved to be successful when Kyle accurately made personal connections to the character. He was able to make logical and personal connections that made sense instead of just trying to point out the obvious, which he has done in the past.

Building Comprehension by Slowing Down to use During Reading Strategies

Many students use during reading strategies that have previously been taught to them without thinking about it. These subconscious connections are sometimes important to point out so that a student can understand that what he/she is doing is a good reading strategy. Strategy instruction indisputably benefits student comprehension because reading strategies help with reading comprehension (Schorzman & Cheek, 2004; Chambers Cantrell & Carter, 2009). It is clear that Kyle uses multiple basic reading strategies on his own while reading aloud. These during reading strategies help with comprehension because they force the student to slow down during reading and to focus on the text. A few of the strategies that he uses are the following: re-reading, sounding out words, and often times self corrects any miscues made. Kyle often re-reads sentences or parts of sentences when he skips a word or says the wrong word. This self-correction is always done without any prompting from myself. Almost every time that Kyle had

a miscue where he left out a word or replaced a word with a similar word, he would re-read it correctly. I have found that Kyle re-reads either part of a sentence, or a word in a sentence, in every instance where he has read aloud for me. It is important to me that I point out to Kyle when he uses this strategy because it lets him know that he is using an important strategy on his own.

Students who possess reading strategy knowledge and have training in comprehension strategies are better able to comprehend text (McNamara, O'Reilly, Best & Ozuru, 2006). In an attempt to figure out whether or not Kyle knew that his re-reading was indeed a reading strategy that good readers used, I asked him during an interview what he does when he's reading and gets stuck. He responded by saying, "I'll just read the sentence over," (Personal Interview, 11/16/2010). To get more in depth I then asked what he does when he gets stuck on a particular word, to which he replied, "I don't know, I just like, try to sound it out," (Personal Interview, 11/16/2010), but if he still doesn't understand something he is reading he said that he would just ask someone. His response proved to me that Kyle is aware of some of the strategies that help him with comprehension, and he is also aware that he uses these strategies to help himself with comprehension. Strategy training is effective in building student reading comprehension skills (Magliano, Todaro, Millis, & Weimer-Hastings, 2005), and I feel that this understanding of what he is doing to help himself with reading comprehension gives Kyle more of a sense of accomplishment.

Kyle is often able to sound out words that he doesn't understand or recognize while reading. He uses the letters in the words to sound out each syllable. Through the DRA I used with Kyle, and his other read-alouds, I have found that he automatically tries to sound out unknown words without first asking what the word is. Usually when he tries to sound out a word

he either gets it right or is very close to the actual word he is trying to sound out. When a word is particularly difficult for Kyle he will sometimes ask what the word is or say something like “I don’t know,” but that rarely happens. I did ask Kyle where he learned to sound out words while he’s reading, but he replied that he didn’t remember. When Kyle slows down to sounds out words and re-read, it proves to me that he is using different during-reading strategies. Even though he cannot remember where he learned the strategies, he understands that what he is doing is using a strategy that good readers use. Because he wants to become a good reader, reinforcement that he is using good reader strategies provides him with a sense of accomplishment. He wants to read well and knows that he is doing what it takes to become a good reader, which ultimately helps him to remain positive and stay focused during his reading lessons.

One of the during-reading activities that I have implemented with Kyle is a Vocabulary Bookmark. Because the development of strong comprehension requires work on word recognition, fluency, and vocabulary (Dewitz, Jones, & Leahy, 2009), I wanted to determine which words Kyle struggled with during his silent reading. The vocabulary bookmark is another strategy that forced him to slow down during reading, but it also helped to identify the vocabulary Kyle struggled with. A vocabulary bookmark it is a tri-fold piece of paper with the titles *Words I Know*, *Words I Don’t Know*, and *Words I Want to Use* at the top of each folded side. While reading Kyle was prompted to use the vocabulary bookmark to write down the familiar vocabulary we had worked on together in the “Words I Know” column, then to write down any words he may struggle with in the “Words I Don’t Know” column, and finally, he was prompted to write any words he’d like to use in his own writing in the “Words I Want To Use” column. Kyle accurately filled out the vocabulary bookmark during reading, which helped him

to slow down and to recognize words that we had been working with and how the author uses them in his/her writing, it also helped me to determine which words and word patterns Kyle was still struggling with, while helping him to find words that he'd like to use in his own writing. Furthermore, I observed Kyle going back to his vocabulary bookmarks throughout the tutoring sessions to use words he had written in the "Words I Want To Use" column. He took some of the words he wrote down and used them in his own writing. This action of using the vocabulary bookmark throughout our time together solidified my initial belief that it was a beneficial tool to use during reading.

Kyle and I had done an exercise in writing where he was asked to substitute some of the "plain" words he used in his writing for some more "exciting" words, like the ones the authors we had read had used. To do this we worked on re-writing some sentences he had written previously and tried to make them more exciting by replacing words he had written with more descriptive and "exciting" words. He was able to brainstorm different words to replace some of his boring words. For example, in one piece of writing Kyle wrote the sentence, "my dad has a big truck" (Field Notes, 10/28/2010) to which we went back to and I asked him to re-write the sentence with more description and exciting words. He then replaced the old sentence with, "my dad has a huge light blue SUV that can fit a lot of people in" (Field Notes, 11/16/2010). Then we went through a few chapters in our guided reading text to find some additional words that he could write in the "Words I Want To Use" column. He went through each page slowly and wrote a few words he found interesting, and at times asked if I thought the words worked. This activity gave Kyle an opportunity to note interesting words that authors use, while providing him with more of the "exciting" words to keep for future reference. It is also important to review the words written in the "Words I Don't Know" column and provide an opportunity for the student

to learn those words. After writing a few words in each column Kyle went online to look up the definitions of the words he didn't know. Since introducing the vocabulary bookmark, and seeing Kyle use it regularly during reading, I feel that when he gets stuck on a word, he will remember to keep track of the word so that he can either look it up later, or ask for help with the word.

Attitudes About Reading

From the two questionnaires (Appendix B and Appendix C) conducted with Kyle, as well as the verbal interview, I have found that Kyle's positive attitude toward reading has had a positive impact on his overall reading comprehension. Luckily, I was able to provide opportunities for Kyle to choose which books he'd like to use as guided reading texts for our sessions. By providing a choice in which books we used, Kyle was able to feel a sense of ownership, which also fostered his positive attitude toward reading. One of the three most successful instructional approaches, as determined by Block, Whiteley, Parris, Reed, & Cleveland (2009), is allowing students a choice of books to be read for reading instruction. Because Kyle enjoys reading on his own and has a desire to become a better reader, he more actively participated in our activities and lessons together. He felt more of a sense of accomplishment because we were focusing on a skill he wanted to build for himself.

Before starting our guided reading texts I had Kyle complete two different interest surveys (Appendix B and Appendix C). One of the questionnaires (Appendix B) given to Kyle asked him who taught him to read, and he answered that it was his mom. Partin and Gillespie (2002) ascertain that the formation of a positive attitude toward reading develops at an early age, and students with positive reading attitudes often report being read to as a child. Positive attitudes toward reading positively affect engagement with the text and help establish a motivation to read. I found out, after speaking with Kyle's mother and reviewing her

questionnaire (Appendix A), that she reads regularly and has read aloud to Kyle since he was a small child, she also noted that he has expressed an interest in becoming a better reader by specifically asking her for assistance, and that he often asks for books as gifts. Furthermore, through my interactions and interview with Kyle where he has stated that his mother reads to him and that he sees her reading regularly, I strongly believe that his positive attitude toward reading is at least partly in response to Kyle's mother modeling a positive attitude toward reading, and in response to her regularly reading to Kyle.

I have also learned, from the reading and interest questionnaires (Appendix B and Appendix C) that Kyle has completed, that he owns many of his own books. Most of his books are fiction because that is what he prefers to read. He also has a library card and enjoys the series *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* and the *Skeleton Creek* series. I also asked on the questionnaire if Kyle thinks that it is important to read, and why, he replied with "yes, it will help you later in life," (Appendix B, Field Notes, 9/14/2010). So, not only does Kyle show a positive attitude toward reading, but he also thinks that it is important to read.

Based on a personal interview conducted with Kyle on 11/16/2010, I have found that during our time together he has particularly enjoyed reading the third book in the *Skeleton Creek* series by Patrick Carman, *The Crossbones*. Knowing that he enjoys those ghost stories so much, I created an activity where he could use his love of reading ghost stories to create his own. I found out, after one of our last discussions, that his favorite activity that we did together was actually writing the ghost story after we read *The Crossbones*. Reading and enjoying a ghost story like *The Crossbones* helped Kyle to creatively write a short ghost story of his own. We focused on the elements of a ghost story (Appendix F) to create characters and a plot that is consistent with what he is familiar with in *The Crossbones*, yet it was a unique story because he

was prompted from the start not to copy any of the ideas from the book. Throughout the process of writing he kept independently reflecting on what he particularly liked about the crossbones. When he finished writing the ghost story he told me that reading all the Skeleton Creek books really helped him write the story. He was very proud of the finished product. Kyle said that he particularly enjoys Skeleton Creek because, “it was like a long mystery, because they have three books,” (Personal Interview, 11/16/2010) and that he is excited to read the next ones when they come out. He had read the first two books before our sessions began, and because he showed such a strong interest in those books I decided to suggest that we use The Crossbones as one of our guided reading texts, he was immediately enthusiastic and showed a positive attitude towards our upcoming sessions that we were going to spend reading.

When I asked Kyle what he thought about our sessions together he said, “Uh, it was fun and it will help me with school I think” (Personal Interview, 11/16/2010). Kyle’s mother told me that it was his decision whether or not to attend the tutoring program, and the fact that a seventh grade student actually wanted to attend after school tutoring sessions proves to me that he values his education and thinks it is important to be able to read and write well. Beyond asking Kyle if he thinks that learning is important, to which he has said yes many times, he has consistently shown a positive attitude about each activity we have done together. Reading comprehension was something he really wanted to improve upon, so we worked hard at finding different strategies that helped him to be the most successful.

Implications and Conclusion

This action research was conducted with the intention to determine which guided reading strategies most successfully lend themselves to the development of comprehension skills in a seventh grade student. I found that it is necessary to apply a variety of strategies to see any

increase in reading comprehension. Therefore, multiple strategies were implemented based on the needs and interests of my student. Through my research I have found that guided reading strategies that include multiple pre-reading strategies (some of which intended to activate prior knowledge), slowing down to use during reading strategies, and a student's attitude toward reading have a significant impact on increasing reading comprehension. Moreover, using a variety of focused instructional strategies, based on the needs of the student, provided more enhanced opportunities for literacy acquisition.

The literature review I conducted along with my own interactions and research have shown that adolescents are in need of specific comprehension instruction and many times do not receive adequate instruction for their specific needs. Based on the literature review I conducted, I found that there has been more focus on elementary students receiving comprehension strategy instruction and not enough on adolescents from fifth grade on through high school (Chambers Cantrell & Carter, 2009; Chambers Cantrell et al, 2010; Partin & Gillespie, 2002; Barth, Catts & Anthony, 2009; and Calhoun, 2005).

Providing opportunities where a student can activate prior knowledge, whether through pre-reading vocabulary or theme introduction, allows students the opportunity to connect to text before reading. When a student becomes more familiar with difficult vocabulary from their guided reading text, comprehension can be much easier. Also, making predictions about a story or a book creates an opportunity for a student to feel engaged in the reading. Making educated predictions is a strategy that can be modeled and taught to students so that they can use this strategy on their own during reading. Following the predictions and after reading, it is beneficial for students to go back and figure out if their predictions were accurate. Having a student reflect

on predictions and then write about what really happened is a good way to solidify comprehension and to check for understanding.

When a student can slow down enough to recognize difficult words during reading, and keep track of those words, it is beneficial to both teacher and student to go back and review those words to ensure understanding before continuing with the reading. Noting particular words during reading not only helps to identify difficult words, but can also activate prior knowledge of vocabulary previously studied and words that the student would like to use in his/her own writing. Seeing how an author uses words in their own writing can encourage students to use those words on their own and also to recognize those words in other books.

Positive attitudes toward reading have a significant impact on a student's comprehension. Because a student's attitude toward reading is shaped prior to starting school, it has been proven that when a student experiences positive reading attitudes at home, they will demonstrate positive attitudes themselves. Reading occurs beyond the school day, it is found in every facet of life. When a student possesses reading strategies, comprehension skills, and a positive attitude toward reading, they feel more confident and prepared for reading.

When teaching students who struggle with reading comprehension, it is imperative that educators figure out which guided reading strategies work best for their students. Not all strategies will work the same for every student, so a teacher needs to determine the specific strategies to fit the needs of each individual student without overwhelming their students by introducing too many strategies at once. The only concern I have as a teacher is how to find the time to determine and then apply the most successful strategies with the students who will benefit from them most. I will always use pre-reading strategies when introducing text, but I

want to find a way to modify the strategies I use to specifically fit the needs of the students who struggle with reading comprehension so that they can get the most out of their reading.

Conclusion

The purpose of this action research was to examine which guided reading strategies positively influenced a student's reading comprehension. Through research and the lens of multiple educational theories I have been able to determine which strategies to use with my student to provide him with the best instructional approaches for his success. Multiple pre-reading activities provided the activation of prior knowledge and vocabulary skills necessary to reading comprehension. During reading activities furthered Kyle's reading comprehension by forcing him to slow down during reading as well as provided me with the areas where he was still struggling. Being able to determine which areas of reading comprehension Kyle struggled with also provided me with an opportunity to implement different strategies specifically focused on the areas where he struggled. Because my student maintained a positive attitude toward reading he was eager to learn and participate in the activities I prepared for him.

Of course there were limitations to my study. The biggest restriction I found was lack of time. I would have liked to have more time to work with Kyle on his reading comprehension skills. More time would have also allowed more opportunities to implement other guided reading strategies. Unfortunately this study was done over a seven-week time limit.

Providing an opportunity for Kyle to choose the kinds of books he would like to use during this study had a positive impact on his motivation to read. Because Kyle had a choice in the guided reading text we were going to use, he felt more engaged in the reading. His engagement with text that he chose proves an alignment with some of the literature I have

studied for this action research. It isn't always possible, but teachers should try to allow for choice in their student's reading materials.

Reading comprehension is imperative to literacy acquisition. For a student to be successful in both school and life, they must be able to comprehend text. The frustration of not being able to comprehend text will dissuade students from reading and make reading comprehension more difficult. Educators need to provide strategy instruction to all students who struggle with reading comprehension so that they can have successful reading experiences.

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Appendix A

Please take a moment to answer each of the following questions about your child as carefully and thoughtfully as you can. Use the back if you need more space.

1. What are your child's major interests?

2. What are your child's **strongest** academic subjects?

3. What are your child's **weakest** academic subjects?

4. Which **reading** skill(s) would you like to see strengthened?

5. Which **writing** skill(s) would you like to see strengthened?

6. Would your child rather watch television/play video games or play outside?

7. Which would your child prefer to do: (circle one)

write a story

read a story

act out a story

8. If your child could choose what subjects were studied in school, what would they be?

9. Do you read to your child? If so, how often and what kinds of books do you read?

Classroom teacher: _____

Contact Information: (phone/email) _____

Please feel free to add any additional information you would like to share with me below:

Appendix B

Name _____ Date _____ Age _____

Please answer the questions below. If you have any questions let me know.

1. When did you learn to read? Who taught you to read? _____

2. How often do you read? _____

3. What do you enjoy reading in school or at home? _____

4. Do you have any books of your own? If yes, what are the titles of some of them? _____

5. Who is your favorite author? What is your favorite book? _____

6. Do you like when people read aloud to you? (Parents, teacher, siblings, etc) _____

7. Do you like to read aloud or silently? Why? _____

8. Do you have a library card? How often do you go to the library? _____

9. What do you think a good reader is? What do they do? _____

10. Do you think that you are a good reader? Why do you think that? _____

11. Do you think that it is important to read? Why or why not? _____

12. What do you most want to learn about reading? _____

Appendix C

Name _____ Date _____ Age _____

Please answer the questions below. If you have any questions ask me.

1. What kinds of things do you like to do in your free time? _____
_____2. What hobbies do you have or sports do you play? _____

3. Do you have any pets? Describe. _____

4. What are your favorite TV shows? _____

5. What are your favorite movies? _____

6. What are your favorite books? _____

7. What is your favorite subject at school? Why? _____
_____8. Who are some of your friends and what do you like to do with them? _____
_____9. Do you have any sisters and/or brothers? Names and ages? _____
_____10. Do you go places or play games with your family? Explain _____
_____11. Tell me at least two things I should know about you! _____

Appendix D

WORDS I DON'T KNOW	VOCABULARY BOOKMARK WORDS I RECOGNIZE	WORDS I WANT TO USE

Appendix E

Skeleton Creek

THE

CROSSBONES

By Patrick Carman

Name _____ Date _____

Prediction Sheet

WHO: Who is/are the main character(s)?

WHAT: What is going to happen to them by the end of the book?

WHY: Why did you make that prediction?

WHAT: What really happened? Were you surprised?

Appendix F

Name: _____

Date: _____

Ghost Story Assignment

Your Task: Now that you have read several books in the *Crossbones* series, you are very familiar with the structure of a ghost story. Using your knowledge of these stories, write your own original (no copied ideas) short story. Use suspense and lots of descriptive language to make your story interesting (do not use gore!). How you set up your story is up to you. Of course, **you have to include a ghost** – it's up to you how you explain it. Is it seen by one character? Every character? Or is it just a rumor and nobody has actually seen it? Use your imagination and have FUN!

Brainstorming: Answer the following questions individually to begin thinking about what makes a GOOD ghost story. After you have completed this portion, share your answers with your partner.

- What makes a ghost story entertaining?

- What makes characters in a ghost story strong, believable, and interesting?

- What makes a good setting for a ghost story?

- What are common problems in a ghost story?

- Who generally tells the ghost story?

Planning: Now that you have several ideas about how to make a good ghost story, you can begin to plan. Use the following outline to plan your story together.