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Becoming Independent Readers: A Toolbox of Close Reading Strategies for Young Minds

Kimberly Anne Petersen

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BECOMING INDEPENDENT READERS: A TOOLBOX OF CLOSE READING
STRATEGIES FOR YOUNG MINDS

by

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DEDICATION

To my mom and dad for the lifelong support and love you have given me. Thanks for shaping me into the person I am today. To Jon for being by my side every step of this journey. Thanks for pushing me along. To my students for giving me a reason to have a passion in life. I promise to always fight for you and be your number one advocate. Never forget that you are good enough and if there is a will, there is a way.

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you, Jon and Simon, for keeping my spirits high. Thank you to my mom, dad, and Steven for everything they have done for me and supporting me in every stage of my life.

ABSTRACT

This action research study explored the practice of close reading for reading comprehension in a classroom of fourth grade students for a duration of six weeks. This study was driven by the problem of practice identified by the researcher's own observations and a look into the data of her own students. The purpose of this research was to provide students with reading comprehension tools to help them take charge of their own reading experiences and apply strategies that help guide them into a better understanding of the text. The teacher-researcher chose to employ a set of six close reading strategies, following a gradual release model of responsibility. As an insider to the study, the teacher-researcher was able to authentically respond to the ongoing data collection and analysis, leading to a cyclic nature of research. The data collection methods consisted of both qualitative and quantitative approaches. Quantitative methods were obtained through a pre-post test, self-checklists, and performance checklists. Qualitative data consisted of observations and semi-structured interviews. The data was analyzed quantitatively through descriptive and inferential statistics, while the qualitative data was transcribed and coded to uncover any themes. The results and findings of each method were integrated through triangulation and both approaches were used to present the findings and answers to the research questions in this dissertation.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

As a previous second grade teacher and a current fourth grade teacher, there is one common challenge across grade levels: teaching students how to become true independent readers aware of their own needs and skill set. I can reflect on my many experiences and memories of teaching students reading skills and it seems the same questions and challenges continue to arise. As students' progress in their reading abilities, the texts get longer and the language gets tougher. By the time a student is in fourth grade, lessons in reading consist of passages, novels, articles, poems, and other literary pieces of varying length. We begin to focus on exposing students to this lengthier text with the assumption that they can read it. If they can read three sentences at this reading level, then they can read 20. However, as the length of text grows, the likeliness of an unknown word, phrase, or sentence increases. A collection of experiences exists in my mind in which a student simply skips a piece of text because they just do not understand it. When there are four paragraphs to read, what's the harm in skipping over the meaning of just one sentence, right? This is the mindset of many young developing readers in the classroom. Without teacher guidance and support in making meaning out of complex texts, the student often avoids the stress and reads right through it.

This collection of memories haunts me. I want to teach my students how to read complex texts even without my direct guidance. I want my students to become aware of the words and sentences they cannot unpack and dig out strategies on their own to do so. I want my students to read a sentence in a text and stop and think, "Wow! That was an

interesting sounding sentence.” I want my students to be able to identify and articulate parts of complex texts that require a close read to further grasp the meaning. Ultimately, I want my students to independently and successfully apply close reading strategies as needed to better interact with a text, whether for academics or pleasure.

Reflecting on all the things I want for my students; my next step is to uncover the best practices to teach my students. I want my students to leave the fourth grade with a set of close reading strategies at their disposal, ready to be employed at any given time. Within this action research study, I plan to discover the best close reading strategies and teach them to my students in a careful and intentional manner.

Problem of Practice

The identified problem of practice for this action research study focused on the high need for teaching reading comprehension skills to fourth grade students. In the ELA classroom, reading comprehension continues to be the most common challenge among students across all reading levels. The students within this study participated in ongoing Strategic Teaching and Evaluation of Progress (STEP) assessments throughout the school year. This research based formative assessment system provided continued data to drive literacy instruction in the classroom. As a classroom teacher in this school, I used this data to prepare my daily instructions and groupings for students based on commonalities among needs and strengths in reading. This data drives both whole group instructional practices, as well as guided reading and intervention plans. Spending each day with the same students I began to notice trends among the daily observations and interactions with these groups of students. Reading comprehension and understanding of texts proved to be the most challenging piece of literacy instruction. The STEP assessment system starts

students at a pre-read level and concludes at step 12 in which students are considered to be ‘stepped out’. According to the most recent end of year STEP data, the most commonly missed targets among fourth graders at CDCPS were oral comprehension, written comprehension, and retelling. A snapshot of the analyzed STEP data collected in June of 2018 showed the results of 4th grade students assessed in levels 9-12. Among these 22 students, 5 passed the oral comprehension, 10 passed the written comprehension, and 11 passed the retelling component. This data supported the findings from my observations and interactions with students during reading instruction in the classroom. It can be concluded from the STEP data that the majority of students were not proving to successfully comprehend the at-level texts as independent readers.

Many schools use reading assessment systems, such as STEP, to assess and target instruction for teaching students reading skills based on individual strengths and needs. This type of local data is a great formative assessment tool to guided teaching practices. More generally though, each state gives end of year assessments starting in grade 3 to measure the overall academic achievement in each subject area. Within the state of Massachusetts, the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) is used to assess learners at the end of each school year. According to the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education 2018 MCAS data results, 52% of third graders in the state are either meeting or exceeding expectations in reading. This shows that 48% of third grade students are either partially or not meeting expectations. Results for both fourth and fifth grade students’ reading scores are within 1% or 2% of these percentages as well. Year after year, schools continue to see students that have fallen behind in reading and now wear a not-so-shiny red label in the years to come.

Supporting these state test scores, the local reading comprehension benchmark scores conclude similar findings. In October 2019, the 21 participants in the study took the first reading benchmark of the school year. The benchmark test assessed student's ability to independently read two fiction passages and answer a series of 24 comprehension questions. The benchmark data is organized into achievement bands, aligned with the expectations of the state-wide scoring system. The data from this benchmark resulted in 14 students scoring "partially meets expectations" and 7 students scoring "meets expectations." The mean score of this benchmark test for the 21 students was 62.71%.

In addition to the STEP reading levels, state scores, and local scores displaying low achievement for reading, the teacher's observations in the classroom also supported these findings. During the ELA core block, the students followed a familiar routine of book club consisting of reading part of a novel, responding to a text-based power question, class discussions, and answering accompanying multiple choice or vocabulary questions aligned with the lesson. During these lessons during the first two months of the school year, I noticed a lack of reading comprehension strategies being employed by students independently. Students were only annotating or using "test taking skills" to aid in the process of answering reading comprehension questions. The class discussions were heavily teacher-led and students seemed not only disengaged, but only to be interacting with the text at the bare minimum of completing the assignments. This led me to realize that the low scores on the state and local tests could possibly be connected to the students not having a reliable set of reading comprehension skills to employ on their own. It was evident that the students were not applying critical thinking or close reading strategies when reading on their own or answering text-dependent questions. My goal in this

research was to identify ways in which close reading skills can be taught and used by students to help increase their understanding and comprehension of complex academic texts.

Background of Literature

The strategy of close reading allows students to analyze and explain the meaning of different elements within a passage to contribute to the overall meaning. “It’s an activity that prepares students for independent autonomous interpretations of the text” (Lemov et al., 2016, p. 83). Many times, students are asked to answer questions about a text or explain the meaning of a text, but it seems the strategies for doing so are not explicitly taught. Close reading takes a deeper dive into the word choice and structure of the text. “Close reading requires unpacking the implicit relationships within and across sentences. However, beyond the practice of close reading, students need to understand the ways writers cleverly use structures to add interest, description, and parsimony to their writing” (Mesmer & Rose-McCully, 2017, p. 451). Finding the relationship between words and meaning is a skill that must be taught. “When students have an inadequate grasp of the form that literary texts take, they are limited to dealing with abstracted ‘content’. They therefore fail in an important sense to grasp a given text, since meaning is necessarily derived from material considerations of language form” (Duck, 2018, p. 15). According to Lemov (2016), close reading skills help students build those problem-solving skills needed to read independently. These are the skills that will help students continue to be successful readers even beyond grade school (p. 111). Reviewing the literature on close reading and the rigor it provides students, I was curious to explore how this type of instruction can help provide students with the tools they need to become

independent readers and thinkers, aware of the support they need when engaging with a complex text.

Choosing specific close reading strategies to implement within my study led me to analyzing the literature of best close reading practices. Comparing the literature with student data and teacher observations led me down the path of creating a toolbox of six specific close reading strategies. Three of these strategies came from the work of Beers and Probst's (2013) *Notice and Note* close reading signposts. The authors of these published strategies established a criterion in helping to identify which features of a text are worth teaching. The *Notice and Note* signposts were developed based on the three key criteria. First, the feature must have characteristics that make it noticeable enough to stand out from the rest of the text. In addition, the feature must show up across the majority of books. Finally, the feature must offer something to the reader when noticed and reflected on that will lead to a better understanding and interpretation of the text (p. 67-68). Having met these three criteria, six signposts were named as specific strategies to help readers notice, pause, and reflect on particular moments in a text. The following three signposts were used in this study as part of the foundation of implemented intervention: Aha moments, Again and Again, and Memory Moment. These three signposts are further explained in the literature review. In addition to Beers and Probst (2013) three signposts, the study implemented three more strategies as a part of the close reading toolkit. These three strategies focused on the specific deficits and needs of the group of students in the study. The following areas of reading skills made up the final three strategies: identifying and making meaning of figurative language, using visualization to create mental images from text, and identifying personal connections,

questions, and challenges. The literature surrounding these six strategies is explored in detail in Chapter 2 of the study.

Theoretical Framework

Reading and engaging with a text serves the purpose of making meaning. As readers, both children and adults interact with texts by connecting the current selection to prior knowledge already stored in the brain. Schema theory explains this knowledge structure in the brain as adding new information to already existing information. This theory serves as a foundation in teaching reading skills to all students. Teaching students to understand their own schema can benefit the way in which they interact with the text and continue to make meaning while reading. “Both quantitative and qualitative analysis revealed that the students provided with relevant schema would comprehend the meaning of the passage significantly better than those without, revealing the facilitative role of schema in readers’ extraction of meaning” (Yanmei, 2015, p. 1353). The findings from Yanmei’s research on students’ schema supports the theory used in this study in that student’s schema have impacts on their understanding of the text. Making both personal connections and text-to-text connections will help students to synthesize and build meaning as they read.

The construction-integration theory separates reading into two categories: micro-level and macro-level. “The micro-level represents the more localized level of reading, including decoding and phonological awareness. The macro-level represents a more global understanding of reading, focusing on semantic representation of the text” (Hodges et al., 2016, p. 3). This theory supports the implementation of teaching students how to engage with text structure in addition, and in support of, understanding the

meaning of written language. Close reading practices give students the opportunities to look at the micro-level of language as a support to the macro-level of language. In this study, we wanted students to understand how words, sentences, and sections of literature come together to influence their understanding of the meaning.

The dual coding theory also played a part in selecting strategies for this study on close reading practices. Developed by Allan Paivio (1971), the dual coding theory supports the common practice of teaching students to visualize while reading. According to the dual coding theory, readers create both verbal and nonverbal representations when reading a text (Sadoski & Paivio, 2001). This theory provides a look into the personal experiences and schema students connect with when creating imagery from textual information. Utilizing language and sensory-created images, a reader can apply the skill of visualization to gain a deeper understand of the text (Koning & van der Shoot, 2013). This process allows students to “see” what they are reading and create a more meaningful understanding of objects and events in a story.

Providing students with the skill set needed to independently engage with a text and produce a strong synthesis while reading will heavily rely on the students’ motivation to employ these taught skills as needed. The motivation theory can be explained in terms psychologically and behaviorally. Specifically, in this study, the motivation theory serves as a set of behaviors within students. While teaching students the skills of close reading, annotating text, and synthesizing while reading, desirable behaviors would include: engagement, confidence, effort, and persistence. Both self-efficacy and intrinsic motivation can predict the willingness of students to engage with a challenging text and involve themselves autonomously with learned reading skills. The goal of teaching

students these “During Reading” procedures in elementary school is that they will eventually become intrinsically motivated and develop a strong sense of self-efficacy as readers. Rosenzweig and Wigfield (2016) conducted an empirical study on the motivational constructs that affect a student as they read. “These researchers also have shown that students’ competence-related beliefs and value vary both within and across individuals and over time; that is, they are malleable” (p. 134).

Purpose and Research Questions

The purpose of this action research study was to explore the relationship between close reading strategies and students’ ability to comprehend and understand a text independently. This study focused on empowering students’ reading abilities by providing them with the most effective strategies to implement during reading experiences. A portion of the close reading strategies in this study were designed based on the research of Beers and Probst (2013). The other three strategies were determined based on the specific needs and strengths of the students in the study. Each of the six strategies as outlined in the text were explicitly taught to a group of students in a fourth-grade classroom in an effort to increase their ability to independently read and engage with complex texts (p. 66-71). The purpose of this study was to empower students with the toolbox of strategies they need to become successful independent readers. Specifically, this study looked at the effects these close reading strategies had on students of varying reading levels. The following research questions guided the action research cycle throughout this study:

- How can explicitly teaching students close reading strategies impact their ability to independently read, comprehend, and analyze a text selection? What

is the effectiveness of close reading strategies on my fourth-grade students' reading comprehension?

- What close reading strategies best help students increase their understanding of a text?
- Which close reading strategies do students prefer to use while reading independently?

Rationale

As a fourth grade ELA teacher, students come to me with a variety of reading skills and abilities in their toolbox. Reading is a foundational skill, one that all other content areas and facets of life depend on. Teaching students to read is, more often than not, evaluated by asking them questions or by providing tasks that require they made meaning of the text. However, from my experience, students are often coming across pieces of text above or beyond their reading ability, and these skills and strategies do not provide the crutch they need to still make sense of the text. My goal was to strengthen students' reading abilities by targeting the strategies they need 'during reading'. I wanted to help students feel successful in independently reading and understanding a text even when the words are *big*, or the structure is *unfamiliar*.

Teaching students these 'during reading' skills consisted of close reading strategies that help them analyze the meaning and synthesize the text as a whole. These skills teach students to look at both the structure and the semantics of the text. "It's an activity that prepares students for independent autonomous interpretations of the text" (Lemov et al., 2016, p. 83). Ultimately, this study introduced students to a toolkit of close

reading skills that taught them, as readers, to self-monitor their own thinking while reading to grasp a deeper understanding of the text.

Positionality

Description of Self

Education and learning has been a value instilled in me since my childhood. I grew up in middle class home with two parents; a working father and a stay-at-home mother. My parents have stayed involved in my educational experiences throughout my lifetime. Because of this, I attribute my love for learning and the intrinsic motivation I have towards continuing my education as an adult. In addition to this, I also grew up in an open-minded home where the importance of diversity was always acknowledged. Because of this, I also grew into an adult aware of my privileges and I make a true effort to understand others' experiences from a different point of view. I always attended schools with diverse populations and found myself befriending others of difference races, genders, religions, and home experiences. However, most peers I interacted with came from the same, or similar, socioeconomic class as myself.

My first teaching job was in a school in which I was the minority. I was conscious in making this decision. I wanted to start my career by opening my eyes to cultures different from my own. Four years later and I am now teaching in a different state, also as the minority in the school in relation to the students. These life experiences have allowed me to get a better interpretation of culture. I understand that the culture within a school is built upon the everyday routines within the building and the beliefs and values of each individual as a part of the school family. "To call something "cultural" is to say not only

that it is shared but also that it runs very deep, that it is stable, and that it is integrated into a larger gestalt” (Evans, 2001, p. 42).

Reflecting on the various settings I have experienced as both a student and teacher, I was able to get a better understanding of how and why the culture exists differently in each atmosphere. I find it valuable to address my personal beliefs and cultural heritage, as well as position myself within the culture and beliefs of the school in which I am working. Doing so helps to shape my everyday instructional decisions, the ways I communicate with others, and the ideas I choose to bring to the table. Prior to exploring my positionality in relation to this current study, I believe it is important to understand the aspects of my own personal perspective.

Relationship Between Self and Study

My own personal experiences and perspectives have helped me discover the relationship I held within this action research study. As a fourth grade ELA classroom teacher I would position myself as an insider (studying one’s own practice) on the Continuum and Implication of Positionality Table 3.1 as shown in Herr and Anderson’s (2013, p.40) text. As an insider researcher, I implemented a set of close reading skills to study the impacts of these instructional practices on a group of fourth grade students. Throughout the action research, I used the data and findings to guide my decisions and make decisions that supported my desires to increase successful independent reading skills among students.

Although I was an insider in that I was the practitioner studying my own practices within my own professional setting, I considered myself an outsider in regards to the participants. Besides the comparison of roles (teacher to student), I also recognized that

my nationality, ethnicity, and first language differed from the majority of the participants in my study. While I was a 28-year-old, white, American teacher, I was indeed the minority. Of the twenty-one students that made up the participants within my research, 83% were from either Puerto Rico or the Dominican Republic. While my first language is English, these 83% of students identified Spanish as their first and home language. As stated in Herr and Anderson (2013), “We may occupy positions where we are included as insiders while simultaneously, in some dimensions, we identify as outsiders” (p. 55). As I began my action research, I understood the importance of my positionality on the continuum and the changes it underwent as the study took its course.

Research Design

Action Research Rationale

Teaching is a work of both science and art. There is a science to everything we do, and an art to the way in which we do it. National and state standards give us the outline, the formula, of what to teach. However, the classroom teacher holds the key to the art of this teaching. As a classroom teacher myself I find true value in my ability to make instructional decisions aligned with the needs of my students. In selecting a research approach, I found a distinct beauty in the use of action research. Action research allowed me to improve my practice and foster the learning in my classroom as connected to the research. Efron and Ravid (2013) explained John Dewey’s (1929/1984) historical and theoretical roots in the development of action research. “He encourages teachers to become reflective practitioners and make autonomous pedagogical judgments based on interrogating and examining their practice” (p. 5). Action research is unique in that it follows a cyclical and intentional practice. This type of research increased my

effectiveness as a teacher, which in turn, increased student achievement in my classroom. Implementing action research and sharing the findings provides the opportunity for other practitioners to continue my work, or use it as it might apply to their teaching experience in some manner. Action research practitioners engage in this type of study in an effort to improve the practices within the classroom setting, or even the organizational functioning at a larger level (Rallis & Rossman, 2012, p. 124). It was my goal to use action research to better myself as an educator, to increase student achievement, and to provide research-based knowledge accessible to others.

Methodology

This study employed a mixed-methods methodology. Both quantitative and qualitative data was collected and analyzed as a part of the research process. Specifically, the study followed a triangulation design research, in which both methods of data were collected to study the same phenomenon. In this study, both methods were collected and analyzed simultaneously, with the same amount of priority. Ongoing quantitative data consisted of weekly classroom assessments in the form of exit slips and self-checklists. These tools were used and analyzed to assess the impact of close reading strategies as students implemented them independently. Self-checklists were also used as a way for students to identify which close reading strategies they employed on that specific exit slip. This allowed students the opportunity to “diagnose their own performance” (Fraenkel, 2015, p. 127). A pre-post test was also administered and analyzed at the start and conclusion of the data collection cycle. Qualitative data included observations and semi-structured interviews. Triangulation was used to integrate the two methods when interpreting the findings from the study (Efron & Ravid, 2013, p. 213). I was able to fine-

tune the best close reading strategies during the action research cycle, as well as took a deeper dive into the best teaching practices to increase students' understanding and use of these specific strategies. I am now able to transfer the knowledge from the study into my future teaching practices, as well as share the results with other professionals in my school setting. It is important that best teaching practices continue to be uncovered year-after-year.

Setting and Participants

This study took place in a public charter school in Lawrence, Massachusetts. The charter school in which the study was employed consists of three schools: an early learning center, a lower school, and an upper school. This research took place in the lower school in a fourth-grade classroom. The participants were fourth grade students, both male and female. All 21 participants were bilingual, speaking both English and Spanish. All 21 students were used in this action research study. Using all available students as participants allowed me to implement these teaching strategies to the whole group on a daily basis. Information regarding participant demographics and reading levels is provided in detail in Chapter 3 of this study.

Data Collection Tools and Instruments

The tools and instruments used to collect data within this action research study examined both qualitative and quantitative measures of the study. Qualitative measures consisted of semi-structured interviews and observations. A pre-post test was administered prior to teaching the close reading strategies and at the conclusion of week six of teaching the strategies. Daily exit slips were collected and analyzed quantitatively to measure the progress of student reading comprehension as close reading strategies

were employed. Students also filled out a self-checklist attached to each exit slip to identify which close reading strategy was used in the close reading interaction, as well as provide some insight into the students' perception and opinion on the close reading learning experiences.

Semi-Structured Interviews

The study used interviews to collect data on the students' use of the close reading strategies. Interviews were designed to assess the students' knowledge, opinions, and interests of the close reading strategies they were being taught as a part of this study. The interviews specifically collected data to gain a better understanding on the students' opinions of using the strategies with fiction texts, their independent reading habits, and their preferred use of the strategies.

Observations

A pre-determined list of behaviors was used within a checklist to observe students in the classroom as they read and answered text-dependent questions. These observations served as a data tool in collecting information on what strategies were being used by the participants during independent reading engagements and a detailed consideration to the interactions students had with both the text and the teaching experience. The checklist helped to identify what types of strategies were being used and for what purpose. The checklist also provided a better look into how the employed strategies were connected to the text-dependent questions students were answering as well as the class discussions that took place at the end of each lesson. This ongoing data collection allowed me to make informed decisions both during and after the implementation process of the close reading strategies throughout the six weeks of the study (Efron & Ravid, 2013, p. 107).

Pre-Post Test

A pretest was administered to the participants prior to the implementation of teaching the close reading strategies. This pretest consisted of a fiction passage with text-dependent multiple-choice questions. Students were instructed to read the passage and use any strategies or skills to annotate the text and answer the questions. At the conclusion of the study, this same passage and set of multiple-choice questions were given to students a second time. The directions instructed students to use the six close reading strategies they had been taught to read, annotate, and answer the questions.

Formative Classroom Assessment Exit Slips

Alongside the pre-post test data collection, weekly exit slips were given to students as a means of a formative assessment. This exit slip included a portion of text and a variety of text-dependent question types to assess the students' independent reading comprehension of that text. Student annotations aligned with the six strategies were also analyzed to gain an understanding of the rate at which the strategies were being employed by students. These exit slips were scored based on student responses, close reading mark-up strategies employed, and general understanding of the given text.

Self-Checklists

Attached to each weekly exit slip was a student-friendly self-checklist. This checklist instructed students to identify which specific close reading strategies were used to understand the text and answer the questions on the slip. The exit slip assessment data and self-checklist responses were analyzed together as a way to assess which strategies were being used and which were leading students to successfully comprehending the text. In doing so, patterns and trends emerged throughout the ongoing data collection and

analysis cycle. This helped me as the teacher-researcher determine next steps in teaching the close reading strategies week to week.

Data Analysis

This mixed-methods research study analyzed both qualitative and quantitative data, simultaneously. Qualitative data was analyzed using inductive analysis and the coding process was used to uncover patterns and themes that emerged. Quantitative data was organized into Excel, followed by the use of both descriptive and inferential statistics to determine the change in student performance and the success of utilizing the six close reading strategies. Both types of data collection were analyzed and compared to one another using a triangulation design during analysis.

Qualitative Data

The data collected through the observations and semi-structured interviews were analyzed through the technique of coding. Following the procedure of data collection, qualitative data was organized and sorted into categories relating to the use of specific close reading strategies. According to Efron and Ravid (2013), breaking down the data into smaller units is helpful during the process of coding and reading through the collected data (p.168). The researcher employed inductive analysis (open coding) as major ideas and patterns emerge. Categorization and thematic analysis (Fraenkel, 2015) was used to help the researcher make connections between specific close reading strategies employed by students, the success of each, and the characteristics of text features that were present during the close reading interactions.

Quantitative Data

The pre-post test was scored and a comparison of the results and a look into the close reading strategies used was analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. The weekly exit slips and self-checklists was also coded based on the close reading strategies being employed and any trends being reported. At the conclusion of the data collection, the formative assessment results were organized visually through tables and graphs to display important trends and success rates of strategies. A table was created to display the percentage of each close reading strategy as it was used on the formative assessment slips. Bar graphs were used to show the comparisons between strategies used, success of strategies, and other characteristics present in the slips. The patterns and trends revealed during the data collection cycle helped to determine which characteristics would be reported in the graphs, as can be seen in Chapter 4.

Validity

Herr and Anderson (2015) described good action research as possessing goodness, trustworthiness, quality, credibility, and workability (p.61). As an insider within my study, it was important to acknowledge my work from an outsider's perspective in an effort to understand my findings and generalizability from an outsider position. The careful planning and implementation during the data collection and analysis helped to address the internal validity of the study. Understanding the biases that existed due to my position as an insider was important to address throughout the research cycle. During this action research process, I made sure to recognize and consider the five validity criteria as explained by Herr and Anderson (2015, pp. 67-70). These criteria helped me provide answers to the research questions that were both trustworthy and

valid. When analyzing and interpreting the results of this research, a triangulation design was used to validate the accuracy of my findings and patterns.

Significance

Connecting the problem of practice and the review of literature, I was curious as to how teaching close reading strategies to students could impact their overall growth in reading comprehension. I was eager to dive into the literature further and carefully plan how to put this research into action. The significance in this research was to explore how close reading strategies could provide students with the reading skills needed to be successful independent readers. This study worked towards teaching students how to become aware of their own reading needs and how to identify the skills they needed, and when, in an effort to comprehend a complex fiction text.

The findings of this study can be significant to other teachers and schools in varying grade levels and subject areas. Reading is a skill transferred into all academic work. The significance of determining best close reading practices can inform other teachers as they prepare lessons and instruction. Now that findings have been presented, the potential of continuing research on this topic can help grow students as better readers at all ages and in all subject areas.

Limitations

The limitations of this study consisted of both the time restraint and participants. Although I was an insider within my research, I was still aware of the limitation of time. While I was able to study the impact that close reading had on these students as fourth graders, I did not get to study the long-term effects of implementing close reading strategies as readers beyond their year in fourth grade. In addition, students were enrolled

in my ELA class in which they were already receiving reading and writing instruction beyond the specific strategies focused on in this study. Therefore, the natural progression of additional literacy instruction may have limited the confidence within my findings. I was careful to closely analyze student achievement as it related directly and solely on the close reading strategies that were employed as a part of the study's intervention. I made sure to acknowledge any outside factors that may also impact student reading achievement and academic progress during the six weeks of this study.

Another limitation to this study was the language barrier that existed among the participants. Some students within the study were English Language Learners (ELL), while all others were identified as Former Limited English Proficient (FLEP). While the students were identified by the school through the administration of state ACCESS testing and did receive support in meeting their language needs, these current, or former, language barriers may have had unknown impacts on the students' engagement with complex texts. However, I was able to use the qualitative data collection measures to best uncover any language needs or challenges that came into play during this research study.

Organization of Dissertation

The remaining chapters of this dissertation consist of reviewing the literature, implementing the mixed-methods data collection, analyzing the results, and sharing the findings using a triangulation design. The data collection and analysis took a cyclic form as a part of the ongoing action research cycle.

List of Definitions

Close Reading - The set of tools readers use to “solve” text when it is challenging and out of their comfort zone.

Positionality - The degree to which researchers position themselves as insiders or outsiders within research.

Action Research - Systematic inquiry that is collective, collaborative, self-reflective, critical, and undertaken by the participants of the inquiry. The goals of such research are the understanding of practice and the articulation of a rationale or philosophy of practice to improve practice.

English Language Learners (ELL) - Students who are unable to communicate fluently or learn effectively in English.

Former Limited English Proficient (FLEP) - A student who is deemed English proficient and can participate meaningfully in all aspects of the district's general education program without the use of adapted or simplified English materials.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this action research was to explore close reading strategies and students' reading comprehension of fiction texts. Based on low state test scores of reading comprehension of the upcoming fourth grade students, Strategic Teaching and Evaluation of Progress (STEP) level reading data, and teacher observations it was noted that students were struggling to comprehend complex texts. Based on the 2018 Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS), 48% of third grade students are either partially, or not, meeting expectations in reading. In addition to this state test data, the STEP assessments indicated that out of 22 students, 17 did not pass the oral comprehension part, 12 did not pass the writing comprehension, and 11 did not pass the retell portion of the reading assessment. When answering text-dependent questions or discussing pieces of complex texts in the classroom, observations showed that students were not utilizing strategies that help to determine the meaning of the text.

The underlying causes of this problem came from the lack of independent reading comprehension skills. Through observations and conversations with current students, I was able to conclude that the readers in my current fourth grade classroom were not accessing any specific reading comprehension skills when reading independently.

Supported by the low state test scores and STEP data, this pointed to the realization that students were not making intentional decisions to make meaning of a text when reading independently. This problem of practice and the underlying causes led me to implement an action research study with the purpose of exploring the method of close reading. The

following research questions guided my action research cycle throughout this six-week study:

- How can explicitly teaching students close reading strategies impact their ability to independently read, comprehend, and analyze a text selection? What is the effectiveness of close reading strategies on my fourth-grade students' reading comprehension?
- What close reading strategies best help students increase their understanding of a text?
- Which close reading strategies do students prefer to use while reading independently?

Organization of Literature Review

Throughout this chapter, literature supporting the practice of close reading will be explored and analyzed. The chapter will begin by discussing the purpose of the literature review followed by the theoretical framework supporting the research. The historical perspective and social issues surrounding the method of close reading within this study will follow. Details of the proposed close reading method will be described as well. The literature review will take a closer look at what close reading is, the close reading strategies that will be implemented in the study, the role of both the teacher and the reader in the practice, and the challenges and implications identified in the literature.

Purpose of the Literature Review

The purpose of this literature review is to explore the existing literature on the topic with the intention of further studying the identified problem of practice. A literature review builds a case from credible evidence collected from previous research in order to

provide the context and background of current knowledge of the topic being explored (Machi & McEvoy, 2016, p. 5). Conducting a literature review provides the study with an organized way to research the chosen topic or problem of practice. It is important to note that the literature review requires a deliberate process of critical thinking and making connections to the data collected. Providing a written review of the research topic gives a foundation for the researcher to begin. Identifying what knowledge already exists allows the opportunity to fill in the gaps, answer any unanswered questions, and explore areas not yet researched. As I approached the data collection and analysis in this study, it was important to have internalized and considered all aspects of the supporting literature through and through.

After identifying the problem of practice and research topic, I began to explore the existing literature. I started with a wide scope, researching and reading any and everything related to my topic. In doing so, I was able to better formulate my research purpose and research questions and really start looking at the literature in a more intentional and organized manner. The majority of my literature came from search engines and databases provided through the University of South Carolina online library. I used both ERIC and EBSCO to search for peer-reviewed literature related to my topic and key words. Using these databases led me to journal articles, websites, and essay articles. In addition to an online search engine, I found value in many books and textbooks. Throughout the process of my literature review, deciding which books I would invest in and purchase meant making careful decisions and reading further into the resources to determine its value in conducting my review. I found the literature review process to take a cyclic action of finding sources that would lead me to new sources and

eventually back around to many of the originally found sources. This allowed me to identify trends, gap in the literature, and many ideas regarding the implementation of my intervention moving forward.

Theoretical Framework

This action research study and the literature explored in this review are supported by a variety of theories relating to the problem of practice and method of close reading. The following theories are described in detail serving as the framework of this study: schema theory, construction-integration theory, and the motivation theory.

Schema Theory

Reading and engaging with a text serves the purpose of making meaning. As readers, both children and adults interact with texts by connecting the current selection to prior knowledge already stored in the brain. The term “schema” was first use by Sir Frederic Bartlett in 1932 to describe this interaction between old knowledge and new information when reading (Anderson & Pearson, 1984). In his book, *Remembering*, Bartlett (1932) referred to schema as “an active organization of past reactions, or past experience...” (p. 201). One of Bartlett’s most notable findings of schema is the idea that individuals do not comprehend a text of situation detail-by-detail, building up to a whole. Rather, individuals use their schema to build an initial general impression of the whole, followed by constructing the probable detail that would justify the general impression (1932, p. 206). This work led to the understanding of how schemata plays a huge roll in the process of reading comprehension.

The schema theory explains this knowledge structure in the brain as adding new information to already existing information. This theory serves as a foundation for

teaching reading skills to all students. Teaching students to understand their own schema can benefit how they interact with the text and continue to make meaning while reading. Alvermann et al. (2013) explained that when readers come across new information, the information is integrated with existing schema or is constructed into new schema.

“Both quantitative and qualitative analysis revealed that the students provided with relevant schema would comprehend the meaning of the passage significantly better than those without, revealing the facilitative role of schema in readers’ extraction of meaning” (Yanmei, 2015, p. 1353). The findings from Yanmei’s (2015) research on students’ schema supported the theory used in this study in that student’s schema have impacts on their understanding of the text. Making both personal connections and text-to-text connections helped students to synthesize and build meaning as they engaged with text in the study.

Dual Coding Theory

The dual coding theory (DCT) was initially proposed by Allan Paivio in 1971 and is used to describe the process of forming verbal and nonverbal representations to make meaning of an event or object in text. The DCT suggests that two subsystems exist separately but are interconnected within the cognitive process of forming verbal and nonverbal representations. Verbal representations consist of words to describe an object or event, while nonverbal representations consist of sensory images of whatever is being represented (Sadoski & Paivio, 2001). These two subsystems are considered to help readers understand the meaning of text by helping the reader form visual representations of the textual information both verbally and nonverbally. The DCT supports the importance of imagery in cognitive operations related to reading comprehension.

Teaching students to recognize the representations of these two subsystems can lead to a more meaningful and intentional reading experience.

According to the dual coding theory, the nonverbal imagery that individuals create when reading or listening is not limited to just visual modality. Rather, the mental imagery is created by all sensory experiences (Sadoski & Paivio, 2001). Therefore, the nonverbal representations of an object in text can be visualized by a reader using information in the working memory gathered from all senses, not just visual properties. Verbal representations created by a reader consist of language connections readers may associate with the object or event. Koning and van der Shoot (2013) provided a look into these two subsystems by describing an example of reading the word “hamburger.” The verbal representation might connect to language stored in the memory such as “made of meat,” while the nonverbal memory will refer to images created by the mind’s eyes, ears, and other sensory experiences (e.g., shape, smell, color).

The dual coding theory was considered in this study when selecting the close reading strategies to be used in the intervention. Applying the DCT to teaching practices is most commonly seen in the reading strategy of “visualization.” This strategy is supported by the DCT in encouraging readers to form visual representations of objects or events in a text that are not physically present, or illustrated on the page (Hibbing & Rankin-Erickson, 2003). Teaching students to connect with the text by giving credit to the visual representations that come to mind when reading allows for a more thoughtful and interactive reading experience. Utilizing these verbal and nonverbal representations during the reading process increases the likelihood that the text will be understood by the reader (Sadoski & Paivio, 2004). The dual coding theory and reading comprehension

strategy of visualizing are later described in connection to one of the six strategies selected for this study.

Construction-Integration Theory

The construction-integration theory separates reading into the following two categories: (a) micro-level, and (b) macro-level. “The micro-level represents the more localized level of reading, including decoding and phonological awareness. The macro-level represents a more global understanding of reading, focusing on semantic representation of the text” (Hodges et al., 2016, p. 3). This theory supports the implementation of teaching students how to engage with text structure in addition, and in support of, understanding the meaning of written language. Close reading practices give students the opportunity to look at the micro-level of language as a support to the macro-level of language. In this research, we wanted students to understand how words, sentences, and sections of literature came together to influence their understanding of the text.

The construction-integration model was developed by Walter Kintsch as a model of text comprehension. This model proposes that comprehension does not rely on prior knowledge, but rather knowledge from the text. According to Kintsch (1988), the two processes of construction and integration describe the way in which a reader makes meaning of the text using knowledge from the text itself and their own working memory. Small units of ideas are generated by the reader from the words, sentences, and context in the reading. These ideas then activate a knowledge net from the working memory that may consist of both relevant and irrelevant pieces of information. These propositions are organized as microstructure from this local meaning. Eventually higher-level

relationships will form a macrostructure in which integration will then construct a knowledge net. A core idea of Kintsch's theory is that "comprehension is generated from the textual information of knowledge out of the text" (Xiao, 2016, p. 187). This means that knowledge is constructed from all textual levels and is refined through the process as it is integrated with a person's own working memory.

Motivation Theory

Providing students with the skill set needed to independently engage with a text and produce a strong synthesis while reading will heavily rely on the students' motivation to employ these taught skills as needed. The motivation theory can be explained psychologically and behaviorally. Kovach (2018) explained that motivation is linked to goals with a starting point and an intentional ending point (p. 35). The motivation theory can be traced back to Maslow's (1943) construct of the Hierarchy of Needs which considered motivation on a basis of need fulfillment. Following Maslow, theorists McClellan (1961), Bandura (1962), and Adams (1963) contributed to the development of the classic motivation theories by exploring motivation as both an external and/or internal factor. Specifically, in this study, the motivation theory serves as a set of behaviors within students.

While teaching students the skills of close reading, annotating text, and synthesizing while reading, desirable behaviors would include: engagement, confidence, effort, and persistence. Both self-efficacy and intrinsic motivation can predict the willingness of students to engage with a challenging text and involve themselves autonomously with learned reading skills. The goal of teaching students these 'during reading' procedures in elementary school is that they will eventually become intrinsically

motivated and develop a strong sense of self-efficacy as readers. Rosenzweig and Wigfield (2016) conducted an empirical study on the motivational constructs that affect a student as they read. “These researchers also have shown that students’ competence-related beliefs and value vary both within and across individuals and over time; that is, they are malleable” (p. 134).

Historical Perspective

Close reading holds roots in the fields of both theology and literary criticism. While the term close reading was not coined until its presence in the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) in 2010, the method of close reading was used similarly in both of these fields. Dating back to the 1600s, the Greek term “exegesis” was adopted referring to the critical explanation or interpretation of a religious text (Sisson & Sisson, 2014). In addition to its use in understanding religious texts in the 17th century, close reading can also be compared to the development of implementing detailed textual analysis in the field of literary criticism in the 1930s. As a new theory, detailed textual analysis described the approach of interpreting a text by reading it closely and considering the specific elements and structure of the language within. This new approach to teaching reading became a significant piece of “New Criticism,” which became the new preferred method of teaching reading and literature (p. 10).

By the 1970s, the New Criticism Movement began to decrease in popularity and the reader response theory, developed by Louis Rosenblatt, took center stage (p. 11). During this time, instruction began to shift from teacher-centered to student-centered (Goodman, 1989; Gutteridge, 2000; Harris & Hodges, 1995; Taylor, 2007). Because of this shift, literacy instruction in classrooms began to incorporate readers as meaning-

makers as they connected with the text. American schools embraced this reader response theory for nearly four decades (Sisson & Sisson, 2014, p. 11).

In 2010, the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) were introduced and implemented in public school classrooms across the nation. Standard 1 of the CCSS mentions the phrase “read closely,” which quickly became a recognizable hallmark of the new standards and led to a new focus of teaching reading (Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2019). Educators and researchers began using this coined term to produce new ways of teaching students to read complex texts closely with the structured support of teacher instruction. A shift came about in that New Critics now urged the teaching of reading comprehension through a lens of looking closely at the structure of a text rather than relying on prior knowledge and personal connections (Sisson & Sisson, 2014). A professor in the communications field, Barry Brummett (2010) described close reading as “the mindful, disciplined reading of an object (text) with the view to a deeper understanding of its meanings” (p. 3). He stressed that close readers should center their thinking on the text itself by reading in a more purposeful and deliberate way to gain a more thorough understanding of the text.

Connecting the historical perspectives of close reading to standards and expectations of students today, close reading is a method that can help students develop their own toolbox of strategies in effort to independently uncover meaning of a complex text. The definition and teaching strategies related to close reading vary greatly from the perspective of different educators and researchers, which has led to an ongoing dialogue of this method. Almost ten years following the original mention of close reading in CCSS, there now exists a wide net of suggested strategies and ways of implementing the

method. As the researcher in this action research study, I have found that reviewing the most current literature on close reading has helped me to develop a plan for the implementation of the method in my ongoing research cycle.

Issues of Social Justice and Close Reading

The close reading method requires the process of intentionally selecting complex texts for specific purposes. Particularly in this study, fiction texts were used as they best aligned with the six selected close reading strategies. When doing so, considering the text selection and its connection to the students required thought and careful decision-making. Often times, teachers use various classroom resources and implement instructional routines with underlying issues of systemic racial bias, a lack of cultural relevancy, or potential added difficulty for EL students. Considering the implementation of close reading strategies in the classroom, the selection of culturally relevant books and anti-racist teaching can not take the back seat. As I designed this toolbox and implemented this study, I know the importance in always keeping focus on best teaching practices as they relate to the importance conversations of social justice in the classroom.

An implication of this study is the short duration of the intervention, in which time constraints and daily class schedules determined the timeframe of the study. This is an important implication to note that a snapshot of the toolbox of strategies in use do not align with texts chosen for cultural relevancy, but rather selected based on student interest. In this study, the two novels used during the close reading lessons are indeed a limitation in gaining understanding of utilizing the strategies as they might be applied to cultural relevant texts or lessons surrounding social justice. Ideal circumstances would have allowed this study to take place during the core block of ELA instruction, in which

the close reading toolkit could be integrated into units reflecting the need to provide opportunity for students to see themselves in the texts and feel as if their voices are being heard.

Systemic Racial Bias

While utilizing close reading as a method to help readers strengthen their abilities to comprehend and become critical thinkers, it is important to recognize that systemic bias exists in the field of education that impacts certain students and their reading experiences. Institutionalized racism is an ugly truth that seems to invisibly hide in the foundation of our schools, government, and all other areas of our society in the present day. Wilson (2012) described the problem of institutionalized racism and the failure of schools recognizing the difference between the past and present effects of racism. “For there is an economic structure of racism that will persist even if every white who hates blacks goes through a total conversion” (p. 11). The problem of racism being so invisible is what makes these underlying issues so difficult to eradicate. The racism is embedded in and accepted as standard operating procedures within the everyday routines of many institutions (Au, 2009). Although this type of racism is invisible in that it may not be intentional or noticed by all, its impacts certainly are visible and should be addressed. Particularly in the field of education, institutionalized racism and bias can be seen in standardized tests, resources used in teaching, and even the physical classrooms in which learning takes place. For example, standardized tests in public education have been found to include racially biased content and language lodged into the test items (p. 70). With this in mind, it is crucial that classroom teachers and educators remain mindful that this same racial bias could potentially exist in the instructional materials used in class as

well. For the sake of this study, the structural racism and bias that exists in the resources and experiences related to reading and literature must be considered.

Cultural Relevant Literature

The method of close reading involves text selection on the part of the teacher. Texts are selected based on their complexity and purpose when implementing a close reading lesson. However, the additional complexity that exists for students due to cultural irrelevancy or language barriers is not openly discussed within the close reading research and literature. This is problematic in that many of our young readers' ability to read and comprehend a complex text may be even more difficult than that of a white, English-speaking student (Au, 2009, p. 144).

The first issue in selecting texts for close reading is recognizing the cultural relevancy between the text selection and the students. It is important to put thought into the content of the text, the language used, and the background knowledge of our readers. Landsman and Lewis (2011) emphasized how important it is that students experience a connection in their real world when in school. Making this happen requires teachers to take the time to get to know students personally as well as explore resources and teaching methods that will reach all learners as readers. "As children experience these daily language and literacy practices, they develop cultural knowledge" (Owocki & Goodman, 2002, p. 17). It is important to understand that students in the classroom bring experiences from both home and the past that will play a role in their understanding and access to the texts provided during any type of reading instruction (Au, 2009, p. 95).

English Language Learners

In addition to understanding the cultural knowledge and experience readers bring to the classroom, it was also important to recognize the relationship between language learners and the close reading texts being provided. Successfully building close reading skills for second language learners in this study meant that the distinction between learning a language socially and academically must be understood (Banks & Banks, 2016). This means it is important to recognize the difficulty that may exist in teaching students academic English, when and if, the English language was first learned only in social settings. While an English Language Learner may have achieved proficiency in communicating via English both orally and through the practice of writing, it is useful for teachers to learn about the cross-linguistic similarities and differences in terms of the different aspects of language (p. 201). Learning to read, speak, and write in two languages means differences do exist in aspects such as writing, phonemes, spelling, and sociolinguistic rules. All of these aspects in language play a role in a reader's ability to close read and ultimately comprehend a piece of text.

Revisiting the social issues that affected the method of learning to close read was kept in the forefront during this study. As suggested, this study continued to address potential issues such as institutionalized racism, cultural relevancy, and language barriers that may exist in any type of instructional practice.

The Method of Close Reading

The method of close reading allows students to analyze and explain the meaning of different elements within a passage to contribute to the overall meaning. "It's an activity that prepares students for independent autonomous interpretations of the text"

(Lemov et al., 2016, p. 83). Many times students are asked to answer questions about a text or explain the meaning of a text, but it seems the strategies for doing so are not explicitly taught. Close reading takes a deeper dive into the word choice and structure of the text. “Close reading requires unpacking the implicit relationships within and across sentences. However, students need to understand the ways writers cleverly use structures to add interest, description, and parsimony to their writing” (Mesmer & Rose-McCully, 2017, p. 451). According to Lemov (2016), close reading skills help students build those problem-solving skills needed to read independently. These are the skills that will help students continue to be successful readers even beyond grade school (p. 111). Reviewing the literature on close reading and the rigor it provides students, I was curious to explore how this method of instruction could help provide my students with the tools they need to become independent readers and thinkers, aware of the support they need when engaging with a complex text.

Close Reading Defined

Understanding the definition of close reading requires a competence of the key terms commonly used in discussions of the method. Close reading can be described as methodical in that readers must use the method to make sense of not only the pieces of text they find engaging, but also the parts of the text that may be more difficult to understand even after several reads. Once these complex parts are identified by the reader, they can then work on breaking down the passage to understand the sequence and significance in specific words. Close reading also takes the reader into studying the language and structure of the text. Breaking down the language allows the reader to find patterns in how the elements of language and word choice are organized (Lemov et al.,

2016). The purpose of close reading is to uncover the meaning of a complex text. Close reading is meant to be challenging. The purpose is to build necessary habits of readers to help them when approaching complex texts independently. These habits include building stamina, being able to identify their own purpose for reading as well as the author's purpose, developing schema, and the ability to consider thought systems related to discipline and genre (Fisher & Frey, 2012).

Close Reading Practices

Close reading leads the reader to both establishing and analyzing meaning. Establishing meaning can be thought of as identifying what the complex passage says, while analyzing meaning explains how the argument (text) is formed (Fisher & Frey, 2012, p. 61). Implementing the method of close reading means providing students with the necessary strategies to be able to do so. According to Boyles (2013), the ultimate goal of close reading is to teach students how to apply this method independently. Implementing the method of close reading in primary school will help students build this habit of reading as they grow their skills as readers and start to see complex texts more regularly. The goal is to encourage readers to identify complex text in their own reading experiences and be able to make critical decisions in how to best make meaning of the complex text by using the toolbox of specific close reading strategies.

Close reading can be taught as a lesson or as a burst. A lesson is taught in four steps utilizing a longer passage or complex piece of text. A "burst" is when close reading is implemented within a reading lesson to help analyze a smaller section of text that may be confusing, complex, or just simply important to the purpose of the lesson (Lemov et al., 2016). After selecting an appropriate text for close reading, there are a variety of

ways to teach strategies to students. While close reading strategies can, and should, be used in authentic moments of reading, utilizing text-dependent questions during explicit instruction of teaching the method gives the teacher a means of both measuring and monitoring the use of these strategies. The following selection of reading practices has been commonly identified across the literature and are being integrated into the daily interventions taught by the teacher-researcher. The following practices of re-reading, annotating, and questioning support the selection of the six specific close reading strategies that students were taught, as later described in this chapter.

Rereading

Rereading is a practice in close reading that allows the reader to take a look at the text multiple times to gain better understanding and clarity. Each reread can be done with different intention and purpose depending on how the reader is connecting with the text. When rereading a text, the reader should do so strategically, to engage with it in different ways (Lemov et al., 2016). Approaching complex texts can be done in three different ways. These three ways are not necessarily mutually exclusive and can be combined to make sense of different texts in different situations (p. 64). The three types of reading and rereading processes are described below.

The Contiguous Read. A contiguous read is done with the fewest possible interruptions. This type of reread is often used at the beginning or end of a close read lesson. It is often used when a reader first approaches a complex text to get a look at the bigger picture, by reading the whole text altogether. It is also often beneficial as a last step in close reading as a means to reread a complex text in its entirety after having analyzed smaller pieces in separate segments. This allows the reader to see and hear the

text come together as a whole after making meaning of the language and structure within the smaller parts of it (p. 65).

The Line-By-Line Read. A line-by-line read is often used a follow up from a contiguous read. In a line-by-line read, the reader will read a sentence, or a few sentences, and pause to make sense of the information within each sentence. This allows the reader an opportunity to unpack information in an intentional way by analyzing each complex piece before moving on to the next. Utilizing a line-by-line read often shows the reader that an author's argument or presentation of written information is organized in a logical way. This requires focus and attention as the reader to see that a text often builds up meaning in an intentional way (p. 66).

The Leapfrog Read. A leapfrog read is often encouraged when a reader might be following an image, phrase, or idea through a passage (p. 67). When utilizing leapfrog read during the rereading process, the reader will intentionally skip over certain parts of the text in order to zoom in on specific sentences that are connected in some way. For example, a paragraph in a text might include scattered references to a certain idea or theme. By leapfrog reading, the reader is able to read a certain sentence and analyze it, then move along to the next sentence that references the same idea or theme. The reader will continue doing so, allowing them to connect the central message or idea all of these sentences have when looked at with proximity. A teacher also often uses leapfrog reading when facilitating whole group discussions during a close read. The teacher will intentionally pull out these pieces of the text, or direct students to identify them when reading together or seeking out evidence for a text-dependent question (p. 67).

Annotating

Annotating a text is the practice of marking up the text by writing down notes when reading. These notes can be related to the text-dependent question being asked or could be utilized to mark a reader's thoughts during the reading process. The strategy on annotating while close reading promotes active engagement during the process, preventing students from simply skimming a text (Lapp et al., 2015). Readers should be encouraged to annotate to help them focus their attention on understanding, or making meaning of, a text. Annotating should be done with purpose and consistency. It is important students tackle the practice of annotating in a meaningful way, ensuring markings and writing tools reflect a pattern in what is being annotated (p. 73). This decision could be facilitated by the teacher or left up to the readers' discretion. Either way, the reader must familiarize themselves with the markings they will utilize aligned with the categories of annotations being made. Cummins (2013) described annotating as coding with the purpose of helping students stay active in the learning process as readers. Annotations can also be used after reading when students are working through text dependent questions or participating in a discussion related to the reading. Using a set of familiar annotations help construct meaning using their own mark-ups and drawings (Minnery & Smith, 2018). In this study, the six close reading strategies are each paired with a specific annotation to be used by the reader when appropriate.

Questioning

The practice of questioning while reading can be understood as students generating their own questions to aide in their own comprehension. Asking the right types of questions can be tricky and should be consistently modeled by the teacher during

close reads. Teaching students how to monitor their own questioning while reading will allow them to eventually transfer this learned skill to other texts they read (Boyles, 2013). Teaching students how to be successful at this step will allow them to become skillful at this practice and less reliant on constant teacher prompts and support as developing readers.

Text-Dependent Questions

Preparing students to close read a text is commonly paired with a set of text-dependent questions (TDQs). TDQs can be a great way to check for student understanding and help students make meaning of the text. Researchers (Fisher & Frey, 2012; Lapp et al., 2013) agreed that TDQs serve an important role of focusing students' attention on certain aspects of a text through the course of repeated readings. Teacher-created questions provide students the opportunity to practice looking at texts in different ways and for different purposes. This set of experiences will later help students transition into close reading in an independent way, being able to self-monitor understanding and ask their own questions about the text. The goal in doing so is to eventually guide students into creating their own text-dependent questions to support their comprehension when reading. Santoria and Belfatti (2016) argued that student-generated questions can lead to rigorous textual analysis that will support students in becoming independent readers who monitor their own comprehension. Taking on the role as a close reader, students can develop the skills needed to generate their own text-dependent questions and work towards the routine of self-monitoring for comprehension during independent reading sessions.

Self-Generated Questions

Allowing students to create TDQs for themselves, or peers, is a useful way to encourage readers to take charge of their own thinking and close reading goals. By generating their own text-dependent questions, students become less reliant on the teacher. Belfatti and Santori (2015) emphasized “the role that student inquiries play in catalyzing rigorous textual analysis” (p. 649). However, it is important that students are introduced to sets of guidelines that lead them in the direction of producing quality TDQs on their own. After selecting a short complex text and either reading it aloud or having students read independently, students can then be instructed to mark up the text for specific reasons. Beers and Probst (2013) suggested telling readers to mark the spots in the text where they were confused, had a question in mind, or felt a sense of curiosity about something (p. 43). Next, students should reread the text selection and pause at each mark they made to jot down a question or comment related to the reason they marked up that spot. Students can use this strategy to either jot down their own answers or continued thoughts, either in the margin or on separate paper, or share these questions with other peers. These self-generated questions can contribute to class discussions, partner talk, or simply serve as an independent tool to help self-monitor the process of thinking when independently reading a complex text.

TDQs help students move beyond understanding just the main idea or summary when reading. Developing these types of questions requires attentive reading, which leads to rigorous interactions with text. “TDQs are those that cannot be answered without firm knowledge of the text itself” (Lemov et al., 2016, p. 75). Whether teacher-generated or student-created, TDQs encourage readers to focus in on the small moments in reading

that are more rigorous and revealing (p. 76). Exploring the answers to TDQs relies on a set of close reading strategies that lead readers into finding the text evidence and making sense of what is being read.

Teacher Implementation

Implementing the method of close reading in an elementary school classroom requires thoughtful and careful planning on part of the teacher. The teacher must know when close reading will be most beneficial for students and how it should be implemented. The teacher must know which texts to select, what strategies to include, how to support students, and how this method connects to the CCSS (Fisher & Frey, 2012; Lemov et al., 2016).

When and Why

While close reading is considered an effective method in helping students self-monitor their understanding of complex texts, it is also important teachers be reminded that close reading is not a replacement teaching tool and should not be used as the sole method of reading instructional strategies. Fisher and Frey (2012) emphasized the importance of utilizing close reading alongside other essential instructional practices to provide students with a toolbox full of many effective reading strategies. This toolbox should include a variety of strategies vital to the reading development of students. Close reading should be used for the specific purpose of helping students comprehend pieces of text that may be difficult to understand.

Developed by mathematics researcher Manu Kapur (2016), the theory of productive struggle shows the idea that failing at the first attempt of a task can improve learning. After first failing a complicated task, the student should then receive instruction

that will help them learn how to tackle the task successfully. Regarding reading and literacy instruction, evidence shows that students learn more when being taught at their frustration level rather than at their instructional level (Kapur, 2016). Therefore, exposing students to the strategies of close reading complex texts can lead to a deeper internalization of reading comprehension skills. However, it is important that close reading is integrated in literacy instruction in an intentional and careful manner. Teaching these close reading strategies should provide an opportunity to bring the text and the reader close together. Beers and Probst (2013) suggested that close reading not only bring rigor into the learning, but also relevance and engagement. Close reading should suggest close attention to the text, relevant experience of the reader, personal thoughts and memories, and close attention to the interactions among all of these elements (p. 36). Therefore, planning a successful implementation of teaching close reading strategies should consist of careful text selection, teaching methods, and what is known about the readers in the room.

Text Selection

The first step in implementing a successful close reading lesson involves selecting a text suitable and appropriate for close reading. To do so, teachers must consider certain factors in selecting the text. Lapp et al. (2015) identified a set of factors that can be used to determine if a text is appropriate for the use of close reading. Quantifiable factors consider the number of words or length of a text, qualitative factors consider the language features and knowledge demands of a text, and reader/task factors consider the characteristics of the readers that will be participating in the instructional practice. According to a collective case study by Kerkhoff and Spire (2015), teachers suggested

“choosing short, worthy passages” (p. 49) as a simple guideline to text selection. Paired with the selection of an intentionally chosen fiction text comes the practice of modeling the strategies of close reading with students.

Teaching the Parts of the Close Reading Toolbox

Demonstrating the practice of close reading requires teachers to provide guidelines of what to look for when reading and how to make sense of this information when approaching it. To do so, teachers must teach students what strategies to use, what signposts to look for, and how to self-monitor this method of reading by asking questions and applying the strategies at their own need and will when reading. Teaching students what to do when they come across information they find valuable in close reading interactions is an important piece of modeling close reading for students. Students should become familiar with the practices of re-reading, annotating, and questioning. These three common practices of reading in the classroom became necessary for the student to implement the toolbox of six close reading strategies determined for this study.

Gradual Release of Responsibility

The implementation of the intervention in this study followed a gradual release model of responsibility (GRR). Pearson and Gallagher (1983) originally presented GRR as a theoretical model rather than a teaching process for lesson planning (Webb et al., 2019, p. 75). The GRR was initially intended to help provide scaffold routines influenced by the work of previous researchers (Wood et al., 1976; Vygotsky, 1978). The purpose of applying the GRR in this study was to provide supports and scaffolds with the goal of leading students to a deeper understanding of the close reading toolkit being taught. A notable piece to this model is the flexibility it offers to allow authentic and thoughtful

response to student performance. Fisher (2008) highlighted that the GRR is not a linear process. Students can (and should) be encouraged to move back and forth between the stages of the process as they master, or need more support, with certain skills and strategies (p. 2). In addition, ongoing assessment cycles in the form of weekly exit slips in the study allowed the teacher-researcher opportunity to make decisions in using the GRR in ways it best suited the learners in the study. Fisher and Frey (2008) suggested, “With enough modeling and practice, students will imitate behaviors like this and reach for appropriate strategies automatically as they read complex texts on their own” (p. 35). Considering the purpose of this action research study, employing the gradual release model to implement the intervention was determined to be the best fit for the research. Following the stages of the GRR and relying on the wide base of current literature of the model provided the teacher-researcher with the teaching tools needed to successfully scaffold the students into learning to apply these close reading strategies independently and with a sense of autonomy.

Selecting the Toolbox of Strategies

The six strategies in this study were selected to align with the needs of the participants in the study. Three of these strategies were borrowed from Beers and Probst (2013) close reading signposts. The additional three strategies were determined based on specific needs of the group of learners, supported by both test scores and teacher observations. Teaching close reading strategies to students means teachers must demonstrate how to implement these strategies and what to look for when reading for meaning. Serafani (2013) warned that unless teachers can successfully model this method

for students, then it can be expected that students will find difficulty in doing so themselves.

When modeling how to close read a complex text, Beers and Probst (2013) suggested teaching students to identify certain “signposts” that will help lead them to be able to independently critically think and ask questions while reading, ultimately leading to a deeper understanding of the text. Three of the six signposts described in the work of Beers and Probst (2013) were utilized in this study. These signposts can be identified as Aha Moments, Again and Again, and Memory Moments (p. 75). Teaching students to look out for these signposts while reading can help them develop the ability to monitor their own thinking and in turn implement comprehension strategies when needed. The signposts were developed to help readers identify specific features in the text that help with understanding character development, internal conflict, and theme (p. 67). Utilizing these signposts led the researchers to realizing that students were using other comprehension processes without having to be prompted. While identifying examples of the signposts in the text, the readers were observed exhibiting the following behaviors: (a) predicting, (b) summarizing, (c) clarifying, (d) questioning, (e) inferring, and (f) making connections (p. 69). Supported by these findings in the literature, the teacher-researcher hoped to replicate these same best practices in the study. The goal of teaching the three signposts developed by Beers and Probst (2013) is to help influence independent comprehension strategies for young readers as they interact with a text.

In addition to the signposts, the students engaged in close reading for three other specific purposes as a part of this study. Recent benchmark testing data and student observations uncovered a deficit of student ability to recognize and make meaning of

figurative language as it appeared in the text. For this reason, figurative language was chosen as a part of the close reading toolkit in the study. Another of the six strategies emerged from an observed strength in student writing. During the writing process at the start of the year, students were taught a simple trick to writing narratives. To help encourage thoughtful narrative writing pieces with strong plot development and voice, students were explicitly taught to “make a movie” in their heads while writing. This simple practice in teaching became a strength for students and an improvement in student writing came of it. As a strength in writing, the teacher-researcher implemented this same strategy as a part of the close reading toolkit students utilized. Rounding off the six strategies, the final close reading strategy was selected to help fill in any gaps. The teacher-researcher also noticed that students often had personal interactions with the text that were not recognized or used as tools when reading. Examples of these personal interactions include, but are not limited to, the following: making a personal connection to the story, making a text-to-text connection, coming across words or pieces of text that were confusing, having a question when reading, and noticing a part of the text that was interesting or stood out to the reader for some other reason. The teacher-researcher combined all of these different personal interactions into one category, named by the students as “hmm moments.” The literature surrounding these six strategies was fully explored prior to the start of the study and is described in the subsections that follow.

Strategy 1: Aha Moment

Identifying an “Aha Moment” helps the reader gain a deeper understanding of character development, internal conflict, and the course of the plot. This signpost was developed to help readers recognize moments in which a character or the reader learns

something new or understands something that had not yet been known. Noticing these moments help the readers see the connection between character action and conflict, the progression of the plot, and sometimes the overall theme or message (Beers & Probst, 2013). Identifying this in text means the reader has to watch for clues from the character or pay close attention to their own understanding of the plot. As described by Lapp et al. (2015), close reading practices allow the reader to stay connected to the passage while self-monitoring their own understanding of the meaning on the page. This signpost adds value to the toolkit in this study because it helps the reader stay engaged with the characters and the plot. Successful recognition of an “Aha Moment” requires keeping close attention on the characters in the story, which leads the reader down a path of truly thinking while reading.

Strategy 2: Figurative Language

Figurative language is used in both conversation and text and can be defined as any type of expression that does not literally mean what it says. These types of figurative expressions are a part of everyday oral language and often, people do not even realize the true extent of the metaphorical nature of language (Boers, 2000). While figurative expressions are used and accepted in everyday oral conversations, the existence of this type of language in text can be difficult to interpret for young readers. Research shows that while young children can understand some forms of figurative expression in conversation and text, full comprehension and the ability to produce it independently are a part of the developmental process. This process gives young students the ability to move away from the literal and towards the more complex interpretations of figurative language (Gibbs, 1991; Levorato & Cacciari, 1995; Nippold, 1998, 2000).

It is understood that once students gain an awareness of figurative language and develop the competence to interpret it non-literally, they should be able to think figuratively and use these language devices to produce expressions to describe their own experiences (Glicksohn, 2001). Therefore, this study aims to move beyond the explicit teaching of figurative language in poetry and provided examples, but through the use of it in lengthier and more complex fiction texts. Palmer and Brooks (2004) provided a case study looking into best practices and teaching techniques surrounding the instruction of figurative language. The case study concluded that figurative language should indeed be taught as a skill necessary for reading comprehension of all texts (p. 375). Beyond recognizing the presence of figurative language in text, the meaning of figurative expressions moves a reader to gaining a deeper and more meaningful understanding of a text. For this purpose, the skill of interpreting figurative language will be included as a part of the close reading toolbox designed for this action research study.

Strategy 3: Again and Again

The signpost “Again and Again” helps the reader look for repetition and patterns in the text. Recognizing when something in the story keeps happening again and again was a clue for the reader to understand that the author might be trying to make a point (Beers & Probst, 2013). This signpost helped readers make sense of theme and conflict. Applying this strategy during the reading process encouraged students to move beyond simply noticing patterns and repetition and towards further thinking of these moments. In this study, this signpost helped students spend time wondering and speculating the meaning and comparing it to other plot points. A particular strength of this signpost is the opportunity it holds to help students develop strong thinking strategies as readers

(Boyles, 2013). Annotating moments in the text that represent the signpost “Again and Again” ultimately helped the reader self-monitor their own understanding of what was happening and strengthened the ability to make connections and identify patterns within the plot of a story.

Strategy 4: Make a Movie

As mentioned above, this strategy emerged from a specific strength observed of the students in the classroom. The “Make a Movie” strategy was created and named by the teacher-researcher and served as a cue to help students use the process of visualization to make meaning of text. This was used particularly in the writing classroom to help students better develop narrative writing pieces. Supported by the dual coding theory, this strategy was implemented with the intent to help students recognize the verbal and nonverbal representations they create when reading (Sadoski & Paivio, 2001). Teaching students to create mental images when reading a text must be explicitly introduced. Algozzine and Douville (2004) described this process as students creating a “personal movie screen” by relying on the mental images that exist in the reader’s mind. This strategy in the study helped students identify pieces of text that created mental images of both verbal and nonverbal representations. This required helping students close read by noting parts of the text that recalled memories of sight, sound, and other sensory modalities that existed from the connection to prior experiences or knowledge (Long et al., 1989). Supported by the dual coding theory, the “Make a Movie” strategy helped students develop a deeper personal connection to the text and a richer visual representation of the meaning of story.

Strategy 5: Memory Moment

This strategy also is a signpost provided by Beers and Probst (2013) as a part of the *Notice and Note* close reading lessons. Similar to the other two signposts described in this study, a “Memory Moment” gave the reader a chance to close read for a specific purpose. A “Memory Moment” is described as part of the story in which the character interrupts the action to share a memory from the past (p. 176). Close reading into these moments allowed readers to notice that memories often have an important role in a story or book. The signpost was paired with the anchor question, “Why might this memory be important?” Noticing and annotating a “Memory Moment” gave the reader a chance to pause and think more about the character and plot. This often lead to prediction making and recognition of foreshadowing implemented by the author.

This strategy paired well with the close reading practice of rereading. Teaching students to identify memories described by a character often lead to an discovering an emerging theme or trend in the text. In this case, readers were encouraged to leapfrog read these annotated pieces of text to make meaning out of the trends or patterns throughout the story (Lemov et al., 2016). Rather than making meaning on the spot, leapfrog reading allows students to make connections by comparing annotations in various places of the text (p. 67). The strength in pairing these two practices of close reading existed in the opportunity for independent thinking it facilitated. Rather than preparing pulled passages for a leapfrog read as is often used, readers were able to create this experience on their own by recognizing the “Memory Moments” annotated throughout a single story or book and reread these annotated pieces of text to uncover their own trends and patterns in the story.

Strategy 6: Hmm Moment

Young readers often rely on their own previous experience and prior knowledge when making meaning of a text or new content. Encouraging readers to tap into their own memories was the basis of this sixth and final strategy. According to Yui (2015), readers more logically and coherently comprehend a text when schema is recalled. In the present study, a “Hmm Moment” gave the reader a chance to connect with the text in a personal way. Annotating questions, confusing words, or connections to the story was encouraged by this strategy. Boyles (2013) suggested the practice of teaching students to acknowledge any hard or important words when reading. This type of interaction with the text taught students to self-monitor their thinking once again and apply a metacognitive approach to reading. Buoncristiani and Buoncristiani (2012) introduced the intentions of metacognition as understanding, monitoring, evaluating, and regulating (p. 29). By allowing students to take note of their own personal questions, connections, or moments of difficulty, the process of metacognitive thinking exists. Throughout the study, students kept track of the strategies they employed to comprehend a text and were also being encouraged to monitor their own thoughts throughout this process by tracking their “Hmm Moments.”

Creating Text-Dependent Questions

Close reading allows readers to monitor and assess their thinking in the context of processing the thinking of others too. TDQs are questions that cannot be answered without evidence from the text itself (Lemov et al., 2016). TDQs should require attentive reading and should focus on the small moments that are revealing and rigorous, often repetitive in a text (p. 75). When generating TDQs, teachers should consider the key ideas, insights, or main points they want students to understand from the text. These

questions should be created in a way that returns a reader to the text for re-reading and deeper analysis (Lapp et al., 2015). TDQs can lead the reader to explore the language used, theme, main idea, text structure, word choice, vocabulary, complex messages, and a variety of other teaching points as identified by the teacher beforehand.

Utilizing TDQs during close reading provides the necessary practice for students to be able to eventually create their own questions before or during independent reading. The purpose of teaching students how to generate their own TDQs as a useful skill will hopefully transfer as an independent routine as they begin to read complex texts independently in grades to come. As concluded in Ness's (2017) case study on student-generated questions, applying this strategy with young readers to low-level texts can help readers pose "juicy" questions as they aim to comprehend the meaning of the text (p. 3). The idea of diving into students' curiosity helps them transfer their natural wonder talk into academic language needed to generate questions. "As students master question generation in simple, familiar texts, they are better prepared to apply the strategy to unfamiliar texts at various genres" (p. 3). Explored by Santori and Belfatti (2016), a case study determined that with effective modeling and demonstrating, students are capable of generating their own text-dependent questions without teacher prompting. These student-generated questions also catalyzed student discussions in which students engaged in close readings of different genres of text (p. 651).

Building the habit of questioning when close reading in young readers can be done by following some "fruitful practices," as outlined by Boyles (2013). The goal of close reading is to aim for independence. This means helping students go beyond the "ho-hum" questions by teaching students how to apply a variety of thinking strategies when

reading. In doing so students can learn what types of questions they should be asking themselves when reading. Boyles (2013) suggested four basic questions to teach readers that will help them transfer their understanding of that particular text to understanding other texts and developing deeper reading and thinking skills. These questions are: (a) What is the author telling me here? (b) Are there any hard or important words? (c) What does the author want me to understand? (d) How does the author play with language to add to meaning? The last “fruitful practice” described in the article is teaching students to focus on observing and analyzing as they read and reread. This practice can be seen as readers learn to locate text evidence to validate opinions or answer questions or the mastery of expressing meaning by using different words. Teaching students how to respond to text-dependent questions by locating evidence in the text could be mastered by teaching students how to annotate the text (Fisher & Frey, 2012).

Connection to Common Core State Standards

In 2010, the development of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) focused on three shifts related to the English Language Arts and Literacy standards. These three shifts were created to build upon the best already existing standards and reflected the skills and knowledge that students would be expected to need for career, college, and life (Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2019) According to these three shifts, two of them focused on reading engagement with increased text complexity and using text evidence to support claims in reading, writing, and speaking. These two identified key shifts align with the addition of close reading to the set of new CCSS. Hinchman (2013) explained the literacy tasks students are expected to complete as outlined by these new shifts. These shifts require that students be able to answer text-dependent questions, find

evidence in the text to support claims, and develop a more sophisticated academic vocabulary applicable in both reading and writing practices. Serafini (2013) emphasized the importance of teachers developing a strong understanding of the requirements for close reading as they relate to these new shifts in the CCSS (p. 301). In doing so, teachers must become familiar with the method of close reading, how it can be successfully implemented, and when it will be most beneficial as an instructional tool in the literacy classroom and beyond.

Roles of the Reader

While the method of close reading relies on teacher knowledge and implementation, the role of the reader must be clearly communicated and set the precedent for integrating this method and its strategies in the classroom. The reader must understand the purpose and goals of close reading, know and learn the strategies to help them successfully do so, as well as develop the routine ability to recognize the strategies as they could be applied in texts. Through the use of the gradual release model of responsibility, the responsibility between the teacher and the student shifted throughout the duration of the study. Engaging in the teacher models and guided practice routines, students in the study were able to apply their own learning with the support of teacher prompts and appropriate responses to performance (Webb et al., 2019). Towards the conclusion of the six week study, students became experts in applying these close reading strategies and the participants were able to assume independent responsibility of applying the strategies during their own reading experiences.

Goals of Close Reading

Close reading serves the purpose of helping readers better understand a complex text. According to Fisher and Frey (2012), close reading should be thought of as a goal, not a strategy. It is a goal of applying analytic reading skills to complex texts. With this being said, not all texts require or are worthy of close reading. Implementing close reading in an instructional setting typically consists of engaging in close reading of a complex text deliberately and repeatedly. Teachers' scaffolds and discussions often assist this interaction. This usually leads to deep comprehension and allows students to then answer text-dependent questions. This purpose of this method is to prepare students to be able to independently handle difficult texts as readers (Fisher, 2015). Students should understand their role in utilizing this method means understanding how and when to implement close reading strategies with the ultimate goal of being able to use this method during independent reading experiences.

Understanding the goals of close reading falls in alignment with understanding the role of a close reader. Before learning specific strategies and the "how-tos" of close reading, students had to internalize their role as a close reader and how this related to their goals when close reading a complex text. Students must think of close reading as a process and become familiar with the language associated with the thinking closely about a text (Lapp et al., 2015). Taking on the role as a close reader, students needed to internalize the understanding of the purpose of learning these close reading strategies. Throughout the six week study, the students were consistently encouraged to metacognitively apply their minds to the task and become experts through and through of the six close reading strategies being implemented.

Related Research

Boudreaux-Johnson et al. (2017) conducted a study with the purpose to find out how close reading would impact reading comprehension achievement of five fourth grade students as well as determine what students did and did not like about utilizing the practice. The study would work to develop procedures related to implementing close reading instruction to the participants. Close Reading intervention occurred in 30-minute sessions three times a week. The teachers used a 10-step procedural outline to carry out the implementation of the close reading instruction each week. Observations and pre-test/post-tests were used to measure student achievement. According to the findings of this study, students did express satisfaction with the close reading instructional routine, which might lead to increased engagement and student buy-in over time. In four out of the six cases, student trend lines for the close reading routine were positively leaning in the short amount of time the intervention was implemented. Lastly, the post-test did show that four of the six students scored higher in reading comprehension after the six weeks of the implementation.

The purpose of Fisher and Frey's (2015) study was to determine what types of scaffolds should be used when teaching students how to implement close reading skills. This study employed a qualitative method of research, which consisted of purposeful sampling to observe teachers as they implemented close reading scaffolds in their teaching. The researchers in this study interviewed the twelve teachers after having observed and taken field notes detailing the flow of the close reading lesson and the students' responses to the instructional event. After the interviews, the researchers returned to observe and take notes on a second close reading lesson in each of these

classrooms. The collected data included transcripts of the interviews and observational field notes. The data were reviewed to identify themes using a constant comparative approach. In conclusion, this study shows us that close reading lessons need to be planned and teachers would be wise to consider a range of contingency plans in the case that student responses to complex texts did not unfold as expected (p. 286). The close reading scaffolds and contingency plans allow students the opportunity to independently do the work of reading and understanding a complex text rather than a teacher explaining it to them.

The purpose of Kerkhoff and Spires' (2015) collective case study was to uncover how K-2 classroom teachers perceive close reading implementation and what instructional shifts are utilized to teach this method of reading in the classroom. The researchers conducted an exploratory collective case study to investigate the phenomenon of close reading because it is an area of research considered new to the field of education. The 12 participants were teachers enrolled in a graduate-level reading course. Based on the data analysis, three themes emerged for each of the guiding questions posed at the start of the study. These themes reflected how teachers were making instructional shifts with close reading. The three themes were: (a) choosing appropriate texts for close reading, (b) modeling close reading, and (c) scaffolding close reading. The results concluded that teachers need to be provided the time and intellectual space to create close reading practices that are both challenging and developmentally appropriate. In addition, continued professional development needs to be provided and reflect the needs of teachers.

The purpose of Victor's (2017) action research study was to examine the effect close-reading instruction has on the comprehension of informational and literary text among fifth-grade readers and to assess student ability to make meaning from reading material. This research-based study employed a mixed-methods approach. The multifaceted results from both qualitative and quantitative data were triangulated within the study using many pieces of data. The results of this study showed that close reading strategies were overall beneficial in student achievement of reading comprehension and growth in literary content. The results also showed that students chose to use close reading strategies to help make meaning of the text as they were using it to influence their reading comprehension. The interviews used during the study showed that the three most commonly used close reading strategies were underlining the main idea, circling confusing words, and talking to others when needing support. All three of these strategies support the comprehension of literary texts. In addition, a survey conducted showed that students preferred literary texts (fiction) versus information text (nonfiction).

Santori and Belfatti (2016) explored the practice of close reading from 'another angle'. The researchers wanted to explore if text-dependent questions needed to be teacher-dependent, or if students could successfully produce their own text-dependent questions to make sense of complex texts. This case study observed and gathered data within a third and fourth grade classroom. The teacher-researchers in each classroom worked with groups of students each week over the course of the school year. During the sessions, the teachers facilitated text-based dialogic discussions, averaging about 30 minutes in length per session. This study employed a case study in which observations were conducted, field notes were taken, and work samples were collected to show the

context and results of each session with the participants. Two major findings were identified between both groups. “First, both groups were able to raise an array of their own text-dependent questions without teacher prompting. Second, student-generated text-dependent questions catalyzed discussions in which students engaged in close readings of narrative and informational texts.

Ness (2017) explored how student-generated questions help students better understand the meaning of texts. The first-grade teacher in this case study implemented this reading strategy using familiar texts, nursery rhymes. The teacher-researcher in this article conducted a case study by observing and gathering qualitative data in a first-grade classroom over the course of a month. Her research consists of observations and collecting field notes. The concluding thoughts within this study explain how applying this strategy to young readers with low-level texts can help readers pose “juicy” questions as they aim to comprehend the meaning of the text. The idea of diving into students’ curiosity helps them transfer their natural wonder talk into academic language needed to generate questions. “As students master question generation in simple, familiar texts, they are better prepared to apply the strategy to unfamiliar texts at various genres” (p. 3).

Comparing the findings and results of the related research presented above, this action research study looks to further explore works of Santori and Belfatti (2016) and Ness (2017) in relation to encouraging close reading habits of independent readers. In addition, as discussed by Kerkhoff and Spires’s (2015) collective case study, the method of close reading exists widely in the literature but seems to be less understood by educators and classroom teachers. It has been concluded that additional professional

development for teachers is necessary in ensuring close reading is implemented effectively.

The relationship between the literature discussed in this review and the current action research study being implemented proves to answer some of the less explored areas and unanswered questions as identified by this field of research. While research is prevalent in close reading as it is utilized in secondary classrooms, Boudreaux-Johnson et al. (2017) uncovered the lack of literature existing in elementary or primary classrooms. This action research study will explore the use of close reading in a fourth-grade classroom with the goal of taking much of the load off the teacher and onto the reader, in the hopes of filling these specific gaps in the existing literature of close reading.

Summary

The literature presented in this review described the historical and current perspectives of the utilization of close reading in K-12 classrooms. The method of close reading should be considered as an instructional tool most impactful when utilized alongside a variety of other modes of literacy instruction in the classroom. The literature in this review supports the claim that close reading should be used to help readers make sense of complex pieces of text. Related research shows that careful planning and intentional use of close reading can lead to student achievement in reading comprehension. Certain characteristics of close reading are important to note that set this method aside from other common instructional tools used in the English language arts curriculum. Close reading takes the reader beyond the surface meaning of the text and invites them to explore the structure of a text through deeper textual analysis (Fisher & Frey, 2012). Although origins are rooted in 17th-century interpretations of religious texts,

the modern perspective of close reading grew from the adoption of the new CCSS in 2010. In the past nine years, literature and research studies have explored the variety of ways close reading can be implemented in the classroom to help readers closely read a complex text. It is commonly agreed by researchers in the field that close reading is best implemented through the use of short, complex pieces of text with the goal of providing students with a set of quality reading habits that can be transferred into the routines of independent reading. This action research study looks to further the existing research on implementing close reading in the classroom by exploring ways to best prepare a group of fourth grade students to be able to become close readers out of habit and independently. This literature review helped to identify best close reading strategies with the hopes of building a future of better-equipped close readers, both academically and in the literacy world that exists outside of the classroom.

Following the literature review, Chapter 3 of this dissertation will introduce the research design, data collection methods, and data analysis plan for the study. The selected mixed methods action research design will be explained in detail, alongside a rationale for the chosen methods. The participants and context of the study will be outlined followed by the data collection measures, instruments, and tools. The research procedure will be written in detail to provide a clear understanding of the steps and allow for a potential replication of the study. An overview of the data analysis and treatment plan will conclude the chapter. The research design was selected to align with the problem of practice, purpose, and research questions as explored in Chapter 1 of this study.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this action research study was to determine best close reading practices students could employ independently. As students began to see lengthier and more challenging texts in the classroom, independent skills needed to comprehend meaning became a necessary part of a learner's tool kit. Although comprehension strategies are necessary skills for students to possess as readers, this tends to be a practice that is tough to teach. My goal in this study was to explore close reading strategies with a group of fourth graders in hopes to determine which strategies would lead to successful comprehension of fiction texts. In addition, this study looked to uncover a set of strategies students can, and will, use as independent readers. Throughout the duration of this mixed methods action research study, I set out to discover the differences and connections between various close reading strategies, text interactions, and characteristics of students.

Problem of Practice

The problem of practice was identified through the use of classroom observations, in-class informal data, and standardized reading test scores. As a fourth-grade teacher, the majority of my students had been classified as fluent readers, with the ability to decode and comprehend basic grade-level texts. Students in the classroom began to see more challenging texts that increase in length, vary in structure and style, and include dense figurative language and voice. These new features in text lead to difficulty in comprehension. Classroom observations and interactions with the readers in my

classroom lead me to realize that many students do not have the tool kit needed to independently make meaning when these complex texts begin to surface.

Overview of Chapter

Chapter 3 of the study examines the action research process and the selected action research design. The chapter provides a rationale of the mixed-methods procedure and a thorough outline of the research plan, including a description of both data collection and analysis. The teacher-researcher describes the context of the setting and sampling procedures of the study, as well as a detailed description of each of the participants. Finally, the chapter addresses the validity and ethical considerations of the study and shares the potential benefits and limitations of the study. The rationale for the selected methodology informs how the data is collected and analyzed in Chapter 4.

Research Questions

The present research study addresses the following questions:

- How can explicitly teaching students close reading strategies impact their ability to independently read, comprehend, and analyze a text selection? What is the effectiveness of close reading strategies on my fourth-grade students' reading comprehension?
- What close reading strategies best help students increase their understanding of a text?
- Which close reading strategies do students prefer to use while reading independently?

Research Design

The present study followed a mixed methods action research design. Specifically, the study employed a triangulation design, which took place during the analysis of the study. A description and rationale for the design choice is described in detail below.

Action Research Rationale

Taking on the role as a teacher-researcher, this study employed an action research design. Understanding the characteristics of action research, the researcher chose this design with the goal of exploring best educational practices in the area of teaching reading and reading comprehension. Designed as a planned, systematic approach the study allowed the teacher-researcher to collect and analyze data on her own work and her own students. Mertler (2017) described action research as being a timely process in which the researcher uses immediate results to improve their own educational practices. However, it is important to note that action research is less structured as compared to the process of traditional research and, therefore, is often more difficult to conduct. Considering the design of this study, the researcher chose action research for the overwhelming amount of benefits that action research has to offer as compared to traditional research.

Efron and Ravid (2013) described the unique characteristics of action research as being constructivist, situational, practical, systematic, and cyclical (p. 7). The cyclical process of exploring close reading strategies allowed the teacher-researcher the opportunity to make changes to the intervention when needed. Using the ongoing data collection, the researcher was able to adapt the learning in the moment to best meet the needs of the students (as participants). Ultimately, the goal of this action research study

was to provide answers to specific research questions about best close reading practices and create new ideas that would lead the group of students towards success as readers.

Action Research Description

The action researcher in this study reviewed the relevant literature and considered the problem of practice to develop a plan of action. The plan of action was driven by the set of research both qualitative and quantitative research questions. As Herr and Anderson (2015) described, a spiral of action cycles is then put into action. The researcher spent time implementing the intervention in the classroom. In this particular study, the participants were introduced to a new set of close reading strategies and explicit teaching of how to employ these strategies as readers took place each week. As students learned how to employ these close reading strategies as readers, the teacher-researcher collected, analyzed, and reflected on this ongoing data collection cycle. The data collection tools and analysis helped inform the researcher of next steps in the study. A continuation of this cycle took place for six weeks as the teacher-researcher continued to look for trends and patterns based on the implementation of the intervention and student performance (reading comprehension).

Rationale for Mixed Methods

Selecting a mixed-methods approach for this study was a decision made to be able to answer both qualitative and quantitative research questions. The research study collected both types of data to gain an understanding of what types of close reading strategies were most beneficial for students as independent readers, as well as why and how these types of strategies led to successful reading comprehension of fiction texts. As described in Creswell and Creswell (2018), the collection of both qualitative and

quantitative data is integrated during analysis (p.215), which leads to the discovery of patterns and themes supported by both databases. A defining characteristic of mixed methods research is the premise that the use of both qualitative and quantitative approach, in combination, provides a better understanding of the research problems than either approach could provide in isolation (Creamer, 2018, p.4). The present study followed a convergent mixed methods approach.

Triangulation design research is used when both methods of data collection are employed and given equal priority (Fraenkel, 2015). In this study, both qualitative methods of data collection and quantitative methods were collected simultaneously. Qualitative data was collected in the form of semi-structured interviews and observations while quantitative data was collected through a pre-post test, weekly formative classroom assessments, and self-checklists. Although there were two data collection tools for each method, the quantitative methods occurred in a repetitive nature weekly, while qualitative data was ongoing and collected multiple times a week. Both methods of data were collected and analyzed separately, followed by a series of coding and integrating of the two collections. Triangulation of the qualitative data ensured that the data collected was trustworthy and valid. Following data collection, the results of each method were combined and interpreted during analysis procedures.

Setting and Context of Study

This action research study took place at a public elementary charter school in Lawrence, MA. Instruction and implementation of the intervention took place in the lower school building, which houses second through fourth grade classes. The school itself serves grades pre-kindergarten through eighth. At a larger level, this charter school

is a part of a network of three k-8 charters and one public neighborhood school. The network of schools has thrived on a mission of meeting individual student needs and keeping ties to the community strong. The city of Lawrence has a history of being a working-class textile mill city. With a population of about 80,000 residents, 77% identify as Hispanic or Latino. The demographics of students in this particular charter school show that 96.3% of students are Hispanic. In addition, 53.8% are considered economically disadvantaged and 39.8% are identified as English Language Learners.

This study took place in a fourth-grade classroom in which a co-teaching model of instruction was often implemented. The implementation of the intervention for this study and the data collection was done only by the teacher-researcher, never by a present co-teacher. The 21 participants in the study were in the same homeroom and were taught in a traditional single classroom setting with one teacher. A swing teacher was utilized as a co-teacher to pull small groups of students throughout the school day. Of the 21 students, 11 were female and 10 were male.

The study was conducted within a six-week timeframe during the spring semester in 2020. Over the course of six weeks, the researcher implemented the intervention and collected both qualitative and quantitative data. The ongoing data collection was coded and analyzed throughout the action research process.

Role of the Researcher

As an insider researcher in this study, I studied the students I taught within the school in which I worked every day. Investigating my own practice meant I needed to be able to balance objectivity and subjectivity during the duration of the study. Efron and Ravid (2013) posed the complex nature of educational practitioners as insider researchers

with the reminder that the ongoing relationships formed between the researcher and the participants may lead to limitations. Therefore, I found it important to describe my role in writing and recognize the connections I had to my research to avoid potential bias influencing the study (p. 57).

My role in this study was to determine best practices to improve my work as an educator and provide research-based practices for others to use in their own classrooms or schools. Understanding this, it was important to acknowledge that I have a particular desire to want to succeed in my research. It was important to be reminded that best practices grow from quality research and that I have a duty to meet the criteria of quality research throughout this study. It was also important to consider the experience I had with this topic I am studying. Close reading is a practice I had employed in my classroom loosely in the previous two years, but with little research to support the instruction I was leading. After having completed the literature review for this study, I implemented the practices of close reading as supported by literature and the most current related research findings. The six strategies implemented as a part of the close reading toolkit were never introduced or used with the participants in the study prior to the research. Having indulged myself in the literature as a part of this study, I am now aware that I will continue to change the way in which I will implement some of my past teaching practices and that is something I need to keep in mind. As an educator, sometimes routines become habits, and sometimes we stick to habits without even noticing. I will be sure old habits are replaced with the best close reading practices that were uncovered throughout the duration of this study.

In addition, my relationship with the participants was important to acknowledge. Reflexivity suggests I maintain self-awareness and take into account any potential impacts my own beliefs and experiences could have on this study (p. 57). The participants in this study were students I have grown to know and care for the past few months. I committed myself to ensuring the relationships with students did not influence the data I collected or analyzed during the study. Using pseudonyms in my study protected the privacy of my participants and I made sure that all collected data was only ever recorded under the code names given to each student. I found that I was able to keep an ethical balance between my role as the teacher to these students and my role as the researcher to this study.

Ethical Considerations

This mixed-methods research study explored the impact an instructional practice had on student achievement. Since the researcher was the individual to be implementing instruction to the students as a part of the research it was important that all participants benefited from this treatment. Creswell (2018) suggested staging the treatment so that all participants are a part of this beneficial treatment, or in this case the close reading instruction. In this study, all students in the teacher-researcher's class were selected as a convenient sample to be participants in this study. Therefore, the researcher was able to ensure that all participants in the study were benefiting from the intervention of close reading instruction as it was implemented among all students in the same context.

It was also important that the researcher addressed the ethical consideration of respecting the site of the data collection. Since this research involved students in a classroom setting, plans needed to be put in place to ensure as little disruption to the

physical setting as possible. Creswell and Creswell (2018) emphasized the importance of the researcher timing visits in a manner that will minimize the disruption to the flow of activities of the participants. In doing so, the researcher prioritized the careful planning of the times and dates of the observations as well as the frequency of visits necessary to collecting data. The teacher-researcher implemented the intervention and collected data during the times students would have already been receiving classroom instruction in that same subject area. To ensure disruption to the flow of activities and learning experiences is as minimal as possible, the researcher also planned the instruction of close reading to align with the same state standards and curriculum map already put in place for that school year. Specifically, the close reading strategies were taught alongside the novel students were already reading as a part of the current ELA intervention unit.

During the data collection process of the study, much of the collected data included scored work samples with participant names or confidential information listed. Since the research was conducted in a regular classroom setting, it could be assumed that collected pieces of data could potentially include information that may not respect the privacy of that individual. As the researcher it was important that names were disassociated with any scores or collected test items. Creswell (2018) suggests using pseudonyms or aliases in an effort to protect the participants' identities. At the start of the research, the researcher came up with pseudonyms to designate for each participant and kept this consistent throughout the research to ensure data is correctly aligned with each participant when collected, coded, and analyzed.

Once the data was collected for this research study it was important that the researcher accurately presented the findings without misrepresenting the data. Creswell

and Creswell (2018) discussed the ethical consideration of not disclosing only positive results when the researcher reports their findings. It was important in this study, where the researcher is looking for a correlation between the independent variable and dependent variables, that the researcher accurately determined if there was a correlation using statistical calculations before presenting a positive or negative correlation.

Prior to beginning the research, the researcher had the research plans reviewed by an institutional review board (IRB) at the university. As described in Creswell (2018), an application was submitted containing the procedures and information about the participants, as well as consent forms signed by the participants. In addition, since the participants in the study are minors, the researcher needed to consider the needs of this vulnerable population of young students. The IRB is in place to help protect the human rights of the participants as well as assess any potential risks to the participants. This action research study was reviewed and approved by the IRB prior to the start of the data collection and analysis.

Participants

The participants in this action research study were selected as a convenience sample. As a teacher-researcher and insider to the study, the participants consisted of the current students in the researcher's class. The cyclic nature of this action research study was best supported through the selection of a convenient sample. Choosing a convenient sample of participants that are easily available and accessible for the sake of ongoing data collection determined the sampling procedures for this study (Efron & Ravid, 2013, p. 64).

The sample consisted of 21 fourth-grade students all within in the same classroom, receiving the same day-to-day instruction. Since the intervention was implemented in the classroom during the ELA intervention block, the researcher made the decision to include all 21 students in the sample. Among the 21 participants, 10 were male and 11 were female. Demographically, 100% of participants identified as Hispanic/Latino. An undisclosed number of students are immigrants from either Puerto Rico or the Dominican Republic. A mixture of first, second, and third generation immigrants were represented in this sample. All 21 students were bilingual, speaking both English and Spanish. According to most recent ACCESS test results, all students had met the proficiency level of English as a second language.

The 21 student participants using pseudonyms are described as follows:

- Andy was a nine-year-old Hispanic male. Andy was a quiet student whom often displayed difficulty focusing and attending to the instruction. Andy read on grade level and scored in the “Meets” achievement band on the previous year’s ELA MCAS (Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System).
- Anthony was a nine-year-old Hispanic male. Anthony was a hardworking student that displayed difficulty keeping calm and quiet in the classroom. Anthony read on grade level and scored in the “Meets” achievement band on the previous year’s ELA MCAS.
- Derek was a 10-year-old Hispanic male. Derek was a hardworking student that followed teacher instructions and school rules most of the time. Derek read on grade level and scored in the “Meets” achievement band on the previous year’s ELA MCAS.

- Finn was a 10-year-old Hispanic male. Finn was a hardworking student that was eager to learn and participate in class. Finn read on grade level and scored in the “Meets” achievement band on the previous year’s ELA MCAS.
- Fatima was a 10-year-old Hispanic female. Fatima was quiet in the classroom setting and showed a desire to do well and follow directions in class. Fatima read slightly below grade level and scored in the “Partially Meets” achievement band on the previous year’s ELA MCAS.
- Jayden was a 10-year-old Hispanic male. Jayden was a hardworking and eager student in the classroom. Jayden read above grade level and scored “Meets” on the previous year’s ELA MCAS.
- Julie was a nine-year-old Hispanic female. Julie displayed difficulty staying focused and on task, and often got frustrated with classwork. Julie read slightly below grade level and scored “Partially Meets” on the previous year’s ELA MCAS.
- Jerald was a nine-year-old Hispanic male. Jerald was an eager student that often rushed through assignments. Jerald had difficulty staying calm and focused on assignments. Jerald read on grade level and scored “Meets” on the previous year’s ELA MCAS.
- Jon was a nine-year-old Hispanic male. Jon was a polite student, but he often made choices that displayed emotional and social immaturity in the classroom. Jon read on grade level and scored “Meets” on the previous year’s ELA MCAS.

- Jake was a nine-year-old Hispanic male. Jake was a polite student in the classroom with a desire to follow school rules. Jake often had trouble staying on task and focusing on classwork. Jake reads on grade level and scored “Meets” on the previous year’s ELA MCAS.
- Kat was a 10-year-old Hispanic female. Kat was a hardworking and shy student in the classroom. Kat read on grade level and scored “Partially Meets” on the previous year’s ELA MCAS.
- Kiah was a 10-year-old Hispanic female. Kiah was a hardworking and eager student in the classroom with a positive spirit. Kiah read on grade level and scored “Meets” on the previous year’s ELA MCAS.
- Luanne was a 10-year-old Hispanic female. Luanne was a hardworking and shy student in the classroom. Luanne read slightly below grade level and scored “Meets” on the previous year’s ELA MCAS.
- Melisa was a 10-year-old Hispanic female. Melisa was a hardworking student in the classroom and took on the leadership role in many academic and social occasions. Melisa read on grade level and scored “Meets” on the previous year’s ELA MCAS.
- Nicole was a nine-year-old Hispanic female. Nicole was a quiet student in the classroom that showed much hesitation to participate. Nicole read slightly below grade level and scored “Meets” on the previous year’s ELA MCAS.
- Nora was a 10-year-old Hispanic female. Nora often had difficulty making kind and respectful choices towards others. Nora was eager to learn and

participated regularly. Nicole read on grade level and scored “Meets” on the previous year’s ELA MCAS.

- Owen was a nine-year-old Hispanic male. Owen was a hardworking and eager student in the classroom. Owen was diagnosed with a speech impairment causing occasional stutters and repetition in his oral speech. This did not deter him from participating and speaking in the classroom. Owen read above grade level and scored “Exemplary” on the previous year’s ELA MCAS.
- Tina was a 10-year-old Hispanic female. Tina was a hardworking and quiet student in the classroom. Tina read above grade level and scored “Exemplary” on the previous year’s ELA MCAS.
- Violet was a nine-year-old Hispanic female. Violet was a hardworking and polite student in the classroom, always following instructions and school rules. Violet read on grade level and scored “Meets” on the previous year’s ELA MCAS.
- Yuri was a nine-year-old Hispanic male. Yuri was a hardworking and shy student in the classroom. Yuri read above grade level and scored “Exemplary” on the previous year’s ELA MCAS.
- Yasmin was a nine-year-old Hispanic female. Yasmin was a polite and hardworking student in the classroom. Yasmin read on grade level and scored “Partially Meets” on the previous year’s ELA MCAS.

Data Collection Methods

This mixed-methods action research study followed a procedure of triangulation design of the two methodologies. During the implementation of the intervention of

teaching close reading strategies to students, the researcher collected both qualitative and quantitative data. The data was collected and analyzed separately. Qualitative data was collected in the form of semi-structured interviews and observations. Quantitative data collection consisted of a pre and posttest, formative classroom assessments (weekly exit slips), and self-checklists.

Qualitative Data

The researcher collected qualitative data to gain an understanding of why students were choosing to use certain close reading strategies and how they were employing these strategies. Semi-structured interviews were conducted each week with a selection of students. This interview style started with a series of base questions, with the option of follow-up questions based on student responses (Mertler, 2017). The interviews were conducted as a follow up after students have independently read a text in class every Tuesday and Thursday. The teacher-researcher used an interview guide to start with some specific questions to ask all participants followed by some open-ended questions that was accompanied by probes and prompts as necessary to obtain further information from the interviewees. Finally, the interview concluded with a series of questions about a specific area or topic relevant to the data collected thus far at the outset of the study (Merriam & Tisdale, 2016). The interview questions provided a deeper look into which strategies students chose to employ, how these helped them understand the text, and their opinion on the strategies being taught. The purpose of collecting semi-structured interviews was to “obtain specific kinds of information that cannot be directly observed” (p. 108). Interviews provided a look into the mind of the participants. This type of information

helped lead the researcher into a deeper understanding of how the participants were thinking and why they made the decisions they did as close readers.

Unstructured observations happened each day to allow the teacher-researcher a look into how students were employing these strategies in independent settings. An advantage of collecting data through observations is the ability to focus on “actual student behaviors” (Mertler, p. 131). The teacher-researcher was able to take notes during observations to identify patterns and trends among students and the strategies they used to comprehend texts when reading independently. While conducting these unstructured observations during independent reading sessions, the researcher used a two-column formatted recording sheet to note both observations and comments. The observer’s comments (OCs) served as preliminary interpretations of what is being observed, often shedding light on the emerging patterns from the collection of observational data (p. 132). Observational data in this study was used to triangulate the findings as patterns emerged through interviews and these observations (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 139).

Quantitative Data

In addition to qualitative data collection instruments, the study also employed quantitative methods of data collection. The study used a performance checklist to measure the performance of weekly close reading exit slips. These exit slips varied in design week-to-week, but always assessed students’ ability to independently employ close reading strategies when reading a chapter from the text and answering TDQs. The performance checklist measured whether or not students were applying specific skills and strategies when completing the close reading task. As emphasized by Fraenkel (2015), the performance checklist was used to indicate only if the desired behaviors took place.

In this particular data collection tool, the performance checklist was utilized to determine if certain skills were being applied and if students were correctly answering the TDQs. Any further desired behavior being measured was specified on the performance checklist and accompanying exit slip.

The present study also utilized self-checklists to gain understanding of student perspective on the intervention. Self-checklists are often used as a tool to encourage students to diagnose or appraise their own performance (p. 127). In this study, the self-checklists were utilized once a week to allow students the opportunity to share their opinion and preferences of close reading strategies being taught and used in class. This piece of data provided the researcher with a better comprehensive understanding of what strategies were effective in the eyes of students and what strategies were leading students to further confusion. The self-checklists were analyzed alongside the performance checklists to determine which close reading strategies were leading to successful reading comprehension, which strategies were preferred by students, and then the comparison of this information.

Intervention

The intervention used in this study implemented a set of six close reading strategies selected by the teacher-researcher, supported by the most recent research and findings on close reading. In addition to support from the literature, the six strategies selected by the teacher-researcher supported the needs of the current students in the classroom based on data trends and observations prior to the study. After reading and analyzing Beers and Probst (2013) close reading signposts, the teacher-researcher chose three of the signposts that best aligned with the strengths and needs of the students in the

study: (a) “Aha Moments,” (b) “Again and Again,” and (c) “Memory Moments.” These three signposts are described and defined in detail in Chapter 2 of this dissertation.

The other three strategies were selected specifically to address a common deficit presented in the most recent state and local test scores or seen in classroom observations. Identify types of figurative language and making meaning of these expressions in text was seen as a difficult task for the group of students in the study. Palmer and Brooks (2004) suggested that the inability of a student to interpret figurative language can lead to gaps in comprehending the text. This can create frustration in readers and often discourages them from participating in the reading task, causing potential delays in later language development (p. 370). Therefore, the teacher-researcher wanted to include figurative language as a part of the close reading toolkit for students. The fifth strategy, “Make a Movie,” was included and taught based on the foundations of the dual coding theory and the process of visualization. Many researchers agree that the ability to visualize information in a text is a central factor in differentiating between proficient and less proficient readers (Koning & van der Shoot, 2013). The literature surrounding best practices of teaching students how to visualize when reading was grounded in the development of this close reading strategy used in this study. Lastly, the teacher-researcher included a strategy in the toolkit that gave students the opportunity to connect with their own personal experiences and memories while reading and making meaning. The “Hmm Moment” strategy reminded students to close read at a personal level in addition to all the academic and content related strategies that were being implemented. This close reading strategy taught students to look for any parts of the text that stood out to them, such as questions they had while reading, parts of text that were confusing,

personal or text-to-text connections, and even tough words or phrases that they could not make sense of independently. The combination of these six strategies was taught to students following the gradual release of responsibility model throughout the six-week duration of the research cycle.

The strategies were introduced to students, in a gradual release of responsibility method (GRR). Each week, students learned two new strategies to look out for when reading. Throughout the week, the students practiced recognizing the particular strategy in class while reading through guided practice and participating in collaborative class discussions. Pearson and Gallagher's (1983) GRR provided the framework for the scaffolded routine of teaching this close reading toolkit to students. The three stages of the GRR were followed throughout the duration of the six-week study, with plenty of flexibility and responsivity based on student performance and observational data. The teacher-researcher determined specific parts in the books being read that included pieces of text that best aligned with the use of one or more of the six close reading strategies. Figure 3.1 shows the anchor chart students utilized in class as a tool to self-monitor their application of these strategies while reading and using the correct annotation to mark up the text or an accompanying question. The participants in the study used this specific anchor chart annotation key to identify the six strategies in texts and make markups on sticky notes provided. This key hung as an anchor chart in the classroom as a resource for students throughout the six-week study.

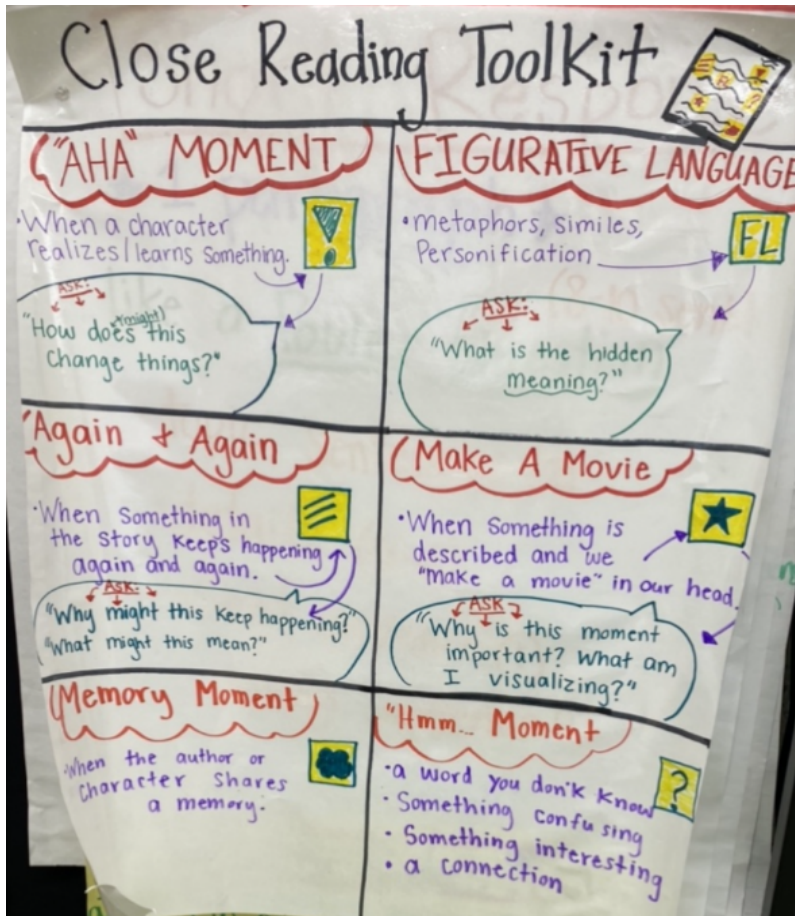


Figure 3.1. Close Reading Strategies Anchor Chart and Annotations

Research Procedure

This research study took place over the course of six weeks in the spring semester of 2020. The six-week duration allowed time to teach students how to identify and use the six strategies following a gradual release model of teaching. Following the direct teaching of each close reading strategy, the participants continued implementing these strategies for a total of three weeks, both independently and in whole group settings through modeled and guided instruction. A timeline of this procedure is detailed below. Table 3.2 provides an organized overview of the six-week cycle and all lesson numbers, texts being used, and data collection instruments involved.

Pre-Test

A pre-test was given to participants the week prior to the start of this six-week study. This pre-test instructed students to use any close reading or other reading comprehension strategies they may know to read the text and answer the TDQs. This same test was administered after the six weeks as a posttest.

Weeks 1-3

The first three weeks of the study included an in-depth introduction to each of the six strategies. Integrated into these three weeks, students were also introduced to the annotations of using these strategies where appropriate when reading. Each week, the lessons within the intervention highlighted two of the six strategies, in sequential order as outlined in Table 3.1. During each of these first three weeks, the strategies of that week were introduced gradually, allowing time for modeling, teacher guidance, and independent practice. Examples from the book that students were reading were used to show how these strategies could be identified and how applying these strategies allowed for close reading interactions of the text. Day 5 of each week, students completed an exit slip in which text-dependent questions were used to assess the students' ability to correctly identify the strategies, as well as comprehend the text using the procedures of that strategy.

Table 3.1. *Weeks Within Study and Strategies Introduced*

Week	Strategy Introduced
1	“Aha” Moment / Figurative Language
2	Again and Again / Make a Movie
3	Memory Moment/Hmm Moment

Weeks 4-6

These three weeks of the study provided the majority of the data collection of observations and semi-structured interviews. During these three weeks of the study, students be implemented all six close reading strategies simultaneously. Students were instructed to apply these strategies, as well as use the annotations, when necessary to comprehend what was being read. Opportunities for each of these strategies existed in the chapters from the book each day. The texts and accompanying comprehension assignments were intentionally selected with these strategies in mind, ensuring implementation could happen each day. Again, a weekly exit slip on day five of each of these three weeks was collected to measure which strategies students were choosing to employ independently and how these strategies were impacting their comprehension of the text at hand. Self-checklists were attached to exit slips bi-weekly to gather data on student perspective and opinion. Data collection and analysis is described in detail in Chapter 4. Flexibility within the study allowed for revisit of any of the six strategies as needed during the final week of the study. Based on data collection and ongoing analysis, the teacher-researcher made decisions on teaching with the purpose of study in mind. With the goal of helping students comprehend complex texts using close reading strategies, this final week allowed opportunity to engage students in the specific close reading strategies that best benefited their success as readers.

Observations and Interviews

Observations and semi-structured interviews were conducted during the six weeks of the study, as is detailed in the data collection method of this chapter. Observations took place throughout all six weeks of the study. Observations done and recorded to gain

insight as to how students were employing these close reading strategies when working independently. Observations recorded what types of strategies were being observed among students, when these strategies were being used, and how students were marking these up when reading or answering text-dependent questions. Semi-structured interviews took place during all six weeks of the study as well. The researcher used the observational data to make decisions on which students to interview and at what point in the study to do so. Samples of the observation forms and semi-structured interview transcripts can be found in the index.

Post-Test

At the conclusion of the six-week study, the teacher-researcher administered the post-test in a whole group setting. The post-test consisted of the same text and set of text-dependent questions as the pre-test. In addition, the post-test included directions instructing the students to use all six close reading strategies to read the text and answer the questions. The results of this post-test were compared to the results of the pre-test in a variety of ways. These results are presented in Chapter 4.

Table 3.2. *Schedule of Research Procedure*

	Book	Strat-egies	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Week 1 (1/27)	<i>James and The Giant Peach</i>	1 2	<i>PRE Test</i>	<u>L.6</u> SCL	<u>L.7</u>	<u>L.8</u> SCL	<u>L.9</u> Exit Slip
Week 2 (2/03)	<i>James and The Giant Peach</i>	3 4	<u>L.10</u>	<u>L.11</u> SCL	<u>L.12</u>	<u>L.13</u> SCL	<u>L.14</u> Exit Slip
Week 3 (2/10)	<i>James and The Giant Peach</i>	5 6	<u>L.15</u>	<u>L.16</u> SCL	<u>L.17</u>	<u>L.18</u> SCL	<u>L.19</u> Exit Slip
Week 4 (2/24)	<i>Frindle</i>	1-6	<u>L.1</u>	<u>L.2</u> SCL	<u>L.3</u> Interviews	<u>L.4</u> SCL	<u>L.5</u> Exit Slip
Week 5 (3/02)	<i>Frindle</i>	1-6	<u>L.6</u>	<u>L.7</u> SCL	<u>L.8</u> Interviews	<u>L.9</u> SCL	<u>L.10</u> Exit Slip
Week 6 (3/09)	<i>Frindle</i>	1-6	<u>L.11</u>	<u>L.12</u> SCL	<u>L.13</u> Interviews	<i>POST Test</i>	

Data Analysis

Following the six weeks of data collection and implementation of the intervention, the researcher analyzed the data by integrating both the qualitative and quantitative measures. The following data analysis methods were used to organize the collected data.

Inductive Analysis was used as a tool to organize and look for coding themes among the integrated data. The coding was transferred into software to provide an electronic database of the themes and patterns that emerged during the analysis. The researcher triangulated the data to support findings that answer the research questions of the study. Tables and graphs were used to present the statistical data of strategies used in

the study, frequency of these strategies, success rates of these strategies, and student preference of the strategies. Further analysis also provided a comparison of each of the close reading strategies, specifically looking at success rate of each strategy when employed by students on exit slips.

In addition to tables and graphs, the researcher provided a detailed, written analysis of all qualitative findings described in the analysis. Each of the research questions presented in this study is discussed and answered thoroughly. Themes and patterns were addressed, as well as limitations and recommendations from the researcher.

Triangulation

Following the design of this mixed methods action research study, both qualitative and quantitative data was integrated and analyzed simultaneously during this phase of the research. Comparing the results of each methodology allowed the researcher to verify similarities among sets of results (Mertler, 2017, p. 196).

Summary

The present study aimed at exploring the use of close reading in a fourth-grade classroom with the goal of helping students become successful independent readers. The convenient sample was made up of 21 participants from the teacher-researcher's own classroom. The study followed a mixed methods action research design, with both sets of data triangulated during the analysis of the study. The six-week study collected data in the form of observations, semi-structured interviews, exit slips measured by performance checklists, and self-checklists. In addition, a pre and posttest were used to assess student comprehension abilities prior to the implementation of the intervention and after. These results were compared and shared alongside the results of the other data collection tools.

The variety of tools provided opportunities for the researcher to answer each of the proposed research questions.

CHAPTER 4: PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF DATA

Problem of Practice

A combined look at standardized test scores and teacher observation show that a deficit exists in student ability to comprehend unfamiliar texts when reading independently. Without teacher guidance and prompting, it was noticed that students in the sample did not possess the skills necessary to make meaning of the text when reading without support. For years, the schoolwide benchmark data continues to show students are either not applying or not understanding how to apply explicitly taught reading strategies on test day. As a fourth-grade teacher, the teacher-researcher focused the study on these students with the hopes of implementing of set of close reading strategies that could become second nature to these students while reading. The teacher-researcher set out to uncover why students were not comprehending texts when reading independently and what could be done to help give these students a toolbox of strategies to use as independent readers from this point forward. The purpose of pursuing this problem of practice was to help students become successful independent readers in all facets of their reading experiences. Too often in education, we teach students how to decode and answer questions about texts, but we do not set them up with the tools to make sense of a text on their own when it is challenging, or the meaning is unknown. The focus of this study was to give students a set of familiar tools to use when reading in any context.

Research Questions

This mixed methods action research study explored three research questions during the six-week data collection and analysis cycle. The goal of the study was to provide answers to these questions based on the analysis of both the qualitative and quantitative data collected during the implementation of the intervention. The questions listed below were developed to align with the stated problem of practice and purpose of the study.

- How can explicitly teaching students close reading strategies impact their ability to independently read, comprehend, and analyze a text selection? What is the effectiveness of close reading strategies on my fourth-grade students' reading comprehension?
- What close reading strategies best help students increase their understanding of a text?
- Which close reading strategies do students prefer to use while reading independently?

Significance of Study

This study is significant at the individual student level, local school level, and potentially to the academic discipline level of teaching reading. Booth et al. (2008) posed the questions, "So what? What will be lost if you don't answer your question?" (p.45). Thinking back to the problem of practice and research questions outlined in this study, the goal of finding reading strategies that work for this particular group of students is at the core of the significance of this action research study. However, this study aims to teach students strategies that can be used even beyond the fourth grade ELA classroom.

Learning a set of close reading strategies can help students become successful readers both in and out of school and at any text level. The significance of this study at the local school level exists in the potential of discovering a new set of best teaching practices. In future years of teaching, the research and team of teachers at the site of the study could be encouraged to make teaching and curricular decisions aligned with the results and findings from the study. Similarly, educator and teachers finding similar problems in their own practice could use the findings presented in this study to replicate data-driven ideas in their own teaching adventures. Exploring this problem of practice and answering the research questions has the potential to help 1-100 students, or more. I am hopeful this research fills the cracks of what is missing in the literature and provides answers for others that seek out similar questions in their own practice.

Data Collection Methods

This study employed both qualitative and quantitative methods of data collection. The steps followed throughout the course of the six-week action research study were the following:

1. A pre-test was administered prior to the intervention cycle to gather both qualitative and quantitative data on student reading comprehension ability and habits;
2. Performance checklists accompanied weekly exit slips as students applied the intervention independently to an assigned reading task with questions;
3. Semi-structured observations were taken bi-weekly as students applied the intervention in both guided practice settings and independent work settings

involving reading and answering text-dependent questions while employing the close reading strategies;

4. Weekly small group semi-structured small group interviews gathered qualitative data on student perception and opinion of the reading strategies being taught;
5. A formal “quiz” was administered at the end of week 3 as an assessment tool for the researcher to determine the success rate and usage of the set of close reading strategies students had learned up to that point of the study; and
6. A post-test was administered after the six weeks to gather both qualitative and quantitative data, again, on students reading ability and habits in reflection to the strategies that have now been taught in full.

The findings and results of these data collection methods are presented and discussed in this chapter. Answers to the research questions are explored alongside the themes that emerged from analyzing the cyclical data throughout the research process. Each of these data collection methods was used to explore one, or more, of the study’s research questions. Table 4.1 shows the alignment between research questions and data collection tools.

Table 4.1. *Research Questions and Instruments*

Research Question	Data Collection Instruments
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How can explicitly teaching students close reading strategies impact their ability to independently read, comprehend, and analyze a text selection? What is the effectiveness of close reading strategies on my fourth-grade students' reading comprehension? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pretest and Posttest Results • Exit Slips • Observations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What close reading strategies best help students increase their understanding of a text? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pretest and Posttest Results • Exit Slips • Observations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Which close reading strategies do students prefer to use while reading independently? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interviews • Exit Slips • Observations

Sample Characteristics

All student names in this study were replaced with pseudonyms. To protect the privacy of the participants in the study, the identity of each student is known only to the researcher and will never be released to any other individual, orally or in writing.

The study consisted of a convenient sample of 21 fourth grade students at the site of the study. These 21 students were chosen out of convenience in that they were all in the homeroom class of the teacher-researcher. Demographically, all 21 participants identify as Hispanic/Latino and speak both English and Spanish fluently. According to the state-mandated ACCESS testing, all 21 participants have been identified as either

current or former English Language Learners, all making expected progress with inclusion EL services. The sample consist of 10 males and 11 females.

Intervention

Specifically focused on the strategy of close reading, the teacher-researcher designed a set of six reading strategies that would be taught to students over the course of the six-week study. In this action research study, the cyclical nature of the data collection would allow the study to respond to student performance in an effort to find best close reading practices for students to put to use. Throughout the duration of the study, the students were explicitly taught the six close reading strategies by being introduced to two new strategies each week for the first three weeks of the study. Teaching these strategies followed a gradual release of responsibility model (GRR), meaning that the teacher-researcher started with heavy modeling of identifying and using the close reading strategy in text leading to students identifying and using the strategy independently when reading and answer text-dependence questions. A glance at the six strategies and the weeks in which they were initially introduced to students during the study can be found in Table 4.2.

As mentioned, the implementation of the intervention during the six weeks followed the procedures of the gradual release of responsibility model. The goal of GRR was to provide a learning experience for students in which a balance between teacher responsibility and student responsibility existed (Pearson & Gallagher, 1983). The GRR was presented with three stages in the model intended to move students in the direction of accepting total responsibility through teacher modeling and guided practice. The first stage of teacher modeling was designed for the purpose of the teacher explicitly modeling

comprehension strategies and providing visible cognitive processes for the learner through direct explanation, think-alouds, and demonstrations (Webb et al., 2019). Following this first stage, students would get opportunity to apply the modeled strategy through guided practice. The teacher’s role would provide opportunity for feedback, additional modeling, and more at-bats with applying the strategy with supports and prompts. These two stages were thought to lead the learner into the third stage of assuming the responsibility of applying the strategy independently (p.76). This described routine of scaffolding through GRR has changed as the body of research surrounding reading comprehension has grown.

Table 4.2. *Initial Introduction of Strategies*

Week	Strategy Number/Name
1	1- “Aha” Moment 2- Figurative Language
2	3- Again and Again 4- Make a Movie
3	5- Memory Moment 6- Hmm Moment

During the last three weeks of the study, the students employed all six strategies simultaneously during the close reading intervention lessons. Each of the six strategies were accompanied by a specific annotation. These strategies and annotation marks were outlined on a class anchor chart visible during all lessons. Each lesson Monday-Thursday followed the GRR model in teaching, allowing for some teacher modeling, guided practice, and independent work. Each Friday, students independently read a chapter of

the current book and completed an exit slip consisting of text-dependent questions created to cater towards the use of these specific close reading strategies. Throughout the six weeks of teaching, data was collected both qualitatively and quantitatively to assess student reading comprehension and abilities in relation to the close reading strategies being taught. Ongoing data collection and analysis led to findings and results to answer the study's research questions.

Part I: Quantitative Results

This mixed-methods study collected and analyzed data throughout the duration of the six weeks of implementing the intervention. The quantitative data collected consisted of a pre-post reading comprehension test, performance checklists of weekly exit slips, and self-checklists paired bi-weekly with the reading and close reading practice questions for that day's intervention. The results and findings of these quantitative methods are presented below. Descriptive and Inferential Statistics were used to display the data and determine the significance of change in student performance and perception from week one to week six of the study.

Pre-Post Test Results

The 21 participants in the study were given a pre- and post- test consisting of questions measuring reading comprehension. These 10 questions were chosen from a bank of MCAS released questions from prior testing years and each of the 10 questions aligned with one of the six close reading strategies that could be used to better comprehend and answer them. Prior to implementing the intervention in the study, students were instructed to read the text, mark it up, and answer the 10 questions using any strategies they already know. Prior to the six weeks of intervention, the student were

instructed to read the same text, use their close reading annotations, and use the six strategies to help them answer the same 10 questions as were given on the pre-test.

Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive statistics of the Pre-Post Test scores are recorded in Table 4.3. The table includes the mean, median, and standard deviation of each test. The statistics shown below represent the raw scores out of the 10 test questions. Additionally, a comparison between the scores of the pretest and posttest are displayed in Figure 4.1 below. This figure shows the spread of the pretest and posttest scores for all 21 participants. The data shows that there was an increase in the mean score from the pretest (M=6.57, SD=2.40) to the posttest (M=8.71, SD=1.48). Calculating the change in mean score shows a 32.6% increase from the mean score of the pretest to the mean score of the posttest. The measures of central tendency were calculated and presented below to describe the collective level of performance of the sample of students (Mertler, 2017). These statistical procedures provide an idea of how the group of students, as a whole, performed both prior to the implementation of the intervention and after receiving six weeks of the intervention.

Table 4.3. *Pre-Post Test Scores*

	Pretest	Posttest
Mean	6.57	8.71
Median	7	9
Standard Deviation	2.40	1.48

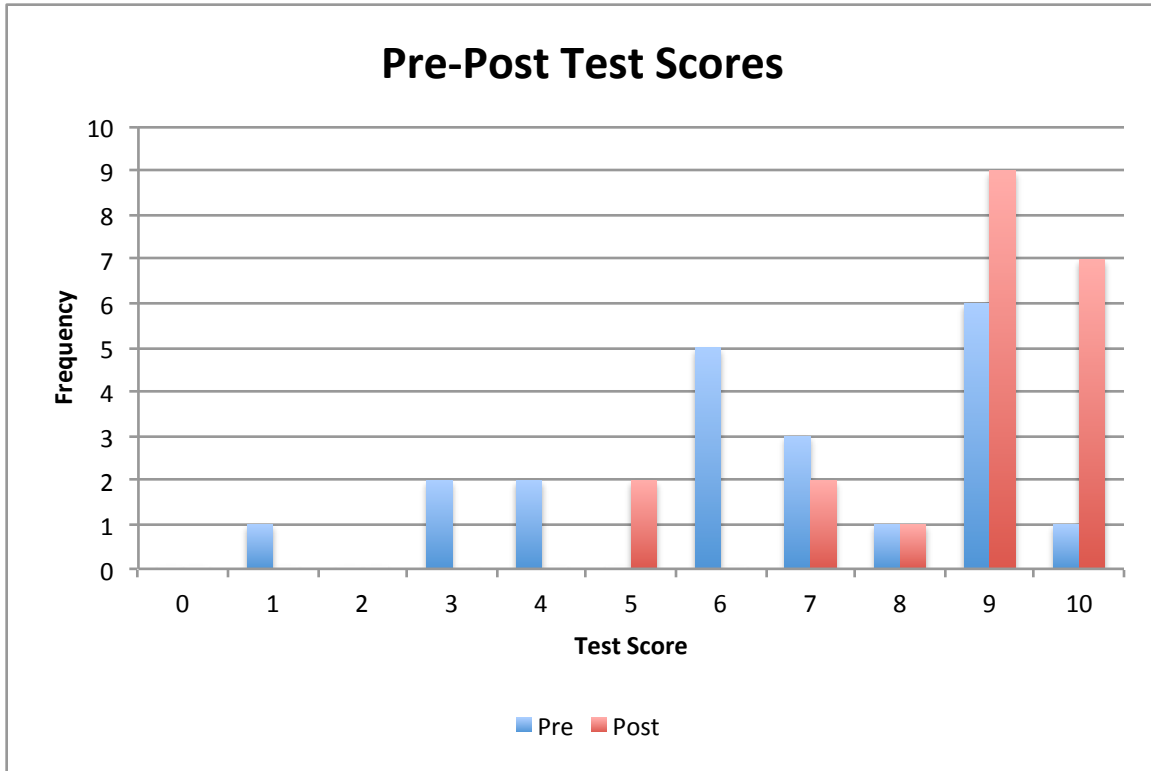


Figure 4.1. Frequency of pre-post test scores.

Parametric Techniques

A repeated measures t-test was used to compare the mean scores of the participants in the study before and after the intervention was implemented. This type of parametric statistical test can be used to determine if there is a significant difference between the means of the two samples of scores (Mertler, 2014). To determine if there is statistical significance, a p-value is obtained and compared with the alpha level. In this case, the alpha level is .05, as is common in educational research (Mertler, 2014). The calculated value of $t=5.3033$ and the value of $p=.00003$. Since the p value $< .05$, the t-test determined there was a significant difference between the means of the pretest and posttest.

Analysis of Six Strategies

The quantitative data collected also provided findings focused on each of the six close reading strategies included in the intervention. As described above, two strategies were introduced per week for the first three weeks of the study. The last three weeks of the study consisted of reading and close reading practice in which students were able to use all six strategies simultaneously. The pre-post- test text and questions were carefully selected from a bank of MCAS Released Items to align with the six strategies in the study. Each test question addressed one, or more, of the six strategies. Table 4.4 below shows a breakdown of the ten test questions and which close reading strategies would be applicable to answering that specific question. Further, the data was analyzed to consider the difference between the pretest and posttest scores for each strategy. The researcher looked at the number of students that correctly answered the aligned test questions for each of the six strategies. The mean was calculated to show, on average, how many students were correctly answering test questions involving each of the strategies. Figure 4.2 below shows the comparison of these means from the pretest to the posttest.

Table 4.4. *Aligned Test Questions and Strategies*

	Strategy Number					
	Strategy 1	Strategy 2	Strategy 3	Strategy 4	Strategy 5	Strategy 6
Aligned Test Question	3	1	5	1	5	6
	7	2	7	4	10	8
	8	4	9	5		
	9	5		6		
	10	8		7		
		9		8		
		10		9		
				10		



Figure 4.2. Accuracy rates of strategies aligned with test questions.

As shown in Figure 4.2, there was increase among correct item responses on questions aligned with all six of the close reading strategies from pretest to posttest. A percent increase was then calculated to show how much of a positive change existed from pretest to posttest in regards to answering questions aligned with all six strategies. Table 4.5 shows these percent increase for each of the six strategies. Figure 4.3 shows these percent increases compared to one another. The data points show that when students applied Strategy 5: Memory Moment to help them comprehend the text and test questions, there was a positive change of 44.4% in students correctly answering those aligned test questions. The order of percent increase from highest to lowest is as follows: Strategy 2: Figurative Language (37%), Strategy 3: Again and Again (29.5%), Strategy 4: Make a Movie (29.3%), Strategy 1: Aha Moment (36%), and Strategy 6: Hmm Moment

(17.6%). These results show that all close reading strategies proved an increase in correct responses on the aligned test questions from pre- to post- test.

Table 4.5. *Percent Increase of Strategies Based on Aligned Test Questions*

Strategy 1	Strategy 2	Strategy 3	Strategy 4	Strategy 5	Strategy 6
36%	37%	29.5%	29.3%	44.4%	17.6%

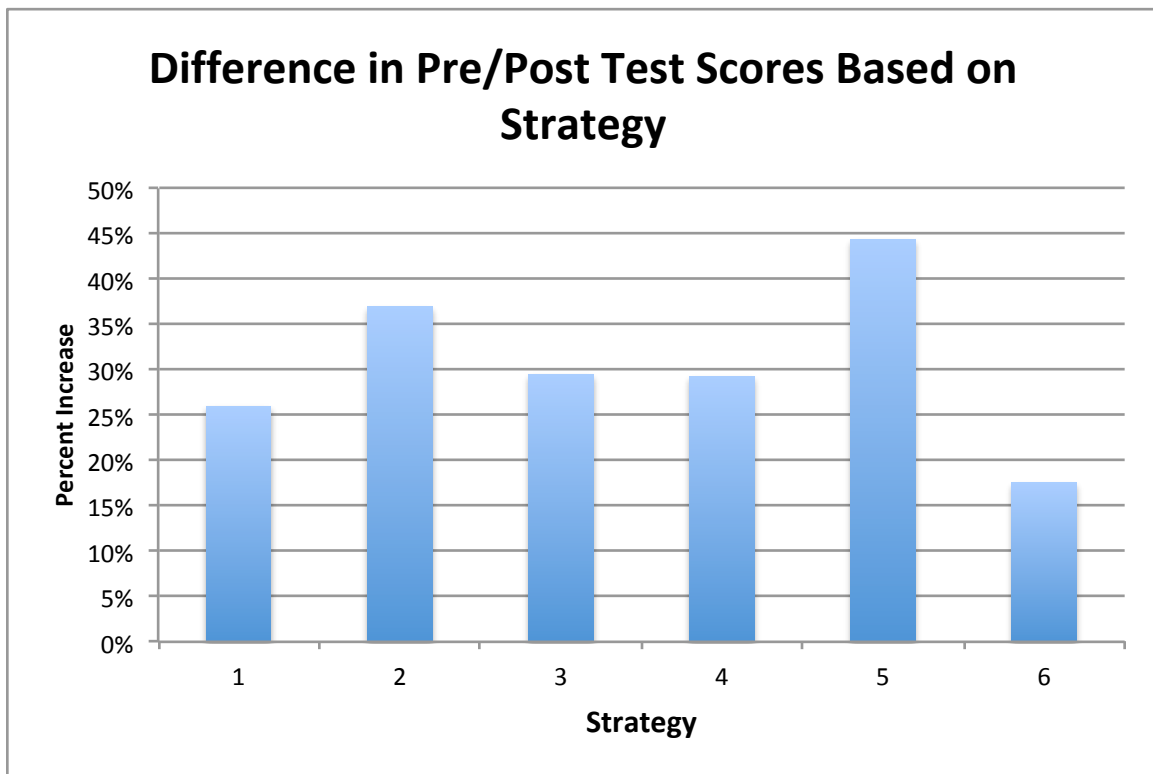


Figure 4.3. *Difference in pre-post test responses and strategies.*

Performance Checklist Results

Weekly exit slips gave insight into which strategies students were choosing to use independently when reading the text and answering the questions. A performance checklist was used to track the strategies students were using when both reading and answering text-dependent questions. Table 4.6 shows a calculated mean of each strategy

used by students on weekly exit slips during the last three weeks of the study. Because students were being introduced to the six strategies in pairs during the first three weeks of the study, students were not given opportunity to know and apply all six until week four of the study. The numbers within the table indicate, on average, how many of the 21 students choose to employ each of the six strategies. Ranking these strategies in order of frequency utilized during the exit slips, the calculated mean shows that Strategy 2: Figurative language (M=16.60) was used the most during the last three weeks of the study, followed by Strategy 4: Make a Movie (M=16.25) and Strategy 1: Aha Moment (M=16.20). The following three strategies were used the least frequently by participants: Strategy 3: Again and Again (M=14.50), Strategy 5: Memory Moment (M=12.57), and Strategy 6: Hmm Moment (M=10.34). It can be concluded from this data that Strategy 2: Figurative Language was used the most and Strategy 6: Hmm Moment was used the least by students when completing the weekly exit slips.

Table 4.6. *Strategies Used on Exit Slips*

Strategy 1	Strategy 2	Strategy 3	Strategy 4	Strategy 5	Strategy 6
16.20	16.60	14.50	16.25	12.67	10.34

While these calculated means provide an answer as to which strategies students did choose to use more or less often, it is important to consider that these numbers do not necessarily indicate a rate of success when using the strategies. Rather, these data points paint a picture as to which strategies students either preferred to use, felt more comfortable using, or which strategies lent themselves as useful more often on the exit slips. These potential connections are later explored in the discussion of the three research questions.

Self-Checklists

Students filled out self-checklists following the close reading lessons twice a week. These self-checklists allowed students to indicate which strategies they chose to use as well as how they perceived the text and the questions, as well as their ability to complete the assignment and use the close reading strategies they have been practicing. Analyzing the data collected on these self-checklists, the teacher-researcher used the responses to gauge how students were feeling each week. Particularly, the self-checklists asked students how they were feeling when using the strategies to read and annotate the text for the day and how they were feeling when using the strategies to answer the text-dependent questions that followed. Students could choose one, or more, of the following to indicate how they felt about using the strategies while reading and answering the questions: (a) confident, (b) confused, or (c) frustrated.

Student responses on the self-checklists were tracked from week one to week six of the study, as a way to determine any trends in student perception of learning these new close reading strategies. Figures 4.4 and 4.5 display the linear trend of students indicating a feeling of confidence when both reading and answering text-dependent questions using these 6 new strategies. A linear trend line fit to the data shows student perception of feeling confident when using the strategies to read shows a positive change of .29 students per evaluation period. The linear trend line fit to the data for student perception of confidence when answering text-dependent questions during the study also shows a positive change of .33 students per evaluation period. While the feeling of confidence had an overall increase in change from beginning to end of study, the feeling of confusion and frustration showed a decrease in change. Figures 4.6 and 4.7 show the linear trend in

students indicating to have felt confused when using these strategies during the lessons in regards to reading and answering the questions. The linear trend line fit to the data for student perception of confusion shows a negative change of $-.29$ students per evaluation period when reading and a negative change of $-.30$ when answering the text-dependent strategies. Finally, Figures 4.8 and 4.9 provide a look into students feeling frustrated when using the strategies to read the text and answer the questions. Similarly, the linear trend in these two figures show a negative change. A decrease of $-.21$ students per evaluation period fits the trend line for students when reading and a decrease of $-.24$ of students per evaluation period when answering the questions. Ultimately, these slopes of change conclude that feeling of confidence when reading and answering questions increased over the duration of the study, while the feeling of confusion and frustration among participants decreased in change over the duration of the study. These results were further explored through qualitative data collection methods of observations and interviews. The trends of these findings will be further discussed in part II of the data analysis.

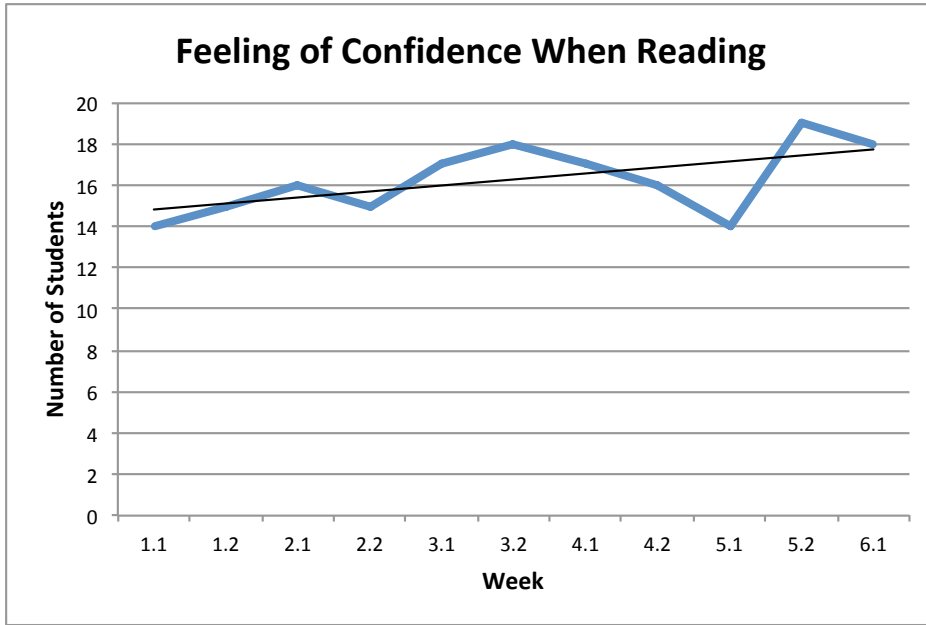


Figure 4.4. Progression of Student Perception of Confidence When Reading

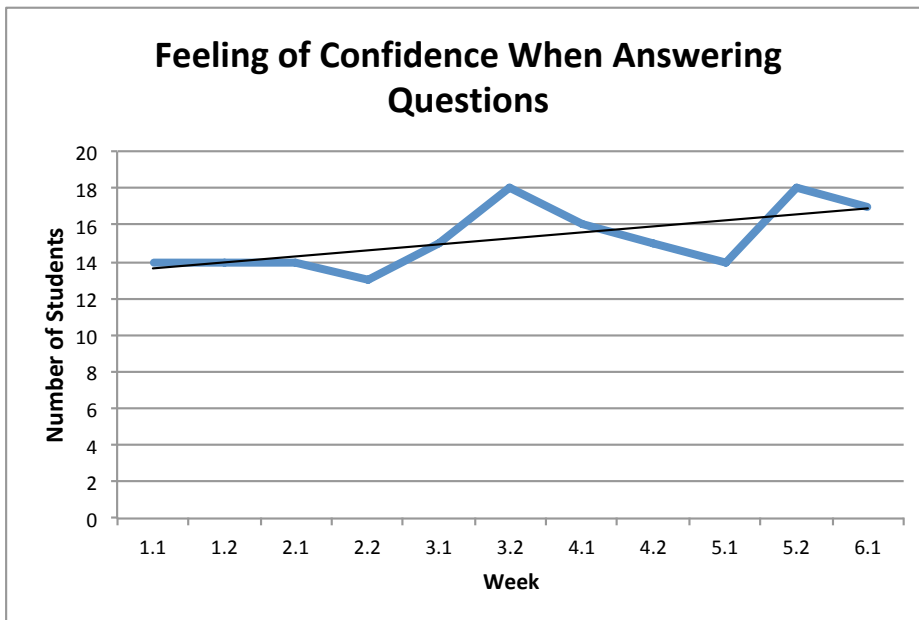


Figure 4.5. Progression of Student Perception of Confidence When Answering Questions

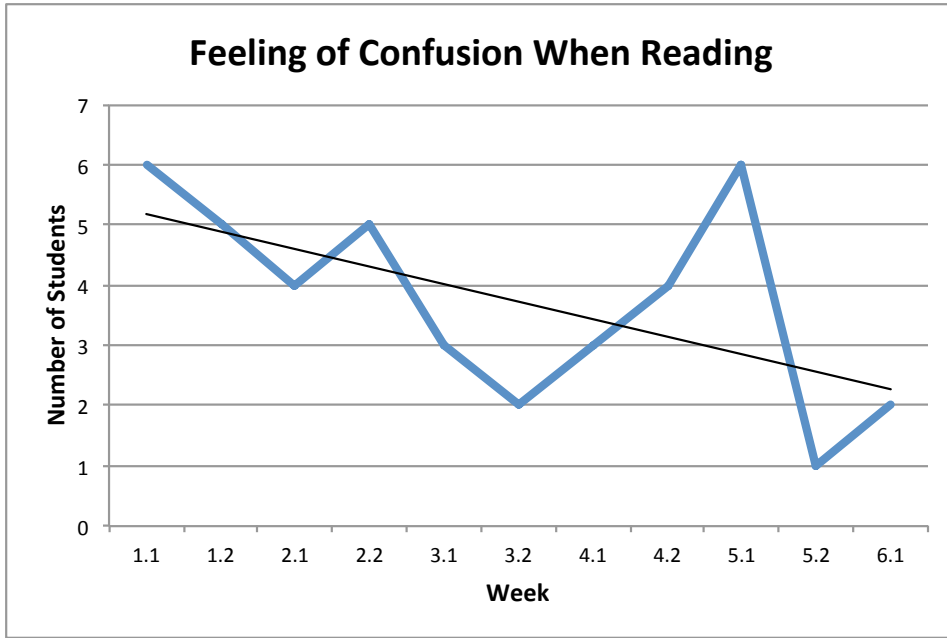


Figure 4.6. Progression of student perception of confusion when reading.

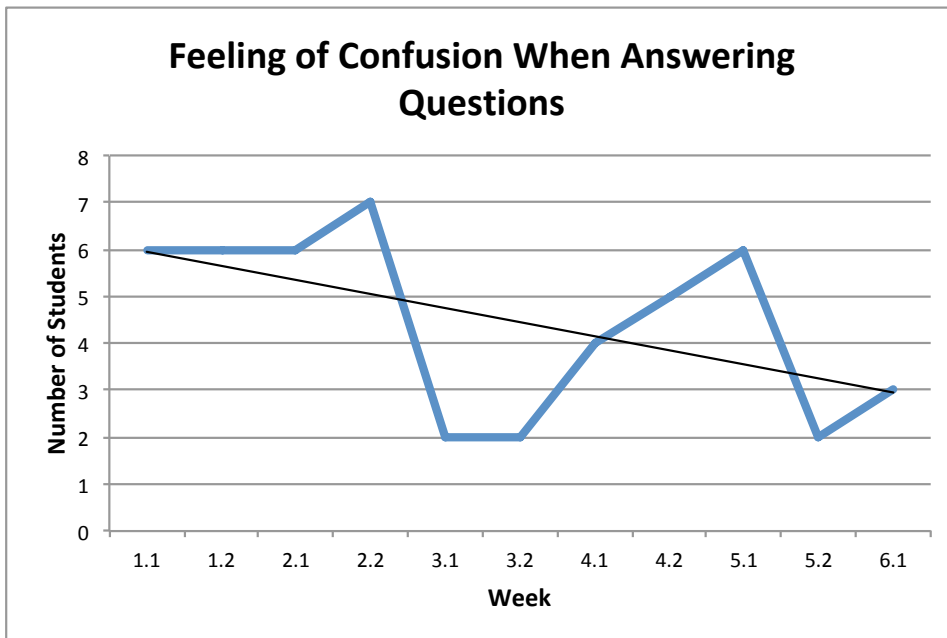


Figure 4.7. Progression of student perception of confusion when answering questions.

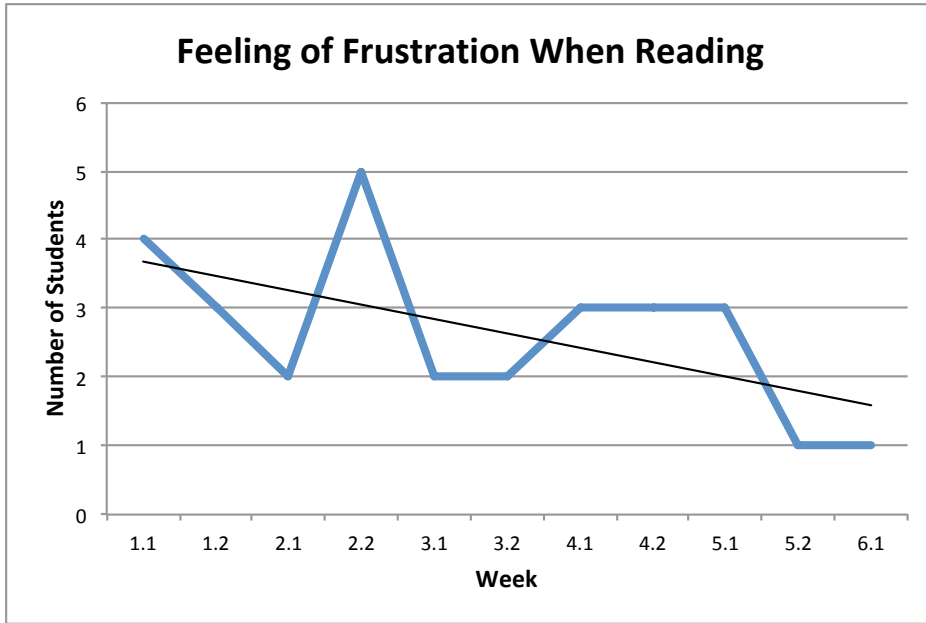


Figure 4.8. Progression of student perception of frustration when reading.

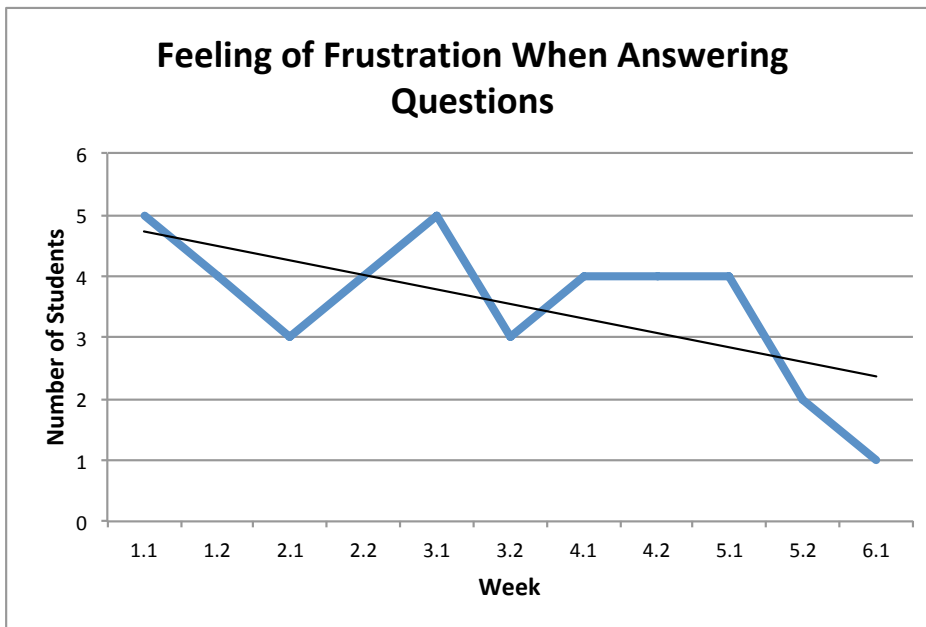


Figure 4.9. Progression of student perception of frustration when answering questions.

Part II: Qualitative Findings

I used semi-structured interviews and observations to obtain qualitative data for this study. Interviews were recorded and transcribed onto an interview form verbatim to the student's actual responses to ensure authenticity. In addition, observation notes were recorded daily as students worked independently. The observation notes consisted of notes describing what students were doing, what questions were asked, and what conversations were had between teacher and student(s) during the close reading interventions. I recorded conversations during these observations and transcribed the discussions verbatim. The recorded conversations were only done when I approached a student and initiated a one-on-one conference or quick discussion about the work being done.

As described in Chapter 3, I coded the data and categories emerged at different parts of the six-week study. The observations and interviews were transcribed and imported into NVivo software. These interviews and observations were analyzed through coding. The software helped to track and organize the codes, leading to trends and patterns. Analysis of this qualitative data led to three emerging themes (See Tables 4.7 and 4.8). Towards the start of the six-week study and at the end, themes emerged surrounding the participation, engagement, and learning experiences happening as a result of the implementation of the study's intervention.

Table 4.7. *Primary Themes from Qualitative Data – Towards the Beginning*

Themes	Examples
1. Increased Engagement and Participation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More students than usual raising hands to share out • Tracking participation showed an average of 9.6 students sharing out during lesson without teacher prompting or cold-calls (at end of week 3) • Increased use of sticky notes to make annotations in text
2. Authentic Reading Experiences and Student-Led Discussions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Less teacher-led questions needed during guided practice portion of lessons (I was not having to use all my pre-planned Q's because students were initiating strategies on own) • More personal connections emerging from using strategies when reading • Increase in student annotations noting questions or parts of the text that were confusing

Table 4.8. *Primary Themes from Qualitative Data – At the End*

Themes	Examples
<p>1. Increased Engagement and Participation</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tracking participation showed an average of 15.6 students sharing out during lesson without teacher prompting or cold-calls (at end of week 6) • Continued use of sticky notes to make annotations in text (both during guided practice and independent practice) • Students now making annotations on own during guided practice (read-aloud) rather than just waiting for teacher to instruct to do so • Students now using more than one strategy at a time when annotating a single section of text or text-dependent question
<p>2. Authentic Reading Experiences and Student-Led Discussions</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students now sharing out notice of strategies needed/employed majority of time (less teacher initiation to do so). • More personal and text-to-text connections emerging from using strategies when reading • Students now willing/volunteering to share out annotations noting questions or parts of the text that were confusing

Theme 1: Increased Engagement and Participation

The first theme revealed from both the observations and interviews was an overall increase in student participation and engagement in the lessons. Having learned six new close reading strategies gave students the opportunity to be more intentional during the reading portion of the lesson. One of the biggest pushes during these lessons was for students to “think while reading.” This led to students being more aware of the character and plot development throughout the two chapter books that were read during the study. Focusing on these six close reading strategies gave students something to look for and questions to consider while reading. Having a familiar set of strategies to guide their thinking led to more student willingness to share out and take risks during the lessons. In addition, students also became more active in their thinking while reading.

The increase in engagement during the progression of the study began as a simple teacher observation, but soon became more apparent as students also supported this finding in their own responses during both interviews and conversations during observations. During the one-on-one weekly interviews, student responses became lengthier and more involved each week of the study. This was first noticed during the third round of interviews, taking place during week three. In one interaction, Jerald actually showed his increase in engagement of the lesson during his interview. On February 27 (week four), Jerald’s interview responses showed they he added onto his own thoughts, with less teacher prompting. For example, Jerald was asked, “Do you feel like the strategies helped you understand the text and answer the questions?” In his previous interview, Jerald answered this question with a simple “yes” and needed a few teacher probes to expand on his response. During this particular interview though, Jerald

was able to express his thoughts completely on his own and seemed self-aware of his thinking and use of the strategies during that lesson. Jerald responded to this same question:

Yes, I do think that. I actually think the Aha Moments today really even helped me. Because like yesterday we talked a lot about how Nick was always coming up with these crazy ideas. Well today, I saw an Aha Moment because he said that he had a big idea and he even smiled I think, in the book...is what it said. But like, then also this was Again and Again because well he had a big idea again.

This response was followed with probing questions digging at what Jerald might think this trend means for the character or plot development. However, it stood out that Jerald was able to not only put a name to the strategies he specifically used, but also initiate his own reasoning for identifying these strategies and explaining his own thought processes. Not only did I code this as an example of increased engagement, but also a result of consistent class discussions and teacher prompting that seemed to be internalized by this particular participant.

Another example during interview sessions that strongly supports the theme of increased participation was the change in responses to the first base question of the interview form. During week four of the study, four of the five participants responded similarly to question one, "What close reading strategies did you choose to use when reading and answering today's questions?" Four out of the five interviewees responded with mention of only one or two strategies. The fifth participant responded with the mention of three strategies; however, during the week six interviews of these same

students, all five participants mentioned five or more strategies when asked this same question. Three of the verbatim transcribed responses are scripted below.

- “I chose to use all of the strategies today. I actually found some of them a lot. I also feel like there was so much figurative language today. That one is always the easiest for me to find. But I also found the others too.” –Fatima
- “I chose to use Aha Moment, Figurative Language, and uhm... Again and Again and also there was a lot of Make a Movie. Oh and one Memory Moment too. This was the first time I think that I found a Memory Moment. That one is kind of hard to find I feel like...” –Jerald
- “I used all of the strategies today. Well I used them all when I was reading. I used a lot of sticky notes today. See! (shows me her book). I didn’t use them all for the questions though.” –Tina

During week two of the study, I started to notice an increase in participation from students in the form of raising their hands, use hand gestures during discussions, and self-initiating annotations during read alouds. This led me to start making daily tally charts to track how many students were participating each day. I simply printed and used a class roster to check off each time a new student raised their hand to share out during the lesson. Due to my role as the teacher-researcher, I only tallied students when raising their hand. Although I did consider actively annotating and using gestures as alternate forms of participation, my bandwidth to both teach and collect data required me to set limits so that I could focus on strong teaching practices. I did not count how many times each student shared, only each time a new student shared out. Table 4.9 below shows the total number of students tallied for each close reading lesson from the middle of week two

through week six. The mean was calculated for each week to show, on average, how many students were participating by raising their hands and sharing out. As can be seen below, the mean from week two to week six increased.

Table 4.9. *Daily Student Participation Rates*

	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4	Week 5	Week 6
Monday	N/A	9	12	13	15
Tuesday	N/A	8	13	16	15
Wednesday	7	11	9	12	13
Thursday	9	11	14	10	17
Friday	8	9	12	14	18
Mean	8	9.6	12	13	15.6

Although the theme of engagement and participation was connected to the implementation of the close reading strategies during the study, this theme can also be aligned with additional factors important to note. As an insider to the study, the teacher-researcher has preexisting relationships and connections to the participants in the study. It is important to acknowledge this disposition as it likely aided in the students' willingness and comfort to participate in the lessons. Daily teaching practices and routines as teacher are important considerations in the replication and understanding of this study's intervention.

As a classroom teacher, engagement strategies and routines are important to pair with any best teaching practices. There is no doubt that the relationships between the teacher and participants, as well as the tips and tricks already embedded in the classroom, both had impact on student engagement and participation in this study. Reflecting on this

implication, it should be understood that teaching practices should be combined with already existing procedures and routines in the classroom that will better lead students towards success. In relation to the motivation theory, a teacher must know what desirable behaviors to target in an effort to intrinsically motivate students to become engaged and participate. Building confidence and encouraging persistence should be an intentional piece of the role of the teacher. Getting to know the students, what strategies lead to motivation, and how to best support each learner will impact the effectiveness of any teaching practice or lesson in the classroom.

Theme 2: Authentic Reading Experiences and Student-Led Discussions

Rather than teacher-prompted questions becoming the base of the guided practice, students began sharing out strategies they were noticing while reading as a class. Below shows an example of what a scenario might look like prior to this intervention when teacher-prompted questions led the discussion during read-alouds and what the scenario looked like when students became more confident in identify and initiating the use the close reading strategies on their own.

Mock Traditional Teacher-Led Read-Aloud (while reading):

T: “Let’s stop here and think about that sentence. What type of figurative language do we see?”

S: “Simile”

T: “Great, and how do we know this is a simile?”

S: “Two things are being compared using like or as”

T: “Yes, and what two things are being compared?”

S: “The grasshopper’s legs are being compared to rods.”

T: “Great, and why do we think the author is using this comparison?”

S: “Maybe to show us what the grasshopper looks like, and to make us realize his legs are sticking straight out.”

T: “Why do we think this is an important thing to notice?”

S: “This helps us notice that the grasshopper might be sitting very still because he is scared.”

Actual Scripted Notes from Week 4 of the study (while reading, student raises hand):

S: “I see the strategy of figurative language- a simile!”

T: “Great find, Finn! Let’s annotate it and think about it. Take a look at our anchor chart and tell me your thoughts.”

S: “I know this simile is comparing the grasshopper’s legs to rods.”

T: “Yes, who can add on?”

S2: “This is important because his legs being compared to rods probably tells us how is feeling and also helps us visualize what he looks like.”

S3: “I think his legs are straight like rods because he is feeling scared.”

(Teacher wait moment)

S4: “I also notice this could be a Make A Movie Moment because as I am reading this sentence I am visualizing what he looks like.”

T: “Great observations and inferences! Let’s keep reading to find out what happens next.”

While the first scenario above was a mock script, it very closely resembles a typical discussion I would have with students while reading in book club prior to implementing these six reading strategies. The second example came from a close

reading lesson in which students were reading James and The Giant Peach during week four of the study. At this point all six strategies had been introduced and students were encouraged to use all of them while reading and answering questions. Because of their familiarity with the close reading strategies, the students in scenario two were able to identify the figurative language example and know that it might be important to understanding the text without teacher prompting. Students in scenario two knew to use this strategy to guide their thinking to better understand the story. Students were not only more engaged in scenario two, but the students were able to lead the discussions and use the strategies to aid their comprehension with lesson teacher prompting and talking.

The idea of “authentic reading” came from the collection of observation notes taken while students were reading, annotating, and answering the text-dependent questions independently during each lesson. As I circulate the room during these portions of the lesson, I would take notes about what students were annotating, any questions asked, and any conversations that were had between teacher and student. While doing this each day and analyzing my observational notes, I began to notice a lot of conversations with students that included some sort of personal connection, a student-initiated question, or a point of confusion that was noted by the student. One example of this was a student that annotated a piece of text with the symbol for strategy 1 (Aha Moment). I asked this student to explain their annotation and thinking to me. Derek stated, “Well, all the characters are arguing about where the peach had landed. I know they landed in NYC because of the illustration and because there are subways like it says in the story.” This moment of Derek noticing something big in the story was an “aha” moment for him because he was able to make a personal connection to the text.

Observing the fact that Derek actually stopped and annotated this showed me that he knew his personal connection would be beneficial to him better understanding the story. This was authentic in that it was not initiated by the teacher and it was a piece of understanding that originated from his own personal life and knowledge. Another example of an authentic moment of reading came from an observation of a student annotating a piece of text with strategy six (Hmm Moment). When asked about this annotation during circulation, Melisa responded, “This stood out to me because I realized that the title of this chapter is the same as the title of the entire book.” I responded with, “Well, why did you annotate that?” Melisa stated, “Well since I noticed it as a ‘hmm moment’ I knew it was probably something important or maybe the chapter is going to have something big happen in it.” Similar to the connection Derek made, Melisa had a moment here in which she made a text connection. Not only was it something that stood out to her because of the close reading strategies, but she was able to articulate why she annotated it and knew that there may have been some intention behind this decision from the author that would be important for her to know. Among many other observations during independent work and discussions during guided practice and read-alouds, it was evident that the qualitative data showed a trend in students being able to use these strategies to create their own authentic reading experiences. The close reading strategies served as a reminder to not only think while reading, but to take initiative for their own learning.

Connecting the theme of authentic thinking and student-led discussions to the theory of metacognition brings some potential explanation as to why this theme came about. Flavel (1976) first coined the term metacognition to describe “one's knowledge

concerning one's own cognitive processes and products or anything related to them, for example the learning relevant properties of information and data” (p. 232). The theory of metacognition and reading has been explored by many educators and researchers as a way to help readers learn to actively think about their own process of reading and understanding. Developing metacognitive habits when reading is thought to help influence learners to be more aware of their own thinking and put make active choices in regard to reading comprehension strategies when reading (Baker & Brown, 1984). In this study, utilizing the close reading strategies while reading puts more emphasis on the habit of monitoring their own thinking while reading, rather than just after reading to answer the questions. Having some sort of focus, or signposts, to look for has shown to keep the participants more engaged in the process. This increase in engagement leads to a more thoughtful comprehension of the meaning. Buoncristiani (2012) explained the purpose of metacognition as one or more of these four intentions: understanding, monitoring, evaluating, and regulating. The authentic reading experiences emerged as a theme of this study partly because the participants were indeed applying these metacognitive procedures while reading. Keeping the six close strategies in mind, the students’ comprehension of the text proved to align with the intentions of understanding their own thinking (what they were looking for) and monitoring their thought processes (implementing the strategies) as they made meaning of the text and applied their own connections, questions, and pieces of understanding.

Analysis of Data Based on Research Questions

Both qualitative and quantitative analysis results and findings were compared and used to answer the three research questions explored in this study. A discussion of each of these three questions is supported by the data analyses and presented below.

- How can explicitly teaching students close reading strategies impact their ability to independently read, comprehend, and analyze a text selection? What is the effectiveness of close reading strategies on my fourth-grade students' reading comprehension?
- What close reading strategies best help students increase their understanding of a text?
- Which close reading strategies do students prefer to use while reading independently?

Research Question #1

How can explicitly teaching students close reading strategies impact their ability to independently read, comprehend, and analyze a text selection? What is the effectiveness of close reading strategies on my fourth-grade students' reading comprehension?

This first research question can be answered by exploring the analysis of the pre/post test results and performance checklist items. Prior to teaching the 21 participants the six close reading strategies covered in this study, the average mean raw score on the pretest was 6.57 out of 10 questions and the average mean raw score on the posttest was 8.71 out of 10. Comparing these mean scores shows a positive change from pretest to posttest after implementing the intervention of the study. In addition to the positive change in test scores, the data also proves that students became more engaged and

participated more frequently as these strategies were taught and used in the classroom. The themes that emerged from the qualitative data overwhelmingly supported the finding that students became more aware of their own reading comprehension when utilizing these strategies. Observations and interviews were coded in NVivo and showed that students were asking more questions, initiating deeper responses, and participating more via class discussions and annotating during reading sessions. The number of participants in classroom discussions were tracked each day from week two to week six. This data collection showed that the mean number of students increased from week two (M=8) to week six (M=15.6). This shows a 95% increase in student participation during the close reading guided lessons. The effectiveness of teaching these six close reading strategies to the 21 participants in the study led to the following:

- Increase of pre- to post- test scores,
- Increase in student engagement,
- Increase in student participation, and
- Increase in students' overall ability to track their own reading comprehension and willingly apply strategies during independent reading experiences.

Research Question #2

What close reading strategies best help students increase their understanding of a text?

The quantitative data analysis of the six strategies shows that there was an overall increase in reading comprehension for all six strategies. An analysis of the six strategies was considered when looking at the comparison between the pre- and post- test scores. The test items each aligned with one, or more, of the six close reading strategies from the study. The mean of the sum of the correct responses on these aligned test questions was

compared from the pretest to the posttest. The difference of these two calculated means showed that each of the six strategies did provide a positive increase in change of correct responses on those aligned test questions. Table 4.10 shows the sequential list of strategies, which provides an answer as to which strategy had the greatest impact on student reading comprehension abilities and which had the least. As can be concluded, Strategy 5: Memory Moment (44.4%) and Strategy 2: Figurative Language (37%) had the greatest impact on student reading comprehension according to the change in correct test questions from pre to post test results.

Table 4.10. *Strategies and Percent Increase When Used by Students*

Strategy	Percent Increase
5: Memory Moment	44.4%
2: Figurative Language	37%
3: Again and Again	29.5%
4: Make a Movie	29.3%
1: Aha Moment	26%
6: Hmm Moment	17.6%

Research Question #3

Which close reading strategies do students prefer to use while reading independently?

In addition to the change in test question scores, an exploration into which strategies students chose to employ on their weekly exit slips also gave insight as to which strategies were helpful for students, from the perspective of the participants themselves. The results from these performance checklists concluded that students employed the six strategies most often to least often in the following sequential order:

Strategy 2: Figurative Language, Strategy 4: Make a Movie, Strategy 1: Aha Moment, Strategy 3: Again and Again, Strategy 5: Memory Moment, and Strategy 6: Hmm Moment. Table 4.11 shows the mean number of students that chose to employ each of the six strategies during the last three weeks of the study.

Table 4.11. *Student Choice of Strategies*

Strategy	Mean Number of Students
2: Figurative Language	16.60
4: Make a Movie	16.25
1: Aha Moment	16.20
3: Again and Again	14.50
5: Memory Moment	12.67
6: Hmm Moment	10.34

In addition to the self-checklist and performance checklists data, interviews and observations also helped in providing insight into this research question. During semi-structured interviews each week, the coded data in NVivo also shows that students mentioned finding examples of strategy two (figurative language), strategy one (Aha Moment), and strategy four (Make a Movie) more often than the other three. When asked why students used these strategies when reading, responses indicated that students seemed to connect more with these three strategies. Figurative language is a standard that students had already been introduced to and therefore, it provides some familiarity to the participants. Identifying figurative language in a text also provides a concrete cue of identification, while other strategies required more abstract thinking. As long as students could recognize the language structure of different types of figurative language, they

could immediately recognize it in text. During an interview, Fatima was asked why she felt as if she used figurative language the most that day and she responded with “Well, I think I am really good at finding similes and personification and it’s kind of fun. I see them all the time, especially in this book [James and the Giant Peach].”

In addition to the number one preference of using the strategy of identifying and thinking through figurative language, students also reported to prefer the use of Aha Moments and Make a Movie. During modeled and guided instruction of Aha Moments, students were taught to look for key words or phrases that often led to an Aha Moment. These consisted of the following: “I have an idea,” “I get it now,” “I know...,” and “I think...” Again, having these types of concrete clues to look for gave students a place to start. A trend that was noticed during observations was students annotating Aha Moments for times in which they, as readers, realized something new or big. This was an interesting and unexpected use of the strategy. However, I liked that students were expanding their use of the strategies and using them to initiate other ways of thinking about the text or noticing their own thoughts. This collection of data leads me to believe that students preferred this strategy over many others, because they began to use it in two different ways, therefore it showed up more often when reading. The strategy to Make a Movie was the third most preferred strategy according to the checklist data. The use of this strategy shares similar characteristics as both figurative language and Aha Moments. Students had previously used this learning strategy of Make a Movie during writing instruction. Therefore, this was another strategy in which students have prior experience. Similar to Aha Moments, students mentioned their ability to recognize when to use Make a Movie because they were looking for clues. Interviews and observations both showed

that students were annotating phrases that contained adjectives, juicy words, or any type of description. Just like an Aha Moment, students seemed to latch onto this strategy because they had something concrete to look for, or keep in mind while reading.

Summary

The purpose of this action research study was to answer the three outlined research questions through a mixed methods approach of both data collection and analysis. The findings and results from both data collection methods were compared during analysis to provide stronger support and validation of one another (Creamer, 2018). Ultimately the compared findings provided answers to each of the three research questions and themes that emerged from analyzing the coded data through NVivo.

When implementing the six close reading strategies in this study, the quantitative data displays a positive change in student scores from pre- to post- test. Supported by the response form students through interviews, observations, and self-checklists, students' feelings of the tasks proved a positive change from beginning to end of the study. The rate of confidence increased, while the rate of confusion and frustration decreased. Further analysis of each of the six close reading strategies proved some to be more effective than others, and some to be preferred by students over others. The comparison of the strategies was outlined and discussed in Chapter 4. Further discussion of the study's conclusions, summary, and recommendations will be presented in Chapter 5.

CHAPTER 5: SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Overview of Study

This action research study aimed to uncover best close reading practices for young readers in a fourth-grade classroom. Supported by state and local test scores and formative data, the teacher-researcher's observations in the classroom led to the goal of finding ways to teach students close reading strategies that would lead to successful, independent reading habits. The study employed a six-week mixed methods cycle of data collection and analysis to explore the effectiveness these close reading strategies had on student comprehension of fiction texts. Specifically, the researcher wanted to determine a toolkit of reading strategies that students could internalize and employ at their own discretion, as readers in the classroom. Qualitative and quantitative measures were used to explore the study's purpose and goals, as well as answer the outlined research questions.

Problem of Practice

The problem of practice leading to the implantation of this study came from a deeper look into students test scores and trends evolving from teacher observations. Both state and local test scores in the area of reading comprehension displayed an area of need in this content area for the students in the study. In 2018, the current participants were administered the Strategic Teaching and Evaluation of Progress (STEP) assessment in their third-grade classrooms to determine specific reading abilities and areas of needs.

The STEP assesses students at their own reading level and this determines which reading

level students will be taught at in their guided reading lessons. At the time, 22 students were assessed among STEP levels 9-12, which all fall in the bandwidth of third grade reading levels. These STEP tests assessed students' oral comprehension, written comprehension, and retell abilities in relation to the text that was independently read. Of the 22 students, 5 of them passed the oral comprehension, 10 passed the written comprehension, and 11 passed the retell portion. In addition to this data, the end of year state tests, showed that 47% of these third graders were either meeting or exceeding expectations in reading, while 53% of the students scored either partially or not meeting expectations. Most recently, the fourth-grade reading comprehension benchmark administered to this group of students in October 2019 concluded that 14 students scored partially meets expectations, and 7 students scored meets expectations. From the test, the mean score of 62.71% showed that on average, the fourth-grade class was not meeting expectations in the area of reading comprehension.

Prior to the start of the study, it was also acknowledged that test scores alone did not give a comprehensive snapshot of student abilities and areas of need in regard to reading. Therefore, informal observations were used to support this problem of practice that guided the design on the study. Daily observations and interactions with the students during the ELA core block did indeed show that students were not self-monitoring for comprehension when reading and specific reading comprehension strategies were not being employed by students when reading independently. Students relied heavily on test-taking strategies to work through multiple choice questions or answer a short response prompt, but there was little observation of students annotating or thinking metacognitively while reading. During book club class discussions, student responses

relied on heavy teacher facilitation and an overall sense of disengagement filled the room each day.

Purpose of Study

The combination of these factors making up the problem of practice led me to realize that these students were in need of their very own reading comprehension strategies. These students needed to be explicitly taught how to think while reading and how to self-monitor their own comprehension when engaging with a story or book. This problem of practice led me down the path of exploring literature related to close reading. I set out on a journey to find specific strategies to teach these students and wanted more than anything to teach these students how to become independent readers that were engaged and responsible for their own reading success.

Research Questions

Following the exploration of related literature and landing on the decision to employ a study looking at close reading strategies, the following research questions were developed to guide the research cycle.

- How can explicitly teaching students close reading strategies impact their ability to independently read, comprehend, and analyze a text selection? What is the effectiveness of close reading strategies on my fourth-grade students' reading comprehension?
- What close reading strategies best help students increase their understanding of a text?
- Which close reading strategies do students prefer to use while reading independently?

Rationale

Selecting the close reading strategies and implementing the intervention was supported by the theoretical framework grounded in this study. Reflecting on the analysis of the findings and themes, the theories selected for this study helped to provide alignment between the rationale, purpose, and outcomes as were presented in chapter 4.

The selection of the six strategies allowed students to interact with the reading experiences in a more meaningful way. Relying on prior knowledge and past experiences with reading, the students began applying the strategies at their own discretion. The autonomy in using the strategies and annotating the text became momentous throughout the six-week intervention cycle. Uncovering the theme of authentic reading experiences and increased engagement showed that students were bringing themselves into the lessons. As described by the schema theory, students were using their own schema to self-monitor for comprehension and understanding as readers.

The construction-integration theory supported the need to target a deficit in the data and encourage students to use figurative language as a strategy. As close readers, students quickly caught on to the habit of identifying examples of figurative language in the text. Many readers then relied on self-generated questions to put thought into the meaning of these micro-level pieces of text to gain better clarity of the macro-level of text. Moving forward, this theory supports the continued practice of teaching students how to make sense of different types of figurative language and other unfamiliar structures of text. The analysis of the six strategies based on the performance checklist determined that figurative language was indeed the most commonly used strategy. As the most commonly applied strategy during the study, it can be concluded that students were

becoming more aware of the micro- and macro- levels of text and using these two subsystems to help comprehend parts of the reading that once proved to be a general weakness.

Teaching reading is a complex process. However, after several years of experience and observations I have learned that paying close attention to student strengths is of equal importance as noting their needs. In doing so, I realized this particular group of students used the practice of visualization to increase voice and vocabulary in their own writing pieces. This strength of students as writers transformed into a skill as readers. Supported by the dual coding theory, teaching students to rely on both verbal and non-verbal representations of text allows for more thought and self-generated ideas to come from reading interactions. Looking for moments to ‘make a movie’, students were naturally encouraged to notice, pause, and think about the text. The authentic reading experiences that emerged from the data were closely related to many moments of visualization and self-monitoring this strategy.

Encouraging students to become engaged and participate in any learning activity relies on student motivation. The motivation theory in this study was a constant reminder to reach towards the goal of intrinsic motivation as readers. I wanted my students to become comfortable enough with the strategies in that they would choose to employ them both with and without teacher guidance. The motivation theory described desirable behaviors that might indicate a person being intrinsically motivated to do a certain task. In this study, the repetitive nature of using the same six strategies led to an increase in student confidence. The observations of self-monitoring and independently applying strategies showed that students were employing what they were being taught. In

connection to the purpose of this study, students became motivated to become independent close readers.

Recap of Methodology

This research study followed a mixed methods action research approach to both collecting and analyzing data. According to Herr and Anderson (2015), an action research study follows a spiral of action cycles in which each cycle increases the researcher's knowledge of the original question or problem, ultimately leading to a solution (p. 5). Choosing action research allowed the research to take on new approaches and follow leads as they were uncovered during the six-week study. Both qualitative and quantitative methods of data were collected and analyzed each day during the study. These qualitative measures consisted of observations and semi-structured interviews with participants. Quantitative data was collected in the form of a pre-post- test, weekly exit slips, and self-checklists. Both types of data were collected simultaneously, but analyzed separately, following a convergent mixed methods design (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). After analyzing both sets of data, the findings and results were compared to one another. The qualitative data was transcribed and imported in NVivo. This software helped the process of analysis by tracking codes and allowing the researcher to uncover trends and themes among the data sources. Descriptive and inferential statistics were used to analyze the quantitative data results (Fraenkel, 2015). These results were displayed and presented visually through the use of Excel. Following the analysis of each, themes emerged, and both sets of data were discussed to support the findings and conclusions of the study.

Recap of Results and Findings

This action research study was framed with a pretest and posttest, with six weeks of data collection and implementation of the intervention within that duration of time. Comparing the results of the pretest ($M=6.57$, $SD=2.40$) to the posttest ($M=8.71$, $SD=1.48$) showed that student scores did increase. The mean score of the posttest had a 32.6% increase from the mean student score on the pretest. A t test for correlated means was calculated to determine if there was statistical significance between the mean of the pretest ($M=6.57$) and the posttest ($M=8.71$). With a p value of .00003, it can be concluded that the difference is statistically significant, based on $p < .05$. Additionally, the data looked at specific item numbers on the test and aligned them with the correlating strategies. Analyzing this data showed a positive change from pretest to posttest of all six close reading strategies. The comparison and rate of change was presented in Chapter 4. Analyzing the observations and interviews using the software, NVivo, two major themes emerged from this study: (a) increased engagement and participation, and (b) authentic reading experiences and student-led discussions. Lastly, the data from interviews, observations, performance checklists, and self-checklists explored student preference and levels of confidence in using the close reading strategies introduced to them. The findings showed that student perception of confidence increased over the duration of the study, while perception of confusion and frustration decreased. Of the six strategies taught, trends among qualitative data and results from the quantitative data showed that students did have preferences of three of the six strategies over the others: figurative language, Aha Moments, and Make a Movie. These results and findings were discussed in detail to answer each of the three research questions in Chapter 4.

Description of the Action Researcher as Curriculum Leader

As a curriculum leader, the researcher of the study will be able to use the findings from this research and make curricular decisions at the local level. It is important as a leader that best practices and new ideas are shared with others and implemented with intention. First and foremost, the researcher shares recommendations and implications for other practitioners to ensure the strategies of close reading as discussed in this study are presented with fidelity. Later in this chapter, these recommendations and implications are provided for the reader.

In addition, the researcher will take the next steps in utilizing the findings in the classroom as best fit for the students. These strategies will be shared with the team of fourth-grade teachers to use or adapt in their own classrooms. Not only is it important that the researcher share these findings, but also offer support to other teachers choosing to implement the strategies explored in this study. Having collected and analyzed data, the researcher must fulfill a role of leading others through the same, or similar, process. Resources, ideas, and suggestions will continually be offered to other teachers as they attempt to utilize these strategies in their own teaching practices.

In the coming years, the researcher also acknowledges the importance of continuing to explore best practices in reading and share new findings with others. As new research and studies emerge, methods for teaching will continue to take shape. Being a curriculum leader means keeping up with best practices and new findings in the field. Each year, the existing ELA curriculum must be adapted to match the needs of the group of learners and all that is new and improved in the related field. As a curriculum leader, the researcher will continue to informally collect data and make curricular decisions

based on the evidence it presents. Seeking out opportunities for professional development and conversations with other leaders must remain a priority each year.

Positionality

After obtaining approval from the Institutional Review Board, the teacher-researcher implemented a six-week study, in which a selection of six close reading strategies were introduced and taught to the students within the teacher-researcher's own classroom. As an insider to the study, the researcher was able to implement the daily intervention, and both collect and analyze the data from the 21 participants in the study. This positionality allowed the researcher the opportunity to explore her own teaching practices and conduct the research using her own classroom and students (Herr & Anderson, 2015, p.40). These participants served as a convenient sample, as all 21 individuals were students in the teacher-researcher's current fourth-grade classroom (Efron & Ravid, 2013, p. 64).

Action Plan

Following this action research study, I plan to share the findings and conclusion/recommendations with the leadership team at my school, as well as the team of fourth grade teachers with whom I work. I hope to integrate the intervention from this study into the ELA intervention curriculum that exists in the school in which I teach. I would like to take the strengths from this study and apply the strategies as they best fit with the selection of books already being used by teachers in the classroom. Having identified the most effective strategies and the most preferred strategies, I recommend these three as a starting place for teachers and students. Because this research study only lasted for the duration of six weeks, I would present the use of the intervention from this

study to be stretched out to cover the course of the school year. Rather than teaching all six strategies during a three-week period, I recommend working with other leaders and teachers to develop a plan to introduce these strategies gradually and allow time for students to get to know them at a deeper level, by using them for a longer duration of time.

As I mentioned above, I would suggest these six strategies be used in one of two ways: (a) teachers begin with introducing the three most effective strategies, then introduce the rest later in the year; or (b) develop a more specific plan in which the books in the curriculum are matched with strategies most suitable for each book. With either, teachers will be able to integrate the teaching of these close reading strategies at a slower pace of gradual release, and will ensure the most effective and best aligned strategies are prioritized. Over time, I suggest integrating the teaching of these six close reading strategies by developing a scope and sequence for use of these strategies aligned with all of the books we currently teach in our ELA intervention units.

The beauty in the use of the close reading strategies that were explored in this study is that they can be chopped, cropped, and combined with other best teaching and learning practices. Using some, or all, strategies can still provide students with effective close reading skills. As mentioned above, these strategies can also be integrated into curriculum units and books teachers already use and prefer. Introducing something new by pairing it with something familiar seems to lessen the apprehension teachers might have in making suggested curriculum changes.

Recommendations for Practice

Like the action plan I outlined above, I would recommend these close reading strategies be thoughtfully paired with books, or novels. While all six strategies proved to be effective, they are only as effective as their presence in a book. Therefore, it is important the book align with opportunities for students to use these close reading strategies. Curriculum leaders and teachers will need to be careful and intentional in the books used to teach these strategies.

In addition, I recommend that these strategies are taught over a longer duration of time. The more practice a student gets with a new skill or strategy, the better equipped they will be to use it. I suggest either stretching out all six strategies over a longer time period, or only teaching three at a time. Using the findings in this study that reveal which strategies proved to be more effective, as well as the strategies students preferred, will provide other practitioners with guidance and suggestions on which strategies might be introduced first or even used at all.

Implications for Future Research

With the analysis of the data and the themes that emerged from this study, several implications also came to light as the teacher-researcher reflected on the research. The intervention of this study provided students with a set of six close reading strategies intended to be used with any complex text of various genres. After writing the literature review and diving into the implementation of the intervention, it was discovered that these strategies best align with fiction genre texts. While some of the strategies may be helpful with close reading a nonfiction or informational text, the teacher-researcher only included fiction texts in the intervention. Further research needs to be done to determine

whether these six strategies could be adapted to nonfiction texts, or if some strategies lend themselves better than others.

The themes that emerged during the analysis of the qualitative data proved to be useful pieces of information for other researchers or practitioners interested in making new strides from this study. The data analysis provided an overwhelming amount of evidence that showed an increase in student engagement and participation during this study. This theme shows that this study provided additional outcomes that may be useful for teachers noticing low engagement during reading instruction as a problem in their own practice. While it is important this study provides some insight to other educators and researchers interested in similar topics, it is important to recognize other potential connections the findings of this study could pose.

As teachers, we are always growing our own toolbox of best practices for our students. The literature and ongoing research on reading comprehension means that our classroom practices most often consist of a combination of teaching tools and strategies from various sources. With this, I hope to encourage teachers interested in utilizing these six close reading strategies to pair them with other best practices and identify the strengths that may exist when paired with other tools. Most importantly, researcher and literature must align with the needs and strengths of our very own students. It must be considered that the findings of this study speak to the experiences of the 21 students in the sample. While these close reading strategies may provide similar results for other teachers and students, it is important to remember that all learners will travel their own unique path of learning experiences that gives them their own strengths and challenges as

a reader. Whether used in full, partially, or even slightly, I hope the findings of this research will help guide other educators in solving their own problems of practice.

Conclusion

Guided by the problem of practice this action research study set out to explore three research questions surrounding the implementation of a set of six close reading strategies to a group of 21 fourth-grade students. The findings from this study conclude that the teaching and use of these strategies provided a positive increase in student performance on reading comprehension from pretest to posttest. A closer look at each of the test questions and their alignment with one or more of the six strategies had a positive impact on student performance. The positive change for each implemented strategy was reported in Chapter 4. In addition, qualitative methods of data collection presented two themes that emerged from the data analysis. These themes conclude that student engagement and participation in reading comprehension increased due to the intervention being implemented in the study. The emerged themes also found that students became involved in more authentic moments of thinking while reading. Interview and self-checklists gave the researcher a look into which of the six strategies were preferred by participants, providing feedback for future use or research. Finally, student perception of reading comprehension while learning these strategies had a positive change from beginning to end. The data concluded that while confidence levels increased, reported levels of confusion and frustration decreased.

The six close reading strategies explored in this study were supported by a body of literature and the teacher-researcher's observations and needs in her own practice. The ultimate goal of presenting this study was to provide the teacher-researcher, and other

educators, insight into best close reading practices for reading comprehension. The findings and results will be shared with others and will hopefully add some substance to the existing body of literature surrounding close reading and reading comprehension practices for teachers.

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APPENDIX A : PRETEST/POSTTEST

Name : _____ Date : _____

Comprehension Questions
from Ida B.

***DIRECTIONS:** Read the “Ida B” passage twice. Using close reading skills you know, annotate and mark up the text while you read. Then use the text to answer the questions below.*

1. In paragraph 2, what does Ida mean when she says that Ms. W. makes words into “story music”?
 - a. Ms. W. reads books quickly.
 - b. Ms. W. reads with expression.
 - c. Ms. W. plays music while she reads.
 - d. Ms. W. sings the words in the books.

2. Read the following text from paragraph 4.

“I was like a dog that would go fetch Ms. W. ’s stick, even if it was in a snake’s hole under a thorn bush that had just been sprayed by a skunk.”

What 2 things are being compared in these sentences?

_____ and _____

What does this tell us about how Ida feels about Ms. W.?

- a. Ida would do anything for Ms. W.
- b. Ida is afraid of Ms. W.
- c. Ida thinks Ms. W. is a terrible teacher.
- d. Ida is jealous of Ms. W.

3. Read the sentences from paragraph 13 below.

“I closed my eyes, put my right hand on top of the book, and passed it lightly across the cover. It was cool and smooth, like a stone from the bottom of the brook, and it stilled me.”

Which two things are being compared in the sentences?

- a. a hand and a stone
- b. a stone and a brook
- c. the book cover and a stone
- d. the book cover and a brook

4. PART A: Re-read paragraph 12. How is Ida most likely feeling in this paragraph?

- a. sick
- b. nervous
- c. terrified
- d. angry

PART B: Go back to paragraph 12 and annotate the evidence that supports your answer to question 4 above.

5. PART A: According to the story, who is Alexandra?

- a. a student in Ida’s class
- b. a child Ida is dreaming about
- c. the main character in the book Ida is reading out loud
- d. Ida’s friend who compliments her at the end

PART B: Go back to the story and annotate any evidence that proves your answer above.

6. What lesson does Ida learn in this story?

- a. Always help adults when they are feeling sick.
- b. Try new things, even when they are challenging.
- c. Always practice reading to yourself, before you read to others.
- d. Keep trying to get things right, even when people laugh at you.

7. In paragraph 20, what does Ida mean when she says, “I left that classroom and went into the story”?

- a. She went to the library and found another book to read.

- b. She forgot she was nervous and started to enjoy the story.
- c. She became tired of the story, so she made up one instead.
- d. She felt the room was too loud, so she went someplace quiet.

8. Read the sentence from paragraph 13 below.

“A whole other world is inside there, I thought to myself, and that’s where I want to be.”

What does Ida most likely mean in the sentence?

- a. The book is surprising to her.
 - b. The book is challenging to read.
 - c. The book is written out outer space.
 - d. The book takes makes her use her imagination.
9. What is the “warm glow” referring to that Ida describes on her bus ride home in paragraph 26?
- a. Excitement from reading out loud like Ms. W. in class that day.
 - b. Nervous that kids will laugh at her the next morning.
 - c. Sick feeling from riding on the bus.
 - d. The warm sun shining through the bus window.

APPENDIX C: SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW FORM

(Form was used for teacher guidance/Responses were typed)

Base Questions:

1. What close reading strategy (ies) did you choose to use when reading and answering today's questions?
2. Why did you choose these strategies?
3. Did you feel successful comprehending the text you read in today's lesson? Did you feel like you were able to successfully (or easily) answer the questions?
4. Do you feel like the strategies helped you understand the text and answer the questions?
5. What did you find challenging about today's reading or questions you had to answer? Was anything confusing to you?

Potential Follow-Up Questions:

- Was there a different strategy you think you could have, or should have chosen to utilize?
- Is this your favorite strategy to use? What other strategies do you often use when reading?
- Which specific questions were the toughest for you today? What made these questions tough for you?

Note: additional follow-up questions may be used depending on students' responses during the interview session. Any and all additional questions, and responses, will be recorded during the interview. A written transcription will be included to show all questions and responses that took place during each interview. A separate template will be used to record the interview date, the accompanying text/set of questions, and a description or copy of the student work.

APPENDIX D: SELF CHECKLIST FORM

Self-Checklist

Directions: Place a check mark in the space provided for those exit slips based on your own opinions and awareness of your performance.

1. I utilized one of the six signpost strategies in this close reading activity. _____
2. Check off the strategy you chose to use (select all that apply):
 - Strategy 1 _____
 - Strategy 2 _____
 - Strategy 3 _____
 - Strategy 4 _____
 - Strategy 5 _____
 - Strategy 6 _____
3. I felt **confident** reading today's text _____
4. I felt **confident** answering today's questions _____
5. I felt **confused** reading today's text _____
6. I felt **confused** answering today's questions _____
7. I felt **frustrated** reading today's text _____
8. I felt **frustrated** answering today's questions _____
9. I felt like I was able to answer some of the questions, but not all of them. _____
10. I used the close reading anchor chart in the classroom to help me. _____

APPENDIX E: PERFORMANCE CHECKLIST

Performance Checklist Accompanied by Friday exit slip

1. Employed strategy 1 _____
2. Employed strategy 2 _____
3. Employed strategy 3 _____
4. Employed strategy 4 _____
5. Employed strategy 5 _____
6. Employed strategy 6 _____
7. Employed strategy 7 _____
8. Marked up text _____
9. Correct response to question # 1 _____
10. Correct response to question # 2 _____
11. Correct response to question # 3 _____
12. Correct response to question # 4 _____
13. Included annotations _____
14. Asked a question during task _____
15. Displayed frustration during task _____
16. Displayed confusion during task _____
17. Displayed general ease during task _____
18. Displayed confidence during task _____
19. Observed using anchor charts in classroom _____