

Improving Guided Reading Levels of 2nd grade Students by
Implementing Independent, Silent Reading

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Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the
Degree of Master of Education

July 2018

Graduate Programs in Education

Goucher College

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to determine if 2nd grade students' reading achievement would improve if they participated in a silent reading program. The measurement tool used was the Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark Assessment System to determine the students' guided reading levels. This study used a pretest and posttest design to measure the data collected before and after the students were given the extra time to read silently. The majority of the students tested improved at least one guided reading level. Research in this area should continue to improve student accountability during this silent reading time and to determine causation between the extra reading time and improvement in guided reading levels.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Overview

Throughout the years, education has swayed back and forth between praising and condemning silent reading time in the classroom. However, there is a positive correlation between time spent silently reading and reading achievement (Reutzel & Juth, 2014). This would point to silent reading making a return to the classroom, but that is not always the case in schools. With the implementation of small group instruction, it is hard for the teacher to determine if the students not in the small group are on task and reading silently to themselves. This would propose having a specific time of the day that all students stop what they are doing and read silently to themselves. Research also suggests that the teacher gives the students some guidance when it comes to this silent reading time (Reutzel, Jones, Fawson, & Smith 2008). The teacher should explain to the students what independent reading looks like and how the students should be effectively using their time. Educators should instruct the students on how to choose books during this time as well. With guidance on how to read during independent reading time and what books to choose, the research hopes to improve the guided reading level of the students in her class.

Statement of Problem

The problem this study seeks to answer is whether or not participation in independent reading time will help improve students' guided reading levels. The researcher wants to determine if the act of reading on their determined guided reading level alone will help to increase the students' reading accuracy and comprehension.

Research Question

What proportion of students participating in 15 minutes of independent reading time daily will demonstrate growth in their guided reading level?

Operational Definitions

The independent variable is student participation in 15 minutes of independent reading time daily. The dependent variable is the students' guided reading level.

Operational definitions of the variables are as follows:

Independent Reading Time is 15 extra minutes every day that students will stop everything and read by themselves.

Guided Reading Level is the level determined by the Fountas & Pinnell Benchmark Assessment System.

Accuracy is the student's ability to decode words within a text accurately.

Comprehension is the student's ability to understand what he/she read in a text.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Throughout the years, silent reading has been revered in classrooms and has also been taken out completely. The pendulum of education has swayed from one extreme to the other regarding this practice. However, effective silent reading is a life skill that all children must acquire. It is necessary to understand why silent reading is important, what silent reading is, how silent reading will improve guided reading levels in students, what the current silent reading practices are, and the current interventions to improve silent reading in the classroom.

The Importance of Silent Reading

There is a correlation between time spent reading and reading achievement. The more time you spend reading, the more success you will have with reading. Students who choose to read in their spare time perform better on standardized tests and have higher achievement in school (Kelley & Clausen-Grace, 2006). Studies have shown that when a student has additional time to read it leads to gains in vocabulary, comprehension and fluency (Reutzel, Spichtig, & Petscher, 2012). If teachers want their students to improve in reading, then the teachers should have time every day for the students to read.

Many classrooms have students reading orally along with the whole class during the reading lesson. However, there are many added benefits to having the students read silently. Participating in a silent reading program has shown to increase students' motivation and engagement to read when compared to a round robin reading and other oral reading strategies (Reutzel, Jones, Fawson, & Smith, 2008). Independent, silent reading is a necessary skill for everyday life and should be the goal for all reading curriculums (Dickens & Meisinger, 2016). Skilled readers, both children and adults rarely read orally. Most everyday reading is done

silently and students should learn how to effectively read this way (Price, Meisinger, Louwerse, & D'Mello, 2012). In recent years, emphasis has been placed on orally reading because it is easier to observe and grade than silent reading. Teachers do not teach their students how to silently read and that prevents students from developing skills for their future schooling or employment (Dickens & Meisinger, 2016). Silent reading should not be left out of the classroom and should be taught explicitly to students.

What Is Silent Reading?

In order to implement this practice in the classroom, teachers need to first understand what silent reading is. It is simply reading silently, freely, and without interruption (Chua, 2008). There is no reading lesson during this time and there is no specific purpose for reading other than to become better readers. It also has a greater impact on students when they get to self-select the books they will silently read (Reutzel et al., 2008). Once students have had time to practice silent reading, they should begin to improve their silent reading fluency. Silent reading fluency is when the student can read accurately, effortlessly, and automatically (Reutzel & Juth, 2014). Once students can do this effectively, then that will lead to improvements in their reading achievement.

How Silent Reading Will Improve Guided Reading Levels

The overall goal of this action research is to improve students' guided reading levels. In research studies, silent reading has consistently correlated positively with overall student reading achievement (Reutzel & Juth, 2014). In life, reading silently is a skill all people must have, so it is paramount that it is taught throughout school starting at the elementary level. Reading fluency has shown to be a major component of reading achievement and it needs to be mastered in the primary years of elementary school (Raninski, Samuels, Hiebert, Petscher, & Feller, 2011). The

sooner students feel comfortable reading silently the better because as they reach the higher grades, the more silent reading is being asked of them. The more time teachers give the students to read the better student comprehension will be (Kelley & Clausen-Grace, 2006). Teachers must make time for silent reading and in turn it will help improve student reading scores.

However, some of the research is mixed when it comes to silent reading. Some researchers have found that teacher monitoring of Silent Sustained Reading (SSR) will improve student comprehension and motivation to read more than traditional silent reading programs (Garan & DeVogd, 2008). They suggest that instead of the teacher leaving the students to read completely independently, the teacher should check-in with the students to assess their progress. There have also been studies that showed better comprehension with orally reading a text, so teachers need to give more support to students during silent reading time (Dickens & Meisinger, 2016). Teachers need to show students how to effectively read silently, so students can comprehend what they are reading. Teachers must also explain to students that reading the same text multiple times will help increase their fluency and reading a variety of genres will help increase their comprehension (Reutzel et al., 2008). With a little guidance from the teacher, students can truly appreciate the benefits of silent reading in the classroom.

Current Silent Reading Practices

Silent reading goes by many different names in the classroom. The most common names for it are Silent Sustained Reading (SSR), Drop Everything and Read (DEAR), and Sustained Quiet Uninterrupted Independent Reading Time (SQUIRT) (Reutzel & Juth 2014). Teachers can find numerous resources and visuals for all of these names that they can use in their classrooms. However in educational research it mostly goes by SSR. SSR was developed to practice fluency, increase vocabulary, and improve comprehension. It requires that the students have access to a

wide variety of books and they need to have time to read during the school day (Kelley & Clausen-Grace, 2006). Usually, SSR is free reading and students get to choose the book they will read during this time. There is no assessments, monitoring, or instruction from the teacher (Garan & DeVogd, 2008). However, some models of SSR do have monitoring from the teacher. Students need to have a certain number of books that must be read, the teacher can check-in with the students, and the students might have to keep a reading log. Regardless of how much monitoring is done by the teacher, students should be given 15-30 minutes of independent reading time daily with a book of their choice. These are the basic requirements to implement SSR.

However, over the years researchers have found some major flaws with implementing an SSR program. Many researches have concerns with keeping the students engaged with their reading. Studies have found that students are not choosing appropriate books for their current reading level. The books are either too easy or too hard, so they are not engaged with the text (Reutzel & Juth, 2014). This is especially true for low achieving students. They cannot read their chosen text so they are not getting any of the benefits from reading silently (Reutzel, Spichtig, & Petscher, 2012). Students are also choosing the same type of books to read over and over again. When students choose from only a few genres, they are not getting the benefits of reading a wide variety of texts (Kelley & Clausen-Grace, 2006). By reading a variety of genres, students are exposed to rich vocabulary and unique concepts.

Other studies have found that by not having discussions about their books the students are not held accountable for actually reading during this time (Kelley & Clausen-Grace, 2009). There is no follow up from the teacher and the students know this. This makes it very easy for the students to sit there with their book open, but not actually read any of the words on the page.

The students do not understand the value of reading books, so SSR did not help promote reading during their leisure time or during school hours (Chua, 2008). Many SSR programs suggest that teachers be a model of what a good reader looks like by reading their own independent book during this time (Reutzel et al., 2008). So instead of taking the time to explain to the students why reading silently will improve their reading ability, the teachers just told the students to pick a book and read for the next 15 minutes. Due to all of these concerns, teachers have stopped giving their students time for independent reading all together (Kelley & Clausen-Grace, 2009). By giving up on this type of program, teachers are denying their students the added benefits of reading silently. However, with a few minor changes to silent reading, it can be an invaluable part of a reading curriculum.

Current Interventions to Improve Silent Reading

In order to help promote silent reading in the classroom again, programs have been created to improve silent reading. The first program is called R5: Read & Relax, Reflect & Respond, and Rap (Reutzel & Juth, 2014). The goal of this program is to create engaged readers because engaged readers will develop better reading comprehension (Kelley & Clausen-Grace 2009). The Read and Relax part of the program gives the students a purpose for reading, a practice strategy they will use, and the teacher has conferences with the students to see how they are progressing (Kelley & Clausen-Grace, 2006). The next step is the Reflect and Respond part of the program. This is when the students write about the book they are reading and the strategy they are practicing. Finally the Rap is when the students can share and discuss their book with a partner or with the whole class. This program holds the students accountable for what they are reading and lets them interact with their books.

Another program that is an improvement on SSR is Scaffolded Silent Reading (ScSR). The goal of this program is to increase student engagement while they are silently reading (Raninski et al., 2011). ScSR has teacher directed lessons on choosing appropriate reading materials and the students are held accountable with reading logs and reports. The teacher must provide a wide variety of genres and texts, have individual conferences with students, and give students objectives for while they are reading (Reutzel et al., 2008). These programs were developed to help keep silent, independent reading in the classroom and to make sure students are getting the most educational benefits during this time.

Summary

Silent reading is an important part of overall reading success in school as well as in life. By giving students time each day to read independently, they can build their vocabulary, comprehension, and fluency. With some guidance and accountability given by the teacher, silent reading can help to improve reading scores in elementary students.

CHAPTER III

METHODS

Design

This was a descriptive study to determine if students reading for 15 extra minutes a day on their independent reading level will help improve their guided reading level. The participants in the study were second grade students of mixed reading abilities. The entire second grade class participated, so there was no randomization in this study. A pre-and post-test was given before and after the students started reading for the 15 extra minutes.

The independent variable was the 15 minutes of independent reading time. The dependent variable was the students' guided reading level. Guided reading level is the reading level where the most learning will take place. The students can read most of the words and can comprehend most of the text. By reading this level, the student gains some knowledge on the topic or concept of the book. There were no constraints involved in the design of this study.

Participants

The sampling methodology utilized in this study was convenience, as the researcher chose a sample of students that were already enrolled in the researcher's school and in her class. The researcher had easy access to the students and there was time built into her schedule to make sure there was 15 minutes every day for the students to independently read. The group of students were her entire second grade class which was 21 students. This group included nine female and 12 male students. The students were seven and eight-years-old when they participated in this study. The beginning guided reading levels ranged from below grade level to above grade level, therefore this was a mixed ability grouping of students.

Instrument

The instrument that was utilized for the pre-and post-test in this study was the Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark Assessment System. This assessment system places the students on a scale from A-Z. They have to read a text and answer comprehension questions about the fiction or nonfiction story. The educator will determine the percentage of accuracy bases on the students' reading errors and level of comprehension based on how detailed the students respond to the comprehension questions. These two scores will determine if that text is the students' independent, instructional, or hard reading level.

While there is no review of the Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark Assessment System in the Mental Measurement Yearbook, the Fountas and Pinnell Literacy Company assures this assessment is standardized and authentic (Woolett, 2017). In the assessment guide there are clear procedures and scoring guides to help the teachers complete this in a standardized way which would ensure this test's reliability. The assessment guide also claims that the child reading several books and discussing what they have read is a valid way to assess the child's reading comprehension.

Procedure

This study began in November 2017 with the administration of the pre-test and lasted until March 2018 with the administration of the post-test. Once the guided reading level was determined for each student, they were instructed on how to participate in this independent reading time. Whole group lessons on how to choose "just-right" books and how to read that book three different ways were presented to the students. The teacher explained "just-right" books were books the students could read with only a few mistakes. They are not working too hard to read or it is not too easy for them to read. Once they have their "just-right" book, then

they can read it three ways. They can “read” the pictures, read the words, and then re-tell the book to themselves.

The students were then given a blue bag with their guided reading levels (A-Z) written on them along with one level below and one level above. The students were instructed that they could pick books from the leveled classroom library with those same letters on them as their blue bag. Students are allowed to switch out their books daily. Then five days a week from 2:10-2:25, students would stop what they are doing and pull out their blue bag of books to read independently.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

Descriptive analyses were run to determine the proportion of students who did or did not demonstrate growth in their guided reading levels. Results are shown in Figure 1. Results indicated that 84.7 % (n=18) of students showed reading growth, while 14.3% (n=3) showed no growth in their guided reading levels. Of the students who demonstrated growth, 57.1% (n=12) of students grew two or more levels in their guided reading instruction. These results and their implications will be discussed in the next chapter.

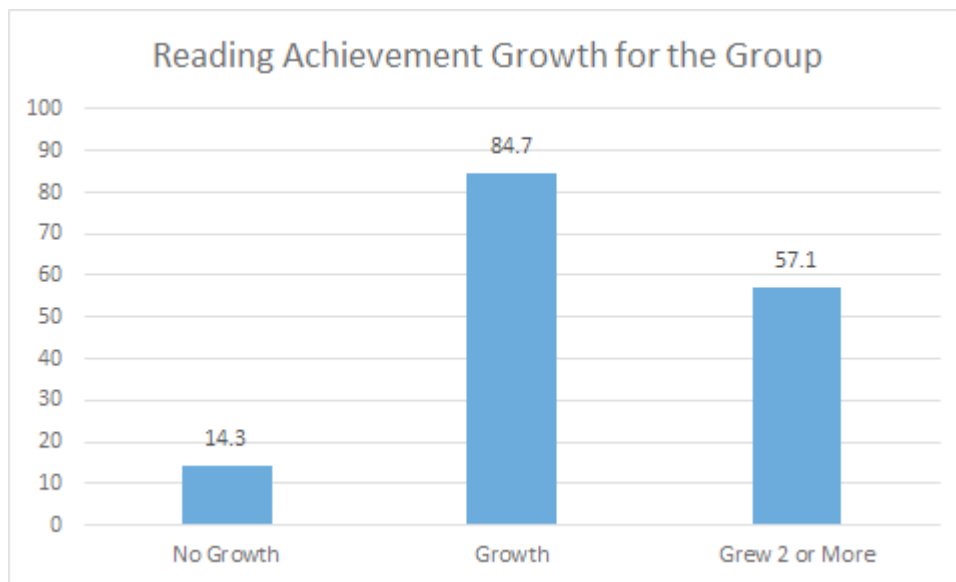


Figure 1

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

The researcher wanted to know what proportion of students participating in 15 minutes of independent reading time daily would demonstrate growth in their guided reading level. Out of the 21 students who participated in the study, 84.7% showed growth in their guided reading levels. Of that 84.7%, 57.1% showed growth of 2 or more guided reading levels. Therefore, students who do participate in 15 minutes of independent reading time will improve their guided reading levels.

Implications of the Results

The results of this study suggest that providing independent reading time with books that are on the students' guided reading levels will help the students progress to the next guided reading level. There was a significant proportion of students that improved their guided reading level and another proportion of that group improved two or more guided reading levels. This would imply that while students were reading on their guided reading level, they were learning new vocabulary, phonics patterns, and concepts to help them with their comprehension.

Theoretical Consequences

The results of this study did support some of the teaching suggestions discussed in Chapter II. Many of the studies found a positive correlation with time spent silently reading and reading achievement (Reutzel, Spichtig, & Petscher, 2012). The same relationship was found in this research study. Many of the studies suggest having a wide variety of books for the students to choose from in the classroom. They also suggest that the act of reading alone with no assessment or activity paired with it will improve the students' reading scores. One study did suggest to have a teacher directed lesson at the beginning of this silent reading program that

teaches students how to choose appropriate books for their silent reading time (Raninski, Samuels, Hiebert, Petscher, & Feller, 2011). The researcher did a similar lesson at the beginning of this study and it seemed to help the students choose books that were just right for them. The research seems to support the study's findings.

Threats to the Validity

Throughout this study some of the major threats to internal validity were maturation, selection of subjects, and history. This study was conducted over four months and during that time students could have had cognitive development unrelated to the silent reading that would also improve their reading levels.

Another threat to the validity was the selection of subjects. The sampling methodology utilized in this study was convenience, as the students were chosen because they were enrolled in the researcher's classroom. There was no randomization when choosing test subjects.

History is also a threat to the validity of the results of this study because of the instruction going on during the same time of this study. Students could have been using the knowledge from the daily language arts and phonics lessons to help them improve their guided reading levels. There was no way to directly link the silent reading to the increase of guided reading levels.

The external validity was also threatened because the results of this study could not be generalized to the population. This sample size was limited because it only consisted of 21 students who were in the researcher's classroom. In order for the results to be generalized to the population, the sample size would need to be much larger, randomly selected, and more representative of the general population.

Connections to Previous Studies/Existing Literature

Various studies have been conducted which try to demonstrate the correlation of silent reading to student reading achievement, similar to this study. In a comparison study, Reutzel and Juth (2014) describe two silent reading programs that they believe will help improve students' reading achievement. They first describe the precursors necessary to have a successful silent reading program. There must be appropriate student book selection, supportive classroom environment, and student engagement. In the researchers study, there was a lesson on how to choose a "just-right" book and the classroom was set up to allow students to read in areas of their choice. Reutzel and Juth then describe two evidence-based silent reading interventions, which are Scaffolded Silent Reading (ScSR) and R5. Both of these interventions start in a similar way to this study. The teacher demonstrates how to choose books to read and then show students appropriate ways to silently read them around the room. However, these two interventions take the silent reading program to the next level by holding the students accountable for what they are reading. They need to either meet with the teacher to discuss what they are reading or respond to their reading in writing. These aspects of the interventions were not explored in this study. Reutzel and Juth stated that by adding student accountability to their silent reading programs this improved student engagement in the silent reading. This in turn improved the students' overall reading achievement.

Implications for Future Research

This research could be used in future studies on improving guided reading levels or implementing a silent reading program with students. Additional research could include adding a student accountability aspect to the program, enlarging the sample size, or conducting the study with a control and treatment group. Not all of the students improved their guided reading levels

in this study. By adding a student accountability piece to the program to ensure student engagement in the silent reading, this might improve the guided reading levels of that 14.3% of students who showed no growth. The researcher could implement one of the following extensions to this study: teacher conferencing/discussing with students about what the students are reading, students recording the list of books they have read, or students responding to their reading with writing. The researcher could then see if adding an element of accountability would help to improve all students' guided reading levels.

The researcher could enlarge the sample size from just one second grade classroom to an entire school or several schools to broaden the results of this study. As it stands, the results of this study cannot be generalized to the population because it was only implemented with 21 students. However, if the program was administered to a much larger sample size, then the researcher could see if there was still a connection between silent reading and improvement of guided reading level. The researcher would then also be able to generalize the results to the population.

Finally, there was no way to directly connect the act of silent reading to the improvement of the students' guided reading levels. During this study, the students were also being instructed in language arts and phonics, which could have improved the students' guided reading levels by themselves. However, if the researcher was able to have a control group that just received the daily language arts and phonics lessons and a treatment group who additionally got 15 minutes to read silently, then the researcher could determine if the silent reading directly improved the guided reading levels.

Conclusion

It was determined that 84.7% of the second grade students did improve their guided reading levels when they were able to read independently and silently daily. From these results, one could see that adding a silent reading program would benefit the students in the elementary classroom. The researcher learned that future studies should examine the effect of holding students accountable for what they reading. Additionally, future studies could be conducted with a larger sample size and with a control/treatment group to improve the validity of this study.

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