Improving Reading Comprehension

in the

Elementary School Grades

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to determine whether including an additional program, Junior Great Books, to the curriculum would impact the reading comprehension of second grade students. The measurement tool was the Scholastic Reading Inventory Assessment. This study involved taking the assessment three times throughout the year to look at the progress of each student. Scores from the two years tested, showed little difference in utilizing Junior Great Books or not utilizing the program. Research in this area should continue because reading is so important in our society and for student growth.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Overview

At six years old, children know between 4,000-5,000 words (Child Development Tracker, 2019). Children will learn an additional 3,000 words each year. This means that by second grade, students will know about 7,000-8,000 words. According to PBS, the typical child has the capacity to learn about 20 new words a day on average during elementary school. Students who have trouble with reading comprehension will struggle retaining and learning all the new words that are expected. Additionally, those students will get further and further behind their same age peers because they are fighting to keep up academically.

A teacher's job includes helping students become proficient in their current grade and getting them ready to move to the next grade. This means helping those students who struggle and also challenging those who excel. This researcher wanted to see how different reading comprehension strategies and lessons impact student reading comprehension. This year, this researcher focused on Junior Great Books (JGB) as well as the lessons provided to the teacher by the county. This differs from the reading class last year because the researcher did not teach Junior Great Books.

Part of teaching JGB was utilizing close reading skills. This strategy involves being a text detective. JGB requires students to focus in on the information the text provides and figure out what the text is trying to teach. JGB also requires students to recognize the author's tone or perspective, understand the implications of the author's word choices, and understand the text structure or organization. Essentially, students are required to be a detective.

This researcher was interested to determine whether students had better reading comprehension skills in the year in which they participated in Junior Great Books. After the first

discussion, the researcher noticed that students were able to delve deep into the text and hold conversations together. They were making connections to past stories and noticing things without the researcher needing to step in.

This researcher was interested in this topic because reading comprehension is monumental in fostering success in students. Reading is a fact of life because everything we do involves reading. In math, we read word problems and equations. In science, we read labs and data that have been collected. In history, students are taught about many significant leaders and events throughout history, such as Abraham Lincoln, The Constitution, and the Civil War. Outside of school we read recipes, our phone messages, and directions to help us get to new places. In order for children to succeed in reading at every level, both academic and personal, they must understand what is being said. Reading comprehension will help them understand and help them process the information in the text.

The study looks at how to improve reading comprehension in elementary school students. This is an important age group in which to conduct the study because in the primary grades creating the foundation is so important. Without comprehension, reading becomes frustrating and pointless. Students give up and learn to hate reading. This is not what teachers want. Teachers want students to be successful and to reach all of their goals, both short- and long-term. Everyone has a teacher that they can think back to and thank for helping them get to where they are. It all starts with reading comprehension. This is why the researcher wanted to focus on reading comprehension for the study.

Statement of Problem

This study addressed whether adding an additional program, Junior Great Books, to the curriculum would impact the reading comprehension of second grade students.

Hypothesis

The null hypothesis for this research is that there will be no significant difference in the adjusted means of Scholastic Reading Inventory (SRI) lexiles of second grade students who participated in a supplemental Junior Great Books program compared to students that participated only in the standard curriculum when controlling for pre-intervention lexiles.

Operational Definitions

Standard curriculum-This is the standard second grade reading curriculum provided by the school system. It includes the use of Harcourt Storytown books. There are six different themes included in the curriculum. The themes are communities, count on me, the language of lessons, through the lens of others, creative thinkers, and seek and find.

Junior Great Books (JGB)- JGB is a strong, inquiry-based language arts program that refines and extends students' skills in reading, thinking, and communicating (Scholastic, 2019). The program is a model of student-centered learning in which students work with complex ideas and rigorous texts. Through consistent use of the program students develop their reading and thinking skills by asking questions, formulating and sharing their opinions, and supporting their ideas with evidence from the selections they read (Scholastic, 2019).

Small Group Instruction

Small group instruction is very important in improving reading comprehension in students who are struggling. Small groups allow the teacher to assist students by observing their reading behavior and teachers can support in using the correct strategies while they are reading. It also lets the teacher differentiate instruction for each group of students. In this study, small groups involved approximately 8 to 10 students that were grouped homogeneously from the students who were in the reading classroom.

Close Reading Skills

Close reading instruction teaches students to dive deeper into the story to gain a richer understanding of the text. Close reading requires students to read the text multiple times. Each time students reach the texts they focus on something new. "The first reading will focus on what the text says, second reading will focus on how the text works, the third will engage students in evaluating the text or compare it to other texts" (Scholastic, 2019). The JGB program involves close reading.

Reading Comprehension

Reading comprehension was operationally defined as performance on the Scholastic Reading Inventory (SRI). The SRI is an interactive and computer-based assessment designed to measure how well students read literature and expository texts of varying difficulties (Scholastic, 2019). This assessment gives each student a lexile number after completion of the test. Teachers then use these lexiles to determine proficiency levels and to watch student's growth. The lexiles help determine what stories and books each student should be reading in class. This also helps each student read at their appropriate level while also challenging them properly.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This literature review explores strategies to improve reading comprehension in elementary school students. Section one provides a definition of reading comprehension and explains why it is important. Section two covers the components of reading comprehension including: questioning techniques, motivation techniques, close reading, and vocabulary skills. Section three covers the assessments to help determine if students are developing a stronger reading comprehension. Finally, section four provides a conclusion.

Reading Comprehension

Reading comprehension is an interactive, strategic, adaptable process that occurs before, during and after a person reads. Reading comprehension is an interactive process because it involves not just the reader, but also the text and the context in which reading takes place. It is a strategic process because readers have purposes for their reading and use a variety of strategies and skills as they construct meaning. It is finally an adaptable process because readers change the strategies they use as they read different kinds of text or as they read for different purposes. To be able to accurately understand written material, children need to be able to: decode what they read, make connections between what they read and what they already know, and think deeply about what they have read. Strickland and Townsend explain in their article *The Development of Literacy in the Elementary School,* "Children's literacy development during the elementary school years is the foundation for their academic success and, to an extent, their life success in their later years" (Strickland & Townsend, 2011, p. 1).

Components of Reading Comprehension

Good readers monitor their comprehension as they read. When they realize that they do not understand what they are reading, they apply procedures to "repair" or "fix-up" their lack of understanding. The first strategy they might use to help them understand their reading is to ask

themselves questions. When readers ask questions as they read, they are not only interacting with the text to make meaning of it, but they are also monitoring their own comprehension of what they are reading. Even children who are strong readers, they don't instinctively know that good readers ask questions as they read. This is where the teacher can step in. Teachers who model how to ask questions while reading help children to learn how to build interest with the text and become stronger readers.

One questioning technique is DeBono's Six Thinking Hats. In his book, *Serious Creativity*, Edward de Bono asks you to imagine six colored hats (1993). Each hat represents a role your mind plays in the critical thinking process. By switching from one hat to another as you think about your topic, you are forced to look at your topic from a variety of perspectives. White hat is used to think about facts and information. White hats questions include: "What do I know? What do I need to find out? How will I get the information I need?" Blue hat is used to think about the process and the main idea. Blue hats questions include: "What thinking is needed? Where are we now? What do we need to do next?" Red hat is used to think about feelings. Red hats questions include: "How do I feel about this? What do I like about these feelings? What do I not like about these feelings?" Yellow hat is used to think about the benefits. Yellow hats questions include: "Why is this a good idea? What are the advantages and benefits?" Green hat is used to think creatively. Green hats questions include: "What new ideas are possible? What is my suggestion? How can this be changed or improved?" Lastly is black hat, which is used to think cautiously. Black hats questions include: "What problems could arise? What are the disadvantages?" By having students complete a reading assignment from the viewpoint of one or multiple hats, the students will be required to think about the topic in a new or different idea and in turn giving them a better understanding of what they are reading. This way, learners are physically moving between the hats. Therefore, they are moving between the different modes of

thinking (De Bono's Six Hats, 2016). To summarize, by utilizing DeBono's Six Thinking Hats, students can answer more complex questions and are given the task to focus and develop their comprehension skills.

Another questioning technique is asking Thick and Thin Questions. Thick questions lead the learner to deeper thinking. They connect to background knowledge and have longer more thought-provoking answers than thin questions (Thick and Thin Questions, 2016). Answers to thick questions are complex, open ended, and deal with the "big picture." Thin questions deal with specific content and the answers are short and close ended. Thin questions are asked "to dispel confusion" and can be answered simply. These questions are needed, but they do not usually lead to stimulating discussions. Both types of questions have their place, but we should encourage students to see the value of the thick questions that lead to better conceptual understanding. Thick question starters include: "What if…", "Why did…", and "What caused…". Thin question starters include: "How many…", "Who…", and "What…". By explicitly teaching questioning techniques, and celebrating more than the quick answer, we empower students to ask more thought-provoking questions (Thick and Thin Questions, 2016). This helps them to become more self-sufficient problem solvers who can use inquiry to assess their work.

The last questioning technique is the Q-Matrix. The Q-Matrix (Q for question) was designed and developed by Chuck Wiederhold in 1991 (Idek, 2016). It is constructed from the six questions starters of what, where, when, which, who, why, and how. It can then be combined with six verbs: is, did, can, would, will and might. It contains 36 different combinations of question starters. This matrix can be used by teachers and by students to create questions. The 36 question starters can be used for any topic that move from recall questions at the very basic level to higher level that involves analytical, creative and critical thinking. The questions become

more complex and open ended as it proceeds through the matrix. The chart can guide teaching and learning as teachers are able to design questions at the level the student is able to fulfill and also to construct increasingly more complex questions that can challenge them to think more critically.

The next technique to improve reading comprehension is motivation techniques. Stutz, Schaffner and Schiefele stated that reading amount was assumed to mediate the relation between reading motivation and reading comprehension (2015). Students need to be given the right amount of reading. This means enough to challenge them and to gain understanding, but not so much that students feel overwhelmed and just want to quit. This evolves to interest in the task. If a student is not interested in their learning, then they will not find value in the task or the content. If students do not recognize the value, they may not be motivated to expend the effort and they will not take ownership of the material. In order to help overcome this the teacher can implement multiple strategies into their teaching including: showing relevance to student's lives, real-world application, allowing students some amount of choice, and showing your passion and enthusiasm in the topic. If students feel that the topic and themselves as students are important then they will expend the effort.

Additionally, intrinsic motivation is very important to encourage students to complete a task. Students who read because they love to read and to learn are motivated intrinsically. They want to complete the task because they enjoy it. Students who do not enjoy reading but know that their teacher or parent want them to read are motivated extrinsically. An extremely widespread research finding is that internal motivations (interest, intrinsic motivation) are positively correlated with reading achievement, and external motivations (pressure, requirements, rules) are not correlated with reading achievement (McRae & Guthrie, 2013). We

want our students to love learning and to understand everything that we teach them. If they are intrinsically motivated, then learning will happen at the student's pace.

Another technique to improve reading comprehension is close reading. Close reading is an important component of the standards that can be addressed through discussion. There are various definitions of close reading, but essentially close reading promotes "thoughtful, critical analysis of a text that focuses on significant details or patterns in order to develop a deep, precise understanding of the text's form" (Burke, 2017, p. 2). Close reading expects readers to focus on the information that a text provides, without relying on a lot of information or support. This is different from other kinds of reading lessons you teach, "in which you may start out by introducing teacher-set purposes, discussions of students' life experiences, picture walks, and so on" (Shanahan, 2019, para.5). Close reading discourages such front-loading. The goal of close reading instruction is to foster independent readers who are able to "plumb the depths of a text by considering only the text itself" (para. 6).

During close reading students can dive deeper into a text and analyze, interpret, and infer using a variety of literacy skills. While students closely read, they are understanding the purpose for reading that text. Close reading involves three different readings. The first reading will focus on what the text says. The second reading will emphasize how the text works. The third will engage students in evaluating the text, comparing it with other texts, or thinking about its implications in their lives. As such, it is used with complex texts. Given that students in the primary grades are learning to read, the texts used for close reading are typically much more difficult than those used for developing students' foundational skills (Fisher & Frey, 2014). If students dive deep in the text with a strong understanding, then their reading comprehension will continue to grow.

The last technique discussed in this paper to help improve reading comprehension is vocabulary. Reading vocabulary refers to the words we need to know to help us understand what we read. We need to teach and help students learn to use context clues to determine the meanings of words. It is important to teach them that some context clues are more helpful than others and provide examples of helpful and less helpful clues. Then, have students use the taught vocabulary words often and in various ways both orally and in writing so they are better able to remember the words and their meanings. Another way to help improve comprehension with vocabulary is to teach students about the important, useful, and difficult vocabulary words before students read the text. This will help them remember the words and improve comprehension as they read. By teaching during explicit instruction students can use their knowledge during independent readings. However, vocabulary does not have to be taught while students are reading a text themselves. Teachers should read to their class each day. When the book contains a new or interesting word, pause and define the word for your students. After you're done reading, engage your students in a meaningful conversation about the book.

Additionally, vocabulary can be fun and engaging by playing oral and written word exercises and games. One game that you can play in your classroom is human Tic-Tac-Toe. The class is split into 2 teams. The teacher creates a tic- tac-toe board on the carpet with tape or chalk. The teacher asks one team how to spell a word and to give a definition. If the student responds correctly, she/he takes a place on the tic-tac-toe board. Students cannot advise their teammates or competitors about where they should stand on the board. The teacher then gives a vocab word to the first child in the other line. If the answer is correct, that child takes a position on the board. If it is not correct, the question goes to the first child in the other line and the student who answered incorrectly goes to the end of the line. Have the students who are waiting write the vocabulary word on a white board, so all students are engaged in the activity. Play

continues until one team achieves three in a row. In the primary grades learning should be fun and engaging. By creating games students are learning so much more than they ever imagined.

Assessment of Comprehension

Assessments are given to determine which students are below grade level, on-grade level, and above grade level. This helps teachers establish what texts and what teaching needs to be done for each group of students. One test that is administered is Scholastic Reading Inventory or SRI. SRI is an interactive computer-adaptive assessment designed to measure how well students read literature and expository texts of varying difficulties. This psychometrically valid assessment instrument can be used as a diagnostic tool to place students at the best level in the program, so they can read with success (Scholastic Reading Inventory, 2011). When students are finished the inventory, they are given a Lexile Score ranging from Beginning Reader to 1,500. A Lexile measure is determined by the difficulty of the items to which a student responded. This inventory provides teachers with a tool for evaluating and monitoring student progress. It also allows teachers to match student groups to text that will be on their level or to challenge them appropriately.

A second tool that is used in classrooms to monitor student progress is the assessments from Junior Great Books. Junior Great Books is a strong, inquiry-based language arts program that refines and extends students' skills in reading, thinking, and communicating (Montgomery County Public Schools, 2019). Shared Inquiry reading, discussion, and writing activities may be used with a wide range of literature to encourage students to use high level thinking processes as they explore curricular themes. After the implementation of the curriculum through books and stories there is an assessment to determine if students used the techniques taught to understand the text. Questions range from multiple choice questions, vocabulary

questions, and a written response. Teachers can see if students comprehended the text by how they did on the assessment.

Conclusion

Reading comprehension is monumental in fostering success in students. Reading is a fact of life because everything involves reading. In math students read word problems and need to understand what the question is asking. Outside of school students read recipes and directions to determine the next steps. Reading comprehension is an interactive process because it involves not just the reader, but also the text and the context in which reading takes place. It is a strategic process because readers have purposes for their reading and use a variety of strategies and skills as they construct meaning. Strategies include questioning, motivation, close reading, and vocabulary. When used correctly students can gain a deeper knowledge of the text and can develop strong ideas from what they read.

CHAPTER III

METHODS

Design

The study had a variant of nonequivalent control group design, which is a type of quasi-experimental design. Two preexisting second grade classrooms were assigned to a treatment and control group conditions. Unlike in a traditional nonequivalent control group design, assignment of the classrooms was not random. The students in the researcher's current classroom were in the treatment/Junior Great Books condition while students in the researcher's last year classroom were in the control group. The independent variable for this study included the use of Junior Great Books. The dependent variable for the study were the use of SRI Lexile scores. Scores from the fall administration of the SRI were used as pre-test data to evaluate whether the groups differed significantly in SRI performance prior to the intervention. Scores from the spring administration of the SRI were used as post-test data. Due to pre-existing differences in pre-test scores, an analysis of covariance, controlling for fall SRI lexiles, was conducted to compare post-test scores.

Participants

The researcher was a second-grade language arts teacher. There were 3 second grade classrooms in the school. The school is in a suburban area school in the mid-atlantic region. According to school records, twenty-four percent of students in this school are from low-income families with seventy-one percent white and nine percent African American.

Students were placed in different classrooms based on ability level according to information gathered from the previous school year and the beginning of the current school year. Information gathered included Fountas and Pinnell levels (Heinemann, 2019) and Scholastic Reading Inventory levels. The reading specialist then determined which class was best for each

student. The researcher's classroom was designated to be a high ability level classroom in both years of the study.

In both years, students were in the researcher's classroom for one hour, five times a week. Last year the researcher's classroom included 11 boys and 10 girls. They were all between the ages of 7 and 8. This year the researcher's classroom included 7 boys and 13 girls. They were all between the ages of 7 and 8.

Instrument

The Scholastic Reading Inventory (SRI) was used as the measure of reading comprehension. SRI is an interactive and computer-adaptive assessment designed to measure how well students read literature and expository texts of varying difficulties. At the end of the test each student receives a test score. That score is then documented and compared to end of year progression scores. For example, at the end of second grade the proficiency range is 420-650.

SRI is both valid and reliable according to the Scholastic Reading Inventory Educator's Guide (Scholastic Reading Inventory, 2011). Validity indicates whether the test measures what it is supposed to measure. SRI has documented three different ways to examine the validity of the SRI assessment. Each type of validation asks an important question about the test. First there is Content Validity, "Does the test sample important content related to what the test is supposed to measure?" (Scholastic Reading Inventory, 2011, p. 16). The SRI consists of short passages and questions that measure comprehension by focusing on skills readers use when studying written materials from a variety of content areas. The second is Construct Validity, "Does the test measure the theoretical construct (or trait) it is supposed to measure?" (Scholastic Reading Inventory, 2011, p. 17). The SRI has been found to have adequate construct validity using several measures, including developmental changes in test scores and correlation with similar

tests that measure reading comprehension. Lastly there is Criterion-Related Validity, "Does the test adequately predict the test-taker's behavior in a specific situation?" (Scholastic Reading Inventory, 2011, p.18). SRI has been directly correlated with numerous state assessments. All studies reveal statistically significant and positive correlations between the SRI and other reading measures.

According to the Scholastic Reading Inventory Educator's Guide the assessment is also reliable (Scholastic Reading Inventory, 2011). The test is reliable because it creates stable and consistent results. It is a computer-based test so there is no human error. The computer algorithm that controls the administration of the SRI uses a statistical procedure designed to estimate each student's ability to comprehend text. SRI states:

> The algorithm uses prior information about students' levels to control the selection of questions and the calculation of each student's reading ability after they respond to each question. When students take a computer-adaptive test, they all receive approximately the same raw score, or number of items answered correctly. This occurs because all students answer questions that are targeted for their unique ability—not questions that are too easy or too hard. (Scholastic Reading Inventory, 2011, p.21)

Procedure

In both years of the study, information about baseline reading comprehension skills was obtained in the fall, during the beginning of the school year. The SRI test was taken within the first few weeks of school. This is done so there is a limit of reading instruction in the new school year. After the first SRI test is completed, the information is put into a document to keep track of the scores. For the purposes of this study, the fall scores were compared by an independent samples t-test. An independent samples t-test indicated that the fall SRI scores was significantly lower for the standard curriculum group (Mean = 489.00, SD = 95.84) than for the Junior Great

Books group (Mean = 577.75) [t (39) = 2.38, p < .05]. In both years the students took a second

SRI in the winter. Those scores were used for instructional decision making by the researcher.

The data, however, was not used for the analyses in the current study.

The second-grade curriculum is split into 6 units. These units include communities, count

on me, the language of lessons, through the lens of others, creative thinkers, and seek and find.

Within each unit there are essential questions that lead the focus for each unit. For example, unit

1 has three essential questions. The first is, "What is a community and how is being a part of a

community beneficial?" The second question is, "How do characters/individuals work together

to create and sustain a community?" The final essential questions asks, "What is my

responsibility in my community and its responsibility to me?" By the end of each unit students

need to be able to answer each question with evidence gained from the unit.

The class in the first year of the study did not receive JGB instruction. They received the

reading series that was given to teachers by the reading department. Instead of reading JGB they

read books from the Harcourt Storytown Series. There are two Storytown textbooks that are

organized by themes. Themes in Harcourt include Count on Me, Doing Our Best, Changing

Times, Dream Big, Better Together, and Seek and Find. Some examples of stories that are

included in the themes are Farmer Fred, Annie's Gift, Tanya's Garden, and Dogs. These stories

are a mix of non-fiction and fiction. Harcourt books were developed to have a "Balanced literacy

program with Professional courses and coaching that foster a student-centered approach to

instruction that helps students grow as readers, writers, and independent learners" (Houghton

Mifflin Harcourt, 2019, p. 2). Graphic organizers were given to students to fill out as they read.

Graphic organizers would ask students about the different parts of the story. For example,

setting, characters, lesson learned, and the conclusion. This is different from JGB because with

JGB students make their own organizers and are given a question to answer for the day as they read.

The JGB program was used in the second year of the study. This program involves teaching multiple reading comprehension skills including close reading, motivation techniques, questioning techniques, and vocabulary. "The mission of the Great Books Foundation is to advance the critical, reflective thinking and social and civic engagement of readers of all ages through Shared Inquiry discussion of works and ideas of enduring value" (Great Books Foundation, 2019, p.2). The introduction of this program is done in the beginning of the school year. Instructions are given on how each day of JGB works. The first day is the first read. While reading, students write down questions that they have and any vocabulary words they do not know. The second day is for the second read. Students take notes on a specific question given to them by the teacher. The third day is to get ready for a discussion. Students are given a specific question for the shared inquiry discussion. Students write down an answer and include evidence to support. The fourth and final day is for the quiz.

JGB focus on Shared Inquiry for their discussions. Shared Inquiry is a method of teaching and learning that enables people of all ages to explore the ideas, meaning, and information found in everything they read. It centers on "interpretive questions that have more than one plausible answer and can lead to engaging and insightful conversations about the text. It is based on the conviction that participants can gain a deeper understanding of a text when they work together and are prompted by the skilled questioning of their discussion leader" (Great Books Foundation, 2019, p.2). Typically the discussion leader, or teacher, does not lead the discussion; the students themselves run the discussions. For this study the discussion leader was the researcher. The researcher helped facilitate by asking questions to further the discussion but never gave answers.

Books chosen for students to read depend on their reading level and grade. The books range from 20-40 pages in length. Books are primarily fiction and they are separated by themes. Some themes are kindness, confidence, friendship, community, and being yourself. Books are chosen by the theme that matches the unit of study the class is currently in. For example, when the researcher was in Through the Lens of Others unit the class read stories in the bravery theme. Some titles included in JGB are *Jack and the Beanstalk*, *Nail Soup*, *Doodle Flute*, and *Miss Maggie*.

In both years, the students completed the spring SRI. Scores were compared by an analysis of covariance with fall SRI scores as the covariate.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

This study addressed whether including an additional program, Junior Great Books, to the curriculum would impact the reading comprehension of second grade students. The null hypothesis for this research is that there will be no significant difference in the adjusted means of Scholastic Reading Inventory (SRI) lexiles of second grade students who participated in a supplemental Junior Great Books program compared to students that participated only in the standard curriculum when controlling for pre-intervention lexiles.

The independent variable for this study was type of reading curriculum instruction-- Junior Great Books or the standard curriculum. The dependent variable for the study was SRI Lexile scores. An independent samples t-test indicated that the fall SRI scores was significantly lower for the standard curriculum group (Mean = 489.00, SD = 95.84) than for the Junior Great Books group (Mean = 577.75) [t (39) = 2.38, p < .05]. Due to pre-existing differences prior to the intervention, a one-way ANCOVA was conducted to determine if there was a statistically significant difference in spring SRI scores between the standard curriculum group (estimated marginal mean = 703.49) and the Junior Great Books group (estimated marginal mean = 751.74) with Fall SRI scores as the covariate. There was not a significant effect for type of curriculum on spring SRI scores after controlling for Fall SRI scores, [F (1,38) = 2.15, p = .15]. Please see Table 1 for descriptive statistics and adjusted means and Table 2 for a summary of ANCOVA results. Consequently, the null hypothesis that there will be no significant difference in the adjusted means of Scholastic Reading Inventory (SRI) lexiles of second grade students who participated in a supplemental Junior Great Books program compared to students that participated only in the standard curriculum when controlling for pre-intervention lexiles was retained.

Table 1
Descriptive Statistics and Adjusted Means for SRI Scores

Condition	N	Fall SRI (pre-test)		Spring SRI (post-test)		
				Obtained		Adjusted
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean
Standard Curriculum	21	489.00	95.84	672.81	118.69	703.49
Junior Great Books	20	577.75	140.06	783.95	138.69	751.74

Table 2
Analysis of Covariance: Comparison of Traditional and Junior Great Book Groups on Spring SRI Scores with Fall SRI Scores as Covariate

Source of Variation	Df	Mean Squares	F
Curriculum	1	20830.66	2.15 (NS)
Error	38	9679.75	

NS = non-significant at $p \leq .05$

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

This researcher wanted to see how different reading comprehension strategies and lessons impact student reading comprehension among second grade students. This year, this researcher focused on JGB and well as the lessons provided to the teacher by the county. This differs from the reading class last year because the researcher did not teach JGB. Part of teaching JGB was utilizing close reading skills. This strategy involves being a text detective (Shanahan, 2019). JGB requires students to focus in on the information the text provides and figure out what the text is trying to teach. JGB also requires students to recognize the author's tone or perspective, understand the implications of the author's word choices, and understand the texts structure or organization. Essentially, students are required to be a detective.

The researcher found that there was not a significant difference between spring SRI lexiles, when controlling for fall SRI lexiles, between students in the two different school years. Consequently, the null hypothesis that there will be no significant difference in the adjusted means of Scholastic Reading Inventory (SRI) lexiles of second grade students who participated in a supplemental Junior Great Books program compared to students that participated only in the standard curriculum when controlling for pre-intervention lexiles was retained.

Implications of The Results

Due to this study finding no significant changes in students SRI scores, the practical implication is that schools do not need to purchase the JGB curriculum if the outcome measure of interest is SRI lexiles. Schools can implement the standard curriculum that the county has already created and purchased. JGB is not needed as a supplement to the already established curriculum.

The researcher found that students responded better to the JGB program when compared to the standard curriculum. They enjoyed reading the stories more and were able to make more connections to self and to other stories. Students were also able dive deeper into the text to gain a better understanding by using higher level reasoning skills. During written responses students were able to write longer and more complex responses.

Theoretical Consequences

Close reading is an important component of JGB. There are various definitions of close reading, but essentially close reading promotes "thoughtful, critical analysis of a text that focuses on significant details or patterns in order to develop a deep, precise understanding of the text's form" (Burke, 2017, p. 2). Close reading expects readers to focus on the information that a text provides, without relying on a lot of information or support. This is different from other kinds of reading lessons you teach, "in which you may start out by introducing teacher-set purposes, discussions of students' life experiences, picture walks, and so on" (Shanahan, 2019, para. 5). Close reading discourages such front-loading. The goal of close reading instruction is to foster independent readers who are able to "plumb the depths of a text by considering only the text itself (para. 6)".

The researcher believes that JGB does a very good job at supporting close reading by giving students specific things to look for each day. Students are to find evidence that supports a question or thought. Students are given little information in the beginning but are expected to find lots of supportive evidence. JGB has students read for a specific purpose.

Threats to the Validity

One threat to the validity of the study was the small number of subjects. Only two second grade classes were used. Having more students in the study would give the study more statistical power and make it more likely to identify any differences due to variations in the curriculum.

An external threat to the validity, includes the researcher not following the JGB procedures exactly. This is because there were discussions in the beginning of the year that the researcher led instead of the students. As the year progressed, students took more control of the discussions.

An internal threat to the validity was the children's behavior during testing. It is difficult for seven-year-old students to sit quietly while others finish the test with their computer turned off. This is a difficult thing for students to do without distracting others. Also, the setting of the computer room has opportunities for distraction with students sitting so close to each other. Both of these threats may affect the scores of students.

Connections to Previous Studies/Existing Literature

Case studies completed in Washington D.C., New York, and Chicago showed significant improvements in their students reading comprehension while utilizing the JGB curriculum. However, the age groups of these studies differ from the age group that the researcher focused on. In Washington D.C., New York and Chicago, grades three, four, and five received the program, while the researcher focused on second grade. The teachers from the case studies had support from a panel that offered teachers suggestions to improve and what to do next (Measuring the benefits, 2015). The researcher believes that this greatly helped increase the scores of their students.

Implications for Future Research

With regard to further studies, more research will need to be conducted to determine the effectiveness JGB has on reading comprehension of students. During this study there was no significant difference in the adjusted means of Scholastic Reading Inventory (SRI) lexiles of second grade students who participated in a supplemental Junior Great Books program compared to students that participated only in the standard curriculum when controlling for pre-intervention lexiles was retained. In a further study the researcher might consider using a bigger sample size to determine the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of using JGB in the classroom.

Looking back at the study the researcher found that only using one assessment does not give the bigger picture of what students are capable of completing with the use of JGB. The researcher found that after implementing JGB into the classroom students were more skilled in completing writing assignments and were more accomplished during discussions.

The writing samples of the current school year were of a higher caliber compared to last years. They made more connections are were able to write more with little teacher input. Also, after the first discussion, the researcher noticed that students were able to delve deep into the text and hold longer conversations. They were making connections to past stories and noticing things without the researcher needing to step in. As the year went on students were able to strengthen their skills in more areas than just reading comprehension.

Conclusions/Summary

The statistical analyses indicated that there was no significant difference in reading comprehension skills between students who participated in the standard curriculum and students who participated in JGB. Observational data, however, suggested that participating in JGB helps student improve their writing, delve deeper into the text, and hold longer conversations. Further research should be conducted on JGB because although students were successful under both

conditions, the JGB curriculum better prepares students to be more complex readers and thinkers.

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