

The Impact of Guided Reading Instruction on Students'  
Reading Achievement in Second Grade

By Morgan Mwaura

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

July 2018

Graduate Programs in Education  
Goucher College

## Table of Contents

List of Tables	i
Abstract	ii
I. Introduction	1
Overview	1
Statement of the Problem	2
Statement of Research Question	2
Operational Definitions	2
II. Literature Review	3
Introduction	3
Independent Reading Ability	3
Guided Reading	5
Effects of Guided Reading on Independent Reading Ability	6
Summary	8
III. Methods	9
Design	9
Participants	9
Instrument	9
Procedure	10
IV. Results	11
V. Discussion	13
Implications of Results	13
Theoretical Consequences	14

Threats to Validity	15
Connections to Previous Studies/Existing Literature	16
Implications for Future Research	17
Conclusion	18
References	19

## List of Tables

1. Figure 1: Reading Growth for the Group	15
---	----

## Abstract

The purpose of this study was to determine the impact of guided reading instruction on students' reading achievement in second grade. The Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark Assessment Kit was used to determine the students' independent reading ability. The students' fluency, accuracy, and comprehension were assessed to evaluate their reading level. After the pretest data was collected, small group guided reading instruction was implemented a few times a week to address their independent reading level needs. The Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark Assessment Kit was used again to collect posttest data after the seven-week guided reading instructional intervention. Findings shows that there was no statistically significant difference in students' reading growth, but more students did make improvements.

# **CHAPTER I**

## **INTRODUCTION**

### **Overview**

Each year, students begin a new grade level although academically they may not be ready to tackle the learning challenges that follow. For students who are academically below grade level in reading, school can become a daunting task. Extensive research has been conducted that proves that children who get off to a poor start in reading rarely catch up (Iaquinta, 2006). Teachers are now faced with the challenge of how to prevent these serious reading deficits from occurring.

In the researcher's school, there has been an increase in the number of students who are exhibiting difficulties with reading across all grade levels. To help combat this concern, administrators have encouraged all educators to make use of guided reading instruction in the classroom. Guided reading instruction supports the reader's development of effective strategies for processing novel texts at increasingly challenging levels of difficulty (Fountas & Pinnell, 2012). Teachers have been equipped with the necessary materials and professional development in order to implement this reading instruction. The researcher took an interest in guided reading to see whether it would increase the students' independent reading level to get them where they need to be academically.

A review of literature related of guided reading suggested that it could provide meaningful improvements in reading skills (Duke & Block, 2012). The researcher conducted research in a second-grade classroom to determine the impact on the students' reading ability.

### **Statement of Problem**

The purpose of this study was to examine the impact of implementing guided reading lessons on students' independent reading levels, as demonstrated by the Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark Assessment data.

### **Research Question**

What proportion of students participating in guided reading will demonstrate growth in reading achievement?

### **Operational Definitions**

*Guided reading instruction* is operationally defined as a structured practice implemented in a balanced literacy framework. The students were placed in guided reading groups based on their independent reading level that was assessed at the beginning of this study. Guided reading instruction was implemented in small groups about three to four times a week. Each lesson was conducted for 15-20 minutes.

*Independent reading level* is defined as students' ability to read with success on their own. Students' ability to read accurately and fluently and to be able to comprehend determines their overall independent reading level. Students' reading levels can be assessed by using the Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark Assessment. For this study, students' levels were assessed in the beginning and at the end after receiving guided reading instruction for seven weeks.

## **CHAPTER II**

### **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

#### **Introduction**

Learning how to read may sound like a simple task, but it is a challenge for many young students. It is known that the foundational reading skills are presented during the early childhood and primary years of school. Recently, educators are more readily recognizing the importance of these reading skills and the true effects of deficits in those reading areas. If students are unable to learn how to read during primary grades, then they will be unable to read to learn in the following years to come. Data proves that students have major reading skill deficits, and research is being conducted on what interventions can be implemented. This review of literature will support the idea that guided reading instruction is crucial for students to develop and maintain their independent reading ability.

Section one of the review will explore independent reading ability. Section two will provide more information about guided reading. In the third section, the effects of guided reading on students' independent reading ability are described. A summary is provided to conclude the review.

#### **Independent Reading Ability**

There are certain components that determine a student's independent reading ability. The three components are fluency, accuracy, and comprehension. Fluency includes the reader's ability to integrate, rate, intonate, stress, phrase, and pause while reading. Accuracy is the reader's ability to correctly read words throughout the text. Comprehension is the reader's ability to share his/her understanding from what he/she has read.

The three components can be assessed and determined by completing a running record or benchmark assessment. During this time, the teacher is assessing the student's accuracy level, fluency, and comprehension of the text, and observing oral reading behaviors to learn more about the student (Fountas & Pinnell, 2012). From there, a student can be leveled using the Fountas and Pinnell gradient scale from A-Z.

When all of the components are working together, a student can become a strong reader. The three components working in harmony create a confident reader and writer in the classroom. Kindergarten through third grade is a crucial time in the development of foundational literacy skills (Snyder & Golightly, 2017). A teacher's main goal is to ensure that students develop basic reading skills so then higher reading skills such as fluency and comprehension can be incorporated into instruction.

The student's independent reading ability is expected to increase several levels throughout each grade level. First grade has the most demand for growth. A student should begin first grade at a level E and finish reading at a level J (Fountas & Pinnell, 2012). In second grade, a student should begin reading at a level J and finish reading at a level M.

However, if a student does not have all of these components working together, then reading can become quite the challenge. The Common Core State Standards have set high expectations for comprehension among many other things (Duke & Block, 2012). Duke and Block (2012) state that "While failure to build the conceptual and content knowledge in primary graders may not affect reading development in the short term, the long-term results of this failure may be substantial" (p. 61). Iaquina (2006) states "...a child who is a poor reader in first grade

is 88% more likely to remain a poor reader in fourth grade” (p. 413). It is clear these reading deficits have daunting effects on young students, so the question is, what can be done to fix it?

### **Guided Reading**

Guided reading is a component necessary for a balanced literacy program. Guided reading is a research-based strategy and is known as an appropriate strategy for children in the early years of literacy development (Iaquinta, 2006). It provides differentiated small-group reading instruction to students with similar strengths and instructional needs (Avalos, Plasencia, Chavez, & Rascon, 2007). This strategy can be used for struggling or independent readers, and its overall purpose is to meet the individual needs of all students (Fawson & Reutzel, 2000). Proper implementation of guided reading in the classroom would reduce the number of out of level interventions needed for students (Ford & Opitz, 2008). Guided reading allows flexibility in choosing any reading material or strategy in order to provide the supportive instruction students need in order to become successful readers (Schirmer & Schaffer, 2010).

There is a structure to follow in order to create a well-designed and effective guided reading lesson. First, data should be collected and analyzed in order to group students based on strengths and needs. From there, the following steps can then be taken to design the lesson: selection of text, introduction to the text, reading the text, discussion of text, teaching points, word work, and extension of understanding (Fountas & Pinnell, 2012). During text selection, the teacher carefully chooses a text that is at the students’ instructional level and allows opportunities for growth of strategies and reading components. When the text is introduced, the teacher provides a synopsis of the story to help prepare the readers and boost their confidence. Students then begin to read the text independently and quietly to themselves. This allows the teacher time to listen in to each student and take note on individual reading behaviors such as

fluency and accuracy. After the text is read, a discussion is held among teachers and students to check their comprehension. During this discussion, it is also a good time to bring up valuable teaching points. The teacher can find these moments from the common errors or misconceptions that she or he noticed when students were independently reading. After, the students participate in a word work activity. This may consist of letter sound identification, sight words, etc. Finally, an extension activity may be given at the end. This usually is a writing prompt to extend students' learning and to support their writing skills.

Guided reading can be implemented in any classroom with the necessary materials, data, and effort from the teacher. It is crucial to have a variety of leveled texts to fit the Fountas and Pinnell system gradient level. Since guided reading is conducted in small groups, it is necessary to have a designated spot available in the classroom to use during this time. The lesson is about 15-20 minutes long. Students should have access to books, word work materials, and other supplemental writing materials. Data is needed before guided reading can begin so teachers are aware of the students' current independent reading ability and reading behaviors. Data should also be continuously collected in order to best meet the needs of the students. Most importantly, the teachers must show enthusiasm and must help students become strategic problem solvers (Lipp & Helfrich, 2016). Teachers should be observant to provide effective strategies and feedback to help the students become more independent readers (Iaquinta, 2006).

### **Effects of Guided Reading on Independent Reading Ability**

Fawson and Reutzel (2000) state that, "Guided reading is an important "best practice" associated with today's balanced literacy instruction" (p. 14). That statement can be proved based on the evidence on its effects of students' independent reading ability. Overall, guided reading builds a strong reading process within students by making them active learners (Askew

& Fountas, 1998). Active learning includes monitoring and checking strategies, word solving strategies, processing information, and more. Guided reading lessons can address a student's accuracy, fluency, and comprehension.

Guided reading lessons can benefit a student's accuracy. Students are given opportunities to solve words, monitor and correct, utilize word attack strategies, and practice word work activities to build their accuracy level (Fountas & Pinnell, 2012). By using books on their reading level, they are able to use phonemic awareness and phonics skills to help them with the word attack. The teacher allows word work which focuses on phonological awareness, vocabulary skills, or orthographical awareness (Avalos et al., 2007).

Guided reading also promotes growth of students' fluency rate. The independent, whisper read conducted at guided reading builds fluency. During this time, teachers encourage students to read at a fluent pace and correct choppy, slow, or staccato reading (Lipp & Helfrich, 2016). Fluent readers save their mental resources for comprehension. Students are able to practice emphasized pausing, phrasing, word stress, and intonation (Fountas & Pinnell, 2012).

Reading comprehension is also positively impacted by guided reading instruction. A student's comprehension can be evaluated after the text is read. The teacher uses effective questioning to gauge the student's understanding. The teacher can observe many reading observations with this by seeing if the students use the text for support or are able to locate answers using different strategies. Students' comprehension is bound to increase due to the fact that they are able to read fluently and accurately with the books used during guided reading lessons. If this is an area of need, the teacher can use prompts and supports to build that for the student.

Overall, there are positive impacts on students' independent reading ability when guided reading instruction is implemented. Iaquina (2006), states that, "The National Reading Panel argued that balanced approaches are preferable when teaching children to read, based on their review of scientific research-based reading instructional practices used by teachers in classrooms across the country (p. 1). Frey, Lee, Tollefson, Pass, and Massengill (2005) also conducted a study of the use of balanced literacy that incorporated guided reading instruction. Data and experts seem to agree that guided reading instruction is necessary for helping our young readers. By incorporating guided reading, a teacher builds upon the knowledge, skills, and strategies that students already have in order to become independent readers. If students are independently able to read with accuracy, fluency, and demonstrate comprehension, then this will help them for years to come.

### **Summary**

This literature review demonstrates that guided reading is a crucial component that should be incorporated in daily instruction. The data and researchers seem to have similar findings of the benefits. It is important to ensure that students are able to independently read in order to build their success for the future.

## **CHAPTER III**

### **METHODS**

The purpose of this research was to determine the impact of guided reading instruction on a student's reading growth.

#### **Design**

A descriptive design was used to determine the relationship between guided reading instruction and a student's independent reading level. The independent variable was the implemented guided reading instruction. The dependent variable was the student's independent reading ability level.

#### **Participants**

This research was conducted in a second-grade classroom at a Baltimore County school. During the 2017/2018 school year, the school became partly Title I, due to the increase of low-income families in the area. There were 23 second-grade students who participated in this study. The sample was convenience. The students were of mixed ethnicities and races such as Caucasian, African American, Hispanic, and Indian. Fifty-seven percent of the students were male, and 43% were female. Within the group of students, there were a range of mixed academic abilities. Forty-three percent of the students were reading below grade level, 4% were on grade level, and 53% were above grade level. Among those students, 4% received ESOL services, and 22% were receiving special education services.

#### **Instrument**

There were two measurements used in this study. The first measurement was the Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark Assessment System. This assessment kit includes fiction and nonfiction books written for literacy leveling assessment purposes. Data was collected in the beginning for

a baseline and then once again at the end of the study. The data indicated the students' independent reading level according to the Fountas and Pinnell text level gradient.

The second instrument used in this study was a leveled books classroom library. This set included books ranging from books A-Z. The books were aligned with the Fountas and Pinnell leveling system. The teacher carefully selected books to be used appropriately during guided reading instruction. A two-day guided reading lesson was designed and implemented to go along with each selected story.

### **Procedure**

Baseline data was collected at the beginning of this study to determine the students' current independent reading level. This data was collected using the Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark Assessment System. The data was analyzed to create different leveled guided reading instructional small groups. Over the course of seven weeks, the groups received guided reading instruction. The instructional groups met three to four times a week for about 15-20 minutes. Each guided reading lesson followed a two-day reading lesson plan. At the end of the seven weeks, data was collected once again using the Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark Assessment System. This data was used to determine how much students' reading levels increased during their exposure to guided reading instruction.

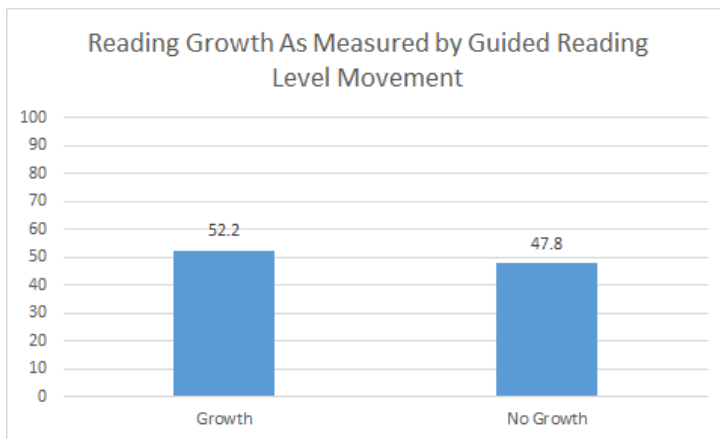
## CHAPTER IV

### RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to examine the impact of implementing guided reading lessons on students' independent reading levels. The Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark assessment was used to measure the students' independent guided reading level. Data relative to the students' independent guided reading growth is displayed in the figure below. The data represents the students' reading growth after the conclusion of the study.

Figure 1

#### *Reading Growth for the Group*



This graph indicates the class reading growth as measured by guided reading level movement. Descriptive analyses were completed to determine the percentage of students who did or did not demonstrate growth in their guided reading levels. Students were identified as making growth if they moved at least one reading level up on the Fountas and Pinnell text level ladder. Students were identified as not making growth if they did not move up one reading level on the text level ladder.

The research question asked the following: what proportion of students who participated in guided reading lesson would make improvement in their independent guided reading growth?

The data results indicated that 52.2 % (n=12) of students demonstrated reading growth, while 47.8% (n=11) demonstrated no growth in their guided reading level. Of the students who showed growth, all but one grew one level in their guided reading instruction. While more students made growth than not, with a difference of 4.4%, findings do not indicate statistical significance as this was a descriptive study. The data suggests that guided reading may have had an impact on students' reading achievement. These results and their implications will be discussed in the next chapter.

## **CHAPTER V**

### **DISCUSSION**

The research question asked the following question: what proportion of students who participated in guided reading lesson would make improvement in their independent guided reading growth? The data results indicated that 52.2% of students demonstrated reading growth, while 47.8% of students demonstrated no growth. There was a 4.4% difference in students who made growth versus did not, but this is not considered a statistical significance as this was a descriptive study.

#### **Implications of Results**

The data implies that guided reading instruction may have had an impact on students' reading growth. This implication can be supported by the data result that 52.2% of students made growth. Those students progressed one reading level on the Fountas and Pinnell scale, and one student progressed two reading levels. Since growth was made, it can be determined that the students' fluency, accuracy, and comprehension all increased in order to progress on the Fountas and Pinnell scale.

The researcher also noticed from the data that most of the students who made growth were either reading below or on grade level. The students who were already reading above grade level did not make further growth; instead, they maintained their reading level. This finding can imply that guided reading instruction has more of an impact on students that are reading below or on grade level.

It can also be implied that some students may need more than seven weeks to make visible reading growth. This study was conducted over a seven-week span, but if additional time was given, there may have been more of a difference in students who made growth or did not.

The researcher noted that student engagement was high during the guided reading lessons. During the brief 15-20 minute lessons, students were actively listening, participating, and attending to instruction. It seems that short yet concise reading instruction can be a powerful tool for some students.

### **Theoretical Consequences**

From the literature review in Chapter II, it seemed that guided reading instruction would benefit students' independent reading level. Although the results of this study did not show a statistically significant difference in the proportion of students who made growth and did not, it is important to consider threats to validity that could have altered the outcomes.

In the literature review, it stated that there is a strict structure to be followed in order to implement effective guided reading instruction (Fountas & Pinnell, 2012). These steps include text selection, text introduction, reading the text, discussion of the text, teaching points, word work, and extension of understanding. All of these steps need to occur in order to have a successful and meaningful lesson. It also states that the lessons should be implemented on a daily basis for 15-20 minutes. At times during the study, there were inconsistencies within the lesson structure and length of instruction. The inconsistencies of lesson structure came from student or teacher interruptions. At times, the students were unable to complete an entire lesson because they came late, or had to leave the group for a varying reason. The teacher also experienced interruptions from other staff members or meetings. The length of the lessons also varied due to schedule conflicts such as meetings, drills, or delays. These factors during the study could have caused conflict with the students' potential reading growth.

Research by Fountas and Pinnel (2012) states that students should be reading at certain levels within each grade. In second grade, students are expected to begin the year reading at a

level J and conclude the year reading at a level M. The researcher noted that some of the students were already reading at a level M or higher at the beginning of the study. Some of those students did not make growth by the end of this study. This could be due to the fact the students were already reading above their expected level in second grade.

### **Threats to Validity**

There were several threats to validity within this study. The first external validity of this design was the variations of the environmental conditions in which the guided reading instruction and assessment was conducted in. During the guided reading lessons, the researcher tried to limit noise and student interruptions, but each day those were uncontrollable and varied. Those also varied during the Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark Assessment for the pre- and post-data collection. Although the assessment was conducted one-on-one with each student, the noise and interruptions could have posed a threat.

A second threat to validity was scheduling conflicts that interfered with the guided reading instruction. The guided reading lessons were designed to be implemented on a daily basis for 15 to 20 minutes with each group. At times, there were scheduling conflicts such as special education service hours, school closures due to weather, or safety drills.

Another threat to validity was student attendance. Student attendance fluctuated during the seven week study. Many of the students were absent throughout the week, as there was very rarely a day when all students were in attendance. To go along with that, some students arrived late in the morning which caused conflict. The guided reading lessons were held in the morning, so if the student arrived late, then they most likely missed the reading group. This caused the students to miss instruction that could be crucial to their success with guided reading.

The last validity concern was sample size and nature which impacts generalizing these results to other elementary school-aged students. This study occurred in one second grade classroom in Baltimore County with 23 students. The findings are limited to this set of students and lessen the generalizability of results to other groups of students.

Overall, all of these threats to validity related to the ability to implement guided reading instruction to its fullest potential. The missed instruction and varied learning environment could have altered the outcomes within this study.

### **Connections to Previous Studies/Existing Literature**

Implementing guided reading lessons in primary classrooms has been a big initiative the last few years. Research shows that more students are experiencing reading deficits and that guided reading is a necessary component for a balanced literacy program (Iaquita, 2006).

This study showed that more students made growth in their independent reading level than not. Students that did make growth increased their reading accuracy, fluency, and comprehension since they were able to move up a level on the Fountas and Pinnell scale. This held true as stated as one of the effects of guided reading instruction (Fountas & Pinnell, 2012).

Guided reading instruction was described to best used for students that are struggling or independent readers (Fawson & Reutzel, 2000). In the study, students who were reading below or on grade level made growth. Students that were already reading above grade level did not progress, yet they maintained their level. It seems to be true that guided reading instruction is best served for students that have areas of needs within their grade level reading expectations and standards.

Lastly, the study connected to the research that guided reading helps students become active learners (Askew & Fountas, 1998). The researcher observed an increase in student participation, listening, and attention to tasks during the instructional time.

### **Implications for Future Research**

Future research should continue on the impact of guided reading instruction on students' reading independent reading level. There are several considerations to have in mind for future studies.

One idea to consider is the sample used for future studies. It may be worthwhile only focusing guided reading instruction on students who are below or on reading level. This could help better determine guided reading really helps strengthen the foundational reading skills that are lacking in struggling readers.

The environment in which the guided reading instruction is given is another factor to consider. Ideally, students learn and perform best in quiet and consistent environments. It could be worthy to note in a limited distractions environment would have an impact on the students' growth.

Future research may want to consider focusing on a variety of primary grades with guided reading instruction. This study was limited to a second-grade classroom. Next time, it could be beneficial to explore guided reading instruction in a kindergarten and first-grade classroom to compare and contrast findings.

Lastly, future research may want to alter the length of time the study is completed in. More ample time could show different findings of results for this research question.

## **Conclusion**

This study focused on the important topic of student reading growth and if students could benefit from guided reading instruction. Although there was no statistically significant difference, more students did make reading growth. Based on the literature review and study findings, it is clear there are some benefits to implementing guided reading instruction. It is crucial for our students' success to continue searching for additional information about guided reading instruction and other interventions that could help.

## References

- Askew, B. J., & Fountas, I. C. (1998). Building an early reading process: Active from the start! *Reading Teacher*, 52(2), 126.
- Avalos, M. A., Plasencia, A., Chavez, C., & Rascón, J. (2007). Modified guided reading: Gateway to English as a second language and literacy learning. *Reading Teacher*, 61(4), 318-329. doi:10.1598/RT.61.4.4
- Duke, N. K., & Block, M. K. (2012). Improving reading in the primary grades. *Future of Children*, 22(2), 55-72.
- Fawson, P. C., & Reutzel, D. R.. (2000). "But I only have a basal": Implementing guided reading in the early grades. *The Reading Teacher*, 54, 84-97.
- Ford, M. P., & Opitz, M. F. (2008). A national survey of guided reading practices: What we can learn from primary teachers. *Literacy Research and Instruction*, 47(4), 309-331.
- Fountas, I. C., & Pinnell, G. S. (2012). Guided reading: The romance and the reality. *Reading Teacher*, 66(4), 268-284.
- Frey, B., Lee, S., Tollefson, N., Pass, L., & Massengill, S. (2005). Balanced literacy in an urban school district. *Journal of Educational Research*, 98(5), 272-280.
- Iaquinta, A. (2006). Guided reading: A research-based response to the challenges of early reading instruction. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 33(6), 413-418.  
doi:10.1007/s10643-006-0074-2
- Lipp, J. R., & Helfrich, S. R. (2016). Key reading recovery strategies to support classroom guided reading instruction. *Reading Teacher*, 69(6), 639-646. doi:10.1002/trtr.1442
- Schirmer, B. R., & Schaffer, L. (2010). Guided reading approach. *Teaching Exceptional Children*, 42(5), 52-58.

Snyder, E., & Golightly, A. F. (2017). The effectiveness of a balanced approach to reading intervention in a second grade student: A case student. *Education, 138*(1), 53-67.