

The Impact of Close Reading Strategies on 3rd Grade Students' Reading
Comprehension

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to investigate the impact of close reading on third grade students' reading comprehension. The participants of this study consisted of two third grade classes in the same school in Anne Arundel County. This study has been created in order to find out if close reading strategies will help 3rd grade students to make growth on an assessment focusing specially on the standard RL 3.1. The results determined no significant difference between the success of students who used close reading strategies and the students who were not taught close reading strategies during the language arts instruction. Research in the area of close reading strategies should continue.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Overview

Close reading is 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, craft, meanings, etc. It directs the reader's attention to the text itself. Students are struggling on the Common Core State Standard RL.3.1 and close reading is a key instructional strategy to help elementary school students be successful. To effectively teach close reading so elementary students gain a deeper understanding of a text, teachers must incorporate the essential elements of complex text, multiple reads, collaborative conversations and text dependent questions. This study has been created in order to find out if close reading strategies will help 3rd grade students to make growth on an assessment focusing specially on the standard RL 3.1.

Statement of Problem

The purpose of the study is to investigate the impact of close reading on third grade students' reading comprehension.

Hypothesis

The null hypothesis is that close reading will not have a significantly impact on the 3rd grade students' reading growth measured by the county quarterly assessment results of Common Core State Standard **RL 3.1**, *ask and answer questions to demonstrate understanding of a text, referring explicitly to the text as the basis for the answers.*

Operational Definitions

In this study, the independent variable is close reading and the dependent variable is the common core standard RL 3.1 measured by Anne Arundel County quarterly assessme

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The purpose of the study is to investigate the impact of close reading on third grade students' reading comprehension. Section one gives an overview of what text dependent questions are. Section two discusses close reading and why it is important regarding student comprehension. Section three examines specific close reading strategies. Section four explores how close reading improves achievement.

Text Dependent Questions

The Common Core State Standards promote application of text dependent questions that force students to locate evidence within the text as opposed to the traditional practice of asking students questions that can be related to the reader and answered without reading the text. Text-dependent questions require students to carefully read text and produce evidence in their responses whether it be verbal or written. The questions focus on the text itself to build a solid foundation of knowledge for the reader. That foundation of knowledge facilitates personal connections that are both meaningful and informative. Teachers structure the questions in ways that prompt students to dive into the text and find evidence for their response instead of just recalling it. There are at least six categories of questions used to configure a progression of text-dependent questions that move from explicit to implicit meaning. (Fisher & Frey, 2012) The categories include general understanding, key details, vocabulary and text structure, inferences, purpose, and opinions, arguments, and intertextual connections. Effective questions about literature and nonfiction texts require students to go back into the text to find the answers. The intent of using text dependent questions is to build a habit of critical thinking and promote thoughtful critical analysis of a text.

Close Reading

“A significant body of research links the close reading of complex text- whether the student is a struggling reader or advanced- to significant gains in reading proficiency and find close reading to be a key component of college and career readiness.” (Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers, 2011, p.7) Close reading can be instructed in shared reading, literature circles or discussion groups, interactive read-aloud by the teacher, and guided reading. “Close reading requires unpacking the implicit relationships within and across sentences” (Mesmer & Rose-McCully, 2018). All ages can take part in this type of reading because developing readers can begin to navigate strategies such as drawing on prior knowledge, making connections, identifying what is not addressed in a text, and analyzing what the author’s words mean. “Developing learners’ ability to read more closely at an early age helps to build a strong foundation in writing” (Baker & McEnery, 2017) One way to introduce close reading is by revisiting a short piece of text through multiple readings and multiple instructional lessons. This will encourage students to read and reread deliberately to examine and analyze for multiple reasons. Teachers must instruct students’ development of the skills needed to meet the demands of complex text through scaffolding and discussion. Using strong questioning techniques will increase rigor and allow students to begin connecting their prior knowledge about a topic. Teachers need “less frontloading before reading; more text-dependent questions that address a full range of standards during reading; and oral response, not just written assessment, after reading.” (Boyles, 2014) “Insufficient vocabulary correspondingly contributes to the comprehension issues that many schools are facing today. Students with limited vocabulary also struggle with reading comprehension” (Glover, 2016) Using close reading, students can read text and strategies can be modeled from the teacher to help with better understanding unknown words

and more difficult vocabulary. Students must focus on specific details and language used by the author and read with purpose and understanding. Teachers must build the foundation for close reading by implementing instructional strategies and a process for which students can improve their critical reading skills. (Baker & McEnery, 2017)

Close Reading Strategies

“Current models of close reading offer different ways of engaging students in their interaction with complex texts, with some focusing on reading and rereading for understanding and others providing more intense linguistic support.” (Fang, 2016) Teachers provide instruction that will help readers develop the skills for close reading by uncovering one layer of meaning after another, by viewing it from multiple themes and diverse viewpoints, rich language, and unique structures. To begin preparing students for close reading the teacher must guide them to think about what they are reading. Teachers guide and model close reading for students is through annotation of the texts, decreasing the amount of background knowledge they activate for students before reading and engaging the students in argumentation around the text by asking rigorous questioning. Next teachers help students “extend their thinking about related topics and evolutions of thought.” (Baker & McEnery, 2017) This could be done using manipulatives such as post-its or notecards where students write down or illustrate their initial thoughts and ideas. Another strategy for close reading would involve the students to think more critically about the text focusing on multiple meaning words or literal/nonliteral. The students reread a familiar or new short text and focus on how the author used specific words. For example, the text may describe the setting as “pouring buckets” and students would need to understand it is raining a lot. The focus on reading and rereading for understanding versus providing more intensive linguistic support. “Engaging students in close reading of short texts allows us to focus on the

reading skills that the Common Core State Standards for reading literature and informational text are meant to develop.” (Wertz & Saine, 2014) Teachers must enable readers to answer text dependent questions related to content, organization, and perspective. Students should try to extend, and use parallel structure analyzing and identifying the relationships. Another common strategy when teaching close reading to primary grade is using multiple text sets of picture books. The text sets propose an opportunity to reteach concepts from text to text. The opportunity to return and reread deeper into a text to better understand. “The goal is to provide enough opportunities for text-to-text connections without introducing so many texts that the process becomes unwieldy” (Boyles, 2014, p.?). The insights students gain from different close reading strategies in relating linguistic forms and structures to functions and meanings in contexts enable them to become more critical readers. “The goal is developing engaged readers who are able to comprehend, compose, converse about, and evaluate complex texts in thoughtful, critical ways.” (Fang, 2016)

Manipulatives are an effective way to advance students’ literacy. “85% of elementary school teachers rank manipulatives as being “highly effective” instructional materials” (Instructor, 2005, p.?). Manipulatives are most often associated with math or tactile development. Recent research shows that the use of manipulatives is a highly effective way to teach students literacy. Reading manipulatives build a student’s self-confidence, cater to multiple learning styles, link the abstract to the concrete, and engage and motivate learners. Instruction for close reading of complex texts can be complemented using digital technology with digital texts. Struggling readers benefit because they can replay the audio of the text and follow along with their eyes gaining a deeper understanding. Many digital resources are available to help students use the typical manipulatives of highlighting, sticky notes and wixie sticks (a skinny wax stick

used like a highlighter). “Interactive graphic organizers designed to support comprehension through close reading by allowing students to document main ideas and details, chart story elements, write summaries, and create timelines.” (Wertz & Saine, 2014) Most commonly manipulatives are use in small or whole group. Students can use manipulatives via technology and submit assignments online rather than traditional paper and pencil. The students gain the most from manipulatives while working in a small group setting.

How Close Reading Improves Student Achievement

Close reading is an efficient practice to help students develop critical reading, thinking, and written communication skills. “Incorporating literary criticism through close reading allows educators to motivate students to achieve academic success.” (Valentine, 2016) Close reading improves student achievement not only in the content area of language arts but also in social studies, science, and math. When students explore informational text, they gain information about a topic or idea. Close reading is a great strategy to ensure that they make connections to the text and gain a deeper understanding. Common Core State Standards influenced this shift in instruction and promote close reading. Teachers must motivate, inspire and engage students when implementing strategies for close reading. Students’ academic success will increase. Deborah Kozdras and Stephen Day discuss how the requirements for the Common Core State Standards have the potential to not only to improve core literacy competencies but also strengthen the subject of Economics as well. (Kozdras & Day, 2013) Teachers are advocating a mix of fiction and informational text in other content areas along with their literacy block of instruction. They use text to help students understand complex concepts and historical events that are necessary to the subject area. “While close reading has been used with traditional text, the strategies are essential, not just for the written word, but also for the close *viewing* of images,

videos, charts, and graphs. Close reading, therefore, is deep reading for analysis of evidence in texts” (Kozdras & Day, 2013, p. 25).

Close reading improves student achievement in literacy and other content areas because it can address fascinating issues and helpful strategies that grab students’ attention. One common strategy that primary students enjoy best is acting as a detective to explore their text. The process of guided inquiry allows students to have the freedom of exploration to produce their own ideas and point of view while guided by the teacher. “The end result, if done well, could be a generation of incisive thinkers and lucid writers” (Kozdras & Day, 2013, p.30).

Summary

Close reading strategies that use manipulatives are the most efficient teaching practices to increase students’ critical thinking skills and prepare them to be college and career ready. This way of teaching can incorporate cross curriculum content; it allows for exploration and truly engages students. Close reading bridges writers and readers. It creates readers who can critically analyze and think about concepts in depth. Common Core State Standards emphasize “reading closely” offers educators the best practice to increase critical thinking and reading comprehension by students. Close reading is the best practice to produces greater student reading achievement.

CHAPTER III

METHODS

The purpose of this study was to investigate the impact close reading strategies has on reading comprehension.

Design

The design of this study was quasi-experimental and used a pre and posttest. The independent variable was the close reading teaching strategy, while the dependent variable was the students' score changes on common core standard RL 3.1 from quarterly assessment 1 to quarterly assessment 3. The treatment group received close reading strategies instruction in guided reading while the control group completed the same assessment but was not taught these strategies.

Participants

The participants used were two 3rd grade classes. Class C was the treatment group while class P was the control group. The class met Monday through Friday from 1:15-2:15pm. The treatment group was 48% female and the 52% male. The control group was 52% female and 48% male. The school is in a high to middle class area of Anne Arundel County.

Instrument

The instrument was the county's quarterly assessment results focusing on the results of standard RL 3.1. Students read two on grade level text and answer comprehension questions. There were 6 items assessing Common Core Standard RL 3.1 for Quarter 3 Assessment and 8 items for Quarter 1 Assessment. The assessment evaluated the students' ability to demonstrate understanding of a text, referring explicitly to the text as the basis for the answers.

<http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/RL/3/#CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.3.1> The

performance assessment has content validity because it was created by a group of experts in the field and analyzed by teachers in the county. In addition, this assessment format is familiar to students as they have had similar task in the past.

Procedure

This study was intended to determine if close reading strategies impact third grade students' comprehension. The pretest which was the Quarter 1 Reading Assessment was given on October 18th. The assessment is made up of the students reading two text, answering comprehension questions about the text and finally answering to a writing prompt. The results are what drove the study. When analyzing the results, the standard RL 3.1 was an area of need. The participants were the students in 3rd grade. The treatment group was my reading class. They were given specific instruction incorporating close reading strategies during small group instruction for 20 minutes each day for about 5 months. The control group was the other 3rd grade class that was not instructed on close reading strategies. The posttest was given to all the third-grade students on March 20th.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

Analysis of the Data

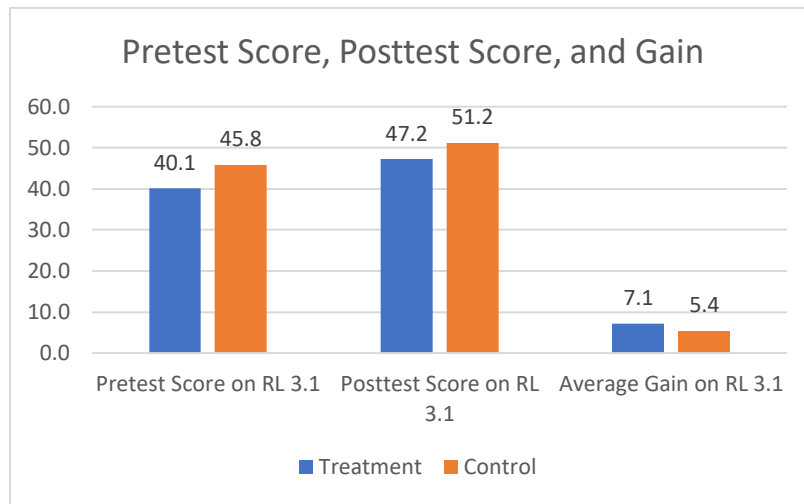
This study was designed to determine whether close reading strategies impacted student achievement on the quarterly assessment. The growth was measured by focusing on the results of standard RL 3.1, ask and answer questions to demonstrate understanding of the text. Two classes of heterogeneous students were assessed on the same 3rd grade standards and assessment. Class P was the control group while Class C was the treatment group. Both were instructed on the same standards and Anne Arundel County Curriculum but Class C which consist of 25 students, implemented close reading strategies into the guided reading instruction.

The procedure for assigning and selecting each class was determined by the school principal and reading specialist. Students' Fountas and Pinnell reading level, special education services, and behaviors were considered when creating the classes. Both teacher C and teacher P have the same amount of experience with the third-grade curriculum.

Table 1. Results of the growth

Group	Average of Q1 RL 3.1	Average of Q3 RL 3.1	Average of Gain	Student Count
	Percent Score	Percent Score	on RL 3.1	
Treatment	40.1	47.2	7.1	24
Control	45.8	51.2	5.4	27
Grand				
Total	43.1	49.3	6.2	51

Figure 1.



The two groups had no statistically significant differences. A p value that is greater than 0.05 indicates the difference is not statistically significant. The results and their implications will be discussed in the next chapter.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

This study examines if close reading strategies have an impact on reading comprehension. Statistical analysis of the data indicated no significant difference between the two classes results on their quarterly reading assessment.

Implications of Results

The implication of results demonstrates using close reading strategies to improve student's comprehension as compared with similar control students. The evidence for the county's quarterly reading assessment, however, was not enough to support advantages for the treatment. The results mean differences between the control and treatment groups (in favor of the treatment) were not statistically significant at the customary 0.05 level. The focus on close reading instruction with comprehension has been popular and the results are important to both researchers and educators. The close reading skills may have contributed to the minor improvements in reading comprehension with the treatment group. It also has implications for using close reading strategies, like looking for deeper meaning within the text and asking text-dependent questions. Students in the treatment group receiving close reading strategies increased their overall average gain on CCSS.RL.3.1 score by 7.1%. This slight advantage in percentages contributed to the close reading technique of finding text evidence; the students were explicitly taught this strategy. It has implications that when students used close reading strategies, they are more successful about responding to what they read. Close reading allowed students to focus on specific aspects of the text per lesson and allowed them to gain a deeper understanding of each element within the text, thus better comprehending it.

Threats to Validity

Threats to validity can impact the outcome of any study. There were internal and external threats to the validity in this study including the sampling method, timing and maturation. The sampling method utilized in this study was convenience. The subjects in the study were 3rd grade students in the researcher's class and there was no randomization when choosing the test subjects. Due to the small sample size, the statistical capability was limited, which made it difficult to detect major differences in performance. If a larger sample of students had been used, more valid results could have been attained. The texts in both reading benchmark assessments were on or above third- grade reading level. Although the texts were complex, the reading levels varied slightly and may have been too complex for some of the below grade level readers. Timing and maturation were threats to validity. Students are anticipated to naturally mature in their comprehension over a course of the school year. Other external factors prevented close reading from being practiced daily. There were scheduled and unscheduled interruptions during the Language Arts instruction block. Field trips, assemblies, fire drills, state standardized testing, etc. All these variables may have caused a risk to the studies validity.

Connections to Previous Studies

Techniques to improve students reading skills have been studied extensively for years. Results show that each source has a differing opinion from the next. Ultimately all researchers are determined to find the best practices teachers can implement to increase the reading comprehension of their students and help them grow as learners. Recently, close reading has been emphasized with the implementation of the Common Core State Standards, but it's difficult to find valid studies and research on the effects of close reading and the specifics to teaching it. One study supported the current action research project. In Fisher and Frey's (2012) study, a

group of research professional observed an elementary school class to determine the best practices for incorporating close reading techniques. Although the variation in scores from the study were small, the researcher noticed that students were more engaged in reading using the close reading strategies. The researcher noted the lack of close reading instructional techniques imbedded within the Common Core State Standards. Research links close reading of complex text to gains in reading proficiency and finds close reading to be a key component of college and career readiness. More close reading techniques and strategies need to be included in the required state curriculum.

Implications for Future Research

Some implications for future research will need to be conducted to determine the level of effectiveness close reading has on reading comprehension. With the control/treatment mean differences being not statistically significant and the effect sizes being small in the current study, it would be valuable to conduct such a study over a greater period and with a larger sample of students. It could be useful to see the difference of completing this study with another grade. Future research may want to change the pre-assessment and post-assessment times to see how students performed on the Quarterly Language Arts Assessments after a full year.

Summary

In conclusion, the hypothesis was supported in this study. The results of this study prove that there is a minor impact on comprehension. It was evident that close reading strategies can have a positive impact on students' reading comprehension achievement but for the results of this student there was not a significant gain from pre-to-post. More research needs to be conducted with a larger sample size for a longer period.

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