

Best Practices in Guided Reading that Impact Comprehension

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## Abstract

The purpose of this research was to determine if a structured guided reading lesson and professional development could impact the reading comprehension of kindergarten students.

The measurement tool was the Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark Assessment and Scholastic Progress Monitoring passages. This study involved the use of a pretest/posttest design to compare the data from January of 2016 (before the intervention was administered) to data from April of 2016 (when intervention was complete). Achievement gains were significant for reading accuracy, although results were not significant for comprehension or text level.

Research in the area of primary reading comprehension should continue given the continued disparity over the best instructional practices needed to accelerate reading comprehension.

# **CHAPTER I**

## **INTRODUCTION**

### **Overview**

The complex process of decoding the written word combined with language comprehension is one that has been studied by many. Inquiries into the subject illustrate the important distinction between those students who struggle to read in the primary grades and are likely to be behind when it comes to academic achievement and students who learn to read early and continue to prosper academically (Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998). Educators understand the value of searching for alternative approaches to reading instruction to strengthen comprehension, the kind of reading instruction that produces successful readers. This interest is propelled by the consequences that struggling readers face in school: “When students fail to develop fluent reading skills in the primary grades, they often continue through school as a clunky, word-by-word readers” (Torgeson & Hudson as cited in Allington, 2009).

### **Consequences of Struggling Readers**

The prevalence of struggling readers in our system today has teachers under pressure to find just the right kind of instruction to fix this problem. Much has been said about the five pillars of reading instruction—phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension—and their importance to the development of fluent readers. Whether the program used to teach reading is phonics-based or comprehension driven, the reality is that there are countless numbers of children who are unable to read proficiently in the early grades. Studies to determine the right approach, program, or method dominate educational journals. Teachers and schools continue to modify curriculum and instruction in order to meet the needs of their students.

## **Approaches to Reading Instruction**

An area that has seen a surge in studies in the primary grades is reading comprehension. The teaching of research-based comprehension strategies has provided insight into the thinking about successful readers. “Readers employ many strategies—some that are automatic and some they need to think about-in order to construct the meaning of a text” (Serravallo, & Goldberg, 2007, p. 3). The teaching of these strategies has begun to open our minds to the detailed process that is teaching reading. Serravallo and Goldberg (2007) cite small group instruction, strategy groups, and guided reading as successful structures to achieve this end. They further clarify that all small group reading instruction must match the reading level of the student, explicitly teach strategies such that readers employ them proficiently and independently, value the amount, time and range of material, and be structured in a consistent way.

## **Best Practices in Guided Reading**

The dilemma of improving reading fluency and comprehension has educators eager to study the achievement of other schools and engage in best practices for reading instruction. The focus on guided reading as a best practice is gaining momentum in school districts across the country. Anne Arundel County Public Schools has implemented a focus on guided reading coupled with a purchase of leveled readers to address the early literacy goal of having all students reading on grade level by 2<sup>nd</sup> grade. These efforts provide a platform for studying the effects of guided reading as a best practice at the study school.

## **Statement of Problem**

This study will identify the best practices in guided reading that impact the comprehension of students in reading.

## **Hypothesis**

Kindergarten students who participate in small group guided reading instruction will not increase their reading comprehension scores.

## **Operational Definitions**

The dependent variable is reading comprehension, as measured by performance on the Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark Assessment (Fountas, 2008).

The independent variable is the type of small group instruction known as guided reading. The teacher determines the reading level of her students as measured by Fountas and Pinnell Running Record, selects an appropriately leveled text, and engages in a structured guided reading lesson. Pre-reading, during reading and post reading elements are included in the best practices acknowledged in this study and shown in Appendix A.



## **CHAPTER II**

### **REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE**

#### **The Importance of Reading Acquisition**

The importance of reading acquisition has long been researched and documented. The development of a highly integrated process to construct meaning from a written text, comprehension, is one that has captured the attention of educators, parents, and policy makers. Research shows that children who read well in the early grades are far more successful in later years, and those who fall behind often stay behind when it comes to academic achievement (Snow et al., 1998). Over the past 15 years, federal education programs such as the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, Race to the Top, and Reading First initiatives have provided funding to support reading achievement. What these programs have in common is the use of those funds to purchase research-based programs. Where they differ is in what regulations they have and what they advocate for in their recommendations.

While educators agree that reading is a vital skill, the research on reading achievement and remediation for struggling readers is varied. Studies to identify a way to optimize reading achievement and minimize reading failure have sought to name the program, material, or method that is the most effective. However, this type of research selectively analyzes a program of choice and has a tendency to generalize its results. “Much of the educational research available, even in the published papers, fails to meet rigorous quality criteria” (Allington, 2006, p. 11). Nevertheless, the effects of this research have directed efforts to modify our schools and new curriculum to meet the needs of our students, but the reviews are mixed and the program implementation is inconsistent. Recommendations from studies like these and federal mandates tied to funds have dominated our choices for reading programs in schools across the country.

Though schools continue to use what we have learned about reading instruction to select reading programs and transform instruction, prolonged research around the best method to use is still desired. A review of the literature presented here seeks to clarify the best practices in reading instruction that impact the reading comprehension of students.

### **Necessary Skills to Develop Proficient Reading Abilities**

The skills necessary to become a proficient reader include phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension. Frequently referred to as the “Big Five,” these essential skills have been identified by the National Reading Panel as critical components of literacy instruction (NRP, 2003). Decoding is the process by which students use what they have learned through phonics about letters and sounds to pronounce written words. Through these strategies students learn to use context clues, high frequency words, and their sounds to read accurately. An extensive vocabulary is key to enabling students to improve their comprehension. Understanding what most words mean enables students to construct meaning and connect the text with prior knowledge. Oral language is the basis for this essential literacy skill. Reading comprehension is the final, ultimate goal of proficient reading. Being an intentional, active reader supports the understanding of a text and assist in making connections. Whereas educators recognize these skills as the basis for reading instruction, how they choose to instruct students and the amount of time for each varies from school to school and classroom to classroom.

### **Essential Components of Reading Instruction**

The essential components of reading instruction are a fundamental place to begin. The National Reading Panel produced their findings in the booklet *Put Reading First; The Research Building Blocks for Teaching Children to Read* (Armbruster, Lehr, Osborn, Adler, & National Institute for Literacy, 2003). The partners, in an endeavor to share a compilation of reading

research with the nation, reported on the five areas of instruction required to teach children to read. In their report, the NRP offered teachers the evidence necessary to devote time and energy to the everyday teaching of these reading components (NRP, 2003). The report stated that teachers can learn from “these methods and approaches that have worked well and caused reading improvement for large numbers of children” (NRP, 2003, p. iii).

The emphasis on phonemic awareness in the primary grades establishes an essential building block of language. There is a hierarchy of skills, all of which involve hearing, identifying, and manipulating sounds in spoken words. The development of phonics skills pairs the sounds of language with letters of the alphabet. “[Systematic] phonics instruction clearly identifies a carefully selected and useful set of letter-sound relationships and then organizes the introduction of these relationships into a logical instructional sequence” (NRP, 2003, p. 16). Teachers in the primary grades spend much of their time teaching this essential building block of reading.

Vocabulary instruction is also a principal component of learning to read. The panel persuaded teachers to directly instruct students on difficult or unknown vocabulary in order to increase their reading comprehension (NRP, 2003). In her column in *Education Week*, Gewertz (2013) suggests, “If Kindergarten teachers aren’t doing strong work on vocabulary, there isn’t much hope for teachers succeeding in later grades on the new standards” (para. 2). Vocabulary knowledge is strongly related to overall reading comprehension. If students decode and pronounce a word but the meaning is not recognized, their comprehension will be impaired. A study by Hart and Risley on the importance of vocabulary development and the number of words students must learn each year in order to become a fluent reader has given teachers reason to focus their daily instruction on vocabulary (1995).

Fluency has been defined as “the ability of readers to read quickly, effortlessly, and efficiently with good, meaningful expression” (Rasinski, 2003). Fluency and comprehension are closely linked, whereby students who read accurately in phrases with expression have increased comprehension. As noted by one researcher, the infusion of guided reading instruction not only impacts oral reading fluency but also supports all facets of reading (Allington, 2009).

Additionally, instruction that supports students’ use of comprehension strategies can significantly increase their ability to become purposeful, effective readers. “Readers employ many strategies—some that are automatic and some they need to think about—in order to construct the meaning of a text” (Serravallo & Goldberg, 2007, p. 3). If the only requirement to eliminate struggling readers was the identification of these critical components of reading, then by now we should have found the solution to the predicament of struggling readers. In spite of this information, we continue to have students who labor to read and comprehend grade level text.

### **Significance of Reading Comprehension**

As reading comprehension is the essence of reading, the importance of reading comprehension is a persistent subject amid educators. A review of the research on reading comprehension reveals that this is a complicated process. Comprehension occurs as a consequence of the interaction between the person who is reading, the text the reader is reading, the task the reader is trying to accomplish, and the circumstances under which the reading is done. While complicated to diagnose and teach, comprehension instruction is definitely needed, as evidenced by the NAEP reading scores for fourth grade (NAEP, 2011).

As research reveals, comprehension, or thinking about the text, “can be improved when students are provided explicit demonstrations of the comprehension strategies that literate

people use when they read” (Allington, 2006, p. 120). This type of instruction is modeled by teachers who provide insights to their students about the kind of thinking fluent readers engage in. In addition to finding time in the instructional day to model, this instruction takes a substantial amount of time to see its application in students in their independent reading tasks. Consequently, teachers tend to spend their time teaching letters, sounds, and words to students in the primary grades because this is where they see tremendous growth. However, creating opportunities for students to repeatedly practice comprehension strategies in the classroom is critical.

The use of research-based comprehension strategies with students has proven to be useful in providing a window into the thought processes of successful readers. It is necessary then to find the time and look for opportunities in the primary grades to embed this crucial instruction.

### **Reading Comprehension in the Primary Grades**

The high expectations brought on by the Common Core State Standards have provided an additional focus on the importance of explicitly teaching comprehension strategies to all students, including young learners. Historically, the work of teachers and young learners has been comprised of basic skills required to learn to decode text, with the majority of time spent familiarizing students with routines, the language of school, and learning the basics of reading. This may be the reason that there is little published research in the field of reading comprehension in the primary grades. Perhaps the complexity of the task is why primary teachers have been hesitant to commit precious time to teach comprehension strategies. More recent studies have concentrated on ways to improve primary students’ reading comprehension. Recommendations include “the gradual release of responsibility model” for strategies such as visualizing, monitoring, drawing inferences, questioning, and retelling (Duke &

Block, 2012, p. 64). Also noted in the research is a focus on monitoring comprehension “demonstrated as students detect and resolve errors in their reading” (Hacker as cited in Scull, 2010, p. 88). These ideas are supported through the *IES Practice Guide* (Shanahan et al., 2010). In this publication, the authors make five recommendations to improve reading comprehension in young children, the first of which is to teach students how to use reading comprehension strategies. The study explains, “A strategy is the intentional application of a cognitive routine by a reader before, during or after reading a text” (Shanahan et al., 2010, p. 10). Teaching these routines to young children is said to have a positive effect on their comprehension, whether taught in combination or individually.

Further support for this theory can be found in the work of Mahdavi and Tensfeldt (2013). This study established that using multiple comprehension strategies in combination contributed to the success of students’ reading comprehension. Promoting this concept is the notion that, as active readers, students “engage in a continuous process of asking and searching for answers to self-posed questions” (Singer, 1981, p. 303). Similarly, Scull (2010) looks at the conversations teachers had with students to facilitate their understanding of the text. “This was intended to detail patterns and principles of effective instructional interactions that might support young readers to effectively engage with text meanings and develop complementary skills and strategies” (Scull, 2010, p. 89).

Conversely, Scull (2010) noted research in which there is confusion over strategy instruction and a minimal amount of time devoted to comprehension strategy instruction in primary classrooms (Pearson & Duke, 2002). Unfortunately, not every program or method has a strong focus on reading comprehension. In his work, Allington (2013) cites a study by Dewitz, Jones, and Leahy which analyzed five core reading programs for their use of the explicit teaching

of reading comprehension strategies. Their study noted that these “reading programs don’t provide the same amount of guided practice as is provided by the research, don’t consistently follow the gradual release of responsibility model researchers have developed and don’t consistently follow the research on providing explicit instruction” (Dewitz et al., 2009, p. 523). With all of these factors in the primary grades, we continue to experience an overabundance of students who struggle to read and comprehend.

### **Struggling Readers**

There are countless reading difficulties that prevent children from becoming proficient readers. “When students fail to develop fluent reading skills in the primary grades, they often continue through school as a clunky, word-by-word reader” (Torgeson & Hudson as cited in Allington, 2009). There are those students who are unable to decode words, the most basic of functions in learning to read. If students are spending copious amounts of energy trying to sound out words, letter by letter, they have little to no cognitive resources left to make meaning of what is being read (Cooper et al., 2006). Conversely, there are students who can read every word on the page and are unable to connect the words read to their background knowledge or any other part of the text. “When a child is repeatedly unsuccessful in comprehending texts that he/she has read, these suggest reading difficulties at the processing level” (Kendeou, van den Broek, Helder, & Karlsson, 2014, p. 11). Teachers encounter both types of readers in their classrooms.

One component of reading that is crucial is the ability to make inferences. When students struggle with making inferences, their comprehension is weak “because they are unable to identify important connections that lend coherence to their text representations” (Kendeou et al., 2014, p. 12). Another cause of reading problems comes from a reader’s executive function. We know that executive function begins early in life, as students learn to control their behavior and

focus their attention. As children grow, their executive function plays a role in their ability to make a plan, in their working memory and inhibitions. “Problems can arise because working memory resources are limited or become overloaded if suppression or inhibitory controls are lacking, preventing accurate and efficient integration” (Johnston, Barnes, & Desrochers, 2008, p. 125).

Researchers seek to distinguish between young readers and older readers in the causes of reading difficulties. Longitudinal studies identify struggling readers in the primary grades as having difficulty with word reading while older students’ struggles are related to story structure, monitoring of comprehension, and making inferences. Additionally, reading difficulties are found related to vocabulary development. “Vocabulary predicts growth in reading comprehension, reading comprehension predicts growth in vocabulary” (Johnston et al., 2008, p. 127). The concept of comprehension monitoring and repairing is also related to the executive function previously discussed. “Younger children are far less likely to detect when they do not comprehend a text” (2008, p. 128). This skill has predictive qualities on reading comprehension that far surpass word reading and vocabulary. Whatever the source for reading problems, it becomes necessary to diagnose what causes students to struggle to read and employ instruction that is best suited to their needs.

### **Reading Instruction to Improve Reading Comprehension**

The problem of improving reading comprehension is a compelling one that has transfixed educators for years. As children enter school with varying degrees of skill, teachers continue to look for the best practices to ensure that their students become fluent readers. As is customary, primary teachers spend time teaching their students in small groups. These reading groups focus on exposing students to leveled text, scaffolding instruction with picture walks and word work,



and even reading the text to students. In primary classrooms, teachers provide enough support to make students successful with the text. While this method of instruction is typical, it is not sufficient to impact the reading comprehension of our students.

Serravallo and Goldberg (2007) have focused on the use of guided reading to impact reading comprehension. Their focus on reading conferences has spurred conversations about the importance of meeting with individual students during reading groups. Specifically, the act of conferring supports teachers as they match instruction to individual readers in their classroom, coach those students towards independence, teach explicit strategies, value time and choice in reading, and follow a predictable routine during small group reading time. Serravallo and Goldberg believe that incorporating these structures into reading instruction will produce students who continue to read throughout their lives. Additionally, the use of discussion questions and comprehension support are necessary components of the lesson. Creating a thinking job for students provides a purpose for their reading.

A study of reading instruction at the Rosa Parks Community School focused on the structure of the literacy block, which included guided instruction, comprehension strategies, and reading conferences (Fisher & Frey, 2007). The study showed an increase in the percentage of students scoring proficient or advanced from 11.5% to 41% on a state test. The Literacy Framework established at the school included specific instructional categories, Guided Reading being one, and comprehension strategy instruction coupled with conferring being another. Instruction focused on the gradual release model, where teachers model an instructional strategy (I do); teachers provide practice with support (we do), and students engage in independent practice of the strategy (you do). “The literacy framework provided teachers with an opportunity

to focus their teaching rather than script their teaching. The final result is a group of students who read, write, and think at impressive levels” (Fisher & Frey, 2007, p. 41).

Additional support for guided reading can be found in the theoretical foundations of a study from the United Kingdom. This study finds that by converting literacy instruction from a passive process into an engaging one, students construct their own meaning from text. This change in instruction produces critically literate students. Furthermore, “it can be seen that guided reading provides an excellent context for the specific teaching of inferential and evaluative reading strategies” (Fisher, 2008, p. 20). This instruction resembles a Reading Recovery model but with small groups of children instead of one on one instruction. A study to determine the effects of Reading Recovery “found a positive and statistically significant effect of Reading Recovery on the reading comprehension subtest of the Comprehensive Test of Basic Skills” (U.S. Department of Education, 2008, p. 5).

A contrasting view of guided reading versus explicit instruction was performed in a study by Denton, Fletcher, Taylor, Barth, and Vaughn (2014). The researchers hypothesized that the students in the guided reading group would outperform students in an explicit instruction group on measures such as comprehension. Their hypothesis was not supported by their results. However, the students in the guided reading group did outperform students who received typical classroom instruction.

### **Conclusion**

As evidenced by the research, there is much to learn about the process of reading. There is evidence to suggest that teachers of young children can impact their comprehension through explicit instruction. Research from these studies lends credibility to the view that a change is needed in the way teachers focus their small group instruction. Guided Reading lessons with a

conferring component can support critical skills that students need to comprehend what is read.

With continued research, the goal of producing stronger, more fluent readers who comprehend what they read is attainable.

## **CHAPTER III**

### **METHODS**

#### **Design**

This study was designed to identify the best practices in guided reading that impact the reading comprehension of students. This research employed a quasi-experimental design using a pre- and posttest. Reading comprehension was measured using the Fountas & Pinnell Benchmark Assessment for the pretest. The type of instruction was implemented through two groups of kindergarten students. One group received small group guided reading instruction, targeting comprehension support and guided reading professional development for the teacher. The other group participated in small group guided reading instruction with no professional development for the teacher. The study lasted six weeks.

#### **Participants**

The study involved two classrooms of kindergarten students at an early education center in Anne Arundel county, Maryland. In the experimental group, 22 participants were five or six years old. The group consisted of thirteen boys and nine girls. Sixteen students were White, two Hispanic, two Multi-Racial, and one African American. Nine of the 22 students were identified as qualifying for FARMS (Free and Reduced Meals Students), and thirteen were not. The non-treatment group was similar, with all 23 students being five or six years old. This class had fifteen boys and eight girls in the group. In this class, 16 students were White, three were Hispanic, two were Multi-Racial and two students were African American. Fifteen of the 23 students were identified as FARMS, and eight were not. Veteran kindergarten teachers teach both classrooms. Small group reading instruction is established in each classroom. The guided reading template is new to both teachers.

The study school is comprised of ECI, Pre-Kindergarten, and Kindergarten students in a total of seven classrooms. Pre-Kindergarten students were identified as economically disadvantaged based on family income and defined by the Maryland State Department of Education as eligible for free lunch. Approximately 25% of the students continue on to Kindergarten in this center. The KRA (Kindergarten Readiness Assessment) is a state-mandated assessment designed to identify whether students are on track and ready for kindergarten. The data for the school shows that, of the 68 students attending kindergarten by September 30<sup>th</sup>, 46 students demonstrated readiness in the Language and Literacy Domain and 21 students had not yet demonstrated readiness.

### **Instrument**

As a pretest, this study used a standardized assessment, Fountas & Pinnell Benchmark Assessment (F&P), a one-on-one reading assessment, to determine the independent, instructional and frustration reading level (A-Z) of all students as well as their accuracy (a percentage) and comprehension (score of 0-3). The posttest is a progress monitoring tool used to determine the instructional reading level and comprehension level of similar Scholastic readers between assessments.

The F&P assessment has been mandated by Anne Arundel County Public Schools for grades K-2 as a reliable measure. The assessment contains fiction and non-fiction text that progress in difficulty from levels A-Z. In addition to reading passages, the assessment includes a reading record to document students' accuracy, fluency, and comprehension. Fountas and Pinnell (2008) convey that through editorial development, independent data analysis, and field-testing, the assessment is reliable and valid to determine a students' reading level: "These books have been written, edited, and extensively field-tested to ensure that they reflect the characteristic of

texts and the demands of texts on the reader at each specific Fountas & Pinnell level” (Pinnell & Fountas, 2008, 2011).

### **Procedure**

The two classes of kindergarten students were selected based on their demographics and background. These two groups of students had similar qualities, but they did not receive the same instruction, nor did their teachers receive the same professional development support. The guided reading instruction was different because of the explicit focus on comprehension support and comprehension questions. The professional development involved planning with the teacher of the first group to develop guided reading lesson plans. The initial F&P reading record was completed for every student in both groups. This baseline data was used to form guided reading groups.

### **Small Group Guided Reading Instruction**

Upon determining the reading level of students, the teacher engaged in professional development with specific training on the comprehension support identified for each text and comprehension questions on the guided reading template. The planning of the comprehension support centered on explicit text characteristics and post reading comprehension questions and was intended to support students’ understanding of the key ideas in a text. Specifically, these components focused on engaging students in questioning beyond and about the text, rather than within the text or literal meaning, to improve the comprehension of students in higher order thinking skills. The guided reading lesson is divided into pre-reading, during reading, and post reading. The guided reading lesson takes approximately 15-20 minutes. Both groups of students received guided reading instruction. The second group did not receive guided reading instruction

with a focus on comprehension support or questioning. In addition to training, weekly observations were held to validate teaching of guided reading lessons and planned.

## CHAPTER IV

### RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to identify the best practices in guided reading that impact the comprehension of students in reading. The quasi-experimental design used reading text level, accuracy, and comprehension in January and in April for two classes of kindergarten students, one in which the teacher received professional development in planning guided reading lessons and one class where the teacher did not. The results are presented in Table 1 below.

Table 1

*Reading assessment results for the intervention and non-intervention students*

Scores	Group	Mean	N	Standard Deviation	t	Significance
Winter Text Level	Intervention	3.6	22	2.36	1.28	0.21
	Non-Intervention	2.9	23	1.25		
Winter Accuracy	Intervention	81.1	22	18.20	2.29	0.03*
	Non-Intervention	90.2	23	4.44		
Winter Comprehension	Intervention	3.7	22	2.15	0.61	0.54
	Non-Intervention	4.1	23	2.28		
Progress Monitoring Text Level	Intervention	4.6	22	2.56	0.42	0.67
	Non-Intervention	4.2	21	2.17		
Progress Monitoring Accuracy	Intervention	72.9	22	17.58	2.14	0.04*
	Non-Intervention	82.6	21	11.30		
Progress Monitoring Comprehension	Intervention	4.0	22	1.84	0.50	0.62
	Non-Intervention	3.7	21	1.60		

\*p<0.05



The null hypothesis, that Kindergarten students who participate in small group guided reading instruction will not increase their reading comprehension scores, is rejected for Winter Accuracy and Progress Monitoring Accuracy and is supported for text level and comprehension.

## **CHAPTER V**

### **DISCUSSION**

The purpose of this research was to determine if a structured guided reading lesson and professional development could impact the reading comprehension of kindergarten students. The study hypothesized that kindergarten students who participated in a small group guided reading lesson and whose teacher received professional development for guided reading would increase their reading comprehension of leveled text. The null hypothesis is rejected for Winter Accuracy and Progress Monitoring Accuracy and is supported for text level and comprehension.

The researcher began by noting the initial Fountas and Pinnell reading behaviors and scores of kindergarten students at the study school in January. The scores were noted for text level, accuracy, and comprehension, as defined by Fountas and Pinnell. The classroom teachers had been engaged in small group instruction for guided reading since the beginning of the school year. As part of the intervention, one classroom teacher received one-on-one professional development with structured guided reading planning to include conferencing with individual students and development of higher-level comprehension questions. Questions were developed for within, beyond, and about the text. Small group instruction was observed in the intervention classroom and the professional development sessions with the teacher were held over a six-week period. The six weeks were interrupted by a break in the school calendar for approximately ten days. The results indicated that the accuracy of students in the intervention group significantly improved over the non-intervention group. The comprehension and text level variance was not significant. The results are shown in the data table in Chapter IV.

## **Implications**

The results of this study support the research on conferencing or conferring individually with students during a guided reading lesson. Although the results did not show a significant increase in the text level or comprehension of the kindergarten students, it did show a significant increase in the accuracy rates of these students.

These results are important to educators and researchers in several ways. First, the focus on guided reading instruction in education has been scrutinized in the past as too costly, and the results have been varied. The accuracy rate of the students in the intervention group may have contributed to their reading of higher-level text. It also has implications for the modeling and support given to individual students during their guided reading lesson. Although the text level increase in these students was not significantly higher than in the non-intervention group, all students increased their text level by one or more levels. Additionally, individual students whose initial comprehension scores were low saw an increase in their comprehension levels of text during progress monitoring of their reading behaviors.

The importance of the findings can influence the type of instruction provided during small group work with a teacher. The structure of a guided reading lesson supports the learning of students at their instructional or just-right reading level. Students become accustomed to the routines, as do their teachers, and are able to focus on the expectations. Teaching students in a small group setting with students who have like reading behaviors allows the teacher to focus on text characteristics that may be challenging to a group of readers. The one-on-one coaching of students during their reading and the fluent models of reading provided by the teacher suggests that this type of instruction may, with additional time and practice, impact the reading comprehension of young readers.

### **Theoretical Consequences**

The results of this study support prior research on the use of small group guided reading to develop reading comprehension. In previous research, guided reading has shown an increase in comprehension strategies, fluency, vocabulary development, and accuracy. In their research, Serravallo & Goldberg (2010) cite small group instruction, strategy groups, and guided reading as successful structures to help students develop comprehension. They further clarify that all small group reading instruction must match the reading level of the student, explicitly teach strategies that students need, and value the amount, time, and range of material and have a consistent structure.

### **Threats to Validity**

There are factors that may have influenced the results of the study. If the researchers had more time to provide professional development and lesson writing with the teacher, perhaps the students would have increased their comprehension and text levels. Other factors include the amount of time lost in instruction due to spring break and absences. With the non-intervention class also receiving guided reading instruction, the lessons and text read could have been comparable. The administrators for the assessment were different from the pretest and posttest with the posttest having an unfamiliar adult working with the students. The children received instruction in foundational literacy skills to build their word recognition, which may have impacted their ability to read accurately. In addition, the developmental level of the kindergarten students must be considered as a factor in that the expectation level for kindergarten reading is limited. Finally, the scale in the scores could have supported the result of an increase in the accuracy scores, as the scale for accuracy was out of 100, the scale for comprehension was 0-7.

Additionally, the scale for text level was a narrow margin, with students making progress according to an A-Z scale.

### **Connections to Existing Literature**

Ways to improve on the comprehension of students have been studied widely and for many years. The number of ways varies with each publisher, school district, and theorist. The pedagogy behind each theory seeks to determine the best practices teachers can implement to increase the reading comprehension of their students, thus increasing the complexity of the text they are able to read. Duke and Block (2012) noted that a focus on questioning and retelling improved the comprehension of primary students. In the intervention group, students were asked to provide a collaborative retell of the text they read with their peers. Additionally, the questions that teachers planned were scaffolded to begin with the most literal information and build to inferred meaning in the text. A similar study in guided reading focused specifically on the use of reading conferences, known as conferring in the work of Serravallo and Goldberg (2007). Like their study, this study found that monitoring students' oral reading, noting a needed strategy, modeling that strategy, and teaching it to students supported their accuracy during reading.

### **Implications for Future Research**

In reference to future studies, the findings provide support for guided reading instruction with a group of students who read on the same instructional level. The use of a structured lesson plan, purposely focused on the teaching of reading strategies that have been modeled by the teacher and are tailored to individual students could lead to studies where the time spent in small groups is focused on comprehension and not primarily word work. Extended time with this kind of structure could prove to be successful with readers at all levels and may have implications for interventions that focus on isolated skills, rather than guided reading. Although time and energy

has been devoted to uncovering the best practices for reading comprehension, additional research is needed.

### **Summary**

This study was an attempt to discover the best practices in reading instruction for primary students that would impact their reading comprehension. The results of this study do not support the use of guided reading as a way to increase reading comprehension in beginning readers. However, further research with a larger sample of students over a longer period of time could yield better results. Some unanswered questions remain about the average progress students make over the course of a year and how that compares to the results of this study. With focused professional development over the course of a year, the teacher could improve in her questioning, conferring technique, and time on task. The inclusion of guided reading instruction during the school day is suggested and warranted, as it can have positive results on the accuracy and text levels of students.

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## Guided Reading Planning Template

**Text Title:**

**Text Level:**

**Primary Standard:**

**Supporting Standard(s):**

**I can**

<b>Pre-Reading</b>	<b>Introduction (required)</b> Today you will be reading a... (name genre, brief summary similar to F&P running record introduction)	
	<b>Word Work (as needed)</b> High frequency words and/or sound patterns needed to read the text with fluency	
	<b>Vocabulary (as needed)</b> <i>Vocabulary Word (location in text):</i> Choose words that holds meaning in the text that a student must know to comprehend the story, but could not figure out through context, prior knowledge, or decoding	
	<b>Comprehension Support (as needed)</b> Include the teaching point and a strategy for how students will apply it within this text level. Focus on one item that benefits ALL students in the group.	
	<b>Thinking Job (required)</b> Standard based question that sets students up to master the primary standard. This is what the student needs to be thinking/doing while reading	
<b>During Reading</b>	<b>Conferring Plan</b> Identify students to confer with and skills to teach based on running records and/or formative data	
<b>Post-Reading</b>	<b>Discussion Questions and Comprehension Application</b> Create a series of scaffolded questions that align to the College and Career Readiness Standards, text level characteristics, and the pre-reading portion of the guided reading plan.	

<b>Extension Suggestions</b>	<b>Related Tasks</b> Ex: Writing/drawing to source prompt, Arts Integration, re-tell the story, sequence the story, create a Thinking Map, sketch a prediction, dramatize selection, reinforce High Frequency words, vocabulary, Phonics, phonemic awareness skills	
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