

The Effects of Close Reading on Third Graders'
Reading Comprehension and Writing Skills

By Nicole Higdon

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

May 2019

Graduate Programs in Education
Goucher College

Table of Contents

List of Tables	i
Abstract	ii
I. Introduction	1
Overview	1
Statement of Problem	3
Hypothesis	4
Operational Definitions	5
II. Review of the Literature	7
Introduction	7
Close Reading Defined	7
Close Reading and Common Core	8
Best Practices for Close Reading in Elementary Students	9
The Five Key Features of Close Reading	11
Annotations	14
Teaching Close Reading during Guided Reading	15
Effectiveness of Close Reading for Improving Reading and Writing	16
Close Reading and Writing	17
Motivating Students and Educators	18
Conclusion	19
III. Methods	21
Design	21
Participants	21

Instrument	22
Procedure	24
Analysis Plan	27
IV. Results	28
Findings	28
V. Discussion	35
Implications of the Results	36
Theoretical Consequences	38
Threats to Validity	39
Connections to Existing Literature	40
Implications of Future Research	41
Summary	42
References	43

List of Tables

1. Text-Dependent Question Types	13
2. Means Scores for Control and Treatment Groups	29
3. Reading Test Pretest Control vs. Treatment Groups	29
4. Reading Test Posttest Control vs. Treatment Groups	29
5. Writing Test 1 Pretest Control vs. Treatment Groups	30
6. Writing Test 1 Posttest Control vs. Treatment Groups	30
7. Writing Test 2 Pretest Control vs. Treatment Groups	31
8. Writing Test 2 Posttest Control vs. Treatment Groups	31
9. Writing Test 3 Pretest Control vs. Treatment Groups	32
10. Writing Test 3 Posttest Control vs. Treatment Groups	32
11. Reading Test Pre-to-Post Gain Control vs. Treatment	33
12. Writing Test 1 Pre-to-Post Gain Control vs. Treatment	33
13. Writing Test 2 Pre-to-Post Gain Control vs. Treatment	34
14. Writing Test 3 Pre-to-Post Gain Control vs. Treatment	34

Abstract

The study was designed to examine the effectiveness that close reading strategies have on the improvement of reading comprehension, writing, and attitudes toward reading in third-grade students as compared with similar students using the customary county curriculum. The reading comprehension and writing tests were measured using Anne Arundel County Public Schools Quarter 2 and 3 English Language Arts Reading Benchmark Assessment. The students' attitudes toward reading were measured using the *Elementary Reading Attitude Survey*. This research employed a quasi-experimental design using a pre- and posttest with the intact classrooms. The results of the study showed non-significant gain from pre- to posttest for both the treatment and control groups. The small increase in test scores were most likely due to the small sample size rather than the lack of substantial treatment effects. Further research needs to be conducted with a larger sample size for a longer time period.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Overview

According to the National Assessment of Educational Progress (2018) 37% of fourth-grade students performed at or above the proficient level on the reading assessment in 2017, and 68% of those fourth-grade students performed at or above the basic level.

Fourth-grade students performing at the *Proficient* level should be able to integrate and interpret texts and apply their understanding of the text to draw conclusions and make evaluations. Fourth-grade students performing at the *Basic* level should be able to locate relevant information, make simple inferences, and use their understanding of the text to identify details that support a given interpretation or conclusion. Students should be able to interpret the meaning of a word as it is used in the text. (NAEP, 2018)

Reading comprehension is critical to success in life and can create educational challenges for students who struggle to read. Knowing that early intervention is the key to literacy success, educators must understand the process of reading comprehension before they can improve the skills of a child who is struggling to comprehend. There are several factors contribute to reading difficulties, including learning disabilities, low cognitive ability, poor fundamental reading skills, inadequate instruction, poverty, and lack of environmental support to encourage reading.

In addition, a breakdown in reading comprehension can occur for numerous reasons. For students to adequately comprehend, they are required to analyze and sort through multiple layers of textual meaning. Reading comprehension requires an individual to identify words and extract meaning from those words. Identifying prerequisite skills and the interrelationships

among them is critical for early identification of reading difficulties and for designing interventions (Carlson, Jenkins, Li, & Brownell, 2013). Another factor the educator must consider is a student's motivation to read. If student A loves to read and has a positive outlook on the process, he or she will demonstrate better comprehension strategies and test scores when compare to student B who despises the reading process and everything that comes with it. Students must be motivated to read and have a distinct purpose for reading or excitement about the content which they're reading, or they will quickly lose interest.

The problem also lies within the standards we teach; if we want all students to be college and career ready by the time students leave high school, we need to have a greater focus on teaching primary student to read closely. The Common Core State Standards' emphasis on analytical reading and the use of text-based evidence to develop interpretations and make arguments has resulted in renewed attention to "close reading" texts (Dalton, 2013, p. 643).

Numerous comprehension strategies and techniques for teaching reading comprehension have been used by educators for years. However, the lack of effective teaching instruction, paired with inadequate resources, has contributed to the issue of reading comprehension in elementary schools across the nation. Students in the lower grades are not receiving the best instructional reading practices, and it shows when they reach third, fourth, and fifth grade.

The instructional strategy of close reading has been around educational settings for years and close reading strategies are primarily being taught throughout middle and high school with the intent to improve a student's reading comprehension. There is a major reading comprehension achievement gap between primary and intermediate grades. Unfortunately, there is minimal research regarding the effectiveness close reading has on a younger student's

comprehension. Only a handful of studies have been conducted and field tested at the elementary level.

With the implementation of Common Core, younger students are being held accountable for learning a more rigorous curriculum. Third graders are being asked to critically analyze the deep structures of a text without ever learning *how* to critically analyze the deep structures of a text. Student often “shut down” at the thought of answering text-dependent questions and lack the motivation to go back into the text to determine an answer or provide evidence. If the goal is to develop proficient readers and writers who can successfully comprehend a text and write about their reading, then educators need to determine the effectiveness of teaching close reading strategies in the younger grades.

Over the span of an educational career, the saying, learning to read and reading to learn, have resonated with the researcher. One of the researcher’s main goals while teaching first grade was to teach the students how to read. After teaching six years of learning to read, the researcher wanted to teach something more, so a move to third grade was undertaken. This grade presents the stage at which students should no longer be learning to read but reading to learn. In the researcher’s limited experience with third grade, one lesson emerged: students are still learning to read, and the ones who can read have a difficult time truly comprehending a text to meet the rigorous standards of Common Core as well as state standardized tests.

Statement of Problem

Countless students are not grasping the foundational reading skills they should have attained in the primary grades. The study will address the fact that numerous students are entering fourth and fifth grade with deficiencies in reading comprehension skills; they also lack

the ability to answer TDQ's correctly. This often leads to students developing negative viewpoints about reading and their overall ability to becoming a successful reader. The purpose of the study is to determine whether the implementation of close reading strategies will improve the overall reading comprehension and writing skills of third-grade students. It will also determine the effects that close reading has on students' attitude on reading.

Hypothesis

The hypothesis for this experiment is that close reading strategies will not have an effect on the improvement of reading comprehension, writing, and the attitude toward reading in third-grade students as compared with similar students using the customary county curriculum. The null hypothesis for this experiment would be if close reading strategies have no effect on the improvement of reading comprehension, writing, and the attitude toward reading in third-grade students as compared with similar students using the customary county curriculum.

The intent of the study is to test the effectiveness of close reading strategies; do they or do they not affect student achievement and growth in reading comprehension, students' perception of confidence and attitude in reading, and achievement in writing? The study will examine the effectiveness of these strategies by comparing the reading and writing results from Anne Arundel County Quarter 2 and 3 English Language Arts Reading Benchmark Assessment and the *Elementary Reading Attitude Survey*. The assessment data results from one third-grade class (treatment) will be compared to another third-grade class (control) that scored similarly on the Quarter 2 benchmark assessment. Students in Class A will be taught explicit close reading strategies, while students in Class B will follow the Anne Arundel County English Language Standards for reading and writing. The attitude and interests for reading will be considered when

selecting close reading passages for Class A, but will not be considered for Class B.

Operational Definitions

The independent variables for this study are the close reading strategies and teaching approaches used. The dependent variable, student achievement, will be measured by the percentage of improvement each student gains from the Anne Arundel County Quarter 2 English Language Arts Reading Benchmark Assessment to the Quarter 3 ELA Reading Benchmark Assessment.

Close reading: A critical in-depth look at a text. Close reading allows students to read a text with purpose and understanding. Close reading is purposeful reading of texts to gain ideas details, understand writing structure, and critically evaluate knowledge, claims, and evidence.

Close reading strategies: An instructional routine in which students critically examine a text, especially through repeated readings. Student examine the deep structures of text including text organization, vocabulary use, key details, arguments and inferential meanings, author's purpose, and how ideas connect to other texts.

Reading comprehension: A process that allows readers to construct meaning by interacting with the text through the combination of prior knowledge and previous experience, information from the text, and the position the reader takes in relationship to the text.

English language arts: English language arts are composed of reading, spelling, literature, and composition skills that aim at developing the students' comprehension and capacity for use of written and oral English language.

Text-dependent question: A type of question posed during close reading instruction where the student is required to provide evidence from the text in their response.

Common core state standards: A set of high-quality academic standards in mathematics and English language arts/literacy (ELA). These learning goals outline what a student should know and be able to do at the end of each grade. The standards were created to ensure that all students graduate from high school with the skills and knowledge necessary to succeed in college, career, and life, regardless of where they live.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

This literature review analyzes the topic of close reading. Close reading has been a topic of research and discussion within the educational community for a while, yet minimal field research has been conducted. With the implementation of the Common Core State Standards, educators and reading specialists have questioned how and when the instructional strategy should be implemented.

Section one defines close reading and its place within the state standards. Section two describes best practices for close reading instruction and importance of implementing close reading in elementary schools. Section three covers the effectiveness of close reading with improving reading and writing achievement. Section four describes what motivates teachers and students to participate in the close reading protocol.

Close Reading Defined

It is critical to understand the level of contention about what close reading is and how it should be implemented. The term has developed a variety of interpretations by scholars and educators with differing theoretical beliefs about reading, language, text, and literacy.

Fisher and Frey (2012) believe close reading is a type of instructional routine in which students critically examine the deep structures of a text through repeated readings. These deep structures include text organization, precision of vocabulary, key details, arguments, making inferences, author's purpose, connecting ideas to other texts, and consolidating information to formulate opinions.

Boyles (2013) offers a different perspective, suggesting that “Essentially, close reading means reading to uncover layers of meaning that lead to deep comprehension” (p. 37). Keeping Common Core Standards in mind, The Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Career provides more clarification on close reading:

Close, analytic reading stresses engaging with a text of sufficient complexity directly and examining meaning thoroughly and methodically, encouraging students to read and reread deliberately. Directing student attention to the text itself empowers students to understand the central ideas and key supporting details. It also enables students to reflect on the meaning of individual words and sentences, the order in which sentences unfold, and the development of ideas over the course of the text, which ultimately leads students to arrive at an understanding of the text as a whole. (PARCC, 2011, p. 7)

Although the definitions of close reading vary, Santori and Belfatti (2017) argue the following practices can be associated with all close reading instruction: critically examining the text, rereading the text, asking questions that require readers to provide textual evidence, developing persistence and stamina when faced with reading complex text, keeping teachers frontloading to a minimum, and annotating the text.

Close Reading and Common Core

The Common Core State Standards (CCSS) were conceived as a result of the lack of readiness for college and career among many high school graduates, especially English Language Learners and children who live in poverty. Close reading, as addressed by the CCSS state that students “read widely and deeply from among a broad range of high-quality, increasingly challenging literacy and informational text” (National Governors Association

Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010, p. 10). Furthermore, the Common Core State Standards call on teachers to engage students in close reading of increasingly complex text to gain key ideas and details, understand writing craft and structure, and critically evaluate knowledge, claims, and evidence.

Fang (2016) states that although the CCSS place a special emphasis on close reading, they do not provide specific guidelines for how close reading is to be implemented. Rather the standards encourage teachers to use “whatever tools and knowledge their professional judgment and experience lends to be helpful in meeting the goals set out in the document” (NGACBP & CCSSO, 2010, p. 4). This gives teachers considerable freedom about how they choose to implement close reading instruction within their classrooms. Several models of close reading have been proposed for classroom implementation, including Rose and Martin’s (2012) Reading to Learn model, as well as one of the most influential methods described by Fisher and Frey (2012), which will be discussed in the following sections. With the adoption of the Common Core State Standards in English Language Arts, educators have a vested interest in understanding best practices for teaching close analytic reading.

Best Practices for Close Reading in Elementary Students

Most research regarding close reading has centered around secondary schools. Fortunately, more research is highlighting the importance of implementing close reading instruction in elementary schools. “It needs to find its niche in kindergarten and the years just beyond if we mean to build the habits of mind that will lead all students to deep understanding of text” (Boyles, 2013, p. 37). With some modifications, close reading is something elementary school teachers can implement within their classrooms. Most elementary teachers already teach habits associated with close reading by asking students to set a purpose for reading, determine

the author's purpose, creating their own schema, and identifying genres and domain specific vocabulary. However, not all teachers integrate these habits within the context of more difficult pieces of literature.

Before any close reading instruction can occur, the teacher must first select a piece of literature. It's important to note that not all text warrant the kind of attention that accompanies a close reading routine. If a text is easily understood and simply organized, there is no reason to do a close reading. According to Fisher and Frey (2012), close reading is about showing our students that some texts are worth that level of attention, and moreover, teaching them how to become fully immersed in those texts to analyze them. In addition, "Close reading must be accompanied by other essential instructional practices that are vital to reading development: interactive read-alouds and shared readings, teacher modeling and think-alouds, guided reading with leveled text, collaborative reading and discussion, and independent reading and writing" (Fisher & Frey, 2012, p. 180). When close reading strategies become second nature to students, it is hypothesized that students will become better at comprehending any type of text.

To determine whether close reading is an appropriate instructional routine for elementary school students, the 2012 study conducted by Fisher and Frey asked principals to identify 14 highly qualified teachers to implement a close reading procedural study with students in grades K-6. Two teachers from each grade with over a decade of experience were selected to participate in the study. After observing each teacher's instructional routine, a team of professionals discussed the key aspects of close reading and how the instructional implications could work for elementary-age students. The same study also determined five key features of close reading which are reviewed below.

The Five Key Features of Close Reading

The length of a passage is the first key features of close reading. Studying short text is helpful to enable students with a wide range of reading levels to practice closely reading demanding text. “Reading short text allows them to make more passes through the entire sequence of a text... a short piece of text of a page or two can be digested in one lesson” (Boyles 2013, p. 36). One English teacher noted, “My students read longer pieces on their own. When we really dig into a text, I use a shorter piece so that I can teach them skills for interrogating the ideas in the text” (Fisher & Frey, 2012, p. 180). To modify this for elementary students, teachers must continue to select short texts from a wide range of genres and types.

The second key feature of teaching close reading in the lower grades is choosing a complex text. The text should be on the students’ grade level if not one grade level above and worthy of extended instructional time. Providing students with text complexity ensures the need to dig deeper to demonstrate an understanding of the text. In addition, choosing a text for close reading instruction should not stand in isolation from other subject areas and text types. Fang (2016) notes that conducting close reading within rich contexts of interdisciplinary learning-where observing, performing, inquiring, reading, writing, listening, viewing, and talking are woven together – makes the experience much more authentic, purposeful, productive, and enjoyable.

The third key feature of frontloading was a controversial one. Whether or not to frontload students before reading was heavily discussed in the literature. Most were surprised with the lack of frontloading and pre-teaching they observed. In Fisher and Frey’s (2012) study, teachers consistently set a purpose for reading but did not engage in students in a discussion about the meaning of text, key vocabulary, or what they should expect to find. Rose and Martin (2012)

argue that during the first stage of the closed reading process, the teacher reads a text aloud and then summarizes its plot or key ideas in terms all student can understand.

The study group agreed, “that not every text needed frontloading and that this scaffold had probably been overused in the past” (Fisher & Frey, 2012, p.181). Rather than ban frontloading and pre-teaching, the group discussed situations in which the features are necessary. For example, when a vocabulary term is not used in a way that students could figure out using context or structural analysis, frontloading that information would be appropriate. Participants in the same study also agreed on two additional criteria, “... frontloading should not remove the need to read the text, and that frontloading should not take readers away from the text to their own experiences too soon” (p.184).

Another key feature of teaching close reading is the use of repeated readings. Students of all ages and grades reread the text several times. Each time, students are provided a purpose, think job, or question that should influence the reason for each repeated read. Rereading allows for students to develop more background knowledge from the previous readings and conversations, so they understand more each time they read. Teachers in the study focused their purpose for rereading around the types of questions they posed to their students. The second stage of Rose and Martin’s (2012) Reading to Learn model agrees with the Fisher and Frey (2012) model in that “the teacher engages students in reading, paraphrasing, and discussing a short but challenging passage from the text, sentence by sentence, with the aim of expanding students’ linguistic repertoires for building tension, construing technicality, density, and abstraction, evaluating issues and critiquing texts and ensuring full comprehension” (p. 109).

The fifth key feature is using text-dependent questions or TDQ’s which involves asking a sequence of questions that will lead students to a deeper understanding of the text. These types of

questions help readers build the capacity for independently comprehending a text through close reading. Questions posed during a close reading routine should require both literal and inferential thinking. They should be open-ended and generate real discussion, not sticking too closely to the kinds of things we typically ask young readers like in-text questioning or convergent questions. Text-dependent questions should relate to state standards and require students to analyze the craft and structure of a text as well as the integration of knowledge and ideas. To restructure the questions necessary for close reading, teachers must have read the selection in advance of teaching it. To form appropriate text-dependent questions the participants of the Fisher and Frey (2012) study agreed on six broad categories which are reviewed in Table 1 (p. 185).

Table 1

Text-Dependent Question Types

Question type	Question purpose
General understanding	■ Draw on the overall view of the piece, especially main ideas or arguments
Key detail	■ Who/what/where/when/why/how questions that are essential to understanding the meaning of the passage
Vocabulary and text structure	■ Bridge explicit with implicit meanings, especially in focusing on words and phrases as well as the way the author has organized the information ■ May include text features and discourse structures
Author's purpose	■ Draw the reader's attention to genre, point of view, multiple perspectives, and critical literacies, such as speculating on alternative accounts of the same event
Inferential	■ Challenge students to examine the implicitly stated ideas, arguments, or key details in the text
Opinion and intertextual	■ Allow students to use their foundational knowledge of one text to assert their opinion or make connections to other texts, using the target text to support their claim

Note. To create this table, we synthesized information from "Close Reading in Elementary Schools," by D. Fisher and N. Frey, 2012, *The Reading Teacher*, 66(3), p. 185.

Santorì and Belfatti (2017) argue that not all text-dependent questions need to be teacher-dependent. Their study emphasized the role student inquires play in rigorous textual analysis. During the study, teachers worked with groups of third- and fourth-grade students for 30 minutes each week over the course of a school year. The groups facilitated text-based

discussions granting the students considerable textual agency to develop their own questions. To get a sense of range in variation of questions students generated, Santori and Balfatti identified the questions according to the six broad categories of text-dependent questions identified by Fisher and Frey (2012), as shown in Table 1. Results from the study encouraged teachers to provide time and space for students to generate their own text-based inquiries. While conducting their research, Santori and Balfatti found that, "...following, rather than leading, students' textual investigations (a) fosters student's substantive engagement with text, (b) allows students to probe multiple text features and text structures in both narrative and informational genres, and (c) identifies places where students perceive textual ambiguities" (p. 651).

Annotations

Another instructional implication that accompanies close reading is the art of teaching annotations. Formal annotation is normally associated with high school and college readings. Most elementary school students have limited experience with annotations and many teachers have minimal experience teaching it. However, informal annotation has begun to make its way into the classrooms of many elementary schools thanks to the rigorous standards implemented with Common Core. "By taking a measured approach to what has traditionally been regarded as a secondary and postsecondary skill, teachers were able to make some informal modifications that take their younger students' development, cognition, and metacognition into account" (Fisher & Frey, 2012, p. 187).

Starting in kindergarten, readers can use wiki sticks to underline key ideas in big books and collaboratively develop notes about books. Around second and third grade, writing instruments are introduced and students use bookmarks and sticky notes to remember key ideas, keywords, and phrases. In fifth and sixth grade, additional symbols like the question mark or

“EX” are used to identify questions about the text or when the author provides examples. Students continue to write two- to three-word comments in the margins. Fisher and Frey (2012) state “teachers have found that annotations can become a great platform for small group discussion of a text, as well as provide insight into the depth of their student's level of comprehension” (p. 186).

Teaching Close Reading during Guided Reading

Educators should understand that close reading is not a substitute for developing the necessary skills of literacy; phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension. Frequently referred to as the “Big Five,” these essential skills have been identified as critical components of literacy instruction. Teachers in the primary grades should spend much of their time teaching these essential building blocks of reading while introducing components of close reading.

“The high expectation brought 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” (Raines, 2016, p. 8). Teaching close reading through a guided reading routine can have a stronger impact on reading comprehension. To start, working with a smaller group will lead to better comprehension because the teachers is able to dedicate more time to each individual student. Also, students in a smaller group have more opportunities to participate in group discussions about their annotations and the text. During their guided reading instruction, Serravallo and Goldberg (2010) focused on teaching explicit strategies, appreciating the amount of time and choice in reading, and using student-generated discussion questions while providing comprehension support. They also highlighted the importance of creating a “thinking job” to set a purpose for reading. Many aspects of these guided reading

routines align with close reading strategies, making the two instructional strategies fitting for elementary schools.

Overall, college and career readiness can begin in the primary grades. By implementing the key features of close reading, making the appropriate modification, and following a guided reading routine, close reading skills can be taught to even our youngest readers.

Effectiveness of Close Reading for Improving Reading and Writing

Teachers, principals, and policy makers have questioned close reading strategies and the effectiveness they have on student reading and writing. One study analyzed close reading to determine the most efficient practices by examining the New York State English Language Arts Exam data from ten school districts. Over 6,000 exams given in third, fourth, and fifth grade were analyzed. Using this data, the study examined whether a close-reading approach to reading has a greater effect on student achievement in comparison to non-close reading approaches. The statistical data revealed that adopting the New York State ELA Modules, which didn't implement close reading strategies, was not associated with higher student scores on the ELA exam. The researchers concluded, "that prescribed curriculum does not guarantee higher student achievement over the manner in which a teacher presents close reading and motivates student learning" (Valentine, 2016, p. 3).

Fisher and Frey (2014) demonstrated the effectiveness of close reading as an intervention for 100 low-performing seventh and eighth graders who participated in an after-school program. The close reading group "significantly outperformed a comparison group of over 300 students on the state accountability assessment and on their reading" (p. 25).

In another study, Williams et al. (2014) studied 197 at-risk second-grade social studies students who read, discussed, and analyzed texts written at third- or fourth-grade levels. The researchers found “that the students who were taught text structure performed significantly better both on text that had been used in the instruction and on novel text that they had not encountered before, which is, of course, what is meant by reading comprehension” (p. 12). Even though the study wasn't directly related to close reading, this research advances the position that careful examination of the structure of informational text above students’ reading level may be beneficial to close reading.

Rose and Martin (2012), mentioned above for their position on the Reading to Learn model, found that in schools where the Read to Learn model was implemented, average literacy gains across schools and classes, among students from all backgrounds and ability groups were double the expected rate of literacy development. “With the widespread interest in close reading and the complexities involved in its implications, it’s important for the educational community continue to determine how it works best across different pedagogical settings” (Ross, 2015, p. 113).

Close Reading and Writing

Writing can act as a formal assessment in the close reading process. “Students perform a writing task about the passage, which includes paraphrasing, explaining connections in the text, and or evaluating the position of the author” (Valentine, 2016, p. 43). The strategies used to find meaning an author's work will help with students’ writing skills which aligns to the Common Core ELA Anchor Standard 1; “...cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text” (NGACBP & CCSSO, 2010, p. 10). During the third stage of Rose and Martin’s (2012) Reading to Learn model, students write—first as a whole class

and then individually—a new text in the same genre, paraphrasing or appropriating the language resources of the text they have been reading. Writing has an important place in the close reading process as it allows students to communicate their understanding of the text. Writing is also embedded across the subject areas include math, science, social studies, and reading, making it a vital skill starting at a young age.

Motivating Students and Educators

Many hours of lesson planning and professional development have been dedicated to close reading with the goal of increasing students' academic success. Educators know that student motivation can make the difference between learning something temporally and learning with permanence and internalization. Therefore, teachers must understand what motivates children. To achieve these high standards and the rigors of high-stakes testing teachers must tap into students' intrinsic motivation to read and comprehend assigned texts. Valentine (2016) states, "To develop this drive, educators create strategies to engage students, pique interest, and spark motivation" (p. 45).

When asking readers to read the same text multiple times, it's imperative they have a distinct purpose for reading each time. "The first re-reading should include a focus on the details or story structure. The second re-reading may define the author's craft or ways the author utilizes dialogue, description, or ideas. A third re-read may consist of an analyzing the theme, a characters, climax, or conflict of the story" (Glover, 2016, p. 25). Providing readers with a goal or purpose for reading will increased their motivation to do the repeated readings.

The accountability associated with participating in literature circles can also motivate students to use close reading strategies and develop the stamina required to read a text with

thoroughness to seek a deeper meaning. As noted, students read more carefully when they have an authentic purpose for doing so. They want to look and sound like an expert when sharing their thinking within the literacy circles, so they often reference the text, infer meaning, make text connections and use correct vocabulary.

Technology can also be a motivating factor when asking students to implement close reading strategies. There are numerous free online resources that can be used in the classroom that promote CR. Many websites, e-readers, and applications can be used during the process of close reading a digital text. Text of all genres can be uploaded ahead of time to include students' interest. In addition, students have the advantage of focusing more on comprehending the text and gain a deeper meaning when they can have the text read to them or use voice-to-text when responding to questions. E-readers can also be used for English Language Learners to boost motivation as well as their confidence level when reading and responding to the text.

Students' confidence and outlook on reading are factors to consider during the research and use of close reading strategies. Students who see themselves as poor readers may have difficulty with the level of stamina and perseverance that close reading demands. By igniting a student's motivation to read, an educator can boost a reader's confidence and choose reading passages that pique interest and stretch student's reading and comprehension abilities.

Conclusion

Although close reading is seen as a potential platform for developing content knowledge, advanced literacy, and critical thinking, more research is still needed to bring a clear understanding of the effectiveness of its strategies and for whom they are most effective. The research reviewed agrees that the implementation of close reading strategies should be

introduced in elementary school versus waiting until middle or high school. With simple modifications, elementary teachers can simultaneously attend to the reader, the text, and the task. The close reading models reviewed can enrich learning experiences to help students grow into proficient readers who can access, produce, communicate, evaluate, and renovate knowledge across all academic content areas.

CHAPTER III

METHODS

Design

This study was designed to examine the effectiveness that close reading strategies have on the improvement of reading comprehension, writing, and attitudes toward reading in third-grade students as compared with similar students using the customary county curriculum. This research employed a quasi-experimental design using a pre- and posttest with the intact classrooms. The reading comprehension and writing pretest was measured using Anne Arundel County Public Schools Quarter 2 English Language Arts Reading Benchmark Assessment. The students' attitudes toward reading were measured using the *Elementary Reading Attitude Survey* for the pre- and posttest. The type of instruction was implemented with two classes of third grade students. The treatment group (class A) received explicit close reading instruction, while the control group (class B) followed the Anne Arundel county English Language Art standards for reading and writing. The attitude survey for reading will be considered when selecting passages for class A, but will not be consider for class B. The study lasted seven weeks. The independent variable in this study was the type of reading instruction (close reading or county curriculum). The dependent variable was the reading comprehension scores of both classes on the second and third quarter reading benchmark assessment. The quarter three benchmark scores from both classes will be compared to the quarter two benchmark scores to determine the most effective practice for teaching reading comprehension and writing.

Participants

The study involved two classrooms of third-grade students from an elementary school in Anne Arundel County, Maryland. The procedure for selecting and assigning the classes was

determined by the school's principal and reading specialist. Students' F&P (Fountas & Pinnell) reading level, special education services, and behavior were considered when creating the classes. In the treatment group, 21 participants were eight or nine years old. The group consisted of twelve boys and nine girls. Five of the students were White, five Hispanic, one Multi-Racial, one Arabic, one Asian, and eight African American. Three of the students had been diagnosed with learning disabilities and receive special education services. Three of the students were English Language Learners. Twelve of the 21 students qualify for FARMS (Free and Reduced Meals Students), and eight did not.

Class B was similar, with 21 students being eight or nine years old. The group consisted of eleven girls and ten boys. Eight of the students are White, four Multi-racial, one Asian, and 8 African Americans. Two of the students had been diagnosed with learning disabilities and receive special education services. Four of the students were English Language Learners. Ten of the 21 students qualify for FARMS (Free and Reduced Meals Students), and eleven were not. Teachers with at least four years of teaching experience teach both classrooms. Small group reading instruction was established in each classroom.

The study school included grades pre-kindergarten through fifth and is currently comprised of 521 students. Of the school's total population, 44% come from low-income areas. According to the Maryland State Department of Education, the school scored 3/5 stars or 47% on the 2018-2019 Schools Report Card. The data from the school shows that 43.3% of the school's students scored "proficient" on the English Language Arts state test.

Instrument

As a pretest, this study used the Anne Arundel County Public Schools Reading Grade 3 Benchmark Assessment Quarter 2, a county mandated assessment for the 2018-2019 school year. Students are given 75 minutes to read two short passages (fiction and non-fiction), answer 15-part A/B selected response questions, and respond to one writing prompt that refers to both passages. The selected response questions are each worth one point. One question requires students to select the two best answers and is worth two points. The writing prompt is scored using a county rubric. Totalling nine points, the rubric is broken into three sections: three points for Language Conventions, three points for Written Production, and three points for Written Expression.

Veteran classroom teachers and the school's reading specialist report that the assessment is a quick and easy to implement. The measures provide solid, broad diagnostics for both individual students and groups of students. The assessment uses a variety of texts to assess students' ability to construct meaning. The multiple-choice questions comprise retrieval items and local inference items based on small sections of text, which are all components of close reading.

The Elementary Reading Attitude Survey (ERAS) was used for the studies pre- and posttest. The tool is a quick and easy way to assess students' attitudes towards reading. There has been a long history of research in which attitude and achievement in reading have been consistently linked. Wixson and Lipson (in press) acknowledge that "the student's attitude towards reading is a central factor affecting reading performance" (p. 626). The administration procedure for the ERAS was information that accompanied the instrument itself. The teacher reads each question aloud twice and the students mark their responses. Each item is assigned one to four points, four indicating the happiest. The scoring sheet that followed the instrument is

used to organize the process and record recreational, academic, and total scores, along with a percentile rank of each.

Procedure

Before close reading was explicitly taught, students in the treatment group completed the Elementary Reading Attitude Survey as well as the Reading Grade 3 Benchmark Assessment Quarter 2. The attitude survey was not given to the control group. The reading benchmark assessment data was used to group students according to their areas of need. Once the students' interest and targeted areas of weakness were identified, specific passages were selected. It was important to choose shorter passages or use chunks of a longer text to practice interrogating the ideas of the text. The complexity of the text was also considered when selecting the text. During close reading instruction, the text selected is well above the students' independent reading level.

Reading instruction was implemented whole group for 15-20 minutes, followed by four 15-minute small group rotations. Some rotation groups were focus groups based on their area of need, while other days the students were grouped by their F&P level. To begin, the class was taught the meaning of close reading, how good readers read closely, and why it's an important skill to use when reading. To motivate the class, each student was provided with a pencil box of close reading "tools" which consisted of a pen, pencil, highlighter, various size post-its, a small magnifying glass, and a bookmark with annotation symbols.

During the first week of the study, the class was taught how to annotate the text and symbols good readers use while annotating. For example, readers use an exclamation point for an interesting or surprising part, a question mark for any areas of confusion, circle any important or unknown words, the letter C for connection, the letter E for evidence, and a heart for a favorite

part. Then, they were taught strategies close readers use while reading closely. For example, an anchor chart displayed the following strategies: highlight important information, circle words or phrases you don't understand, write a note on a post-it or in the margins, reread the text, and make connections. A small group of students were confused on what parts of the text to annotate. Their papers were highlighted from beginning to end with post-its everywhere. Reteaching this small group consisted of repeated models of reading aloud. The group practicing annotating while following the I do, we do, you do model.

For the duration of the first two weeks, students practiced using close reading strategies while annotating a wide range of genres and text types according to their interests and F&P level. The students built up their stamina by rereading the same text several times. With each read, students were provided a different purpose or question that influenced their repeated reading. Frontloading was minimal, so the students built up their own background knowledge with each read, making sure their own experiences didn't take away from the central message of the text.

Week three focused on types of questions, more specifically, Text-Dependent Questions (TDQ's). An anchor chart was created to identify the six different types of questions: general understanding questions, key detail questions, vocabulary and text structure, author's purpose, inferential questions, and opinion and intertextual questions. One of the lessons this week had students identify each type of question on the Quarter 2 Benchmark Assessment and sort them into the correct category. Additional small groups were created according to each type of question missed on the Benchmark Assessment. For example, students who missed similar questions were grouped into focus groups to target specific areas of weakness. Sixteen percent of the class incorrectly answered the question with standard RI.3.1 (ask and answer questions to demonstrate understanding of a text, referring explicitly to the texts the basis for the answers).

Therefore, mini lessons were created for that specific small group of students. For questions where 40% or more were answered incorrectly, a whole group lesson was created. The focus of the lesson was how to use close reading strategies to improve upon that specific standard.

For the next four weeks, reading instruction followed a consistent pattern: whole group instruction followed by a rotation of small groups. Most close reading lessons took about four days to complete. On day one, students were given a cold read to annotate independently. During small groups, the class discussed their annotations and discussed the basics of the passage, main idea/details, new vocabulary, and author's purpose. Students summarized the text and discussed what jumped out to them while they read or any questions they had.

On day two, students completed the second read with a partner to further their comprehension. They had the choice of choral reading the text together or to take turns reading the entire passage then switching rolls. In small group, the class revisited their annotations to determine the genre of the passage by identifying the text structures and text features used. Students were asked to identify how the author feels about the subject and why they thought the author used words and phrases.

Students read the passage independently for a third time on day three. They applied their knowledge by making inferences and summarizing the text by answering TDQ's. They answered questions like; "What can you inferences can you make?" "How does the author support key details?" or "How does this relate to other text you've read?" To improve writing craft and structure, much emphasis was placed on the importance of restating and answering each question. This skill took the entirety of the study to improve upon, and some students still struggled to properly restate each question. The instructor provided sentence stems for special

education students as well as students whose comprehension was being compromised by their inability to correctly restate the questions.

On day four, students read the passage independently for working through a culminating writing activity on their own. On day five, students could finish their writing activity or complete an extension activity from a choice square if they finished. For example, one extension activity had the students conduct further research of the topic on an iPad. Other activities included sharing their opinion of the topic, creating a list of questions to ask the author, or writing their own story using the same topic.

At the end of the seven-week study, students took the Quarter 3 English Language Arts Reading Benchmark Assessment. The attitude survey was also administered post-study to determine how the students' attitudes towards reading may have changed after being taught close reading strategies.

Analysis Plan

For each dependent variable, the statistical significance of the pre-to-post change will be assessed by the paired t-test. In addition, Cohen's (1998) Delta effect size will be calculated. Effect size measures the amount of change from pre-to-post regardless of sample size. The null hypothesis is that there will be no mean change in the dependent variable from pre-to-post in the theoretical population of the study sample. The alternative hypothesis is that there will be a mean change in the dependent variable from pre-to-post in the theoretical population of the study sample.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

Findings

The purpose of this study was to examine the effectiveness that close reading strategies have on the improvement of reading comprehension, writing, and attitudes toward reading in third-grade students as compared with similar students using the customary county curriculum. A treatment group of 21 Grade 3 students received close reading instruction for reading and writing. A second sample of 21 students in the control group received the customary Anne Arundel County Public Schools reading and writing instruction.

This research employed a quasi-experimental design using a pre- and posttests. The students were tested in reading comprehension and three writing skills, pre and post. The reading comprehension and writing was measured using Anne Arundel County Public Schools Quarter 2 and 3 English Language Arts Reading Benchmark Assessment. The students' attitudes toward reading were measured using the *Elementary Reading Attitude Survey* for the pre- and posttest. This survey was only conducted with the treatment group.

The procedure for selecting and assigning each class was determined by the school's principal and reading specialist. Students' F&P (Fountas & Pinnell) reading level, special education services, and behavior were considered when creating the intact classrooms. Both teachers have the same number of years of teaching experience.

Table 2 below contains the mean scores for the control and treatment groups from pre- to posttest as well as the results of statistical analysis.

Table 2

Means Scores for Control and Treatment Groups

Group	preRead	postRead	preW1	postW1	preW2	postW2	preW3	postW3
Control	50.6	61.3	2.12	1.80	2.06	1.88	2.01	2.01
Treat	56.5	69.1	2.44	2.31	2.19	2.41	2.36	2.42
Diff	5.9	7.8	0.32	0.51	0.13	0.53	0.35	0.41

The treatment group had higher mean scores than the control group for all the pre- and posttests section on the Anne Arundel County Public Schools Quarter 2 and 3 English Language Arts Reading Benchmark Assessment.

Tables 3 and 4 below contain the reading pretest and posttest scores for both the control and treatment groups as well as the results of statistical analysis.

Table 3

Reading Test Pretest Control vs. Treatment Groups

Group	Obs	Mean	Std. Err.	Std. Dev.	[95% Conf. Interval]	
control	21	50.58571	4.506679	20.6522	41.18495	59.98648
treat	21	56.50952	3.47456	15.92243	49.26172	63.75733
combined	42	53.54762	2.848192	18.45839	47.79558	59.29966
diff		-5.923809	5.690582		-17.4249	5.577286
diff = mean(control) - mean(treat)				t =	-1.0410	
Ho: diff = 0				degrees of freedom =	40	
Ha: diff < 0		Ha: diff != 0		Ha: diff > 0		
Pr(T < t) = 0.1521		Pr(T > t) = 0.3041		Pr(T > t) = 0.8479		

Table 4

Reading Test Posttest Control vs. Treatment Groups

Group	Obs	Mean	Std. Err.	Std. Dev.	[95% Conf. Interval]	
control	21	61.31905	4.812685	22.05449	51.27996	71.35813
treat	22	69.14091	4.958	23.25508	58.83018	79.45163
combined	43	65.32093	3.469702	22.75236	58.31879	72.32307
diff		-7.821862	6.918404		-21.79386	6.150138
diff = mean(control) - mean(treat)				t =	-1.1306	
Ho: diff = 0				degrees of freedom =	41	
Ha: diff < 0		Ha: diff != 0		Ha: diff > 0		
Pr(T < t) = 0.1324		Pr(T > t) = 0.2648		Pr(T > t) = 0.8676		

The treatment group widened its advantage over the control group for each of the outcomes in the samples. The sample pretest mean differences between the control and treatment groups (in favor of the treatment) were not statistically significant at the customary .05 level. The sample posttest mean differences between the control and treatment groups (in favor of the treatment) were not statistically significant at the customary .05 level.

Tables 5 and 6 below contain the Writing Test 1 pretest and posttest scores for both the control and treatment groups.

Table 5

Writing Test 1 Pretest Control vs. Treatment Groups

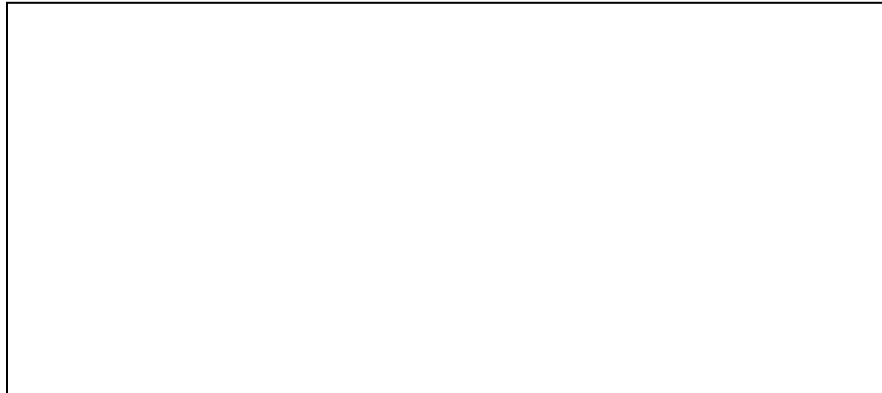
Group	Obs	Mean	Std. Err.	Std. Dev.	[95% Conf. Interval]	
control	21	2.121429	.2305937	1.056713	1.640418	2.602439
treat	21	2.442857	.1264104	.5792853	2.17917	2.706545
combined	42	2.282143	.1322746	.8572376	2.015009	2.549277
diff		-.3214286	.2629697		-.8529102	.210053
diff = mean(control) - mean(treat)				t =	-1.2223	
Ho: diff = 0				degrees of freedom =	40	
Ha: diff < 0		Ha: diff != 0		Ha: diff > 0		
Pr(T < t) = 0.1144		Pr(T > t) = 0.2287		Pr(T > t) = 0.8856		

Table 6

*Writing
Test 1
Posttest
Control
vs.*

Group	Obs	Mean	Std. Err.	Std. Dev.	[95% Conf. Interval]	
control	21	1.8	.222486	1.019559	1.335902	2.264098
treat	22	2.311364	.189495	.8888103	1.917287	2.70544
combined	43	2.061628	.1491749	.9782052	1.760581	2.362675
diff		-.5113636	.291299		-1.099654	.0769266
diff = mean(control) - mean(treat)				t =	-1.7555	
Ho: diff = 0				degrees of freedom =	41	
Ha: diff < 0		Ha: diff != 0		Ha: diff > 0		
Pr(T < t) = 0.0433		Pr(T > t) = 0.0867		Pr(T > t) = 0.9567		

Treatment Groups



Tables 7 and 8 below contain the Writing Test 2 pretest and posttest scores for both the control and treatment groups.

Table 7

Writing Test 2 Pretest Control vs. Posttest Groups

Group	Obs	Mean	Std. Err.	Std. Dev.	[95% Conf. Interval]	
control	21	2.057143	.2495302	1.143491	1.536632	2.577654
treat	21	2.185714	.1661233	.7612724	1.839187	2.532241
combined	42	2.121429	.148386	.9616515	1.821757	2.4211
diff		-.1285714	.2997703		-.7344298	.477287
diff = mean(control) - mean(treat)				t = -0.4289		
Ho: diff = 0				degrees of freedom = 40		
Ha: diff < 0				Ha: diff != 0		
Pr(T < t) = 0.3351				Pr(T > t) = 0.6703		
				Ha: diff > 0		
				Pr(T > t) = 0.6649		

Table 8

Writing Test 2 Posttest Control vs. Treatment Groups

Group	Obs	Mean	Std. Err.	Std. Dev.	[95% Conf. Interval]	
control	21	2.007143	.2242789	1.027775	1.539305	2.47498
treat	21	2.364286	.1839754	.8430811	1.98052	2.748052
combined	42	2.185714	.1459508	.9458694	1.890961	2.480468
diff		-.3571429	.2900827		-.9434218	.2291361
diff = mean(control) - mean(treat)				t = -1.2312		
Ho: diff = 0				degrees of freedom = 40		
Ha: diff < 0				Ha: diff != 0		
Pr(T < t) = 0.1127				Pr(T > t) = 0.2254		
				Ha: diff > 0		
				Pr(T > t) = 0.8873		

Tables 9 and 10 below contain the Writing Test 1 pretest and posttest scores for both the control and treatment groups as well as the results of statistical analysis of all three writing tests.

Table 9

Writing Test 3 Pretest Control vs. Treatment

Group	Obs	Mean	Std. Err.	Std. Dev.	[95% Conf. Interval]	
control	21	1.878571	.2580737	1.182642	1.340239	2.416904
treat	22	2.406818	.1641024	.7697086	2.065549	2.748088
combined	43	2.148837	.1550416	1.016676	1.835951	2.461724
diff		-.5282468	.3028929		-1.139951	.0834578
diff = mean(control) - mean(treat)				t =	-1.7440	
Ho: diff = 0				degrees of freedom =	41	
Ha: diff < 0		Ha: diff != 0		Ha: diff > 0		
Pr(T < t) = 0.0443		Pr(T > t) = 0.0887		Pr(T > t) = 0.9557		

Table 10

Writing Test 3 Posttest Control vs. Treatment

Group	Obs	Mean	Std. Err.	Std. Dev.	[95% Conf. Interval]	
control	21	2.007143	.2242789	1.027775	1.539305	2.47498
treat	22	2.420455	.1441372	.6760634	2.120705	2.720204
combined	43	2.218605	.1342716	.8804776	1.947634	2.489576
diff		-.4133117	.2640981		-.9466687	.1200453
diff = mean(control) - mean(treat)				t =	-1.5650	
Ho: diff = 0				degrees of freedom =	41	
Ha: diff < 0		Ha: diff != 0		Ha: diff > 0		
Pr(T < t) = 0.0626		Pr(T > t) = 0.1253		Pr(T > t) = 0.9374		

The treatment group widened its advantage over the control group for each of the outcomes in the samples. The largest increase in the pre-to-post difference occurred with the W2 writing test.

Cohen's (1998) Delta effect size for the W1 posttest E vs. C difference was 0.54, which is in the medium size category on a scale of very small to very large. The effect size for W2 posttest E vs. C difference was also in the medium effect size at 0.53. This indicates that the non-significant results for W1 and W2 posttests were likely due to the small sample sizes rather than to the lack of substantial treatment effects.

Cohen's (1998) Delta effect size for W2 gain comparing the control and treatment groups was in the medium range at 0.54. This indicates that the non-significant gain from pre-to-post favoring the treatment was likely due to the small sample sizes rather than the lack of substantial treatment effects. The other sample gains for reading, W1 and W3 had small or very small effect sizes. Therefore, the non-significant results for sample gains in reading, W1, and W2 cannot be attributed only to small sample sizes. Table 11 below contains the reading pretest and posttest gain control and treatment groups.

Table 11

Reading Test Pre to Post Gain Control vs. Treatment

Group	Obs	Mean	Std. Err.	Std. Dev.	[95% Conf. Interval]	
control	21	10.73333	3.835637	17.5771	2.732335	18.73433
treat	21	14.11905	4.642657	21.27533	4.434634	23.80346
combined	42	12.42619	2.985859	19.35058	6.396126	18.45626
diff		-3.385715	6.022157		-15.55695	8.785519
diff = mean(control) - mean(treat)				t =	-0.5622	
Ho: diff = 0				degrees of freedom =	40	
Ha: diff < 0		Ha: diff != 0		Ha: diff > 0		
Pr(T < t) = 0.2886		Pr(T > t) = 0.5771		Pr(T > t) = 0.7114		

Tables 12-14 below contain the Writing Test 1-3 pretest and posttest gain control and treatment groups.

Table 12

Writing Test 1 Pre-to-Post Gain Control vs. Treatment

Group	Obs	Mean	Std. Err.	Std. Dev.	[95% Conf. Interval]	
control	21	-.3214286	.208383	.9549308	-.7561079	.1132507
treat	21	-.0857143	.2005986	.9192582	-.5041556	.332727
combined	42	-.2035714	.1440294	.9334171	-.4944447	.0873018
diff		-.2357143	.289246		-.8203023	.3488737
diff = mean(control) - mean(treat)				t = -0.8149		
Ho: diff = 0				degrees of freedom = 40		
Ha: diff < 0		Ha: diff != 0		Ha: diff > 0		
Pr(T < t) = 0.2100		Pr(T > t) = 0.4199		Pr(T > t) = 0.7900		

Table 13

Writing Test 2 Pre-to-Post Gain Control vs. Treatment

Group	Obs	Mean	Std. Err.	Std. Dev.	[95% Conf. Interval]	
control	21	-.1785714	.2132953	.977442	-.6234977	.2663548
treat	21	.2714286	.1469763	.6735301	-.0351587	.5780158
combined	42	.0464286	.1326645	.8597641	-.2214928	.3143499
diff		-.45	.2590308		-.9735207	.0735207
diff = mean(control) - mean(treat)				t = -1.7372		
Ho: diff = 0				degrees of freedom = 40		
Ha: diff < 0		Ha: diff != 0		Ha: diff > 0		
Pr(T < t) = 0.0450		Pr(T > t) = 0.0900		Pr(T > t) = 0.9550		

Table 14

Writing Test 3 Pre-to-Post Gain Control vs. Treatment

Group	Obs	Mean	Std. Err.	Std. Dev.	[95% Conf. Interval]	
control	21	0	.1771803	.8119421	-.3695916	.3695916
treat	21	.0642857	.2069087	.9481749	-.3673183	.4958898
combined	42	.0321429	.1346245	.8724665	-.2397368	.3040225
diff		-.0642857	.2724043		-.6148353	.4862638
diff = mean(control) - mean(treat)				t = -0.2360		
Ho: diff = 0				degrees of freedom = 40		

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this research was to determine that close reading strategies will not have any effect on the of reading comprehension, writing, and attitudes towards reading in third-grade students as compared to similar students using the customary county curriculum. The study hypothesized that third-grade students who participated in explicit close reading instruction would not increase their reading comprehension and writing score on the Anne Arundel County Public School's Reading Benchmark Assessments when compared to similar students who received the customary county reading instruction.

The null hypothesis that there will be no mean difference in the dependent variables in the theoretical population between the control and treatment groups could not be rejected at the traditional .05 level of significance for the pre- and post-reading test and the pre- and post-writing tests. The effect sizes, however, for Writing 1 and 2 posttests were in the medium range and Writing posttest 3 was just below the medium range. These effect sizes indicate that the lack of statistical significance could be mostly due to small sample sizes rather than weak treatment effects. That is, replicating the study with larger samples would likely yield statistically significant advantages for the close technique for the writing tests. The reading test, on the other hand had non-significant differences between controls and treatment groups as well as small effect sizes. Therefore, there is insufficient evidence that the close reading instruction would yield higher reading test scores. All the pretests had non-significant statistical differences and small effect sizes. Therefore, the study began with equivalent sample groups as far as reading and writing tests were concerned.

The researcher began by noting the initial reading comprehension and writing scores from the Quarter 2 Reading Benchmark Assessment. In addition, students from the treatment class were asked to take the Elementary Reading Attitude Survey to gauge their feelings about reading. Quarter 2 Benchmark scores from the control class were also taken into consideration, but their attitudes about reading were not. Over the course of seven weeks, the treatment class was taught using close reading strategies. Both whole and small group instruction were implemented. Students in the treatment group were taught to annotate the text using a variety of text types. These students were also explicitly taught how to answer Text Dependent Questions (TDQ's). At the same time, the control class continued to follow the Anne Arundel County English Language Arts standards for reading and writing. The results indicated the students in the treatment group had a higher, though non-statistically significant mean score in each of the outcomes of the reading benchmark assessment. The results are shown on Table 1 in Chapter IV.

Implications of the Results

The results of the study support the research on using close reading techniques to improve students written expression as compared with similar control students. The evidence for the reading test, however, was not enough to support advantages for the treatment. According to the reading benchmark data, the treatment group widened its advantage over the control group for each of the outcomes in the samples. The sample pretest mean differences between the control and treatment groups (in favor of the treatment) were not statistically significant at the customary .05 level. The pretest comparison established a fair and unbiased study because the mean differences between the two groups were not statistically significant and the effect sizes were small. The sample posttest mean differences between the control and treatment groups (in

favor of the treatment) were not statistically significant at the customary .05 level. However, the effect sizes for W1 post and W2 post were of medium effect size. Therefore, the non-significant results for W1 and W2 posttests were more likely due to the small samples rather than ineffective treatments (in comparison to the controls). W3 post was very close to the medium effect size range but not quite.

These results are important to researchers and educators in many ways. First off, the focus on close reading instruction in education has been popular for a few years, and not much field research had been conducted at the elementary level. The close reading skills may have contributed to the slight improvements in reading comprehension and written production 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. After all, the students in the control group who were not receiving close reading strategies had a 10.7% increase on their overall mean score. Students in the treatment group receiving close reading strategies increased their overall mean score by 12.6%. This slight advantage in percentages could be contributed to the close reading technique of annotating; the students were explicitly this strategy taught over the course of seven weeks. In contrast, the control group was taught with the standard curriculum, which only spends one day on teaching “Readers React” or annotating the text.

The writing scores also showed improvement with the treatment group widening its advantage over the control group for each of the outcomes in the samples. The W1 post and W2 post were of medium effect size which was demonstrated in Chapter IV. This was the “written expression” and “written production” portion of the students’ writing samples. Students received full credit for these sections if their response addressed the prompt and used accurate evidence from the text to answer the question asked.

The importance of these findings supports the idea that implementing close reading strategies can improve a student's writing skills. It has implications that when students used close reading strategies and annotate what they read; they are more successful about responding to what they read. This paramount skill is written into numerous curricula as well as school improvement plans. The importance of these findings can influence the type of instruction provided during reading instruction. The skills and strategies of close reading support the learning of how students understand the text in order to gain meaning.

While conducting the research, the researcher noticed students getting accustomed to the close reading routine of focusing on one to two skills a day. For example, on day one of a close read, students focus on determining the main idea or the author's purpose. This pattern allowed students to focus on and truly understand one or two skills a day. In contrast, with the county curriculum, in one lesson, students are asked to make predictions, recall prior knowledge, identify unknown words, summarize, and recall information while answering a series of questions. Having students only focusing on one aspect of the text per day allowed them to gain a deeper understanding of each element within the text. This allowed students to build upon what they learned the previous day and apply it to the next day's read.

Theoretical Consequences

The results of this study were similar to prior research on the use of close reading instruction to improve reading comprehension and writing skills. Even though the treatment group scored slightly higher, the control/treatment differences in mean scores were not statistically significant. Numerous theories support the benefits of close reading but lack the statistical data to prove its affects. Theories do suggest that students can benefit from a variety of close reading techniques and methods. For example, by using short passages, exposing students

to TDQ's and shifting the focus on observing and analyzing text, close reading can bring a deeper meaning to text at the elementary level. In her research, Boyles (2013) notes the best thinkers do monitor and assess their thinking but in the context of processing the thinking of others. She further suggests that college and career readiness begins in the primary grades, and that, with the right tools, schools can build close reading skills even in our youngest readers.

Threats to Validity

There are factors that may have influenced the results of the study and could have caused threats to internal validity. First off, the convenience sample of two third-grade classes was used in the study. 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 would have been attained.

In addition, 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. Also, during the close reading process, the teacher can read the text to the students during the first read. However, when taking the assessment, the teacher cannot read any of the test out loud. These variables may have caused a risk to the studies validity.

Furthermore, the teachers in the control and treatment groups both have six years of teaching experience. But the difference in teaching styles between the two teachers and how much time they each spent on reading instruction both cause a threat to the internal validity of the study. Both teachers scored their own benchmarks for the writing section, and because each teacher acted as the teacher and assessor, an experimenter bias was possible. There is potential

for unconscious bias when the assessments are scored by the same teachers who administered them. This bias could have led to skewed data or inaccurate results of the study and were an additional threat to external validity.

Lastly, the students from both classes had more experience and are more accustomed to the county curriculum. Much of their reading instruction has been delivered this way over the course of their educational career. If students had more practice using the close reading strategies that were introduced, their comprehension and writing scores may have been different. In addition, close reading strategies were not specifically used with these students in the primary grades. It's possible that if the students had more experience with close reading, they would have performed better on the reading benchmark assessment. The difference in history of experience with the two strategies created a risk to the studies validity.

Connections to Existing Literature

Ways to improve students reading and writing skills have been studied widely for years, each source having a differing opinion from the next. Each source seeks to determine the best practices teachers can implement to increase the reading comprehension of their students. 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 how to teach it. One study did lend itself to the current action research project. In Fisher and Frey's (2012) study, a group of research professional observed an elementary school classroom in order to determine the best practices for incorporating close reading techniques in the primary grade levels. The techniques used in Fisher and Frey's study were like the ones used in the action research project: annotating the text, using a variety of short passages, and asking text-dependent questions.

Although the variation in scores from the study were small, the researcher noticed that students were more engaged and interested in reading when they were able to annotate the text. Fisher and Frey (2012) noted that annotation of text (the practice of making notes for oneself during reading) is an essential component of analytic reading. They also mention how annotating is useful in analytic writing about the text, which was the section on the assessment where the treatment group excelled over the control group.

The researcher also noted the lack of close reading instructional techniques imbedded within the CCSS. Part of the reason the control group was included was to highlight this deficit of close reading strategies within the standards as well as the disconnect between what teachers should be teaching and what is being asked to teach. According to the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (2011), 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 finds close reading to be a key component of college and career readiness. Therefore, if schools want students to be college and career ready, more close reading techniques and strategies need to be included in the required state curriculum.

Implications for Future Research

With regard to further studies, more research will need to be conducted to determine the level of effectiveness close reading has on reading comprehension and writing. With the control/treatment mean differences being not statistically significant and the effect sizes being small in the current study, it would be useful to conduct such a study over a greater period of time with a larger sample of students. In further studies one might consider splitting an entire grade level and teaching half close reading techniques for the school year and the other half with county curriculum. More time would allow students to become more proficient with close

reading strategies. The reading attitude survey proved that students' attitudes about reading were not affected by close reading strategies. Instead, researchers could consider using interest inventories or learning styles surveys to determine which types of instruction students prefer.

Summary

This study was an attempt to discover the effectiveness of close reading strategies on the improvement of reading comprehension, writing, and the attitude towards reading in third-grade students as compared with similar students using the customary county curriculum. The results of the study supported the use of close reading to improve writing expression as far as effect sizes are concerned. The results did not support an advantage for the treatment with reading comprehension scores. In addition, the students' attitudes towards reading were not affected after the close reading instruction. It's important to note the non-significant gains from pre-to-post favoring the treatment especially for the writing tests was likely due to the small sample sizes rather than the lack of substantial treatment effects. Therefore, more research needs to be conducted with a larger sample size for a longer period of time.

References

- Boyles, N. (2013). Closing in on close reading. *Educational Leadership*, 70(4), 36-41. Retrieved from <https://goucher.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.goucher.idm.oclc.org/docview/1239542895?accountid=11164>
- Carlson, E., Jenkins, F., Li, T., & Brownell, M. (2013). The interactions of vocabulary, phonemic awareness, decoding, and reading comprehension. *Journal of Educational Research*, 106(2), 120-131 doi:10.1080/00220671.2012.687791
- Cohen, J. (1988), *Statistical power analysis for the behavioral sciences*, 2nd edition. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Dalton, B. (2013, May). Engaging children in close reading. *The Reading Teacher*, 66(8), 642-649. doi:10.1002/TRTR.1172
- Fang, Z. (2016). Teaching close reading with complex texts across content areas. *Research in the Teaching of English*, 51(1), 106-116. Retrieved from <https://goucher.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.goucher.idm.oclc.org/docview/1840885215?accountid=11164>
- Fisher, D., & Frey, N. (2014). Student and teacher perspectives on a close reading protocol. *Literacy Research and Instruction*, 53(1), 25. Retrieved from <https://goucher.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.goucher.idm.oclc.org/docview/1466642463?accountid=11164>

- Fisher, D., & Frey, N. (2012). Close reading in elementary schools. *The Reading Teacher*, 66(3), 179-188. Retrieved from <https://goucher.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.goucher.idm.oclc.org/docview/1149965337?accountid=11164>
- Glover, C. (2016). *Close reading and its impact on reading comprehension* (Order No. 10191853). Available from Education Database. (1909332648). Retrieved from <https://goucher.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.goucher.idm.oclc.org/docview/1909332648?accountid=11164>
- National Assessment of Educational Progress. (2018). *Reading report card*. (n.d.). Retrieved from https://www.nationsreportcard.gov/reading_2017/nation/achievement?grade=4
- National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers. (2010). *Common core state standards for English language arts and literacy in history/social studies, science, and technical subjects*. Washington, DC: Authors. Retrieved from http://www.corestandards.org/assets/CCSSI_ELA%20Standards.pdf
- Partnership for Assessment and Readiness for College and Careers. (2011). *PARCC model content frameworks: English language arts/literacy grades 3-11*. Retrieved from www.parcconline.org/sites/parcc/files/PARCCMCFELALiteracyAugust2012_FINAL.pdf
- Raines, K. (2016). *Best practices in guided reading that impact comprehension*. Goucher College, Towson, MD. Retrieved from <https://mdsoar.org/handle/11603/2819>
- Rose, D., & Martin, J.R. (2012). *Learning to write, reading to learn: Genre, knowledge, and pedagogy in the Sydney School*. Bristol, CT: Equinox. Retrieved from <http://journals.equinoxpub.com/index.php/LHS/article/viewFile/29304/25537>

- Ross, J. A. (2015). *The effects of close reading strategies on reading achievement, writing achievement, and students' perception of confidence related to reading* (Order No. 3706867). Available from Education Database. (1695806795). Retrieved from <https://goucher.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.goucher.idm.oclc.org/docview/1695806795?accountid=11164>
- Santori, D., & Belfatti, M. (2017). Do text-dependent questions need to be teacher-dependent? Close reading from another angle. *Reading Teacher*, 70(6), 649-657.
doi:10.1002/trtr.1555
- Serravallo, J. & Goldberg, G. (2010). *Teaching reading small groups: Differentiated instruction for building strategic, independent readers*. Chicago, IL: Heinemann. Print.
- StataCorp. (2013), Stata Statistical Software: Release 13. [Computer Software.] College Station, TX: StataCorp L.P.
- Valentine, C. J. (2016). *The effects of implementing close reading in a third, fourth, and fifth grade public school setting to improve student achievement* (Order No. 10191478). Available from Education Database. (1865331087). Retrieved from <https://goucher.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://search-proquestcom.goucher.idm.oclc.org/docview/1865331087?accountid=11164>
- Williams, J.P., Pollini, S., Nubla-Kung, A.M., Snyder, A.E., Garcia, A., ...Atkins, J.G. (2014). An intervention to improve comprehension of cause/effect through expository text structure instruction. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 106(1), 1-17.
- Wixson, K. K. & Lipson, M. Y. (In press). *Reading diagnosis and remediation*. Glenview, IL: Scott, Foresman.