

# The Effects of Reading Strategies on Students' Reading Levels

By Alexandra Barnabee

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

July 2015

Graduate Programs in Education

Goucher College

## Table of Contents

List of Tables	i
Abstract	ii
I. Introduction	1
Overview	1
Statement of Problem	2
Hypothesis	2
Operational Definitions	2
II. Review of the Literature	3
Defining Reading Comprehension and the Comprehensive Reader	3
Text Complexity	4
Lexiles and Their Purpose	5
Matching Text to Reader	6
Measurement of Reading Progress	8
Strategies for Increasing Reading Levels	9
Summary	11
III. Methods	12
Design	12
Participants	12
Instrument	12
Procedure	14
IV. Results	18

V. Discussion	19
Implications of the Results	19
Threats to Validity	20
Connections to Previous Studies	21
Implications for Future Research	22
Conclusions	23
References	24

## **List of Tables**

1. Means of Fall and Spring RIT Scores of the Study Group	18
---	----

## **ABSTRACT**

The purpose of this study was to determine the impact of small reading groups, independent reading, and partner reading on students' reading levels from on grade level to above grade level. The participants of this study were six first grade students enrolled at an elementary school in Baltimore County. The participants were provided instruction from Baltimore County Public School English Language Arts curriculum as designed to align with the Common Core State Standards. In addition to this curriculum, treatment students received small group instruction, were required to complete 30 minutes of daily independent reading, and partner reading during independent work. The analysis revealed a significant increase in pre/post-test mean scores. Future research should continue in this area to determine methods of instructions to promote reading level growth to more complex text.

# **CHAPTER I**

## **INTRODUCTION**

### **Overview**

This study was inspired by the implementation of the English and Language Arts Common Core State Standards. These standards require the use of instructional texts with an increase in text complexity. Students need to be able to tackle these more complex and rigorous texts in order to demonstrate their fluency and comprehension with clarity.

Comprehension was once thought of as unimportant, but in the 19<sup>th</sup> century the relationship between meaning and comprehending began to develop. A shift in the importance of reading comprehension came in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, when educators began to emphasize the importance of improving comprehension during silent reading as opposed to an emphasis on oral reading. This gave students an “internal control” with which they could create their own meaning and make connections with a text (“Comprehension,” 2011). Students who lack strong reading comprehension skills end up struggling in school (Halladay, 2012). Academic progress depends on understanding, analyzing, and applying the information gathered through reading. Reading comprehension difficulty occurs frequently in children. Studies indicate that when students get off to a poor start in reading, they rarely catch up. Further, as they progress through the grade levels, the academic distance from those who read well grows more pronounced (Rashotte, Toregesen, & Wagner, 1997).

First through fifth grade students are expected to independently read and comprehend grade-level texts by the end of the school year (Stahl, 2012). Students need to be exposed to richer, more globally competitive citizens. As students wrestle with these more complex texts,

they are able to implement comprehensive reading strategies and increase their reading level growth.

In order to better prepare students to be college and career ready individuals, educators must take the steps needed to promote this type of competitiveness and work ethic in the classroom. With the proper implementation of text complexity and the strategies promoting this model educators have the ability to empower their students to become lifelong successful readers as well as lifelong successful learners.

### **Statement of Problem**

The purpose of this study was to determine what reading activities and strategies can be implemented within whole group and small group learning in order to promote reading growth in students reading on grade level to reading above grade level.

### **Hypothesis**

The null hypothesis is that the implementation of reading strategies and activities will have no effect on students' reading level growth from on grade level to above grade level.

### **Operational Definitions**

The dependent variable of this study is reading growth. ***Reading growth***, as referenced in this research, is defined as the growth of a student's Lexile range over a period of time. The ***Lexile range*** of a student is determined by their score on the Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) assessment.

The independent variable of this study is the reading activities and strategies that impact reading growth. ***Reading activities and strategies*** can be defined as small group instruction, independent reading, and paired reading.

## **CHAPTER II**

### **REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE**

#### **Overview**

A major focus of the Common Core Standards for English Language Arts (CCSS/ELA) is the increasing of text complexity. The goal is for students to increase their abilities in order to read more complex text over their school careers as well increasing reading comprehension across the elementary grades. Third and fifth graders are expected to independently read and comprehend grade-level texts by the end of the school year (Stahl, 2012). The complexities of these grade-level texts are determined by Lexile measurements. These measurements are also used determine a student's instructional reading level.

#### **Defining Reading Comprehension and the Comprehensive Reader**

The definition of reading comprehension has developed and shifted in importance over several years. Comprehension was once thought of as unimportant, but in the 19<sup>th</sup> century the relationship between meaning and comprehending began to develop. A shift in the importance of reading comprehension came in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, when educators began to emphasize the importance of improving comprehension during silent reading as opposed to an emphasis on oral reading. This gave students an "internal control" with which they could create their own meaning and connections with a text ("Comprehension," 2011).

Reading comprehension, as maintained by researchers, is dependent on a combination of four components. These components include reader characteristics, teacher characteristics, text characteristics, and the educational context. The comprehension of a reader depends on age, ability, affect, knowledge bases, and motivation. A teacher's knowledge, experience, attitude, and pedagogical approach also have a great impact on the comprehension of a reader. The genre,



format and features of the text of choice as well the educational environment, task, social grouping and purpose of the reading are of all great importance for reading comprehension.

Skilled readers are those who actively and automatically construct meaning as they read; they are self-motivated and self-directed; they monitor their own comprehension by questioning, reviewing, revising, and rereading to enhance their overall comprehension.

Before reading even occurs, a competent reader always previews the text. The reader examines the title and text features in order to gather information prior to reading. This allows the reader to access prior knowledge that may assist them in making connections as well as setting a purpose for reading. During reading, a competent reader checks their understanding of the text by paraphrasing the author's words, monitors their comprehension by using context clues to figure out unknown words, combines new knowledge from the text with previous knowledge to construct meaning, and utilizes appropriate resources in order to provide assistance while reading. Upon completion of a text, a comprehensive reader summarizes the text by retelling, assesses information in the text as compared to schema on the topic, and applies ideas and knowledge from the text to a broader range of situations.

### **What is Text Complexity?**

The Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts, (CCSS/ELA), demand for an increase in text complexity over students' school careers, but what is text complexity? Text complexity, as defined by the CCSS/ELA, is a function of qualitative factors, quantitative factors, and matching reader to text and task (Hiebert, 2011). The qualitative measures of a text include the purpose, structure, knowledge demands, and language of the text. Quantitative measures include the text's readability or Lexile. Matching reader to text and task includes the reader characteristics, as discussed in the previous section, and the purpose of the task applied to

the text. Below is a graphic of the Common Core Standards Model of Text Complexity, (The Lexile Framework for Reading, 2013.)



### **Lexiles and Their Purpose**

The term “Lexile” has become a popular term in the lives of educators and readers in the Common Core Era. Lexile measurements are determined by a combination of syntactic, word frequency, semantic, sentence length, and measures (Hiebert, 2011). These measurements are numeric representations of a reader’s ability or a text’s difficulty. When applied, the mathematical algorithm provides a Lexile score. The Lexile framework also includes a Lexile scale. The scale provides a range for readers to stretch their reading abilities. The scale is ranged from a beginning reading level at 0L, the easiest, continuing to 2000L, which is the most complex.

Readers’ individual Lexile scores are determined by computerized reading assessment tools. Baltimore County Public Schools implements the Measures of Academic Progress assessment, (MAP), in which students are provided their Lexile score after completing the assessment. This score indicates the level of text a student can read independently with 75% comprehension and dictates the student’s instructional reading level. This 75% comprehension rate allows the students to comprehend enough to develop meaning from the text, but also provides enough of a challenge to keep the reader engaged, but not frustrated. The goal is to

encourage reader growth by providing texts that are not too easy, but not too difficult. The individual Lexile score also determines the student’s range of readability levels within the Lexile scale. The range allows the student to read 50 Lexiles above their instructional level and 100 Lexiles below (Lennon & Burdick, 2004).

CCSS/ELA promotes a “staircase” of increasing text complexity across grade levels. The table below illustrates this staircase of Lexile bands and the expectations as put in place by CCSS/ELA retrieved from: <http://www.lexile.com/using-lexile/lexile-measures-and-the-ccssi/text-complexity-grade-bands-and-lexile-ranges/>

<b>Grade Band</b>	<b>Current Lexile Band</b>	<b>"Stretch" Lexile Band*</b>
<b>K-1</b>	100L-420L	190L-530L
<b>2-3</b>	450L-725L	420L-820L
<b>4-5</b>	645L-845L	740L-1010L
<b>6-8</b>	860L-1010L	925L-1185L
<b>9-10</b>	960L-1115L	1050L-1335L
<b>11-CCR</b>	1070L-1220L	1185L-1385L

\*COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS FOR ENGLISH, LANGUAGE ARTS, APPENDIX A (ADDITIONAL INFORMATION), NGA AND CCSSO, 2012

### **Matching Text to Reader**

Identifying a book that matches a student’s instructional level is a simple task when using Lexile measurements. The third component of the CCSS/ELA model of text complexity, matching text to reader, is not as easy a task. Educators must not only consider instructional levels, but challenge or “stretch” levels as well as student’s experience with reading, motivation,

and prior knowledge. This may seem daunting to educators, especially when considering struggling readers.

The original framework for identifying a student's reading level was established by Emmett Betts. He identified four levels of text complexity including the independent level, instructional level, frustration level, and the capacity level or highest level a student could possibly comprehend (Halladay, 2012). A student's reading level, according to Betts, was determined by identifying the highest level at which a child could read a new text with 95-98% accuracy and 75% comprehension. This thought changed, as it was analyzed by others, including Fountas and Pinnell,(2008) who found 90% accuracy acceptable for instructional level. The reasoning for this was that a student's instructional level could be "elastic" provided some instructional supports (Stahl, 2012).

Frustration level texts, according to Betts, were those in which word recognition was below 90% or comprehension of a given text below 50% (Halladay, 2012). The term, frustration level, is not used in the description of matching text to student in the CCSS/ELA Model of Text Complexity. These texts are now referred to as challenge or "stretch" texts that are included in the CCSS/ELA staircase. Instead of students struggling with frustration level texts, they are exposed to more challenging texts in combination with instructional level texts. Educators may use varying instructional supports in order to make these challenging texts more accessible to student who typically struggle (Glasswell & Ford, 2010). The goal of combining more challenging texts with instructional level texts is not to frustrate students, but rather to motivate and engage them.

## **Measurement of Reading Progress**

There are several assessments that may be used to measure reading progress and reading achievement. Two methods used in the Baltimore County Public Schools are the Measure of Academic Progress assessment, (MAP), and the American Reading Company's 100 Book Challenge. One is a computer-based assessment, while the other is a tandem in-school and at-home reading program.

The MAP assessment is a computer-based test in which students answer 40-60 multiple choice items. They are provided with an individualized assessment that is adjusted to their ability level. The various questions presented to the students during this assessment are based on their answers. Students are provided with a RIT score as well as a Lexile score upon completing the assessment. This data is readily available to compare and monitor students' Lexile growth over time. Students take the MAP assessment in the beginning (fall), middle (spring), and end (summer) of the school year. The MAP assessment shows a high level of reliability and is structured to align with the CCSS/ELA (Cizek, Gierl & Alves, 2012).

American Reading Company's 100 Book Challenge is a program implemented in several Baltimore County Public Schools. The program promotes 30-60 minutes of independent reading daily. Students are assessed on sight word identification, fluency, and comprehension during reading conferences in order to determine their ability level. Their level corresponds with a color and the color corresponds with the book bin in which the students may choose individual texts to be read both in school and at home. The goal is for each student to read 15-30 minutes in school and 15-30 minutes at home, depending on their grade level. Students keep track of their daily reading progress on a "reading log" that is signed by both teachers and parents. Teachers keep track of students reading progress on a web-based database. The American Reading Company

provides correlations in the 100 Book Challenge's leveling system with the CCSS/ELA stretch Lexile band. This allows teachers to use students' Lexile scores as well as their reading level as determined by the 100 Book Challenge conferences, in order to determine their appropriate level texts (<http://www.americanreading.com/>).

### **Strategies for Increasing Reading Levels**

With the release of the CCSS/ELA, several strategies have surfaced for assisting students with accessing complex texts and promoting reading growth. Four major strategies include shared reading, partner reading, small group instruction, and independent reading. Each of these has their benefit for different types of readers.

Shared reading is a whole group teaching strategy in which the whole class is instructed using the same text. This strategy has been used for years, but can be adapted to address text complexity. In heterogeneous classrooms, students at varying levels are all given access to the same text. Educators can assist on-level and even below-level students in comprehending “stretch” or more challenging texts by providing instructional support. Educators may also link more challenging shared texts to lower level texts through theme and content. By providing students with background knowledge through these lower level texts during small group, they come to whole group instruction better prepared to comprehend the more challenging text (Glasswell & Ford, 2010).

Partner reading is a strategy that allows students to become engaged in a text while working with a peer partner. Typically, the pair includes an above-level reader and an on-level or below-level reader. The text of choice is at the level of the above-level reader so it is a challenge level text for the partner. Each of the students has a copy of the text and engages in partner reading. The higher-level student is the “leader” and serves as a model for the partner as they

read through the text. Studies using this strategy showed progress among lower-level readers (Morgan, Wilcox, & Eldridge, 2000). This strategy allows students to not only collaborate, but exposes the lower-level student to challenging text in an engaging way.

Small group instruction allows educators to provide engaging instruction targeted toward that group's academic needs in which students are provided more one-on-one opportunities. During small group activities, educators are able to question students in a way they may not be able to in whole group instruction. This individualized type of questioning can assist the reader in developing a clearer understanding of the text better than they would during whole group instruction. Students may also focus on smaller portions of more challenging texts during small group in order to develop meaning. This particular "close-read" strategy is less overwhelming to readers and is a good transition into getting students to become more comfortable with reading both instructional and "stretch" level texts. It is an important practice when implementing small groups to use flexible grouping. As students make progress with their reading abilities, they are able to move to a group that better suits their needs. Groups do not only need to be created based on reading level or Lexile score, but can also be skill focused. This removes the stereotyping that sometimes comes with small groupings.

Independent reading is another beneficial strategy in tackling complex text when implemented properly. By building a classroom library full of multi-genre and multiple level texts, students have an opportunity to choose books that strike their own interest. Interest surveys allow students to provide information about the type of books they like to read and, in return, the teacher is able to provide students with engaging books within their Lexile range. When students have access to books that spark their interest, they are able to see themselves as readers and this encourages the type of motivation needed to tackle more challenging texts. During independent

reading, teachers are provided with the opportunity to individually conference with students in order to monitor their progress (Glasswell & Ford, 2010).

### **Summary**

The CCSS/ELA provides both educators and students with new challenges that require both rigor and motivation. It is evident that there is a shift in the way reading comprehension and reading levels are viewed in education today, which means this shift must carry over into instruction as well. In order to better prepare students to be college and career ready individuals, educators must take the steps needed to promote this type of competitiveness and work ethic in the classroom. With the proper reading strategies that promote the implementation of text complexity, educators have the ability to empower their students to become lifelong successful readers as well as lifelong successful learners.



## **CHAPTER III**

### **METHODS**

The goal of this research was to determine if small group instruction, partner reading, and independent reading could assist on-grade level readers to become above-grade level readers.

#### **Design**

The research design was a quasi-experimental, pre/post-test design. The independent variable for this study was comprised of the reading activities and strategies implemented to impact reading achievement. The dependent variable of this study was reading growth.

#### **Participants**

This research was conducted at an Elementary School located in Owings Mills, Maryland. This elementary school has an enrollment of 941 Kindergarten to fifth grade students.

The treatment group of students was identified as on-grade level readers and received daily small group instruction and experienced partner reading with an above- grade level reader, and fifteen minutes of independent reading daily. The participants were six first graders, two males and four females, in the researcher's heterogeneously grouped reading class. Two of the students were six years old and four were seven years old. Five out of the six students were African American and one student was from another race/ethnic background. The class make-up was quite diverse racially, economically, and academically.

#### **Instrument**

Two instruments were used to measure reading growth in this study. The first was the Northwest Evaluation Association's, (NWEA) *Measure of Academic Progress*, (MAP). MAP is a computer-based assessment used to measure achievement. The test is adaptive, adjusting to the students' individual levels as they complete the test. Students receive a RIT score (Rausch Unit), which

indicates the level at which the students are answering the questions correctly 50% of the time, and also a Lexile range at the completion of testing. Reviews of this assessment found in *Buros Mental Measurements Yearbook*, (Cizek, et.al, 2012), discuss its reliability and validity. The validity of the MAP assessment, as discussed by the reviewers, is limited to concurrent measures with other assessments that are measures of academic progress, including the ALT assessment, which is an alternative assessment in which students create a response to a question or task instead of choosing a response from a given list, and also the Iowa Test of Basic Skills. Reviewers discuss concurrent validity as the only measure for validity. The reviewers indicated that the MAP assessment as having a high degree of alignment between content and the curriculum. The reviewers indicate the MAP assessment as being reliable. Test-retest reliability showed the standard of error measurement to be low and the efficiency of the test to be high. The reviewers agree on the reliability of the MAP and that it proves to be a reliable assessment.

The second instrument used was The American Reading Company's *100 Book Challenge* program, introduced in 1999. This program has been school-wide and students are required to read at least 15 minutes daily for homework. Students are tested and assigned levels or "colors" of books to read at the beginning of the year and are assessed throughout the year to determine if their levels need to be changed. Researchers from Measurement Incorporated were able to analyze student data and found that the *100 Book Challenge* Program was a valid and reliable source for determining student independent reading levels. Independent Reading Level Assessment (IRLA) scores were strongly correlated with NWEA scores and reflected student reading growth in reading proficiency over time. All reviewers from Measurement Incorporated agreed that the Independent Reading Level Assessment content was grade-level appropriate and

that it posed no content or issues that would affect its validity as an assessment of student reading ability (Bunch & Griswold, 2014).

### **Procedure**

This research study commenced in February and March 2015 as students were grouped based on their RIT scores and Lexile ranges. The pre- and post-tests were in the form of *100 Book Challenge* reading levels as well as the students' RIT scores derived from the Measure of Academic Progress (MAP) testing. The six students chosen for this study were identified as on-grade level readers and were assembled into a small group. These students participated in 15-minute daily small group reading instruction. The group was transitioned from on-grade level texts and small group work to accelerated texts and lessons from the curriculum. Treatment students were exposed to texts of varying complexity and were challenged with above-grade level curriculum.

For the first three weeks, the students read on-grade level texts, which were provided specifically for small group instruction from the McGraw-Hill Wonders reading program. The texts included; *Sam's Latkes* (fiction text), *Go Gator* (nonfiction text), and *The Quilt Square* (How-to text). The students focused on one text per week. The instruction that paired with these on-grade level texts was very structured. On Monday, the text was presented to the students, the students were then introduced to new vocabulary, and completed a picture walk of the story where the students could get a feel for the text as well as go on a vocabulary hunt for the new words learned. Tuesday, the students were given the text, vocabulary was reviewed, students made predictions about the story, and then a choral read was conducted. After reading the story, the students were asked to revisit their predictions and self-evaluate their guesses by filling in a smiley face if the prediction was accurate, a straight-lined face if the prediction was somewhat

correct, and a sad face if the prediction may have not have been precise. Wednesday's instruction consisted of the students re-reading the text and writing down any questions about the text on sticky notes. After the students were done reading and writing down questions, the students were then asked to read their questions aloud to the group to see if anyone could answer them. On Thursday a round robin read of the text was done and then, depending on the genre of the text, the students were asked to complete a story map (for a fiction book) or a main idea and detail organizer (for a nonfiction or how-to text). Friday, the students were asked to read the story one final time, but this time independently to themselves. After the students were finished reading, the students were asked to answer five comprehension questions (multiple choice/fill in the blank) on the text read for that particular week. This weekly instruction was repeated for the next two weeks with the remaining two texts.

After three weeks of reading on-grade level texts and completing lessons in small groups, the students were then transitioned into more accelerated texts and lessons in the small group setting. Over the final three weeks of this study, the students were exposed to more complex texts, which were also provided from the McGraw-Hill Wonders reading program. The texts included; *The Wright Brothers* (nonfiction text), *Penguins All Around* (nonfiction text), and *The Tree House* (nonfiction text). The instruction remained somewhat similar to the first three weeks; however, the texts this time around were a little more demanding. On Monday, the text was presented to the students, the students were introduced to new vocabulary, and completed a picture walk of the story where the students were asked to write down two questions they had about the text on sticky notes and place the sticky notes on the appropriate pages that related to their questions. Tuesday, the students were given the text, vocabulary was reviewed, predictions made about the story, and then an "I read, you read" approach was used where the researcher

would read a page and students repeated the reading. After reading the story, students were asked to revisit their predictions and self-evaluate their guesses by filling in a smiley face if the prediction was accurate, a straight-lined face if the prediction was somewhat correct, and a sad face if the prediction may have not have been precise.

Wednesday's instruction consisted of a choral read of the same text and answering the questions the students previously wrote down on the sticky notes. The students were also asked to identify the text features in the text by circling the text features with wiki sticks. Once the text features were identified, the purpose behind why the author included the text features and how they were beneficial to us when we were reading was discussed. On Thursday, a round robin read with the text was done and then compared and contrasted with a previous text read during the first three weeks. In order to organize the ideas from the discussion, the students used a Venn diagram to record their thoughts. Friday, the students were asked to read the story one final time, but this time independently. After the students were finished reading, the students were asked the question, "If the author wrote one more page and added it to the end of this text what would it say? What would it look like?" The students were asked to create another page that would appropriately continue the text.

During independent reading time, the treatment group was required to complete 15 minutes of independent reading of a text from their *100 Book Challenge* reading level in addition to their required 15 minutes for homework. The students would gather five books from their colored *100 Book Challenge* reading bin every morning when entering the classroom. During small group instruction and center rotation, the students would take out these five books, which were at their independent reading level and read for 15 minutes silently to themselves. When the

15 minutes were up the students were required to record the date as well as the title of their favorite book on their reading log and the teacher signed off on it.

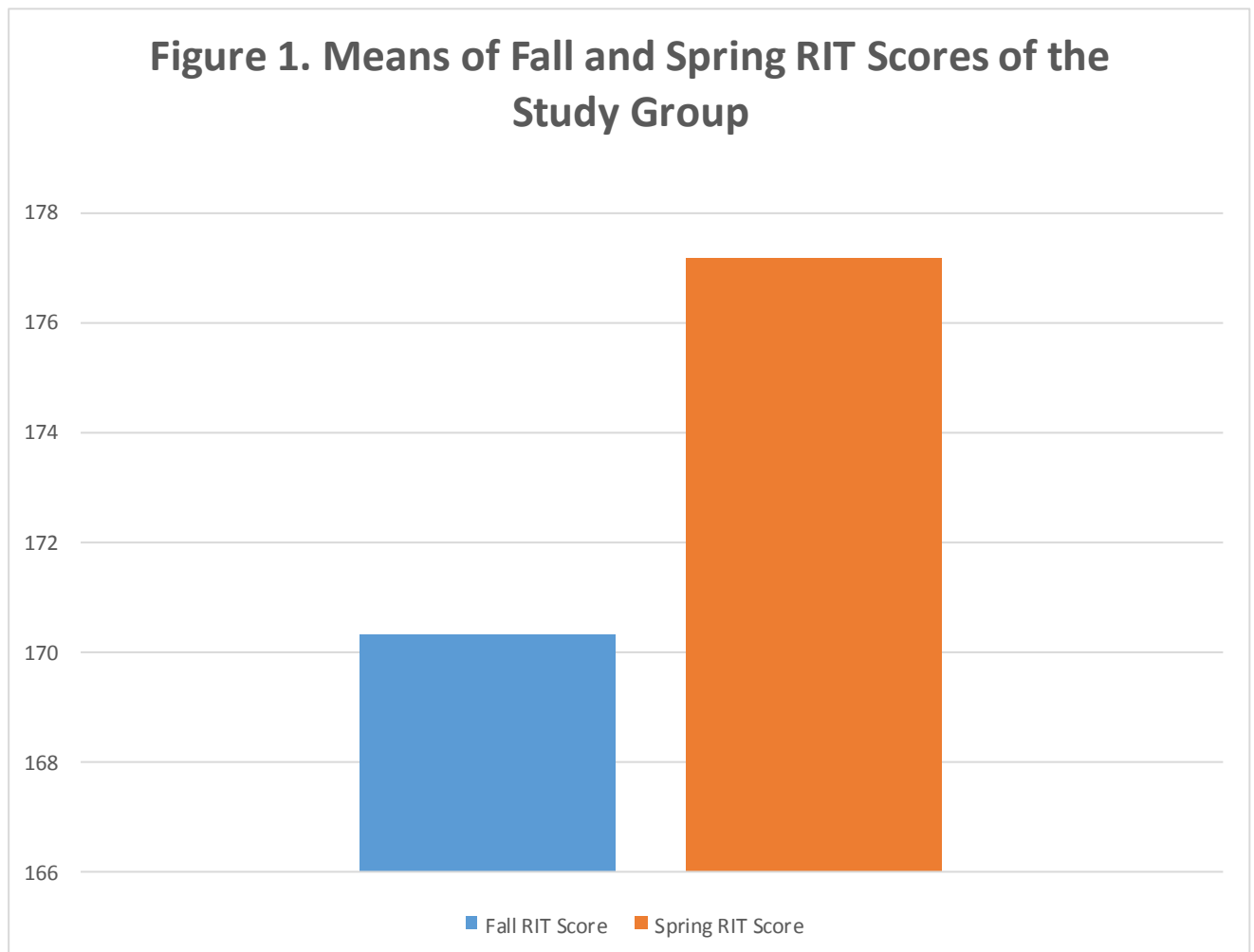
The six students were paired with students reading above-grade level according to their Lexile range for partner reading. Partner reading took place two times a week during independent work time. The texts for partner reading were chosen based on the above- grade level Lexile range. Above grade level students were the lead readers as the treatment group students read along with their partners. The students were allowed to choose a spot to read in the classroom.

Student progress was monitored in small group through discussions based on text, written responses to text, and individual reading within the small group. Independent reading goals were documented on students' reading logs. Every 15 minutes were logged and monitored by both parents and the teacher. Students also logged their partner reading in their reading logs. The teacher monitored reading partners by assisting students in choosing texts and periodically listening in on partner reading sessions.

## CHAPTER IV

### RESULTS

The data results from this study show that students' RIT scores increased significantly due to the intervention. The mean RIT score for Fall was 170.33 and the mean RIT score for Spring significantly increased to 177.17,  $t(5) = -4.80$ ,  $p > .05$ . The results did not support the null hypothesis.



## **CHAPTER V**

### **DISCUSSION**

The null hypothesis was formulated for this study stating that the implementation of reading strategies and activities will have no effect on students' reading level growth from on-grade-level to above-grade-level. The results did not support the null hypothesis. Students' MAP reading assessment results demonstrated a significant increase over the treatment time due to the intervention activities and strategies implemented in this study.

#### **Implications of the Results**

The reading intervention strategies and activities including, small group instruction, partner reading, and independent reading did indeed assist on-grade-level readers to become above-grade-level readers. The post MAP assessment data provided an RIT score as well as Lexile ranges for each student, and it showed significant improvement in scores for six out of the six students in the treatment group. The structure and consistency of these reading activities and strategies in the classroom contributed to making this an effective and successful intervention.

Along with the data indicating significant increase in student reading growth, there was also an evident increase in motivation and engagement in the students during the duration of this study. The variety of activities presented to the students, especially partner reading time, sparked a genuine interest in reading for the six individuals. Partner reading showed that listening leads to fluency and understanding. It was also observationally noted, during small group time, that the students enjoyed the texts introduced to them, especially the above-grade-level readers. Instead of becoming frustrated with the complex text in small group, the students began to ask more questions and engaged in group discussions to better comprehend what was read.



## **Threats to Validity**

There were some threats to validity of the results during this study. These threats included, differential selection using a captive audience, history, and maturation. A few of the characteristics in this study in which the students differ include gender and age. The problem with differential selection in a study is if the groups of students differ on variables other than the treatment variable, any differences found at the post-test may be due to these differential selection factors rather than the treatment intervention. Also, by using a captive audience in this study, the participants have no other choice but to attend and participate in the intervention strategies and activities. This forced participation may be a threat to the validity of the pre- and post-assessment results.

The second threat to the validity of the study is history. The history threat refers to any event, other than the planned treatment event, that occurs between the pre-assessment and post-assessment measurement, and has an influence on the dependent variable. An example of history that could have affected the validity of this study was the researcher's absence from the classroom due to proctoring the PARCC assessment and an intern teaching the reading intervention block for two days. There were also a few snow days in between the pre-assessment and post-assessment that could have affected the students' scores. The combination of treatment and history threats that occurred between the pre-assessment and the post-assessment, made it difficult to know whether the observed difference between the pre-assessment and the post-assessment was due to the treatment intervention or the history events.

The third threat to validity was maturation. Maturation is present when a physical or mental change occurs over time and it affects the participants' performance regarding the dependent variable. Maturation could have been a major threat to the validity of this study because one may

say the results of the study would've happened regardless of the intervention. The six students' scores could have increased because it is the typical kind of growth one would expect to see in a first grade student at the end of the year. In the end, maturation was definitely a threat to the study because it was hard for the researcher to know whether the students' reading growth was due to the treatment intervention or due to maturation.

### **Connections to Previous Research**

Not many studies have been conducted with regard to the CCSS/ELA because of its fairly new introduction, but prior studies have been implemented to determine ways of improving students' reading abilities with regard to reading level. These studies found positive results when implementing the types of strategies implemented in this study.

Glasswell et al., (2010) studied the benefits of exposing students to more challenging texts in combination with instructional level texts, instead of students struggling with purely frustration level texts. They discussed the importance of using varying instructional supports in order to make these challenging texts more accessible to students who typically struggle. They found students to be more engaged and motivated by these texts, as opposed to frustration. Just as Glasswell et al., determined in their findings, treatment students in this study increased their participation and motivation when provided the opportunity to work with more challenging texts in combination with on-level texts. This took place during small group instruction, in which whole group instruction was then scaffolded or enriched upon based on the need of the group.

Morgan et al., (2000) found success with the partner reading strategy. A higher-level student and lower-level student were provided a copy of the text and engaged in partner reading. Studies using this strategy showed progress among lower-level readers. The higher-level student is the "leader" and serves as a model for the partner as they read through the text. This strategy allows

students to not only collaborate, but it exposes the lower-level student to challenging text in an engaging way. The same observations were noted in this study, in which the treatment students were more motivated to read when paired with a partner reading at a more advanced reading level.

### **Implications for Future Research**

As more educators work with the English Language Arts Common Core State Standards, the research studies in this area will no doubt increase. The goal set forth by these standards is for students to increase their abilities in order to read more complex text over their school careers as well as increasing reading comprehension across the elementary grades. With this as a common goal for all educators working with the CCSS/ELA, researchers will work to find the best strategies for teachers to move students toward this common goal. It would be wise for future researchers to be knowledgeable and fluent in the curriculum expected to be taught as well as maintain a solid level of consistency. It is also important for researchers and students to be comfortable and experienced in the form of assessment being used. While the MAP assessment is an extremely effective measurement tool, it is extremely important that students are comfortable with the technology skills necessary for taking the test such as, using the mouse to accurately drag objects, letters, and numbers across the screen, being familiar with the keyboard, and understanding the different icons necessary for assisting with questions. Researchers should also take into consideration various threats to validity when conducting a similar research study, such as the differential selection, history, and maturation of the students. This study is just the “tip of iceberg” when it comes to research within this new wave of educational reform.

### **Conclusion/Summary**

In conclusion, the null hypothesis was not supported in this study as the outcome of the reading intervention strategies and activities proved to be positive. The study does open doors to continued research and adjustment of instruction for upcoming academic school years. The implementation of CCSS/ELA is a shift for all educators, but with research such as this study, more motivating and successful ways of moving students toward the common goal of comprehending more complex texts is attainable.

## REFERENCES

- Bunch, M., Griswold, A. (2014). In *The Independent Reading Level Assessment Framework*.  
Retrieved from <http://www.americanreading.com/documents/report-measurement-inc.pdf>
- Cizek, G. J., Gierl, M. J., & Alves, C. B. (2012). Review of measures of academic progress.  
*Mental Measurements Yearbook and Tests in Print*, 18 (73), Retrieved from  
<http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=mmt&AN=TIP18013571&site=ehost-live>
- Comprehension. (2011). In *Handbook of Research on Teaching the English Language Arts*.  
Retrieved from <http://www.credoreference.com/entry/routengart/comprehension>
- Fountas, I, Pinnell, G.S. (2008). *Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark Assessment System 1, Grades K-2, Levels A-N Portsmouth, N.H.:Heinemann*
- Glasswell, K., Ford, M. P. (2010). Teaching flexibly with leveled texts: more power for your reading block. *The Reading Teacher*, 64(1), 57-60.
- Halladay, J. L. (2012). Revisiting key assumptions of the reading level framework. *The Reading Teacher*, 66(1), 53-62.
- Hiebert, E. H. (2011). Beyond single readability measures: Using multiple sources of information in establishing text complexity. *Journal of Education*, 191(2), 33-42.
- Lennon, C., Burdick, H. (2004). The Lexile framework as an approach for reading measurement and success. *The Lexile Framework for Reading*, April.
- Morgan, A., Wilcox, B. R., Eldredge, J. L. (2000). Effect of difficulty levels on second-grade delayed readers using dyad reading. *The Journal of Educational Research*, 94(2), 113-119.
- Rashotte, C.A., Toregesen, J., Wagner, R. (1997). Growth in reading accuracy and fluency as

a result of intensive intervention. Miami, FL: International Dyslexia Association.

Stahl, K. A. D. (2012). Complex text or frustration level text. *The Reading Teacher*, 66(1), 47-51.

The Lexile Framework for Reading. (2013). *Text complexity and grade level bands*. Retrieved December 2, 2013, from <http://www.lexile.com/using-lexile/lexile-measures-and-the-ccssi/text-complexity-grade-bands-and-lexile-ranges/>