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Student Reading Instruction Preferences and Book Choice

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STUDENT READING INSTRUCTION PREFERENCES AND BOOK CHOICE

Student Reading Instruction Preferences and Book Choice

By

Lauren Kessler

May 2014

A thesis submitted of the Department of Education and Human Development of the State
University of New York College at Brockport in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Science in Education

STUDENT READING INSTRUCTION PREFERENCES AND BOOK CHOICE

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Chapter One: Introduction

Statement of the Problem

As the snow started to fall, I called Jacob (all names are pseudonyms) over to read with me. He dragged his feet as he walked over to the horseshoe shaped table, where I had all the reading materials ready. He slumped down in the chair, eyes looking at the ground. Suddenly, he slammed his hands, which were in the shape of fists, down on the book open on the table and yelled, “THIS IS THE DUMBEST BOOK I HAVE EVER READ. WHY CAN’T WE READ SOMETHING ELSE!?!” I responded with, “I know you don’t like this book, Jacob but we have to read what the other third grade classes are reading.” This was the norm in my multi-age special education classroom. After I said this, I was questioning why it was mandatory to read what the other classes are reading as well.

The following day, I called another student, Robert over to read with me. I started by saying, “Okay Robert so in this story the little girl wants to grow a garden...” I was interrupted by Robert saying, “No, Miss Kessler my story is about a kid who invents a new game.” I suddenly realized another student was reading the book about the garden, and I was getting these stories confused. I could not even keep track of which book each student in my class was reading. This was becoming difficult to teach three different grade levels all at once using Harcourt Trophies (Houghton Mifflin, 2007), the basal reading program adopted by my school.

Wednesday was finally here, almost the end of the week. It was time for Sean to read with me. Sean and I began reading the book together. Sean is approximately two years behind grade level in reading, yet I am forced to do this third grade reading

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curriculum with him. Each week we have the same problems struggling through the book because he cannot read over half the words! While reading the stories in the basal reading program, Sean would withdraw from reading, becoming defiant, saying, “I can’t read this so I am not even going to try,” because he would become so frustrated. This caused Sean to become irritated with the story and with me.

After a few months of this, I could not handle it anymore. Trying to get my already unmotivated students motivated to read was like pulling teeth. I went directly to my principal and asked him, “Can I please stop using the basal reading program and instead bring in a bunch of books to create a classroom library that would allow my students to choose their own books to read at their interests and reading level?” Our school had spent so much money on buying the Harcourt Trophies program that I had to convince him to allow this switch. I explained to him the problems I had been having in my classroom getting my students motivated to read books that were way above their individual reading levels, and unappealing to them. I told him if my students were given the opportunity to choose their own books, and I did more guided reading with books at their reading level, that I would be providing more effective instruction, and less effort would be spent on trying to motivate and convince them to read books they are uninterested in. Fortunately, after giving reasons why I wanted to switch, he agreed to let me try it.

That day I went straight to my parents’ house to retrieve all the boxes of books from my childhood, as well as the ones I have been collecting from garage sales, or ones that were on sale at stores. I loaded them all into my car and brought them to school. I spent hours writing my name in books and organizing them into genres. Once I had my

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baskets completed, I set them on the shelves and windowsill. I had quite the collection of books, over one hundred ranging from very easy picture books to chapter books. My collection also consisted of informational and fiction books for my students to choose from.

The next day, I introduced my students to the books, taught them how to take care of them, and talked about how to choose books that are 'just right' for them using the Goldilocks method (not too hard, not too easy, but just right) and the five finger rule; if there are more than five words on a page you do not know, you need to find another book. They were very excited they got to choose what books they wanted to read! After lunch, when it was time to read, they were so excited to choose their books. I realized I had one problem though. I had an hour and a half for my reading block, and since I relied on the basal reading series so much with their workbooks, which included spelling, vocabulary, grammar, and phonics I did not have anything prepared besides reading. I had been so excited to get the books organized; it did not even cross my mind. I went into panic mode knowing there would be no way they would read for over an hour. That day, I decided to just read aloud some funny books I had in my collection. Since then, it has been a struggle to find something to teach them each day, making sure I am covering all of the material they need to learn in their grade. I often wonder if I made the right choice to switch to a classroom library, or if I should have stuck with the basal reading series, since I am not sure if I am teaching them everything they need to know.

I interviewed my students, all of whom I taught last year, to determine whether they enjoyed reading more last year using the basal reading program or if they enjoyed reading more this year with me using the classroom library to teach reading. I also

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observed my students and interviewed them about their book choices to determine why they chose those books during independent reading time.

Significance of the Problem

Through my own experiences, I have noticed students will become more proficient readers if they are motivated to read. Book choice is a huge motivator for students (Guthrie & Davis, 2003). Students are more likely to read if they are able to choose what they are reading. Since reading is a life-long skill, students need to learn to love it, so they will continue to do it.

There is also much more that goes into reading instruction besides simply reading books. Basal reading series are packed with vocabulary, spelling, phonics, and grammar, which are not incorporated easily into teaching using a classroom library. Finding adequate resources and developing a curriculum for reading is a daunting task.

With the implementation of the New York State Common Core Standards, there is an emphasis on reading more informational texts. When looking through the basal reading program we have adopted at my school, there were significantly more fiction texts than informational texts. Stephens (2007) states that with the push for informational texts, as required in the Common Core State Standards, basal reading programs are not providing enough adequate informational texts for students. This was another reason I chose to use my classroom library texts for my reading instruction.

There is a lack of research on the differences between using a basal reading program or using a classroom library as a source of texts to plan reading instruction. I investigated which one offers the most benefits and least challenges for my classroom.

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This helped me determine whether to continue using my classroom library as a source of texts or to use the basal reading program for reading instruction.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to determine which type of reading instruction students prefer, basal reading program or classroom library based instruction, and why. I also looked at how students choose books in my classroom library, as well as how I planned my instruction to meet the New York State Common Core Standards in a multi-age classroom, utilizing my classroom library. Since reading is a life skill, students need to be engaged in meaningful literacy activities on a daily basis.

I conducted a six-week research study in which I aimed to answer the following research questions:

1. How do students choose books from the classroom library for independent reading?
2. How might I plan guided reading instruction using my classroom library as a source of texts?
3. What type of reading instruction (basal reading series or classroom library based instruction) do elementary students prefer?
4. Why do students prefer one type of reading program to the other?

Study Approach

The participants in my study consisted of four elementary students, two third graders and two fourth graders. All of these students were in my 8:1:1 (eight students maximum, one teacher, and one teaching assistant) self-contained special education classroom. All of these students were classified as being Emotionally Disturbed. Three

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students presented significant delays in reading achievement; the other was considered on grade level. All students were Caucasian males. The study took place in a rural school in western New York. The school district serves students from low-income families (The New York State School Report Card, 2011).

I collected qualitative data through student interviews, observations, and anecdotal notes of my instructional planning for daily-guided reading lessons. To determine which type of reading instruction students prefer I interviewed them. I also audio-recorded the interviews with the participants' parental consent, as well as student assent. In order to gather data for book choice I interviewed the students as well as observed the books they chose during independent reading time.

Rationale

I chose this topic of study because I have found the majority of school districts use basal reading series, but not many utilize a classroom library as the basis for literacy instruction. I wondered if switching to a classroom library was beneficial for my students, or if they would fall behind without the other aspects of reading that a basal reading program provides.

The basal reading program was also not motivating for my students, and I believed allowing students to choose what books they wanted to read would help increase the amount of time my students spent reading. According to Guthrie and Davis (2003), engagement is strengthened through choice, which affects motivation, and motivation when joined with deeper thinking and peer discussions leads to engagement.

The one major concern I had about using my classroom library as my basis for reading instruction was how to design effective instruction. The basal reading programs

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provide teachers with workbooks, texts, assessments, phonics, and grammar components.

Since I decided to switch reading instruction approaches, I have struggled with making sure I address all components and standards my students need for reading instruction.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

My research questions are:

1. How do students choose books from the classroom library for independent reading?
2. How might I plan guided reading instruction using my classroom library as a source of texts?
3. What type of reading instruction (basal reading series or classroom library based instruction) do elementary students prefer?
4. Why do students prefer one type of reading program to the other?

In this chapter, I will compare and contrast a basal reading program and classroom library based instruction. I will also describe how book choice might have an impact on student motivation to read. I have reviewed and synthesized the literature related to basal reading programs and classroom library instruction.

Basal Reading Programs

Basal reading programs have been shown to be helpful in developing reading abilities in most children (McCollum, McNeese, Styron, & Lee, 2007). Dechant (1991) found that eighty-five to ninety-five percent of elementary school teachers use a basal reading program. According to a survey by the Education Market Research (2007), only about twenty-five percent of schools said they do not use a basal reading program (Dewitz, Jones, & Leahy, 2009). Basal readers are helpful for beginning teachers because it gives them a manual to which to refer (Ediger, 2010).

Some critics state that basal reading programs lack attention to instruction on systematic phonics (McCollum, McNeese, Styron, & Lee, 2007). Other critics of basal

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reading programs believe teachers rely too much on the teacher manuals and student workbooks, and in turn their students performed lower on national reading tests (McCollum, McNeese, Styron, & Lee, 2007).

History of Basal Reading Programs

During the 18th, 19th, and beginning of the 20th century, there was a very small amount of children's literature published (Martinez & McGee, 2000). This forced educators to rely on the basal readers for many decades (Martinez & McGee, 2000). It was not until around the 1950s when funding was provided to purchase basals for schools (Martinez & McGee, 2000). Typically throughout the 1950s, basals consisted of narratives about the lives of white, middle-class suburban families (Hoffman et al., 1998). In the 1960s and 1970s, there was an emphasis on skills first, then literature (Martinez & McGee, 2000). It was Durkin who thought teachers needed to supplement the basal readers that were published by textbook companies, with children's literature (Martinez & McGee, 2000). About 25 years ago, basal reading materials began to include readiness materials, word lists for selecting story vocabulary, and an increase in the repetition of vocabulary (Smith, 1986).

The publishers of these basal reading programs consistently adapted their materials to the big educational trends at that time (Dewitz, Jones, & Leahy, 2009). There was a big shift toward balanced literacy in the 1990s (Martinez & McGee, 2000). Balanced literacy is a combination of skill-based instruction and meaning-based instruction (Bingham & Hall-Kenyon, 2013). Balanced literacy instruction consists of guided reading, literacy centers, shared reading, independent reading, independent writing, and interactive writing (Bingham & Hall-Kenyon, 2013). This shift toward

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balanced literacy had a dramatic impact on the basal publishers to change their materials to meet this shift in literacy (Martinez & McGee, 2000). In a study done by McCarthy and Hoffman (1995), they found that when they compared earlier basals from the 1980s to newer basals in the 1990s that the total number of words was less in the newer basals, but there were more unique words showing an increase in vocabulary and repeated words. These new basals also included more diverse stories, more complex plots, highly developed characters, and required more interpretation by the reader (McCarthy & Hoffman, 1995). The stories in the new basals were more decodable, included rhyming, and repeated patterns (McCarthy & Hoffman, 1995). The shift towards balanced literacy also caused teachers to begin using big books, reading aloud regularly, accepting invented spelling, journal writing, reading response activities, teaching vocabulary, and teaching comprehension (Martinez & McGee, 2000).

Components of Basal Programs

Basal reading programs are comprised of a balance of materials including teacher manuals, student books, practice workbooks, assessment materials, as well as instructional aids such as big books, word cards, paperback books, game boxes, charts, reproducible worksheets, and dictionaries (McCollum, McNeese, Styron, & Lee, 2007). Basal reading programs also include manuals, list objectives for student achievement, learning activities, and assessment tools to assess and evaluate student progress (Ediger, 2010).

For example, the Harcourt Trophies (2007) basal reading program created by Houghton Mifflin in 2007 offers a variety of components. The teacher's edition breaks the books up into themes. The first pages of the teacher's edition show the research on

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the different components (phonics instruction, fluency instruction, vocabulary instruction, text comprehension instruction, reading aloud, assessment, writing, listening and speaking, research and information skills, reaching all learners, and classroom management), connections to the standards, and an overview of reading strategies (Harcourt Trophies, 2007). There are a variety of books offered with this reading program. These include whole group reading selections, decodable books, technology resources, and independent reading books for students below-level, on-level, advanced, and English language learners (Harcourt Trophies, 2007).

Each story in the teacher's edition has guides for teaching phonics and spelling, genre of the weekly book, reading and comprehension strategies, vocabulary and high frequency words, books for independent reading, writing prompts, grammar workbook pages, and cross-curricular centers (Harcourt Trophies, 2007). Each book should take five days to complete and the week is planned out in the suggested lesson planner. After the whole week overview, lessons for each day go into even greater details. Every day includes a morning message, sharing literature, phonics, spelling, vocabulary, writer's craft, and grammar lessons. There is a workbook page to accompany each lesson. According to the teacher's edition, there are differentiated workbook pages for vocabulary and suggestions for differentiation labeled throughout the book for various activities.

At the end of each story, there is an assessment which includes nineteen multiple choice questions on vocabulary and comprehension, then one short response question (Harcourt Trophies, 2007). There are also assessments for the beginning of each theme

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that test reading and language skills. At the end of each theme there are summative assessments available.

Critiques of Basal Reading Programs

According to Shannon and Goodman (1994), the goal of the basals was not only to provide guidance for teachers, but to make the curriculum the same for everyone. This would ensure all students are guaranteed a reading program that is successful no matter the level of ability of their teachers (Shannon & Goodman, 1994). However, Serafini (2011) states, it is the responsibility of teachers to use the basal reading programs as a resource and to not try to teach every lesson provided in the program, because that would not be effective for our students.

If teachers only follow the scope and sequence of the program we would be giving up our teaching responsibilities (Serafini, 2011). Teachers do not seem to be professionals during their lessons because they are instructing directly from the teacher's manuals and assigning the basal materials without taking into consideration the students' interests and abilities (Shannon, 1989). Teachers need to gain control over their instruction instead of giving up their power and choice to the scripted manuals (Shannon & Goodman, 1994). According to Shannon and Goodman (1994), the teacher's manuals make teaching easier for the new and inexperienced teachers but take away the control of the individual teachers.

Dewitz, Jones, and Leahy (2009) conducted a study of five basal reading programs, and how they use different comprehension strategies for instruction. They concluded that the basal reading programs covered too many skills and strategies (18 to 29 per program per year). The basal reading programs also use many different names for

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the same skill which is very confusing not only for students, but for the teachers as well. By having large numbers of skills and strategies that are taught, it means there is often one skill taught a week, with one or two skills or strategies reviewed each week. It was unclear to these researchers whether the teachers and their students fully understood the curriculum they were teaching and learning. Basals teach a quantity of skills but do not focus on quality and deeper thinking (Marcell, DeCleene, & Juttner, 2010). Shannon and Goodman (1994) state the basal workbooks allow the teachers to fill the day with exercises believing this will help students to learn to read instead of filling the day with students learning to read for life. Students are being deprived of the opportunities to truly read when they are learning to read by focusing on exercises (Shannon & Goodman, 1994).

Current Uses of Basal Reading Programs

Fawson and Reutzel (2000) discussed how a first grade teacher used the various grade level materials (K-2) of her basal reading program to facilitate guided reading groups in her classroom. The use of the various leveled books helped to give her texts that were at a range of levels (Fawson & Reutzel, 2000). Teachers need to adapt their reading instruction to the individual needs of their students instead of relying on what the basal manual might say (Ediger, 2010).

Moss (2008) conducted a study identifying the genres of text in two basal readers grades one through six. Her results found that 40% of the selections were nonfiction text. Of that forty percent, fifty percent of the nonfiction texts were expository and thirty-three percent were literary nonfiction. This shows these basal readers expose more nonfiction to students than in the past, but not as much as is recommended by the Common Core

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curriculum. According to the Common Core curriculum, students in fourth grade should be reading 50% literary texts and 50% informational texts (Engage New York, 2012).

According to Stein et al. (1999), in six out of seven basal reading programs studied, the words used in the texts had very little to no connection to the decoding instruction in the teacher manuals. Stein et al. (1999) also found that accuracy, which was based on phonics and sight words, would be poor because students would only be able to determine one fourth to one half of the words they encountered. Pilonieta (2010) found comprehension strategies were not observable in the basal reading programs studied, which resulted in students struggling with comprehension. McCollum et al. (2007) studied three reading programs, one of those being a basal reading program, and found there were no significant differences in the reading achievement of the participants. A study based on retelling stories found the students had less discussions after reading a text and instead were more familiar with answering questions and completing workbook pages (Poppewell & Doty, 2001). These authors conclude that the basal reading programs studied were not efficient enough to teach students to read.

Balanced Literacy

“A balanced approach to literacy development is a decision-making approach through which the teacher makes thoughtful choices each day about the best way to help each child become a better reader and writer” (Spiegel, 1998, p. 116). Balanced literacy is not about focusing on one philosophy, but to respond to new issues that arise while still using what research has shown to be effective (Spiegel, 1998). A balanced literacy approach includes components such as guided reading, independent reading, shared reading, and read-aloud (Giordano, 2011). In order to have a successful balanced literacy

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program, teachers need to include independent reading time for students (Kasten & Wilfong, 2007).

After reading, the amount of time students spend discussing what they have read is far less than the time they spend completing worksheets and activities (Serafini, 2011; Gambrell 2011). Teachers often teach reading strategies and force the literature to work with the strategies (Serafini, 2011). Instead, teachers should organize their units of study based on genres, authors and illustrators, themes, or content topics (Serafini, 2011). This would allow the literature to be the foundation for the teacher to teach a variety of comprehension lessons that work with the literature, instead of teaching comprehension strategies alone (Serafini, 2011).

Guided Reading

Fountas and Pinnell (1996) state that guided reading is, “an instructional context for supporting each reader’s development of effective strategies for processing novel texts at increasingly challenging levels of difficulty” (p. 25). The purpose of guided reading is to provide small-group instruction that allows for a closer tailoring to individual strengths and needs (Fountas & Pinnell, 2012). According to Fountas and Pinnell (2012), what happens during guided reading is teachers are working with small groups of children using leveled books to provide instruction to the students in ways that allow the teachers to observe the children’s individual strengths while working toward further learning goals.

Guided reading is still considered a best practice in general education classrooms today (Ferguson & Wilson, 2009; Fawson & Reutzel, 2000; Tompkins, 2001; Tyner, 2004; Simpson, Spencer, Button, & Rendon, 2007). During a study by Ferguson and

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Wilson (2009) of forty elementary teachers, twenty-one said they received training for guided reading either at the undergraduate or graduate level. Fourteen out of the nineteen primary teachers in the study claimed to use guided reading on a daily basis (Ferguson & Wilson, 2009). One challenge with guided reading is time management, regardless of the number of years the individual has been teaching (Ferguson & Wilson, 2009). If the instruction is not of high quality, it will require more time to reach the learning objective (Ferguson & Wilson, 2009). Also, to make sure guided reading is successful groups should not ever remain the same all year but instead change on a daily or weekly basis according to the skills the students need to learn (Simpson et al., 2007).

By using a guided reading approach, students are learning different strategies. These strategies may not be the same as their peers, but by differentiating the instruction, it will help them with their individual reading progress (Ferguson & Wilson, 2009). Children are able to think deeply about a text and make connections to the text when they have the careful support of guided reading (Kulaga, 2011). While in guided reading groups, teachers constantly led discussions with questions to check for understanding along the way, and then prompted students when errors or misconceptions came up (Frey & Fisher, 2010).

Students within a similar developmental reading stage are provided opportunities to apply the strategies they have learned to texts they do not know during guided reading (Ford & Opitz, 2008). When determining groups for guided reading, the students should be reading about the same level and similar in their development (Glasswell & Ford, 2010). Critics of guided reading instruction state that when students are placed in groups of similar abilities the effect tends to be counterproductive (Wosley, Lapp, & Dow, 2010;

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Paratore & Indrisano, 2003). On the other hand, when students are placed in mixed-ability groups, high achieving students might not benefit as much as low achieving students (Wosley et. al., 2010).

While choosing guided reading books, teachers first need to find their students independent reading levels so they can choose texts that are easy enough for the student to read with ninety to ninety-five percent accuracy but still challenging enough to increase their reading abilities (Simpson et al., 2007). Most importantly, teachers need to design a classroom management design to allow them to work with the students in guided reading groups while the other students are actively engaged in other literacy tasks (Simpson et al., 2007). Since implementing guided reading, teachers have reported improved comprehension skills, higher fluency, and an overall increase in reading assessment scores (Ferguson & Wilson, 2009).

Independent Reading/Silent Sustained Reading

According to Siah (2010), Silent Sustained Reading is defined as, “a period of uninterrupted silent reading” (p. 168). While students are reading independently, they are not required to finish a text or complete an assignment after reading (Siah, 2010). Independent reading can help students improve fluency, vocabulary, content knowledge, and a love of reading (Halladay, 2012). Independent practice is only about ten percent of the reading instruction (Dewitz, Jones & Leahy, 2009).

Proficient readers will read as many words in two days as poor readers do the entire year (Harlaar, Deater-Deckard, Thompson, DeThorne, & Petrill, 2011). Some educators think it is a waste of time for students to sit and read independently, and therefore they do not use it in their classrooms (Kelley & Clausen-Grace, 2009). Schools

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need to make more time for independent reading, but often spend the time on skills and preparing for high-stakes testing (Ivey, 2000). Kasten and Wilfong (2007) created the analogy that “independent reading is like the practice time athletes need to become good at their sport, or the time musicians need to get good at their instrument” (p. 2). In order for students to become proficient readers, they need to have uninterrupted time to practice reading. Kasten and Wilfong (2007) also found that if students believe they are good at something, they will gravitate towards it.

During independent reading time, there is a range of readers from the “fake” readers to the bookworms (Kelley & Clausen-Grace, 2009; Bryan, Fawson, & Reutzel, 2003). With all of the technology of today, many elementary students spend time playing on computers instead of reading books for enjoyment (Bryan, Fawson, & Reutzel, 2003). Bryan, Fawson, and Reutzel (2003) conducted a study on three students off-task behaviors during independent reading time. If the students were able to discuss what they were reading, their off-task behaviors decreased significantly and their engagement during independent reading time increased (Bryan, Fawson, & Reutzel, 2003; Bitter, O'Day, Gubbins, & Socias, 2009).

Teachers need to make sure they are engaged in independent reading along with their students instead of using it as a time to get work done (Kelley & Clausen-Grace, 2009). If teachers are monitoring students while they read independently, it can help students to appreciate literature because they are actually engaged in the reading process, and enhance the students' comprehension (Garan & DeVogd, 2008).

Advantages of independent reading include: students do better if they are allowed to choose what to read; the students have to initiate their decoding and comprehension

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skills; the teachers need to have knowledge of the literature in order to have quality conferences with students; there is more time on task for the students because they are engaged in their book choice (Ediger, 2010). On the other hand, some disadvantages include: some students might not be ready to choose books to read or settle down and read independently; some students are insistent upon the teacher choosing books for them; some teachers find it difficult to be knowledgeable about the literature to have quality conferences; it can be difficult for students to self-monitor their own reading (Ediger, 2010).

Differentiation

Classrooms are more diverse than they have been in the past (Ivey, 2000). One-size does not fit all when it comes to reading instruction (Ivey, 2000; Spiegel, 1998)). Students with special needs are often the ones receiving skill-based instruction, when they need time to be able to sit down and just read (Ivey, 2000).

It is extremely rare to find two students who are the same age who learn the same exact things in the same way according to the same timetable (Tomlinson, 2009). If teachers work hard to learn about each of their students, they will teach them better than the day before (Tomlinson, 2009; Servilio, 2009). While teaching students, teachers must make adjustments and change their strategies when needed (Smith & Wilhelm, 2002). Since so much attention is geared towards the readers who read well below grade level, there is a lack of teacher time to encourage advanced readers to pursue the more complex reading materials available in the classroom (Reis, McCoach, Little, Muller, & Kaniskan, 2011).

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According to research by Reis et al. (2011), teachers replaced whole group basal reading instruction for an hour a day with self-selected independent reading supplemented with five minutes of differentiated teacher conferences. The results showed either the same or improved reading fluency and comprehension scores for these students compared to the students in the control group. The results suggested that hypothetically up to four or five hours of weekly whole group instruction in reading could be replaced by brief, differentiated, targeted reading instruction during independent reading conferences with individual readers, with successful results.

Teacher Text Choices for Instruction

Due to the limited amount of time teachers have during the school day, it is mandatory they make choices about what to teach, how much time to spend in each content area, and the background knowledge they provide for their students (Serafini, 2011; Ediger, 2010). It has been shown that teachers tend to give more time to what they value themselves, what is mandated through state and district standards and goals, and what the local community expects (Serafini, 2011).

Giordano (2011) created six criteria for choosing books for students: connections to anyone or anything; length of page or book; interest in topic; count five unknown words; know about topic, author, illustrator; sense and understanding. The first thing Giordano (2011) gives her students to fill out is an interest inventory to see what they are interested in or topics her students would like to know more about. Giordano (2011) has her students use the criteria for students to choose their own books as well when they are reading independently.

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According to Fountas and Pinnell (2012), teachers use a text gradient to help them choose leveled books to use during guided reading. They came up with ten characteristics related to text difficulty which include: “genres/forms, text structure, content, themes and ideas, language and literary features, sentence complexity, vocabulary, words, illustrations, as well as book and print features” (Fountas & Pinnell, 2012, p. 277). Teachers need to consider these difficulties when choosing texts for guided reading.

Questions teachers should ask themselves when choosing books are: Will students learn from the trade books? Do the trade books contain accurate information? Does the author assume the reader has a vast amount of prior knowledge about the concepts or vocabulary? Are the content-vocabulary words included within the text explained, presented, and documented appropriately? Will the audience find the text engaging? (Atkinson, Matusevich, & Huber, 2009). Atkinson, Matusevich, and Huber (2009) suggest making a rubric for evaluating the books teachers are choosing their students to read or using one of the rubrics already created by other people.

Student Choice and Motivation

One thing that has been critical to motivate children to read is student book choice during independent reading (Kasten & Wilfong, 2007; Servilio, 2009; Shevin & Klein, 2004; Johnson & Blair, 2003; Kelley & Clausen-Grace, 2009). Students have been shown to be motivated by the range of texts they are able to read during guided reading (Kulaga, 2011). Katz and Assor (2007) contradict choice as being motivating by saying that offering choice can reduce motivation, because it is not in itself motivating.

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If teachers want students to fall in love with the things they read about in books, the students must care about the things they read and find themselves in the books (Kasten & Wilfong, 2007; Ivey, 2000; Garan & DeVogd, 2008). Students need to have access to a variety of books and other reading materials and therefore teachers need to establish libraries in their classrooms (Johnson & Blair, 2003). Having a comfortable place to read and someone to have a discussion with about what they have just read is also helpful in establishing independent reading activities (Johnson & Blair, 2003). Teachers who use various texts, with varying difficulty, are more likely to find motivating texts for students, since all students are reading at different levels in the classroom (Glasswell & Ford, 2010).

A study conducted by Donovan, Smolkin, and Lomax (2000) found that when students were able to select their own books, sixty-one percent selected books above their reading level, fifteen percent at their reading level, and twenty-three below their reading level. Another study by Williams (2008) found that when students selected books, they mostly chose series books. He also found that fiction was usually chosen over nonfiction in the eight year olds he was studying.

Elementary students think Sustained Silent Reading is a useful activity because they are able to choose their own books and the teacher also reads as a model for the students (Kasten & Wilfong, 2007; Reutzel, Fawson, & Smith, 2008; Johnson & Blair, 2003). A study found that on average students spend only eighteen minutes engaged in sustained reading with text (Brenner, Hiebert, & Tompkins, 2009). Gambrell (2011) determined that students performed better when they enjoyed reading. Gambrell (2011) found that thirty-seven percent of the students have reported that they never read for

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enjoyment. Gambrell (2011) found that if there is a connection between school reading and the students' personal lives, motivation is increased.

Summary

After reviewing the literature, I found benefits and challenges to each type of reading instruction. Basal reading programs have been around for a long time, and companies who develop and market these programs are constantly changing their programs to reflect the educational trends at the time. Recent research states that since one size does not fit all, having the whole class read the same books is not always the best strategy. Guided reading offers the ability to read texts that are at students reading levels so they do not become frustrated or discouraged. The research explained that most teachers create guided reading groups and do not have the groups change all year, but the same group of students do not always have the same exact needs, and therefore groups need to change with the need of the students.

The research suggested more time for students to be able to read independently instead of focusing on skill-based instruction and workbook pages. It was shown that independent reading could be engaging if the students are allowed to choose their own books. The research does caution teachers to make sure their classroom management is superior to ensure each student is engaged rather than "fake reading."

Chapter Three: Methods and Procedures

The main purpose of this study was to determine which type of reading instruction students preferred: a basal reading program or using a classroom library as a source of texts to plan reading instruction. I intended to find out which type of instruction students preferred, along with how students chose books using the classroom library and how I planned my instruction to meet the New York State Common Core Standards in a multi-age classroom.

Research Questions

To help me determine which reading program students preferred, I conducted a six-week study in which I attempted to answer these research questions:

1. How do students chose books from the classroom library for independent reading?
2. How might I plan guided reading instruction using my classroom library as a source of texts?
3. What type of reading instruction (basal reading series or classroom library based instruction) do elementary students prefer?
4. Why do students prefer one type of reading program to the other?

Participants

The participants were the students in my class. All of these students were in my room for the past two years and were the participants for my study because they have experienced both the basal reading series and the use of my classroom library as a source of texts for reader's workshop.

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I teach an 8:1:1 (8 students to 1 teacher to 1 teaching assistant) self-contained classroom for students classified with an emotional disturbance. All four of my students in my classroom were Caucasian males, between the ages of seven and ten and were enrolled in third or fourth grade. They all came from working class families. All of the students were diagnosed with an emotional disturbance. One student was reading at grade level, one was reading slightly below grade level, and the other two were reading significantly below grade level (approximately three or four years below grade level).

These participants attended a non-profit, rural public school in western New York. They were in a self-contained special education classroom, and their interactions with non-disabled peers were minimal.

Context of the Study

The participants were students in an 8:1:1 special education classroom for students with emotional disturbances. According to the New York State School Report Card (2011), total enrollment for the school was 358 students for the 2010-2011 school year. It also states average class size was 19 students. The percentage of students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch was 47. The percentage of students who were Caucasian was 91.

The study took place in my classroom during reader's workshop. In my classroom, there is a reading section of the room, which has three bookshelves and a window ledge. One bookshelf houses all of the chapter books, another houses books by the same authors, and the third houses fiction and nonfiction books which are clearly marked. The window ledge has books organized by different genres. The books are

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labeled with a number so students can easily place the books back where they found them after use.

In the reading area are beanbag chairs for the students to sit on while they read. There is also a “book club house” they can read in if they are reading with a buddy. If they choose not to read in the reading area there is a rocking chair, circular chairs, and other areas in the classroom they can read.

Each student in my classroom has his own iPad. They are allowed to read books on their iPads that I have placed on there for them. Using the iPads allows the students to choose to have the book read to them, to read it themselves, or to be able to click the word for help if they need it.

During the study, reader’s workshop began immediately after lunch. I had the students sit on the rug for a ten to fifteen minute mini-lesson. After, they read independently while I pulled students for guided reading. I usually got to two students a day for guided reading, giving each student approximately twenty to twenty-five minutes. Guided reading was usually on an independent basis due to the various grade levels and expectations in my classroom. At times, a small group of students would be pulled for guided reading if they have similar needs. Sometimes I would pull books from my classroom library for the student to read, and other times I would allow the student to read the book he was reading for independent reading. While I was working with students on guided reading, my teaching assistant spent some time with the students who were reading independently. During the last ten minutes of reader’s workshop, the students had to write a reader’s response based on what they read that day. Reader’s

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workshop was sixty minutes a day, with an additional forty minutes a day for phonics, word work and grammar before lunch.

I was responsible for these students for the whole day, even though some push out for different classes, depending on their general education classroom readiness, which was determined by myself. Some students were in the classroom for the majority of the day, while others were with me only half of the day. All students pushed out for science classes at the end of the day. I had all of my students for reading, writing, and phonics/word work. This was the only subject that I had all of my students for.

My Positionality as the Researcher

I am the teacher-researcher for this study. I am a twenty-five year old, Caucasian female. I live in Western New York State. I come from a middle-class family. Within the last year, I purchased a house in the district in which I teach. I completed my undergraduate degree in Special Education from The State University of New York College at Buffalo State. I am currently completing my graduate degree in Literacy from The State University of New York College at Brockport.

The year I conducted my study was the fourth year I taught in the 8:1:1 classroom at the district used for this study. I taught all of my students the previous year. One of my students I have taught all four of my years. I currently teach in a rural district, but have taught in a city district for my student teaching. I have mostly taught students who are classified with an emotional disturbance, but have also taught students with learning disabilities and other health impaired. I also supervise the one teaching assistant who works with the students in my classroom.

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My educational philosophies impact the way I teach my class. As a special education teacher, it is my job to differentiate my instruction to meet the needs of my students. I believe students learn best when they are engaging in hands-on learning. Students also need to have choices available to them to make learning more fun and engaging. This also helps the students to take charge of their own learning. After four years of working with students who are reluctant readers and do not think learning is fun, I have realized that if you make it exciting, the students will enjoy it, and want to continue to do it on their own. Confidence is another key to learning. My students are often unconfident in their abilities. I have found if you work off their strengths, they will feel some success, enjoy that feeling, and want to continue to be successful by working at it. Fountas and Pinnell (2008) encourage teachers to build off of readers' strengths to get them to be successful in the areas they struggle.

Beginning last year, I have been implementing the Units of Study created by Lucy Calkins during my reader's workshop. Lucy Calkins (2010) does not use a basal reading program, and instead focuses on guided reading and mini-lessons. After learning about her work, I agreed with her philosophy of teaching reading. I think all readers are at different levels, and if you read the same book with all of your students, you will have frustrated some, and bored others. By focusing on guided reading instruction, you can meet all the individual needs of each student. I have also been trying hard to connect my writer's workshop, phonics/word work, and reader's workshop. According to Fountas and Pinnell (2008), readers need to be reading and writing continuous text and making connections between the two. For instance, if I work on the -ike word family in word

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work, I will make sure it is incorporated into reader's workshop and writer's workshop as well to make it more concrete.

My peers, co-workers, professors at The SUNY College at Brockport, as well as the professional developments I have attended have also impacted my philosophies of teaching.

Data Collection

I collected data through the use of interviews, audio-recordings, observational field notes, copies of lesson plans and planning decisions, and a research journal.

Interviews

I conducted many semi-structured interviews throughout the six-week study. I first interviewed students on whether they preferred last year's reading instruction using the basal reading program or this year's reader's workshop using the classroom library. During this interview, I also asked them why they prefer the one over the other, and if they could choose which one we do next year, which they would choose and why. I also had them elaborate on what is better or worse about reading this year compared to last year. These interviews took about ten minutes. This interview was only conducted once throughout the study. The interview protocol is attached as an appendix.

I also conducted semi-structured interviews based on student book choices. I inquired about what made them choose that book, how many times they have read that book, if they have read similar books, and if there are specific authors or genres they enjoy reading. These interviews took about five minutes. I conducted these interviews on a daily basis, rotating between the four potential participants. The data collection protocol for these interviews is included in the appendix.

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I audio-recorded the interviews in order to focus on asking the questions and possible follow-up questions versus trying to write down their answers as quickly as possible. This created more of a conversational interview than a more structured interview. This also made it easier to write transcripts after the interviews.

Observational Field Notes

I took daily observational field notes on student book choices. I divided a piece of paper in half to write down my observations on one side, and reflect on those observations on the other side. I took observational field notes about the title of the books, authors, genres, bookshelf it was chosen from, fiction or informational text, level of the book (based on Fountas and Pinnell leveling system), and if they flip through the pages or only look at the cover. This helped me to look for some patterns in the books they chose.

Lesson Planning and Decision Making

I kept track of my daily lesson plans and planning decisions I made. I wanted to see how using my classroom library for reader's workshop impacted my lesson planning. I used my normal lesson-planning format I have been using all year. I photocopied my lesson plans for data.

Research Journal

I kept a research journal to note anything that I want to remember during the study. I used it to look back at and help me to collect any data that might not have been collected through the other data collection methods. I used the journal to record my decision making during lesson planning. I also used it to reflect on the study.

Data Analysis

Interviews and Audio-recordings

In the first interview about which type of reading instruction my students prefer, basal reading program or using the classroom library during reader's workshop, I looked at the responses of my students and see if there were any themes that occurred. I looked at individual responses as well as compared all student responses. I used a constant comparison method to analyze my data (Hubbard & Power, 1999).

During the interviews about student book choice, I used constant comparison methods to analyze the data and look for themes for each individual student. After that, I compared the students to each other to look for more themes that occurred between all or most of the students.

Observational Field Notes

I reviewed my observational field notes on a daily basis to reflect on the observations I had made. I also reviewed my observational field notes on a weekly basis to see if there were any themes that begin to emerge, using a constant comparison method.

Lesson Planning and Decision Making

I used a constant-comparison method to analyze my lesson plans. I looked at the themes that arose during the planning stage of my lessons. I used triangulation to look at the observations, interviews, and decision-making during lesson planning as a whole. I made connections through coding the different types of data collection and analysis.

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Procedures

Week 1:

Interviewed students on the different reading programs, which they prefer, and why

Tracked lesson planning and decision-making

Interviewed and take field notes on student book choices

Week 2:

Tracked lesson planning and decision-making

Interviewed and take field notes on student book choices

Week 3:

Tracked lesson planning and decision-making

Interviewed and take field notes on student book choices

Week 4:

Tracked lesson planning and decision-making

Interviewed and take field notes on student book choices

Week 5:

Tracked lesson planning and decision-making

Interviewed and take field notes on student book choices

Week 6:

Tracked lesson planning and decision-making

Interviewed and take field notes on student book choices

Criteria for Trustworthiness

As the teacher-researcher of the study, I was firm on conducting this study in an unbiased and ethical way. I was aware of the close relationship I had with my students,

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especially after being with them more than one year, some longer than that. I was conscious of my educational philosophies and how they impacted my teaching and decision-making. I collected and analyzed the data as they were presented. This study impacted my decision making for my reading instruction next year. It also affected the way I planned my lessons based on my findings. In order to guarantee trustworthiness, I collected data using interviews, observational field notes, and lesson planning.

In order to warrant trustworthiness I used persistent observation and prolonged engagement. I conducted daily semi-structured interviews and field notes on student book choices during independent reading time. I observed my students on a daily basis. I also reflected on my decision making while writing lesson plans in my research journal.

Finally, I used member checks to make sure I was interpreting the participants' answers to ensure accuracy. I checked my interpretations with the participant to authenticate my interpretations in a final interview.

Limitations of the Study

One limitation of the study was that the students often are influenced by their emotional state at the time of interviews. If they were in a negative mood, they might have been more apt to express negative comments toward questions asked. On the other hand, if they were in a positive mood, they might have been more apt to express positive comments and answers to the interview questions.

Since I had worked with one of these students much longer than the others, we had more time to build a trusting relationship, and therefore he might have been more honest during the interview than the rest of the students.

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Summary

Due to the difficulties I was faced with while using a basal reading program in my multi-age classroom, I switched this year to using my classroom library as a source of texts to plan instruction, which caused me to face different challenges. I interviewed my students, all of whom I taught last year while using the basal reading program, to gain insight into which type of reading instruction they preferred and why in order to make decisions for next year.

This year, I was using my classroom library as a source of texts during guided reading instruction. While I was doing guided reading with some students, the others were participating in independent reading time. I was interested in investigating what books the children choose for independent reading, and why they chose that book. I observed and interviewed my students to gain insight into their choices.

Since basal reading programs are very scripted, it was fairly easy to plan instruction. For teachers who do not use a basal reading program, and instead use their classroom library as a source of texts to plan instruction, planning can be more difficult. I looked at the decisions I made while I planned my lessons using texts from my classroom library.

Chapter Four: Interpretation of Data

The purpose of this study was to determine which type of reading instruction students preferred, a basal reading program or classroom library based instruction, and why. I also looked at how students chose books in my classroom library, as well as how I planned my instruction to meet the New York State Common Core Standards in a multi-age classroom, utilizing my classroom library.

Research Results:

Research Question One: How do students choose books from the classroom library for independent reading?

While investigating this first research question, I quickly saw a variety of themes forming both within individual students as well as all the students. These themes included rereading of texts, choosing texts based on interest, reading multiple books in a series or by the same author, choosing books that were easier to read, and reading books on similar topics.

Rereading Texts

The first theme I found was that 63% of the time students read a book they had previously read. Some students even stated it was their thirteenth time reading a certain book. Only 38% of the time students read a book for the first time. Student one reread texts 67% of the time and read a new book 33% of the time. Student two reread texts 88% of the time and chose a new book 12% of the time. Student three reread texts 17% of the time and chose a book he has never read 83% of the time. Student four reread texts 67% of the time and read books for the first time 33% of the time. Only one student chose new books more often than rereading familiar texts.

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Table 1

Rereading Texts

| Student | First Time Reading Book | Read Book More Than Once |
|---------|-------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1 | 4 | 8 |
| 2 | 1 | 7 |
| 3 | 5 | 1 |
| 4 | 2 | 4 |
| Total | 12 | 20 |

The students reread books for a variety of reasons. Most said they liked the topic of the book and it interested them. Student one said, “I like the cat because it sits on the girl’s lap. I have a cat but it doesn’t look like this one.” Student one could have read the text about the cat because it reminded him of his cat. Student three also showed interest in a topic he read about by saying, “I like trains, actually I love them!” Student two reread a text because he said, “I read it a long time ago and forgot what happened.” He reread the book to remember what happened in the story. Student two also indicated that he wanted to learn more about the topic by saying, “I am reading it to learn more about the ABC’s.” It was also indicated by student two he reread a book because he had seen it on TV “I like Arthur books and I watch it on TV.” The ending of the story was another factor in rereading a certain text by student two, “It has a puppy and I like puppies very much because they are cute. You’ve gotta hear this ending!” Finally, being successful at reading it once made student four reread many texts by saying, “It is easy to read.”

Choosing Interesting Books

The second theme I found was a commonality in word choices when explaining why they chose a certain book. The word “like” was used in their explanations 12 times. Of those 12, 8 of them were from the same student. The word “love” was used twice,

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“interesting” was used three times, and “exciting” was used once. All of these words indicate an interest in the topic or cover of the books chosen.

Table 2

Words Used in Interviews that Show Student Interest

| Student | Like | Love | Interesting | Exciting |
|---------|------|------|-------------|----------|
| 1 | 8 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 2 | 2 | 0 | 2 | 0 |
| 3 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| 4 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 |
| Total | 12 | 2 | 3 | 1 |

Student two indicated in his interview that, “It is **interesting** because dinosaurs were wiped out 2,000 years ago.” While reading a story about how a character needed to get glasses student two also said, “It is all about eyes. Eyes help you see. I **like** Arthur books and I watch it on TV.” Student two indicated interest in the book by stating, “It has a puppy and I **like** puppies very much because they are cute. You’ve gotta hear this ending.” While asking student three why he chose that book today his response was, “I **like** trains, actually, I **love** them!” Student three also spoke about the cover of a book being his reasoning for choosing that book to read, “The lady swallowed a pie on the cover. It looks **exciting**.” Student one indicated he liked the book by pointing to the picture on the cover saying, “I **like** to paint pictures.” Student one showed interest in the picture on the front again by saying, “I **like** the box because maybe there is something in the box like a necklace.” Students one also related the book to his life when saying, “I **like** the cat because it sits on the girl’s lap. I have a cat but it doesn’t look like this one.” Student four did not give reasoning for why he liked the book he just said, “It looks **interesting**.”

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The books the students indicated they were interested in were almost equally divided between fiction and nonfiction. About 56% of the books read were fiction and 44% of the books were nonfiction. Student one showed 75% interest in fiction books and only 25% in nonfiction books. Student two showed an equal interest in fiction and nonfiction books. Student three showed more interest in nonfiction books with 66%. Student four showed 100% interest in nonfiction books. Based on this information, the preference of fiction or nonfiction depended on the individual student.

Authors and Books in a Series

Some students mentioned authors or series multiple times during their interviews. Some students read books by the same author multiple times and others read books in the same series to see the continued adventures of the characters. The author who appeared most frequently was Dr. Seuss. Other series were mentioned like Magic Tree House, Nancy Drew, Fly Guy, Hardy Boys, Arthur, Frog and Toad, Clifford, and Henry and Mudge. Only one student never mentioned an author while interviewed.

Table 3

Authors or Series Mentioned in Interviews

| Student | Author or Series Mentioned |
|---------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1 | Dr. Seuss, Frog and Toad |
| 2 | Dr. Seuss x3, Mercer Mayer, Arthur x2, Clifford |
| 3 | Henry and Mudge, Nancy Drew, Hardy Boys, Magic Tree House, Fly Guy |
| 4 | None |
| Total | Dr. Seuss x4, Frog and Toad, Mercer Mayer, Arthur x2, Clifford, Henry and Mudge, Nancy Drew, Hardy Boys, Magic Tree House, Fly Guy |

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Student two mentioned Dr. Seuss multiple times because that is his favorite author. Student two has a very vivid imagination, which relates to the imagination Dr. Seuss used to write his books. This student also hated to read when he was first placed in my classroom, and the first books I introduced him to were Dr. Seuss because he did have such a great imagination. Since then, Dr. Seuss has been his favorite. In my reading area I have an Arthur stuffed animal and Clifford stuffed animal which student two likes to read with. This might be why he also mentioned Arthur and Clifford when talking about book series.

Student three is transitioning from picture books to chapter books. I had recently introduced him to the Fly Guy and Henry and Mudge series because they are transitional chapter books. He has recently been reading Magic Tree House books, which are a little more difficult than Fly Guy and Henry and Mudge, but still easier chapter books. At home, he often reads books that his father read when he was a child, hence he mentioned Nancy Drew and the Hardy Boys, because that is what he has access to at home.

Student four only has exposure to books at school. Since he had behavioral difficulties before being placed in my classroom, he never really paid attention to what the teacher was doing or reading. This could be why he did not mention any authors and stated he did not know any authors when interviewed.

Easier Texts

Two of the students used the word “easy” while being interviewed. They said they chose the book because it was easy to read. One student used the word “easy” three times out of the six times interviewed. Student two stated that, “It is a pop-up book, it is **easier** and faster to read, and it is a song too.” Student four would make responses like,

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“It is **easy** and spiders are creepy,” or “It is **easy** to read.” This student is a fourth grader reading at a kindergarten level so it is possible that reading easier texts helps him feel successful at reading and helps him to gain confidence.

Table 4

Number of Time “Easy” was Used During Interviews

| Student | Used word “easy” |
|----------------|-------------------------|
| 1 | 0 |
| 2 | 1 |
| 3 | 0 |
| 4 | 3 |
| Total | 4 |

The book that student two specified was easy was a songbook. He knew the song, which made it easy for him to read the book. The books that student four indicated were easy were books he has read between four and eight times before. They were easy to him because he has read them multiple times and likely memorized them. All of the books he said were easy were also on the topic of animals. This could show he has a lot of background knowledge about animals that made these books easy to read.

Similar Topics

Students often read books on a topic they had read about before. During 21 out of the 32 interviews, the students indicated they have read similar books to the ones they had just chosen. This shows that 66% of the time students read a book on a topic they have read about previously and 34% of the time they read books on topics they have not ever read about before. Students two and three read all books on topics they have read about before.

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Table 5

Number of Times Students Read Similar Books

| Student | # of times read similar books |
|----------------|--------------------------------------|
| 1 | 5/12 |
| 2 | 8/8 |
| 3 | 6/6 |
| 4 | 2/6 |
| Total | 21/32 |

The books that the students read on similar topics were all topics that interested them. Some topics connected to their lives. For instance when student one said, “I like the cat because it sits on the girl’s lap. I have a cat but it doesn’t look like this one.” He was relating the book to his cat at home. Other students also read books written by the same author. This shows that students will often read books by authors they enjoy.

The topics of books that the students read were similar and different to each other. Student one read a lot of books about animals including dogs, zebras, alligators, elephants, hippopotamus, frogs, chickens, and cats. The topics of books this student read most commonly were about alligators, trains, and friends. Student two also read a lot of books about animals including dinosaurs, dogs, lions, tigers, puppies, and cats. He also read books about trucks and the alphabet. The most common topic student two read about was puppies and dogs. Student three read topics mostly about mystery and friends. He also read about trains, dogs, and food. Student four read a lot of books about animals including the noises they make. He also read fairy tales. Overall, the most common topics read about were animals, which all four students read about, dogs, which 75% of the students read about, trains, which 50% of the students read about, and cats, which 50% of the students read about. None of the students read only about animals.

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Summary

These data show that students usually chose a book they have read before for independent reading. Students also usually picked books based on things they “like” or are “interested” in. They choose books that are written by the same author or are part of a series. Half of the students read texts that are easier instead of challenging for independent reading time. Finally, they read books on similar topics to ones they have read previously.

Based on my literature review I was not surprised by most of the data. Research shows that students usually choose books they are interested in or relate to their lives. A study by Williams (2008) found that when students selected books, they mostly chose series books. I found this to be true during my study as well. Students often read books by the same author. Williams (2008) also found that fiction was usually chosen over nonfiction in the eight year olds he was studying. The students in my study were between the ages of seven and ten. I found that the youngest student preferred fiction to nonfiction, the second youngest was on the fence with no preference, and the two older students preferred nonfiction to fiction. Based on the age of the students in the study, it correlates with the data I collected about the younger students.

One thing I did not anticipate was how each of the individual students chose books for different reasons. Some chose books that were easy while others challenged themselves; some read mostly fiction books while others read mostly nonfiction; some had authors they really enjoyed reading while others could not even name one author.

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Research Question Two: How might I plan guided reading instruction using my classroom library as a source of texts?

Since I decided to no longer teach using a basal reading program, over the summer I determined what my English Language Arts (ELA) block would look like. This year, my ELA was based on research I did, things that have been successful in the past, as well as state and district requirements. I decided during my two-hour ELA block that I would do some sort of phonics and word work for twenty minutes, a five to ten minute mini-lesson, forty-five minutes of guided reading or novel studies, as well as forty-five minutes of silent sustained reading. In the following sections, I will explain how I chose books from my classroom library for guided reading.

Guided Reading

During my guided reading time, I planned my instruction using the Leveled Literacy Intervention (LLI) Daily Lesson Plan (Fountas & Pinnell, 2009). These lesson plans are organized into two days, odd days and even days. On the odd days, students reread the book from the previous day, do some sort of phonics and word work, introduce a new book, do letter and word work, then end with an evaluation. On even days, students reread the book from the previous day while the teacher completes a running record, the teacher does a phonics and word work lesson, the students write about reading, and then a new book is introduced.

Figures 1 and 2 show lesson plans that I created using the Leveled Literacy Intervention Daily Lesson Plan. I taught these lessons to student three during guided reading with his individual needs in mind.

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Figure 1: Lesson Plan Done with Student Three

**LLI Daily Lesson Plans
Odd Day**

| Lessons | |
|--------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Objective(s) | Self-correct miscues by self-monitoring while reading Read "th" words and "wh" words correctly |
| Rereading Books | Reread <i>Rosie Feels Sick</i> |
| Phonics & Word Work | Principle of the Lesson: Usually the letters "wh" makes the /wh/ sound. Demonstration of the Principle: I show two words to the student that begin with 'wh.' where and what. "Who" starts with 'wh' so it sounds like Guided Practice: I show the student the words when, where, and why and ask him what sound the beginning of the word makes, then to say the whole word. Application to Reading and Writing: After reading the new book. Assessment: Running record "Wh" sound |
| New Book | No Dogs Allowed – book introduction (see attached) |
| Letter/Word Work | Make "wh" words using magnetic letters -what -when -where -why (has most difficulty with these words) |
| Evaluation | Running record on reread book |

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Figure 2: Lesson Plan Done with Student Three

| LLI Daily Lesson Plan Even Day | |
|-------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Lessons | |
| Objective(s) | Self-correct miscues by self-monitoring while reading Read "th" words and "wh" words correctly |
| Re-reading Books Assessment | Reread <i>No Dogs Allowed</i> |
| Phonics/Word Work | Principle of the Lesson: Usually 'th' makes the /th/ sound and 'wh' makes the /wh/ sound. Demonstration of the Principle: I will show the student the word what and the word then. I will show them how they look different, and how they sound different. Guided Practice: I will give the student the words that and where and have him tell me the differences visually as well as the difference in sounds. He will do this again with the words when, with, there, and these. Application to Reading and Writing: Writing about the reread book. |
| Writing About Reading | Sean will write the events of the story <i>No Dogs Allowed</i> in sequential order. |
| New Book | The Puffer Fish |
| Optional Letter/ Word Work | The student will sort the words with "th" and "wh" either in the beginning, middle, or end of a word. |

Since my school did not purchase the LLI program, I had to use books from my classroom library to teach guided reading. I found very quickly that there were not enough books in my classroom library to last the whole year using the LLI Lesson Plan format. This was when I began collaborating with the school librarian. I would rotate books and go to the library on a weekly basis. In her spare time she also would look for books that I could use, and would keep a pile of them in the corner of the library for me to look through. The limited amount of books in my classroom library was an

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unexpected challenge. I also would search online for books that helped teach specific topics my students were struggling with or needed extra practice with. For instance, I looked up books that had a lot of dialogue, expression, figurative language, and other areas of reading.

Topics of instruction

When determining which books to use for guided reading, I often looked at what type of instruction my students were struggling with and needed extra support in. While working with students during guided reading, I took anecdotal notes in my research journal to determine where to go with their reading instruction. Depending on the student, the topics of instruction were different and sometimes the same.

Student one and student four needed extra instruction in sight words (Research journal, 9/9/13). I would then look through my classroom library for books that had basic sight words for practice during guided reading. After choosing a few books at their levels that were filled with sight words, I would let them choose from the stack of books which ones they wanted to read. This made them more responsible for reading the books and motivated because they were able to pick the book. If they wanted to read the same text, we would read it as a group. If they chose different texts, I would spend some time doing an interactive read aloud with a book I chose, and then have them practice their books on their own with my assistance. They sometimes chose to read their books to the other student, the class, or another adult. Since student one and student four needed the same thing, I did guided reading with them together for the sight words lesson.

I noted in my research journal on 9/11/13, student three struggled with visualizing. I was not sure which books were best for visualizing so I looked up books

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for visualizing online. I found a couple, but did not have them in my classroom library. I had to look them up in the school library and found some of them. For the next few days I worked with student three on visualizing using the books from the school library. I allowed student three to choose which books he wanted me to read, but did not let him look through the pictures. I had him close his eyes while I read a couple pages of the book, then he would draw what he was seeing in his head. I explained to him that visualizing a story is like playing a movie in your head. He really enjoyed being able to draw while I read to him. A few days later, I had him read a book without pictures and he had to be the illustrator for the book and draw what he was imagining while he read (Research journal, 9/13/13).

Student two needed to work on character dialogue (Research journal, 9/10/13). I found I had a lot of books with dialogue in my classroom library. Again, I allowed student two to choose which books he wanted to read. I would model the strategy with the books he did not choose. He really enjoyed changing his voice for the different characters. It also helped him to become aware of which character was talking when, which helped with his comprehension of the book. Other topics my students needed extra instruction with included character changes throughout the book, comparing and contrasting, cause and effect, sequencing the events in a story, problem and solution, and fact versus opinion.

Reading Level

I also chose books based on the students' reading level for guided reading. I wanted to make sure the text was challenging enough to be able to teach something, but easy enough that they did not become frustrated and give up. At my school we use the

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Fountas and Pinnell leveling system A-Z (Heinemann, 2014). I have groups of books that were bought and labeled with the Fountas and Pinnell levels that I used with my students. Since my students were at such different levels, it was difficult to work with multiple students at once during guided reading because they were not at the same level (Research journal, 9/20/13). The text was too hard for one student and too easy for another; therefore I usually did guided reading on an individual basis (Research journal, 9/16/13).

I also used the Step Into Reading (Random House Publishing) books with the levels in the corner labeled 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5. The level 1 is supposed to be for students preschool to kindergarten who are ready to read, level 2 is for students in preschool to grade 1 who are reading with help, level 3 is for students grades 1-3 who are reading on their own, level 4 is for students grades 2-3 reading paragraphs, and level 5 is for grades 2-4 who are ready for chapters. The struggle I found with these books was that what level 1 was for one company seemed to be different than level 1 for another company (Research journal, 9/24/13).

I had to carefully look through the books to see the level of vocabulary and number of words to determine if the book was the correct level for my students (Research journal, 9/24/13). There are a couple of ways I choose books to make sure they are right for my students. I use Giordano's (2011) six criteria for choosing books for students: connections to anyone or anything; length of page or book; interest in topic; count five unknown words; know about topic, author, illustrator; sense and understanding. I know which words my students will struggle with and make sure there aren't too many words they don't know that it become frustrating, but enough to make them practice their

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decoding skills. I also think about the goal for my students. If the goal is to work on sight words, I made sure the books I chose had a lot of sight words in them. If the goal was for the student to work on the “sh” sound, I looked for books that had a lot of words with “sh” in them. I chose books based on different criteria and the goal of the lesson.

Topics of interest

I also looked at which books the students read during independent reading and learned the topics that interested them (Research journal, 9/18/13). I knew that student one enjoyed reading about cats and friendship (Research journal, 9/16/13), student two enjoyed reading fantasy books (Research journal, 9/17/13), student three showed interest in trains (Research journal, 9/18/13), and student four liked to read books about animals and machines (Research journal, 9/20/13).

I tried to look for books that would interest my students because they would be more engaged in the learning. For example, student three has a dog named Max. I once found a book about a dog named Max and he was so excited to read the book that he wanted to take it home to read to his dad. He would constantly ask me if he could read the book about Max. Student four loves reading books about creeping animals like snakes and spiders (I think he really enjoys the look on my face when there is a picture of a creepy animal). I found a large number of books about snakes, spiders, and exotic animals that were on his reading level and he wanted me to read them with him all the time. When I found books that were interesting to my students, they would seem more excited to read them, and want to read them multiple times.

I also found a lot of current events articles in newspapers and online of high interest to my students, especially when it affected their lives. For instance, I found an

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article about changing school lunches to make them healthier (Research journal, 10/8/13). They were very interested in this topic because they all get school lunches. One student showed interest in wanting to eat healthier, while others did not want healthier foods because they do not like vegetables. After talking and reading more articles about child obesity, they understood why school lunches were changing. After doing more research, they all agreed school lunches should be healthier. They were excited to find out that they can make a difference and make changes.

Another topic they were interested in was an article about whether there should be special tables in the lunchroom for students with food allergies (Research journal, 10/10/13). They enjoyed reading this article because they did not all agree on whether there should be a special table or not, and even had a debate. One student has a food allergy and was passionate about wanting to sit with his friends and not having to be secluded just because of his allergy. They were all interested in what our school policy was for food allergies and found out that some students do sit at a special table if they have a peanut allergy and someone is eating a peanut butter and jelly sandwich. They also found out that the table is still in the lunchroom but kids with peanut butter are not allowed to sit there.

Grade Level Novels

Since part of my job was attempting to get the students integrated back into the general education classrooms, I decided to be consistent with the grade level teachers by doing the same novel studies. Each grade level needed to complete at least five novel studies each year. By including these novels in my planning, it enabled me to make sure my students were being exposed to grade level texts and instruction at higher levels of

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comprehension even though some of them are reading several years behind grade level. At times, I also took my students into the general education classrooms while reading these novels to ensure they were getting a rich discussion with their peers, since usually their discussions in my classroom were only with either my teaching assistant or me (Research journal, 10/18/13). This was one thing I had not done in the past, but it seemed to be beneficial, therefore I will continue to add it to my plans in the future.

Collaboration

Finally, a huge part of my daily planning involved collaboration with the general education teachers to prioritize the New York State Common Core Standards, come up with common formative assessments, and determine the pacing of the novel studies. The NYS Common Core Standards were a big influence on planning my instruction for guided reading. I had to make sure I was addressing the standards in the lessons I planned for guided reading. I focused on the prioritized standards that the grade levels determined. This helped to keep me focused and consistent with grade level expectations when creating lessons and groups for guided reading. I would assess my students in a specific standard to see where they were struggling. This would then become the lesson for guided reading with that particular student.

I had to collaborate with my teaching assistant on a daily basis because we take turns working with the students. I do not work with the same student each day at the same time, therefore we both needed to be on the same page with what the students are learning and what the other person did with the student that day. We determined it was easier for her to do the even days for the Leveled Literacy Intervention while I do the odd days because then I could introduce the new book and complete the running record and

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she would reread the books with them on the following day. We would also compare anecdotal notes about how each student was progressing and how we could move them along.

Finally, as mentioned earlier, I had to collaborate with the school librarian. She was extremely helpful and knowledgeable about the books and authors that were at my student's reading levels. I would let her know the topic of interest or the skill we were working on, and she would either bring me straight to the books to look at, or she would do some research and bring a bunch of books to my room to look through. She was thrilled that I was using her as a resource because not many teachers do. Without her expertise, planning would have been much more difficult.

Summary

I used my classroom library during guided reading and the students used it during independent reading. I realized early in the year that my classroom did not have a sufficient number of books to last me the whole year. I had to use the school library as well as the Internet to gather other materials for guided reading. I also used grade level novels to supplement for guided reading. Some ways I chose text for independent reading included topics the students struggled with, reading level, and topics of interest. Overall, planning my instruction without using a basal reading program was fairly easy. I had a lot of materials readily available, and it was a matter of determining what the students still needed and making sure the text was appropriate.

Research Questions Three and Four: What type of reading instruction (basal reading series or classroom library based instruction) do elementary students prefer? Why do students prefer one type of reading program to the other?

I saw a couple themes arise while interviewing my students. Some of their answers had very similar, and some had extremely different, opinions on their preference of reading programs.

Book Choice

The first theme that really stood out was that 100% of the students mentioned choosing their own trade books in the interview. Student one said, “This year is better because I get to choose what I read.” Student two stated, “I get to read what I want like lots of silly books.” Student three said, “I get to read and write about the books I want instead of being forced to read about something stupid.” According to student four, “I like being able to read what I want this year...” All of the students said during the interviews that they liked being able to choose their own trade books to read.

During their interviews students talked about why they enjoyed choosing books. Some things that were said include, “I get to read what I want,” “I get to read books about trains!” “I read about cats like my cat Sam,” “I get to read my favorite story again, and again, and again,” and “I read books that look cool.” These students enjoy choosing books because they can read about what interests them, books they have liked in the past, or books they have a personal connection to.

Text Level

Three out of four of the students mentioned text complexity during their interview. Two stated that reading this year was “easier” and one stated reading last year

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was “easy.” Student one said, “The books I read are a lot easier too. The books last year were too hard for me [to read].” Student two stated, “...last year you had to help me read a lot but it is easier this year so I don’t need as much help.”

Student four, who thought last year was easier, said, “Last year was easier and more fun.” When asked why it was more fun he said, “I got to just listen to the books and didn’t have to read them. We played a lot of games too and rotated in a circle. I got to go on the computer! The worksheets we did were really easy and I could work with a partner.” It seems student two enjoyed doing activities that went along with the basal stories. From getting to know student four the past couple years, he likes having things done for him instead of putting a lot of effort forth. By listening to the story on tape and buddy reading, he doesn’t have to do a lot of the reading himself. This could be why he is behind grade level in reading.

Based on my research question one, two students used the word “easy” while describing books they preferred. This shows student preferences could be heavily weighted on what they perceive as “easy.” Easy seems to be preferable to something more challenging. Easy can mean different things to each student. Student four enjoys reading books multiple times to the point of memorization. These books are easy to him because he has them committed to memory so does not have to actually read the words to read the book. Student four also chooses books that do not have a lot of words on each page. If he chooses a book with what he perceives as too many words he will put it back and get a book with fewer words. This could be due to his confidence level and he thinks the book with more words is too difficult. Student two also enjoys reading books multiple times. He reads them for enjoyment, not because it makes them easy. Student

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one enjoys having a book read aloud before reading it himself. This helps him learn the unknown words before he attempts to read it himself.

Reading Engagement

Of the four students interviewed, 75% of the students talked about which reading program was “more fun.” Student one said, “This year is better because it made reading fun instead of boring.” Student three said, “This year is fun because I get to read what I want and write about cool things.” Student four said, “Last year was better because it was easier and more fun even though some of the books were long and boring.”

Fun to these students could mean a variety of things. For some it was just fun being able to choose the books they read. They enjoyed being able to choose the topic they are reading about instead of being forced to read about a topic they have no interest in. Some students think fun is reading independently while others might think reading with a partner or adult is fun. One student enjoyed being able to write about his reading and getting his ideas out on paper instead of only having the thoughts in his head. Student four thought last year was more fun because he was able to listen to the books on tape and complete worksheets with his peers. This could mean student four prefers auditory learning to other types of learning.

Confidence

Another interesting topic that came up was confidence in reading. Student two stated during his interview, “I have more confidence reading because I am reading by myself.” Since he has been able to read more independently he has gained confidence and thinks he is a better reader. Student two also said, “I am an awesome reader!” He was the only one out of four students that talked about himself as a reader instead of

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about the text and activities during reading. It seems student two would rather read independently instead of in front of peers. He could have gained more confidence because he is not afraid to make mistakes in front of his peers because he is reading independently. He is also reading books at his level versus grade level so the text is at his ability level. He also enjoys discussing the books he is reading to adults and peers. By discussing the books after he reads them it helps him with his comprehension and connections with his peers.

Summary

There were several themes I found while interviewing the students including: book choice, text level, reading engagement, and confidence. All students enjoyed choosing their own trade books to read. Two students thought reading was easier this year while one thought reading was easier last year. Some students thought this year reading was more fun and others thought it was more fun last year. One student also talked about his increased confidence with reading. The majority, three out of four, of the students said they enjoyed reading more this year than last year.

Chapter Five: Conclusions and Recommendations

Introduction

Throughout the six-week study, I examined which type of reading instruction students prefer: a basal reading program or using a classroom library as a source of texts to plan reading instruction. My research questions were as follows:

1. How do students chose books from the classroom library for independent reading?
2. How might I plan guided reading instruction using my classroom library as a source of texts?
3. What type of reading instruction (basal reading series or classroom library based instruction) do elementary students prefer?
4. Why do students prefer one type of reading program to the other?

Conclusions

Students use multiple methods to choose books from the classroom library for independent reading

Students often pick a book they have read before. One of the students I interviewed had even read the book twelve other times. Students often stated that they liked the book when it was a book they were rereading. Other students read books again because they forgot what happened. Students also read books that are on similar topics to those they have previously read. This shows they often choose books that are on topics of interest to them. They also might be reading books on similar topics because they have the background knowledge to help them figure out unknown words or comprehend the text.

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They also chose books based on topics they liked or were interested in. Students often used words like, “interesting,” “love,” “exciting,” and “like.” If teachers want students to fall in love with the things they read about, the students must care about the things they read and find themselves in the books (Kasten & Wilfong, 2007; Ivey, 2000; Garan & DeVogd, 2008). Allowing students to choose books based on their interest allows them to fall in love with the text. Students showed an equal interest in fiction and nonfiction books. The older the students were the more they seemed to like nonfiction versus fiction. The younger students seemed to like the fiction better than nonfiction. The preference of fiction or nonfiction depended on the individual student. Williams (2008) found that fiction was usually chosen over nonfiction in the eight year olds he was studying. Correia (2011) determined that her boy participants chose nonfiction more often than girls. Younger boys tend to express their emotions through action while girls use words to communicate feelings (Senn, 2012). This could explain why boys seem to prefer nonfiction to fiction. Students who prefer informational text say it gives them new information and students who prefer fictional narrative text say it is more interesting or entertaining (Cervetti, 2009).

Students chose books that are written by the same author or part of a series. A study by Williams (2008) found that when students selected books, they mostly chose series books. The students mentioned specific authors they enjoyed reading, and often chose books to read by the authors they mentioned. Some students mentioned the same author, but often the authors they mentioned were different. Only one student did not mention an author while being interviewed, but this could be due to the lack of exposure to books in the past.

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Students chose both texts that are easier to read and texts that challenge them. A study conducted by Donovan, Smolkin, and Lomax (2000) found that when students were able to select their own books, sixty-one percent selected books above their reading level, fifteen percent at their reading level, and twenty-three below their reading level. Some of the students used the word “easy” while being interviewed about their book choices. Some of the books they chose to read were songbooks in which the songs were familiar to them and therefore easy to read. Another student who has a lot of background knowledge on animals read a lot of animal books because he already knew the information about them.

I believe all of these choices help to build the students’ confidence. It helps them build confidence because the students who struggled to read were the ones who chose the easier texts, chose topics they are interested in and already had background knowledge about, reread texts they had read previously, and read books that were by the same author or in a series. Kasperski and Katzir (2013) found that students with high, average, and low comprehension all showed a mixture of low, average, and high confidence ratings. In order for boys to avoid failure, they choose to read easy books and shorter books due to their lack of confidence with reading (Senn, 2012). All of the themes I found help to build confidence in the students as readers.

I plan guided reading instruction based on a variety of factors

The first thing I looked at when planning guided reading instruction was what the students’ needs were. In the beginning of the year I had the students read while I took anecdotal notes on their strengths and needs while reading. The purpose of guided reading is to provide small-group instruction that allows for a closer tailoring to

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individual strengths and needs (Fountas & Pinnell, 2012). It is extremely rare to find two students who are the same age who learn the same exact things in the same way according to the same timetable (Tomlinson, 2009). This is why I constantly switched up the guided reading groups during my study, because the students do not have the same exact needs.

Another important aspect of guided reading is making sure the text is at the right level for the students. While choosing guided reading books, teachers first need to find their students' independent reading levels so they can choose texts that are easy enough for the student to read with ninety to ninety-five percent accuracy, but still challenging enough to increase their reading abilities (Simpson et al., 2007). Students who have a large gap between their guided reading levels should not be placed in the same guided reading group, even if they have the same instructional needs. During my study, when a text was too difficult for my students they would become frustrated and give up. On the other hand, when the text was too easy the students would not learn as much because the text did not challenge their reading abilities.

Finally, I chose texts for guided reading on topics that interested my students. The first thing Giordano (2011) gives her students to fill out is an interest inventory to see what they are interested in or topics her students would like to know more about. At the beginning of the year I always give my students an interest survey, as well as a parent literacy survey. This helps me to see what topics interest my students and try to find text on similar topics for guided reading. One question teachers should ask themselves when choosing books is: Will the audience find the text engaging? (Atkinson, Matusevich, & Huber, 2009). I always kept this question in mind while I chose books for guided reading

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because if the students are interested in the text, it is more likely they will want to read and engage with the text. Students perform better when they enjoy reading (Gambrell, 2011).

Most elementary students prefer classroom library based instruction and guided reading

One of the main reasons students prefer classroom library based instruction and guided reading is because they can usually choose their own books or have a selection of books they can choose from. All of the students interviewed showed a positive interest in being able to choose their own books. Gambrell (2011) determined that students performed better when they enjoyed reading. One thing that has been critical to motivate children to read is student book choice during independent reading (Kasten & Wilfong, 2007; Servilio, 2009; Shevin & Klein, 2004; Johnson & Blair, 2003; Kelley & Clausen-Grace, 2009). When students are able to choose the books they read for independent reading, they have more ownership over taking the time to read it. Elementary students think Sustained Silent Reading is a useful activity because they are able to choose their own books and the teacher also reads as a model for the students (Kasten & Wilfong, 2007; Reutzel, Fawson, & Smith, 2008; Johnson & Blair, 2003).

Another factor was text complexity. Most of the students said it was easier to read this year because they could choose the books and they were at their level. Instead of reading a book that was on grade level with the rest of the class during a basal reading lesson, they were reading books on their own levels. It is important for students to read books at their independent levels instead of always reading grade level text. According to Shannon and Goodman (1994), the goal of using basals was not only to provide

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guidance for teachers, but to make the curriculum the same for everyone. Shannon and Goodman (1994) critique the idea that basal reading programs ensure all students are guaranteed a reading program that is successful no matter the level of ability of their teachers (Shannon & Goodman, 1994).

A third reason students prefer classroom library based instruction is because of the level of reading engagement. Most of the students thought this year was more fun compared to last year. They thought last year was boring because they read the story then had to do worksheets and tests. Gambrell (2011) determined that students performed better when they enjoyed reading. Gambrell (2011) found that thirty-seven percent of the students have reported that they never read for enjoyment. One student thought last year was more fun because it was easier, but he said some of the books were long and boring. When students are motivated intrinsically, they are more willing to read longer text and answer higher order comprehension questions (Schaffner et. al., 2013). While being motivated extrinsically, students are more likely to read shorter text and have negative effects on comprehension (Schaffner et. al., 2013).

Confidence was another factor in why students prefer classroom library based instruction. One student talked about how his confidence with reading improved because he is now able to read books by himself and does not need my help as the teacher. Being able to read independently has helped to build his confidence as a reader. He also stated that he thinks he is an awesome reader. According to Klassen (2010), students with a higher self-efficacy for reading had a higher reading score in comprehension. When students are involved in their own learning, it can help to motivate them and increase their confidence. An increase in confidence could cause an increase in reading abilities

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as well. McCabe and Greenwood (2005) conducted a study with a middle school girl who had a lack of motivation and confidence with her reading abilities. The girl had set reading goals and during the study McCabe and Greenwood (2005) made the connection that when the student's confidence with reading improved, so did her reading abilities.

Implications for Student Learning

The results of my study show several implications for student learning. Mixing the groups for guided reading is beneficial to the students because the teacher can focus on one specific need at a time. Students also need time for independent reading to practice what they have learned and to learn to love reading. Most importantly, students need to be able to choose their own texts for independent reading.

Mixed groupings for guided reading

To make sure guided reading is successful, groups should not ever remain the same all year, but instead change on a daily or weekly basis according to the skills the students need to learn (Simpson et al., 2007). During the study I made sure the groups were constantly changing based on student needs. The students who participated in the study seemed to enjoy working with other students in the classroom instead of just the students in the same grade level. Also, the students were more confident because they knew the students they were working with had similar needs in reading as them.

Time for independent reading

Students enjoyed the time they were given for independent reading. They liked being able to choose their own books, as well as find a comfortable place in the classroom to read. I think this time had significance on the students' feelings about reading. I could tell by their excitement for independent reading that they began to enjoy

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reading. Independent reading can help students improve fluency, vocabulary, content knowledge, and a love of reading (Halladay, 2012). Advantages of independent reading include: students do better if they are allowed to choose what to read; the students have to initiate their decoding and comprehension skills; the teachers need to have knowledge of the literature in order to have quality conferences with students; there is more time on task for the students because they are engaged in their book choice (Ediger, 2010).

Students who struggle with reading need lots of time to read independently. Proficient readers will read as many words in two days as poor readers do the entire year (Harlaar, Deater-Deckard, Thompson, DeThorne, & Petrill, 2011).

Implications for My Teaching

My study has allowed me to consider some implications for my own teaching. It has helped me to identify the importance of a balanced literacy approach during my English Language Arts block.

Guided reading is essential for student learning

Since there are a variety of learners in classrooms, teachers need to make sure they are meeting the needs of all their students by giving them small group or individualized reading instruction. The purpose of guided reading is to provide small-group instruction that allows for a closer tailoring to individual strengths and needs (Fountas & Pinnell, 2012). When working with my students during the study, I made sure I focused on their strengths, not just their needs, during guided reading. For instance, if one of their strengths was sight words and they needed to work on fluency, I chose text with a lot of sight words so they could focus on their fluency.

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The guided reading groups also need to change throughout the year to address student needs, not only what level the students are reading. For instance, in my study when a group of students needed to work on expression while reading, they were grouped together no matter what level they were reading. To make sure guided reading is successful groups should not ever remain the same all year but instead change on a daily or weekly basis according to the skills the students need to learn (Simpson et al., 2007). During my study, I made sure my groups were constantly changing because the same level students did not show the same exact reading behaviors.

Students need time to read independently

Not enough time is given to students to sit down and have a quiet reading time. Independent practice is only about ten percent of the reading instruction (Dewitz, Jones & Leahy, 2009). Schools need to make more time for independent reading, but often spend the time on skills and preparing for high-stakes testing (Ivey, 2000). There are always worksheets or writing activities attached to reading, which can take away from the actual act of reading. While students are reading independently, they are not required to finish a text or complete an assignment after reading (Siah, 2010). I noticed throughout the study that my students really valued the independent reading time. If we had an assembly or something else that would interrupt our independent reading time, the students would ask if they could read when they got back to the classroom. Kasten and Wilfong (2007) also found that if students believe they are good at something, they will gravitate towards it. They also seemed to have more confidence with reading because they were finding books they could read on their own without the help of an adult.

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Teachers need to plan their instruction with student interests and abilities in mind

Throughout my research I noticed that students were more eager and motivated to read when I chose a book they were interested in for guided reading. Giordano (2011) created six criteria for choosing books for students: connections to anyone or anything; length of page or book; interest in topic; count five unknown words; know about topic, author, illustrator; sense and understanding. When I chose texts for guided reading, I would ensure I was checking the six criteria before I chose that text. At times, I would want to challenge my students a little more and did not use the criteria because I wanted them to learn something new or try something out of their comfort zone.

Atkinson, Matusevich, and Huber (2009) suggest making a rubric for evaluating the books teachers are choosing for their students to read or using one of the rubrics already created by other people. This would have been helpful to do during my study. If I had made a rubric to help me choose texts for evaluating texts for guided reading, it might have saved time and helped me to make more informed choices. I also think these rubrics might be handed over to the students eventually to help them choose their own texts. This would be beneficial for the students to make a more informed decision on texts to choose for independent reading. Students would be more responsible for their reading and could become more self-sufficient.

While choosing guided reading books, teachers first need to find their students' independent reading levels so they can choose texts that are easy enough for the student to read with ninety to ninety-five percent accuracy but still challenging enough to increase their reading abilities (Simpson et al., 2007).

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Recommendations for Future Research

The results of my study show which reading instruction students prefer, how I use my classroom library for guided reading, and how students choose books for independent reading. Continued research would be beneficial for my teaching as well as others who teach reading.

Participants

This research was conducted in a self-contained special education classroom in a rural school district. The four participants were all males. Due to the limitations of this study, more research could be done to see if the results are consistent with larger sample sizes, other geographic locations, and include females, as well as general education students who are not classified or assigned to self-contained classrooms. Changing the conditions of the study, would provide more evidence for the benefits of a balanced literacy program led by the teacher versus a scripted basal reading program that does not know the individual needs of the students in the classroom.

Time spent on independent reading

Further research should be conducted on the benefits of independent reading. Current studies show that teachers do not give students enough time to sit and read for enjoyment without activities attached to the reading. Independent practice is only about ten percent of reading instruction (Dewitz, Jones & Leahy, 2009). Schools need to make more time for independent reading, but often spend the time on skills and preparing for high-stakes testing (Ivey, 2000).

Another area that should be further researched is if completing tasks after independent reading is more or less motivating for students. Students are constantly

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asked to complete writing assignments after reading, instead of being able to just enjoy reading by itself. While students are reading independently, they are not required to finish a text or complete an assignment after reading (Siah, 2010). Research should be conducted on whether students should be given time to practice reading without having an assignment attached to it every time.

Looking further into how students choose books for independent reading would be beneficial because then teachers can appropriately choose books to place in their classroom libraries. This could also help teachers when choosing books for guided reading as well.

Final Thoughts

As I reflect back on my study, it is clear that basal reading programs have some benefits, but it cannot ultimately be the only source teachers' use for reading instruction. Due to the varying reading gaps among students in our classrooms, a "one size fits all" type reading instruction would be counterproductive. Teachers need to look at the students as individuals with their own reading strengths and needs. A balanced literacy approach with a focus on guided reading and independent reading would help teachers to differentiate their reading instruction to meet the needs of the individual students.

During my study I realized guided reading is essential to student learning. When teachers mix up the guided reading groups frequently to match the needs of the students, more progress toward student learning goals can be achieved. I also learned that choosing books for guided reading is vital. Books that are too challenging will frustrate students and cause them to give up. Books that are too easy will not challenge their reading abilities. Books that are interesting will engage the student in learning.

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While conducting my study, I recognized the biggest impact on my students' reading abilities was independent reading. Not only did independent reading give my students time to practice what they had learned, but it also made them enjoy reading and build a confidence with reading, something I did not expect from the study. Also, having students choose their own books for independent reading allowed them to take ownership over their reading and put effort towards becoming a proficient reader.

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STUDENT READING INSTRUCTION PREFERENCES AND BOOK CHOICE

Appendix A

CONSENT FOR OBSERVATION AND INTERVIEW OF STUDENT

The purpose of this research study is to investigate student perceptions on reading programs and student book choices. The person conducting this research is a graduate student at The College at Brockport, SUNY as well as your child’s teacher. If you agree to have your child participate in this research study, your child will be observed and interviewed during his/her reading time.

In order for your child to participate in this study, your informed consent is required. You are being asked to make a decision whether or not to allow your child to participate in the study. If you would like for your child to participate, and agree with the statements below, please sign your name in the space provided at the end. You may change your mind at any time and your child may leave the study without penalty, even after the study has begun. Your child can decline participation in the study even with your consent to participate.

I understand that:

- a. My child’s participation is voluntary and s/he has the right to refuse to answer any questions.
b. My child’s confidentiality is guaranteed. Her/his name will not be recorded in observation notes. There will be no way to connect my child to the observation. If any publication results from this research, s/he would not be identified by name. Results will be given through the use of pseudonyms, so neither the participants nor the school can be identified.
c. There will be no anticipated personal risks or benefits because of participation in this project.
d. My child’s participation involves participating in regularly scheduled classroom activities in her/his classroom.
e. The researcher will observe my child during reading time on a daily basis for approximately six weeks and will use field notes to record observations.
f. The results will be used for the completion of a thesis paper by the primary researcher.
g. My child’s participation may involve being audio-recorded answering questions during an interview. It is estimated that it will take 5-15 minutes to complete each interview. The researcher will transcribe the audio-recordings. There will be no way to connect my child to the interview. If any publication results from this research, he/she would not be identified by name. My child may still be interviewed if consent is given to conduct interviews but not audio-recordings.
h. Data, audio-recordings, and transcribed notes will be kept in a locked filing cabinet in the classroom by the investigator. Only the primary investigator will have access to the notes, recordings and corresponding materials. Data, audio-recordings, transcribed notes and consent forms will be destroyed by shredding when the research has been accepted and approved.

I understand the information provided in this form and agree to allow my child to participate as a participant in this study. I am 18 years of age or older. I have read and understand the above statements. All my questions about my child’s participation in this study have been answered to my satisfaction. If you have any questions, you may contact:

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585-765-3122

Dr. Sue Robb
Thesis Advisor
The College at Brockport, SUNY
srobb@brockport.edu
585-395-5935

Consent to Observe: Signature of Parent _____ Date: _____
Consent to Interview: Signature of Parent _____ Date: _____
Consent to Audio-record: Signature of Parent _____ Date: _____

Appendix B

STUDENT READING INSTRUCTION PREFERENCES AND BOOK CHOICE

Observation Protocol

Student Pseudonym: _____

Observation Date: _____ **Observation Time:** _____

Length of Observation: _____

| Description of Activities | Reflective Field Notes |
|---------------------------|------------------------|
| | |

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Interview Protocol

Student Pseudonym: _____

Interview Date: _____

Interview Time:

Purpose Statement: **Start audio recording with students pseudonym, date, and time**

The purpose of this interview is for me to gain a better understanding of your reading, the books you choose, and if you prefer basal reading instruction or using the classroom library for literacy instruction. Please be honest and if you feel uncomfortable with a question I ask, please know that you have the choice to not respond. You may withdraw from the interview at any time. This interview should last about 10 to 15 minutes. I will be recording our conversation, if you have given consent.

Questions:

1. What made you choose that book to read today?
2. Have you read that book before? How many times have you read that book?
3. Have you read any books that are similar to this one? If you have, what are they?
4. Who are some authors you like to read?
5. Do you like reading workshop better this year or last year? Why?
6. What makes reading workshop better/worse than last year?
7. Would you rather have reading next year be like it was this year, or did you like it better last year? Why?

Closing:

Thank you so much for your participation and willingness to share your thoughts with me. Your participation will help me with reading instruction. As noted in your consent letter, I will keep your identity confidential.

Appendix D

STUDENT READING INSTRUCTION PREFERENCES AND BOOK CHOICE

Children's Author's Cited

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Clifford Series: Bridwell, N. (1985). New York, NY: Scholastic Inc.

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Fly Guy Series: Tedd, A. (2005). New York, NY: Scholastic Inc.

Frog and Toad Series: Lobel, A. (1970). New York, NY: Harper Collins

Hardy Boys Series: Dixon, F. W. (1987). New York, NY: Simon & Schuster

Henry and Mudge Series: Rylant, C. (1987). New York, NY: Simon & Schuster

Children's Publishing Division

Little Critter Series: Mayer, M. (1975). New York, NY: Random House

Magic Tree House Series: Osborne, M. P. (1992). New York, NY: Random House.

Nancy Drew Series: Keene, C. & Wirt, M. A. (1968). New York, NY: Simon & Schuster,
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