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Using Various Strategies to Increase Reading Comprehension

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Using Various Strategies to Increase Reading Comprehension

by

Sarah E. Gahagan

August 1, 2007

A thesis submitted to the

Department of Education and Human Development of the

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In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

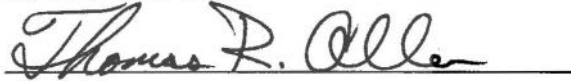
Master of Science in Education

Using Various Strategies to Increase Reading Comprehension

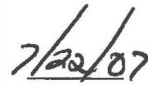
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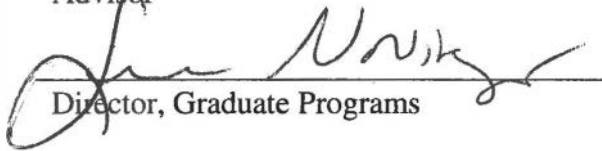
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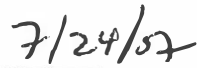
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Chapter I Introduction

Students in today's society have difficulty comprehending text. When students begin school with little knowledge of people, places, things, or books, we as teachers have sometimes confused their lack of information with a lack of ability and lower our expectations for literacy learning (McKenzie & Danielson, 2003). For this reason and more, comprehension problems occur frequently. Teachers who have had this difficulty in their classroom can use many strategies to enhance comprehension. They have to understand the pragmatics of comprehension. McKenzie & Danielson (2003) suggest that for starters, teachers can insert prompts, cues, and questions to text or verbal instruction to guide unsophisticated students in what to notice and how to process new content.

Teachers who understand that reading comprehension is a complex goal are on the path to successfully teaching students to understand and enjoy text (Vaughn & Edmonds, 2006). Knowing when and how to help students when comprehension breaks down is the most important part of teachers. For intermediate readers, the pathway to reading comprehension begins with determining whether students can read the words accurately (Vaughn & Edmonds, 2006).

According to Cortese (2004), "The importance of student's ability to effectively access appropriate sources of information for responding to questions cannot be overstated" (p.376). This has come out in generated discussion groups. Students constantly questioned themselves and others as they read in an effort to increase their comprehension (Newman, 2001). Listening and speaking, or social interaction is a major framework that has aided in comprehension. Fisk & Hurst (2003) suggest providing opportunities for students to

interact with one another and to challenge others' ideas during discussions supports higher leveled thinking (p.182).

Readers start with their schemata; a conceptual system for understanding something and integrating the text into it (Kathryn, 2000). Comprehension requires readers to use their prior knowledge and experience to create new knowledge. Students cannot be expected to comprehend text when they lack sufficient prior knowledge (Kathryn, 2000). Activating prior knowledge before reading particular text is very important in the comprehension process.

Statement of the Problem

I am a general education, sixth grade middle school English Language Arts teacher, with 36 (32%) of my total students being classified as students who were reading and comprehending text below grade level. These students received additional support through programs that addressed the specific needs of a struggling reader but teachers and students need to understand that comprehension is not just a strategy; it is a process with many different elements.

The problem that drove my research was this: What types of quality instructional strategies can a general education English Language Arts teacher implement, in order for students who are reading below grade level to improve reading comprehension?

In addition to teaching a regular school day, I also ran an Extended Day program two times a week, for fifty minutes each day within my classroom. This program incorporated using small groups of students (5-7) who were struggling readers and gave them additional opportunities to choose, implement, and apply different strategies and activities to assist them in comprehension. Students were introduced to a strategy, it was

modeled for them and in turn they had an opportunity to make their own meaning of it. They had the opportunity to decide if it was a tool that would assist their specific needs to aid in comprehension.

In response to this problem, I involved a small group of my Extended Day students in experimenting with various instructional strategies that students had and had not been previously exposed to. Every two weeks I introduced a new strategy to the students and together we discussed the strategies they chose to use when reading a literature selection. I surveyed the students and tested the differences these strategies made in regards to comprehension over the course of six weeks.

Rationale

The national concern about student literacy is strongly felt in school districts across the country. Over the years researchers have devoted considerable attention to the special needs of poor readers and children at risk. Much progress has been made in the area of beginning reading instruction, while less is known about teaching children with a reading disability (RD) in the intermediate grades. It is common to see students in the intermediate grades who read poorly, even though they have had years of instruction and exposure to print. There are large individual differences in reading abilities by the time a student is in his/her intermediate school years. Reading comprehension for older students rests on a broader foundation that includes not only word identification but also language comprehension and the ability to access the background knowledge needed to integrate information (Anderson & Pearson, 2000).

Letting students have a role in the strategies they choose to use while reading should not only motivate them to do their best but also encourage them to use these

strategies more often and without prompting. It should become more natural, as a habit, rather than a chore. When students experience the feeling of success and an increase in their understanding, certain strategies will differentiate themselves as being more successful according to a student's particular learning style as well as the text in question. I believe that performing this research in my classroom has helped me to refine my teaching abilities and teach so that all students learn. This was a purposeful study to see which strategies I should highlight when teaching different genres, short stories, and higher level thinking literature selections.

Summary

Our educational system places a strong emphasis on meeting the needs of our students, especially in the area of literacy. Part of providing a quality education is reaching the group of students that sometimes fall through the cracks. These are the students who have difficulty comprehending literature, who lose interest in reading, and have a negative attitude about any type of literature.

My research started with a simple question. What types of quality instructional strategies can a general education English Language Arts teacher implement, in order for students who are reading below grade level to improve reading comprehension? In order to answer this question, I first identified students in my class who were comprehending text below grade level. Once these students were identified, I invited students to attend the Extended Day program and recorded the results. The program was highly structured with each day planned to promote and model new reading strategies, also giving independent time to practice them.

The benefits of students using reading strategies has been evident for a long time. However, recent changes in Educational Reform remind teachers of their responsibility to best meet the needs of all students. This notion has sparked a great deal of research on the topic. A review of research is presented in the next chapter.

Definition of Terms

1. Comprehension: A process in which readers construct meaning by interacting with the text through the combination of prior knowledge and previous experience.
2. Higher Leveled Thinking: With each skill or concept is an activity suggestion educators can use to expand and extend thinking.
3. Schemata- A mental structure that represents some aspect of the world. People use schemata to organize current knowledge and provide a framework for future understanding. A conceptual system for understanding something and integrating the text into it.

Chapter II Review of Literature

Comprehending Text

Comprehension can be explained by different people in various ways. A common definition for teachers today is that comprehension is a process in which readers construct meaning by interacting with text through the combination of prior knowledge and previous experience, information in the text, and the stance the reader takes in relationship to the text (Pardo, 2004).

Reading is a highly interactive practice that involves many different skills and thinking processes. It is also an interaction between resources that may still be in development. Phonological, semantic and syntactic skills all need to be present to accomplish success in reading. When considering a child's reading ability, Snowling (2000) explained that learning to read is comprised of the development of decoding, word recognition and text comprehension skills.

According to Neufeld (2005), "There are two important features of the comprehension process. First, seeking to comprehend text is an active, intentional thinking process through which the reader constructs meaning" (p.421). Therefore, when students are comprehending material their brain works to try to make meaning of information presented. There are a number of different thinking processes within the reader. Some include word level processes, which is recalling the words quickly and accurately and the knowledge of word wall or sight words. Second, while students' understandings of texts are expected to vary as a result of differences in their background knowledge and experiences, not all interpretations of a given text can be considered valid (Neufeld, 2005).

Reading has to be meaningful to a child. Reading encompasses more than just the ability to accurately decode words in text; the information has to be relevant to the student. Only then can the reading process be meaningful and enjoyable.

It is important to remember that each reader will convey different interpretations of the text. The ideas they bring to the text are all part of their own personal comprehension process. Some students may see texts differently than others and we have to think about this when assessing children. Pardo (2004) agrees when he says each reader is unique and they possess characteristics that are applied with each reading situation (p.349).

Teaching to the Intermediate Student

Intermediate school teachers often notice a puzzling situation: students that are said to be good readers in the primary grades seem to have problems when taking on intermediate reading tasks (Lubliner, 2004). Teachers mainly focus on the mechanical reading skills in the primary grades. This results in a distorted view of a student's reading progress. The ability to read is far more than what it appears, especially to educators who are not trained in the intricacies of this specialty. Mastering the reading process is far more than the relationship between letter and speech sounds. When we consider a student's reading ability we must also take into account their ability to understand what they read and infer and predict information.

A student relies heavily on the ability to read, even from an early age. Ivey (2005) reminds us, "Reading is a tool that students are required to use in order to gain knowledge of any subject area, especially in an upper-grade classroom" (p.812). During the course of a day students read frequently and the majority of the time are not even conscious of this, whether it is a poster, a set of directions, or a note that a classmate passed them in the

hallway. Fielding (2000) agrees when he points out, “Whether it is during teacher centered instructional time or during an independent work opportunity, there is no question, students are often reading” (p.543).

For most students this is an advantage and can help them take control of their learning and focus in on the specific content that they need increased practice on. A teacher still teaches, but at a higher grade level, it is also necessary for the student to know what their role is in succeeding. This makes the learning process more of a team effort. Stupiansky agrees when she says that teaching students what works for them, as an individual, also helps the teacher accomplish his/her own teaching objectives.

A struggling reader however, often uses independent work time attempting to problem solve words, which often leads to losing meaning of the text. Lloyd (2004) reminds us, “A struggling reader often will switch back and forth between decoding and comprehension several times as they move through a text” (p.122). This process requires a great deal of effort, which often leaves the student feeling frustrated and let down because in the long run it is extremely ineffective. Lubliner (2004) supports this idea when she points out that often to a struggling reader, decoding demands most of the child’s attention, therefore comprehension is neglected. At that point a student is simply trying to get through the material, not understand the material.

In the primary grades a student may be able to mask their low comprehension skills by using the repetitive vocabulary and sentence structure from the text (Lubliner, 2004). When students are exposed to intermediate vocabulary and syntax of text, sometimes serious problems are occurring for the first time. Comprehension is a higher level reading task. According to Samuels (2000) in order to be a proficient reader, a child

must be able to decode and comprehend simultaneously. Just as students need to use the mechanics of reading, they also need to develop comprehension fluency in constructing meaning as they read (Lubliner, 2004).

Comprehension as a learning process

If readers have individual differences, how do teachers best support students in achieving comprehension skills? According to Pardo, they teach decoding skills, help students build fluency, build and activate prior knowledge, as well as teach vocabulary words (2004). This needs to be done before the intermediate grades so students can focus on comprehension strategies rather than learning to read.

Teaching decoding skills

Decoding is the ability to decipher printed words by recovering the spoken word that a printed word represents. More specifically, decoding a word involves realizing that a printed word reproduces the spoken word as a written sequence of phonemes. It is also important to recognize that individual phonemes make up sounds, and when you blend those sounds together, words are created. (Carlisle, 2006).

Carlisle explains, “In order to read proficiently, the student must be able to decode with accuracy and fluency” (p.671). Carlisle (2006) also states, “Students must understand the tools and purpose of the written word before even beginning to make sense of print (p.682). Pardo (2004) also reminds us that in order to comprehend material, some level of automatic decoding must be present. This is so the short term memory can work on comprehending, not just on decoding words.

Students who focus on just word calling will never comprehend the information because they will be frustrated with not knowing the word in the first place let alone make

meaning of it. While teachers in the primary grades work with phonemic awareness and phonics, teachers in the intermediate grades can support students' continued development of automatic decoding through spelling, vocabulary and high frequency word activities (Pardo, 2004). When a student reaches the point where he or she is practicing decoding and word recognition skills, that student must work toward fast and accurate word recognition. Students can then rely more on automatic word recognition rather than decoding letter by letter (Carlisle, 2006).

Finally, the student who can read sentences and paragraphs proficiently has the skills to define and interpret written words, then it is the hope that they can also use reasoning and other strategies to comprehend text. The reading process is interactive at this point, and as students continue to read, they learn more words as well as grasp more of the complexities of the English language. (Johns, 2001)

A student who spends a large amount of time on letter and word recognition will not have the energy or attention left to figure out the meaning conveyed by those words, which, after all, is the point of reading. Decoding is a crucial step on the way to automatic word recognition and, ultimately, comprehension. (Carlisle, 2006)

Building fluency

When word calling and decoding become more automatic, students become fluent and in turn can focus on comprehension. Pikulski & Chard (2005) point out that reading fluency is when student's word recognition skills are efficient and effective. If students can read more fluently, they will feel more at ease and in turn, focus less on how they are reading. Better understanding of the text allows a student to read more quickly and accurately (Vaughn, Chard, Bryant and Coleman, 2000). There are many ways to build

fluency. Three foundations pertaining to fluency include: letter familiarity, phonemic awareness, and knowledge of how graphemes typically represent phonemes of words (Pikulski & Chard, 2005).

The letter is the basic unit of reading and writing in English, and familiarity with the letters of the alphabet has consistently been shown to be a strong predictor of future reading success. While not sufficient in itself for reading success, familiarity with the letters of the alphabet is important for developing decoding skills. (Litke & Wren, 2000)

One of the basic building blocks of speech is the phoneme, and to gain knowledge of the alphabetic principle, a child must be consciously aware that spoken words are comprised of phonemes. (Litke & Wren, 2000). Further a child must be consciously aware of the fact that phonemes can be substituted and rearranged to create different words. When a child becomes aware of the fact that spoken words have sounds, phonological awareness is said to be achieved. Litke and Wren point out that, "Some reading failure has been linked to a lack of phoneme awareness." (p.123). The importance of teaching phonological awareness cannot be overstated.

To understand spoken language, a child must be able to hear and to understand spoken language. Virtually every child raised in a normal linguistic environment has the ability to distinguish between different speech sounds in her native language. Almost all native English speakers can therefore hear the difference between similar English words like "grow" and "glow." When children produce these words themselves, however, they may not be able to articulate distinctly enough for others to hear the distinction. Difficulty with articulation does not imply difficulty with perception.

Hearing the difference between similar sounding words such as "grow" and "glow" is easy for most children, but not for all children. Any child who is not consistently exposed to English phonology may have difficulty perceiving the subtle differences between English phonemes. Obviously, children who are not able to hear the difference between similar-sounding words like "grow" and "glow" will be confused when these words appear in context, and their comprehension skills will suffer dramatically. (Litke & Wren)

In order for students to be fluent they need to be taught the following: high frequency vocabulary, how to recognize word parts and spelling patterns, and how to use decoding strategies. Teachers also model fluent reading by reading aloud to students daily so they can see how a reader would read thoughtfully, as well as strategically (Pardo, 2004). Along with building fluency, teachers need to focus on teaching vocabulary words at a young age. Ivey (2003) agrees when he states "The bottom line is that when teachers read to students they enhance students' understanding and their inclination to read independently" (p.812).

Getting students to read independently is key in helping them become more fluent. When a student reads silently, there are many things they can do to understand the text. They can ask themselves questions, predict, make connections to what they already know and relate the information to their own personal experiences. Ivey (2003) reminds us that engaging students in these processes with you helps them think about the text, as well as point out how they can read more effectively on their own. Facklam (2002) supports this statement when he reminds us that students who read frequently on their own, especially struggling readers benefit and have the ability to become more fluent.

Teaching vocabulary words

Vocabulary is especially important in reading comprehension. Students who can decode high frequency words and are fluent in reading them will have an easier time focusing on the comprehension of text. High frequency words are those words that appear over and over again in our language (Pikulski & Chard, 2005). If there are too many words that a reader does not know, the reader will spend too much time and energy figuring out the words and never comprehend the text. Teachers should consider the background knowledge of their students and the text they will be engaged in. They should then select a small number of words or ideas that are important for understanding the text (Pardo, 2004). Pardo further suggests that the words the teacher picks should then be exercised and used in context before the actual passage is read. He also states that if students are given a list of words to look up, they will see no point in the exercise and become less motivated to engage in that story. All of these components are a prerequisite to comprehension: teaching decoding skills, building fluency, and teaching vocabulary words. (Headley, 2000)

Student motivation and comprehension

Many individual qualities of a reader are out of the teacher's control, such as how they develop cognitively and their culture. However, teachers can motivate students by providing them with interesting texts, allowing them choices in reading and writing, and setting a purpose for reading (Pardo, 2004). Teachers seek out students' interests in the beginning of the year in order to make selections of text and themes that students will want to engage themselves in. Another way to motivate students is to have and use trade books

along with nonfiction materials in the classroom. All of these motivators will help students to comprehend text.

Nonfiction materials and motivation

To many, nonfiction is remembered as informational, fact driven text where the details leave you bored and disengaged (Moss, 2003). Today's nonfiction is quite different, often having colorful pictures, photographs and graphs to heighten the readers' senses. Not only are the graphics impressive, but the readers of today will notice a more conversational style of writing (Moss, 2003).

Bell & Caspari, (2002) have come up with three objectives that need to be implemented into teaching in order to increase motivation and comprehension of nonfiction text: increasing the exposure to nonfiction materials, assessability to these materials, and pairing related fiction and nonfiction texts (Bell & Caspari, 2002). Students can then detect the similarities and differences of these types of text and motivate themselves to choose one or the other.

Studies by Schiefele, Krapp, and Winteler (2000) also suggest that regardless of readers' text preferences, when the text topic interests them, their reading is likely to improve. Not surprisingly then, research by Guthrie et al. (1996) shows that approaches emphasizing reading for the purpose of addressing students' real questions tend to lead to higher achievement and motivation.

According to researchers, parents and teachers focus more on vocabulary and literacy concepts when reading informational text aloud versus when they read narrative text (Bell & Caspari). This extra attention from parents and teachers may make informational text particularly well suited for building students' word knowledge according

to Dreher (2000) and Duke, Bennett-Armistead, and Roberts (2002; 2003). Learning to read diagrams, tables, and other graphical devices that are often part of informational text may develop visual literacy. Graphic organizers are tools that often help students synthesize and organize information from nonfiction texts (Bell & Caspari, 2002). The use of graphic organizers helps students to understand the information presented which in turn will help them connect to the text.

Student selection and motivation

Students who get to select their own materials when reading will have a much higher motivation to want to read which will increase comprehension (Vaughn, et al. 2000). Giving students choice to the types of materials they read will make them more motivated and comprehend text to a much higher level. Baumann, Hooten, and White discovered that students who had a choice in their materials and were taught comprehension strategies along with these materials not only showed great excitement in growing interest in books and literature, but students were able to respond and react to literary works (1999). Teachers could assess how the students were responding to their literature through journaling. This showed that there was evidence of students' selection and their adaptation to reading strategies. How students respond to text will enhance their social ability to be able to discuss the text. (Baumann, et al. 2000)

Social interaction and comprehension

Social interaction among students is a foundational component of comprehension. Conversation helps individuals make sense of the world. It helps them build empathy and respect for different opinions. It helps them make sense of the world just like it would help them make sense of text or otherwise comprehending the material. In some classrooms,

students are quiet most of the day and have little opportunity to be involved in discussions. Students that are actively engaged in the conversation process can, over time, become reflective and critical thinkers (Ketch, 2005).

Barbara Rogoff (2000) considers students to be apprentices as they acquire a diverse repertoire of skills and knowledge under the guidance and support of more knowledgeable persons. Adults often model the significance of written language. As teachers and students engage in discussions together, children acquire important tools geared toward literacy acquisition (Bodrova & Leong, 1996, as cited in Dorn, French, & Jones, 1999).

The magic of literature for students is not necessarily bound with the nature of their development. Research in past decades reflects the changing view of how students develop and learn. Students have their own unique needs, interests, and capabilities. They are born with the ability to organize and classify their environment, resulting in the construction of their own unique theory of the world (O'Donnell & Wood, 1999). Very little of the content and order of that theory is the result of direct instruction; rather, it is the interaction of biological, cultural, and life experiences that greatly affects the substance of this theory and the way experiences are organized. As students encounter new experiences, existing memory structures in the brain or schema are reshaped, impacting the linguistic, cognitive, social, and emotional development of an individual over time (O'Donnell & Wood, 2000). Therefore, according to Ryan and Cooper, "Knowledge cannot be given directly from the teacher to the learner, but must be constructed by the learner and reconstructed as new information becomes available" (2000, p. 346). From this point of view, learning is not the result of development; rather, learning is development.

Vygotsky's theory

There are many strategies that teachers use in order to initiate conversation and social interaction among students. Researchers have found that cooperative discussion and questioning strategy, literature circles, and question answer relationship strategy are some of the most successful.

Vygotsky (1978) believed learning is a social activity; he talked about language as a mechanism for thinking, a mental tool (Lloyd, 2004). Social interaction and conversation helps students become more complex thinkers (Ketch, 2005). Sometimes students cannot wait to share what they have learned and the only way to do this is in conversation with their peers. When conversation occurs the feedback students receive clarifies, strengthens, or diminishes the original concept (Lloyd, 2004). This makes students comprehend meaning out of their own thoughts which is all from social interaction and questioning.

Cooperative discussion and questioning strategy

Cooperative learning, discussion, and questioning elements are all incorporated into this strategy (Gauthier, 2001). Through cooperative learning students can work out problems they are having together instead of alone. This may lead to an increase in comprehension through discussion. Discussion promotes interpersonal communication and provides students with a platform for social interactions. Gauthier also states, "When students socially interact with other students it promotes cognitive growth," (2001, p.321). It is important for teachers to model a good discussion so student's thoughts and opinions are not taken the wrong way by teachers and students. If this mindset is established then student participation in classroom activities will increase. This all comes from the types of

questions that teachers ask their students and in turn the questions that students ask their peers.

According to Gauthier, “Teachers can have a tremendous effect on students’ comprehension of written material by the types of questions they ask,” (2001, p.321). Questioning for comprehension purposes can be used as an instructional facilitator or as an evaluation/assessment tool. The strength of each will augment the benefits of the other two, creating a synergistic instructional effect on comprehension. This strategy will enhance all of these elements. Literature discussions have many parts, however once modeled correctly, they promote life long learning. After reading a story to students by method of read aloud, a group of students talk about the story after a teacher gives the group a brief explanation of the expectations and the topics. The teacher then hands out a worksheet that consists of literal, inferential, and critical questions from the story. An increase in comprehension will occur because they are taking the material into such depth (Gauthier, 2001).

Literature circles

Questioning as a reading strategy can be taught through the use of literature circles. There are different variations of how to conduct a literature circle based on the teacher and student needs. Research has found that there are four basic student roles: the “connector” who makes connections between the text and his or her own life; the “questioner” who wonders about and analyzes the meaning of the text; the “literacy luminary” identifies parts of the text that are memorable; and the “illustrator” who provides a graphic depiction of the text (Lloyd, 2004).

The first action that should take place is a read aloud of different texts. Students are then to choose which text they would like to be a part of and are assigned roles to play out. After reading parts of the text, students meet up with each other and discuss the roles that they have. This discussion increases comprehension because the students are analyzing and interpreting the text (Lloyd, 2004). The use of questions in a literature circle is to generate discussion which in turn makes the students genuinely interested in the text. Incorporating comprehension strategies into literature circles and modeling them as the students go along will encompass experiences and active thinking.

Question answer relationship strategy

Question Answer Relationship (QAR) is a strategy that promotes high levels of literacy for students through the use of questions (Raphael & Au, 2005). It identifies questions according to their relationship to two primary sources of information: the reading material to which the question refers and the knowledge base of the reader (Raphael & Au, 2005). The information a reader brings to a text will help to reinforce comprehension strategies that they have learned previously.

Information is generated back through student questioning. Traditional questions that simply require readers to locate and recall information will constitute only a third to a fourth of the questions that students will face (Raphael & Au, 2005). Students must be able to answer those higher level questions in order to comprehend the text. According to Ezell, there are four types of questions. A “right there” question, where the answer is located in the text within a single sentence, is easy for students to locate. A “putting it together” question (also known as “think and search”) is one where the answer is located in the text within two or more sentences. An “author and you” question is one whose answer is

implied in the text but not stated explicitly (Ezell, 2005). An “on your own” question is one whose answer is not in the text but must be supplied by the reader’s prior background knowledge (Ezell, 2005). It is traditionally thought that teachers should teach one type of question at a time, the first two types listed above should be taught first.

When teaching the last two types of questions, students should understand the source of text and should have mastered the first two types of questions so they are ready to scaffold their information. The last two questions are the most important for comprehension because students will demonstrate understanding through a response, group discussion, or peer assisted discussion.

QAR addresses four problems in literacy practice. The first is it can help address the lack of a shared language among teachers and students for improving questioning practices (Raphael & Au, 2005). Teachers and students can work together to devise questions based on text. Second, it can bring consistency to literacy instruction and across grade levels by providing a framework for the growth of comprehension instruction.

While students begin to understand the different types of questions, this growth provides organization and in turn increases comprehension. Third, it provides a focal point to begin sustained efforts for whole school reform aimed at higher standards for literacy learning and teaching (Raphael & Au, 2005). If the whole school can teach this strategy and find an increase in comprehension than test scores will go up and so will student understanding.

Lastly, QAR provides a responsible approach to preparing students for high stakes tests at different grade levels and in a variety of subject areas without detracting from high quality instruction (Raphael & Au, 2005). Students and teachers can benefit from using the

QAR strategy which will give students a chance to improve instruction around questioning activities and reading comprehension.

Some students have little opportunity to socialize in their classroom and because of this they do not have a chance to practice thinking strategies or show evidence of their level of cognitive development (Ketch, 2005). Socialization is what comes out of questioning and good practice with these questioning strategies will in turn create conversation.

Cognitive strategies and comprehension

Some cognitive strategies promote children's comprehension and memory of what they read (Pressley & Woloshyn, 1995). Metacognitive knowledge plays a major role in the comprehension process and there are many cognitive strategies that increase comprehension based on students processing text through thinking. Some of these skills are knowing how to use a strategy, activating prior knowledge of the text, and making connections with the text. (Pressley & Woloshyn)

Metacognitive knowledge

Students who are able to make a visual connection to a text make the thinking process able to support comprehension. This is referred to as metacognition and it is defined as knowledge about thinking and self directed thinking (Barton & Sawyer, 2003). Knowledge about thinking includes three specific types of knowledge: declarative, procedural and conditional. Declarative knowledge is knowing which comprehension strategy to use in a given situation; procedural knowledge is knowing how to successfully employ a strategy; and conditional knowledge, which is knowing the purpose of the strategy and how to employ it (Barton & Sawyer, 2003).

Some students need to evaluate the difficulty of a text which makes them stay focused while reading. Metacognitive practices help readers set comprehension goals for themselves and control the process for reaching these goals (Schunk & Zimmerman, 1998). Perkins and Swartz identify four levels of metacognitive knowledge that are helpful for understanding how learners and readers adapt strategies to their reading purposes: tactic, aware, strategic and reflective.

Tactic learners/readers are readers who lack awareness of how they think when they read. Aware learners/readers are readers who realize when meaning has broken down or confusion has set in, but who may not have adequate strategies for fixing the problem. Strategic learners/readers are readers who use the thinking and comprehension strategies that teachers described to enhance understanding of acquiring knowledge. These types of learners can also monitor their comprehension. Reflective learners/readers are readers who are intentional about their thinking and are able to apply strategies flexibly depending on their goals or purposes for reading (Perkins and Swartz, 2000).

Students that have a combination of knowing when to use a strategy and how to provide themselves with accurate information will become better able to comprehend text. If a teacher teaches all students to be reflective learners than this will increase comprehension because students will know when and how to use the strategies.

Knowing when to use a strategy

It is not enough if students simply understand a given strategy; they must know when, where and how to use it. Students who are proficient readers use comprehension strategies and their metacognitive knowledge to develop an awareness and understanding of text (Harvey & Goudvis, 2000). Students have to choose which strategy fits them at that

particular moment when reading. What works for one student may not work for another. Students use their knowledge to pick a strategy that will help them enhance their understanding of unfamiliar material.

Once a teacher has taught students a variety of strategies, it is important to keep track of how they are applying them (Harvey & Goudvis, 2000). Students should be taught fewer strategies thoroughly so they can make sense of them. Knowing what strategy you use comes in comparison with understanding the text from previous activities which activate prior knowledge of students.

Activating prior knowledge

One goal for a teacher is to set a purpose for reading. Teaching students to think consciously about why they are about to read a particular text has been shown to improve comprehension (Neufeld, 2005). Student motivation to read a text comes from setting a purpose. After stating a purpose for reading and a brief explanation of what the text is about, teachers then activate prior knowledge. Activating prior knowledge of a topic before reading provides a hook, linking knowledge the reader already possesses with ideas in the text (Neufeld, 2005). This practice will improve both understanding and recall of the text. The way in which text is interrupted or remembered depends on the prior knowledge a reader brings to the reading (Pressley & Woloshyn, 2001). Some questions that teachers use are: “What do I know about this topic already? How might things that I already know relate to this text?”

Students who connect with the theme or topic of the story are more apt to be able to retell information because they can relate to the text. This in turn correlates the connection

that if students activate their prior knowledge, they may have connections that make the text and the comprehension strategies more applicable to their lives.

Making connections

Stories that are close to a student's own life and experiences will help them introduce new ways of thinking when reading. Students who find themselves in texts as they read become more sensitive to poetic imagery, authors' styles, and text structure (Barton & Sawyer, 2003). Readers naturally make connections between books and their own lives as well as any experience they go through. For readers to interact with text, they must identify with the characters they read about (Bluestein, 2002). There are three main types of connections students make: text to text, text to self, and text to world (Harvey and Goudvis, 2000).

Text to text connections are everything the student understands from that particular text. This connection contains: structure, genre, vocabulary and language that make every text unique (Pardo, 2004). Text to text connections can also be distinctive to an author's writing style. Some texts are promoted as carrying a certain message or theme by those who have encountered the book previously (Pardo, 2004). If students know an author they can relate to how the story is written based on activities and discussion that link commonalities from prior reading selections.

Text to self connections have to do with characters, events, experiences, and the setting that may be the same as that student that is reading it. These connections are highly personal and remind the reader of particular experiences that they have had in their lives. This is usually the first connection students make with literature. (Pardo, 2004)

Text to world connections go far beyond our own personal experiences. These experiences are larger connections that the reader brings to a reading situation. Often it is a text to world connection that engages a students' thinking towards whether or not they can relate their own personal experiences to the world. Usually these experiences are learned through mediums such as television, movies or books (Harvey and Goudvis, 2000).

Chapter III Applications and Evaluations

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to answer the question “What types of quality instructional strategies can a general education English Language Arts teacher implement, in order for students who are reading below grade level use to improve reading comprehension?” I attempted to find the answer to this question in a variety of ways, specifically targeting tools and resources that I had not yet introduced to this group of students within the regular school day.

Enhancing a student’s reading comprehension revolves around various factors. The ability to make a personal connection, build upon prior knowledge, as well as motivate a reluctant learner are all prime examples of just some of the ways that teachers attempt to address the specific needs of their students. Knowing what works and what does not work for each particular student requires reflecting on a multitude of things, including the content that we teach and the methods that we chose to use.

Participants

This research was conducted on a group of sixth grade students who reside in a Western New York suburb. The school district that they attend was rated forty-fifth out of one hundred on a scale of the top school districts in the state, based on student performance on the latest 2004-2005 state wide assessments. The students I chose were also members of an Extended Day group that met two times a week, for fifty minutes each day.

This program incorporated using a group of five students who were struggling readers and giving them additional opportunities to choose, implement, and apply different strategies and activities to assist them in comprehension. The group met after school for

six weeks. Each week, the students were introduced to a comprehension strategy, the strategy was modeled for them and in turn they had the opportunity to make their own meaning of it. The students also had the opportunity to decide if it was a tool that would assist their own individual needs to aid in comprehension. Each of the five students chosen for this study represented diverse socioeconomic and ethnic backgrounds. The socioeconomic status (SES) of this group of students and that of the school is higher than average for the district, with 40% of students receiving free or reduced lunch, 12% with parents for whom English is a second language, and 29% of the students living in a single parent home.

Procedures

Once I knew who the focus of my Extended Day sessions, I was able to design a program that would hopefully allow me to see which quality instructional strategies I should use in my classroom to meet the comprehension needs of all students, especially the below grade level readers.

I created six interview questions with the goal of obtaining information about each student. These questions were designed to help me clarify each student's thoughts about reading, as well as inquire about their past experiences. I also hoped these questions would help me gauge each student's level of interest in regards to reading, as this would allow me to gain an understanding about where the five target students were before this intervention took place.

The answers to these questions helped me to choose specific comprehension strategies to introduce and model to the entire group, keeping in mind the learner's likes

and needs as well as making a connection between their past learning experiences, both positive and negative.

Next, a questionnaire was distributed to each student. The purpose of this questionnaire was to better understand the student's attitudes towards reading before this study took place. The ten questions that were selected focused on how the students felt in regards to their own capabilities when it came to reading. These questions were used to give me insight on what each individual felt his/her strengths and weaknesses were before beginning this intervention. The same questionnaire was given at the conclusion of this study to examine any differences in attitude toward reading preferences.

Instruments of Study

To administer this research, it was necessary to collect much data, consisting of classroom field notes, teacher reflections and classroom activities. This data was collected twice a week, during each Extended Day session. The reflections included various pieces of information regarding this study: descriptions of the classroom activities, anecdotal student questions and comments, student interactions, as well as noteworthy improvements in student reactions or participation.

This research was collected over six weeks, which gave the students the opportunity to use the four strategies, as well as experiment on an individual basis with the ones that they felt worked best for them.

A questionnaire (see Appendix C) was also given to the students at the beginning and end of this unit to learn more about each student's reading attitudes and interests. A likert scale was used to identify what student's believed their own capabilities were in

terms of reading and comprehending what they read. Each question was analyzed quantitatively to determine how these students viewed themselves as readers.

An interview (see Appendix B) was also given to each of the five students during a non-instructional time. There were six questions contained in this interview and I read each one aloud to each student. The student was not required to write down any of their answers; however a copy of the questions was given to each student for them to refer to. Anecdotal notes, as well as specific quotes were written down during the course of this conversation. The level of effectiveness for the study was then determined by comparing each student's pre and post interviews, specifically referring to each individual question. The student's answers were analyzed qualitatively to determine how valuable each of them perceived the extra attention spent on comprehension strategies was during the Extended Day Program.

Chapter IV Data

Results

Throughout this study, I was able to gather data and formulate results. These results were on a variety of topics, all having to do with what types of quality instructional strategies a general education English Language Arts teacher can implement in the classroom, in order for students who are reading below grade to improve comprehension. The data that was gathered provided information about student's attitudes and interests about reading as well as their motivation to become a better reader. Data was gathered by using a student interview and questionnaire prior to the program and then again after the completion of the program. A variety of field notes and anecdotal records to document observations and perceived motivation was also collected during instructional time and independent work periods. A summary of the data follows.

The first table presents data that was gathered using the checklist for student behavior. Table 1, on the following page, displays observed student behavior before and after the start of the Extended Day Program. This table shows data regarding the total number of times a student displayed positive participation in the classroom and the total number of times a student displayed a negative behavior in the classroom. Positive participation included: participating in class discussions, willingness to attempt new comprehension strategies, and being prepared for class with all the necessary materials. Negative behaviors were defined as any behaviors that disrupted the learning process of anyone in the classroom. These behaviors included, being off task, refusal to attempt a new comprehension strategy, or being unprepared for class.

Positive Participation Before and After the Extended Day Program

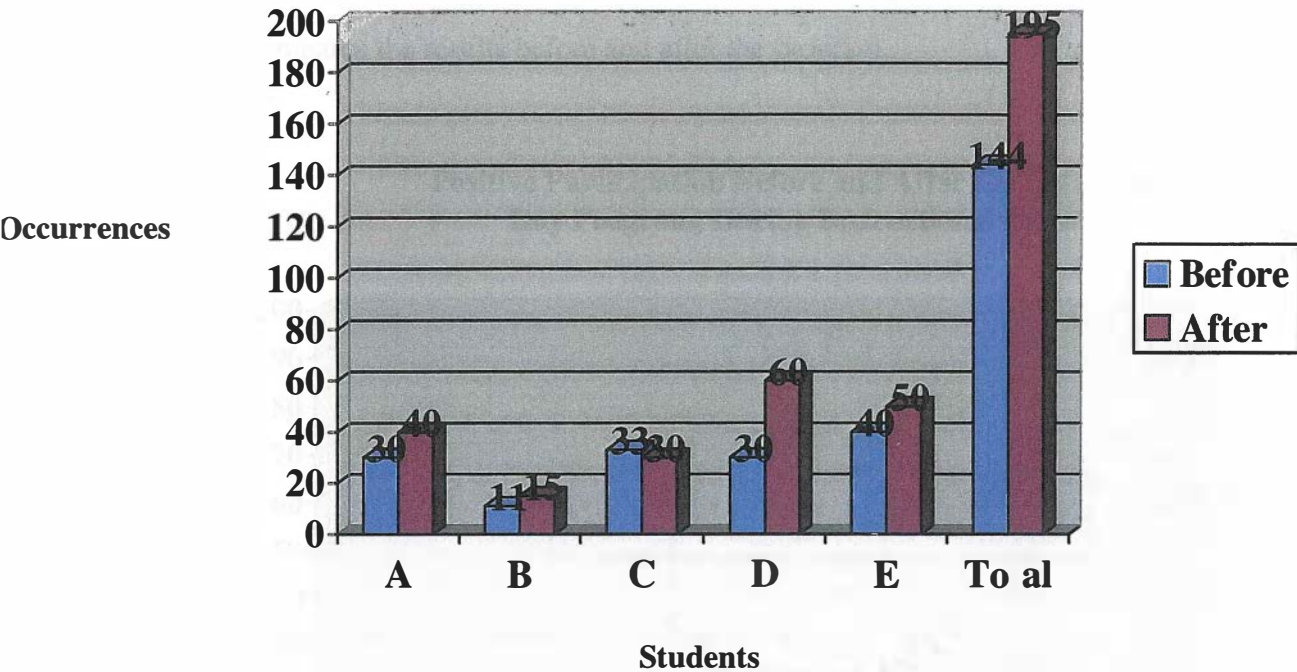


Table 1

Table 1 represents students' positive participation before and following the Extended Day program. Table 1 shows that four out of five students made gains in the amount of positive participation displayed in the classroom. Student D made the greatest gains, raising his/her participation from thirty to sixty participation points. A participation point was given for each time a student participated in the classroom. The totals of all students are also displayed and the graph shows that the positive participation increased from 134 to 195 occurrences.

Table 2, below, presents data regarding student behavior gathered from Instructional time during the Extended Day Program regarding positive participation. This table compares the results before and after the program.

Positive Participation Before and After the Extended Day Program, During Instructional Time

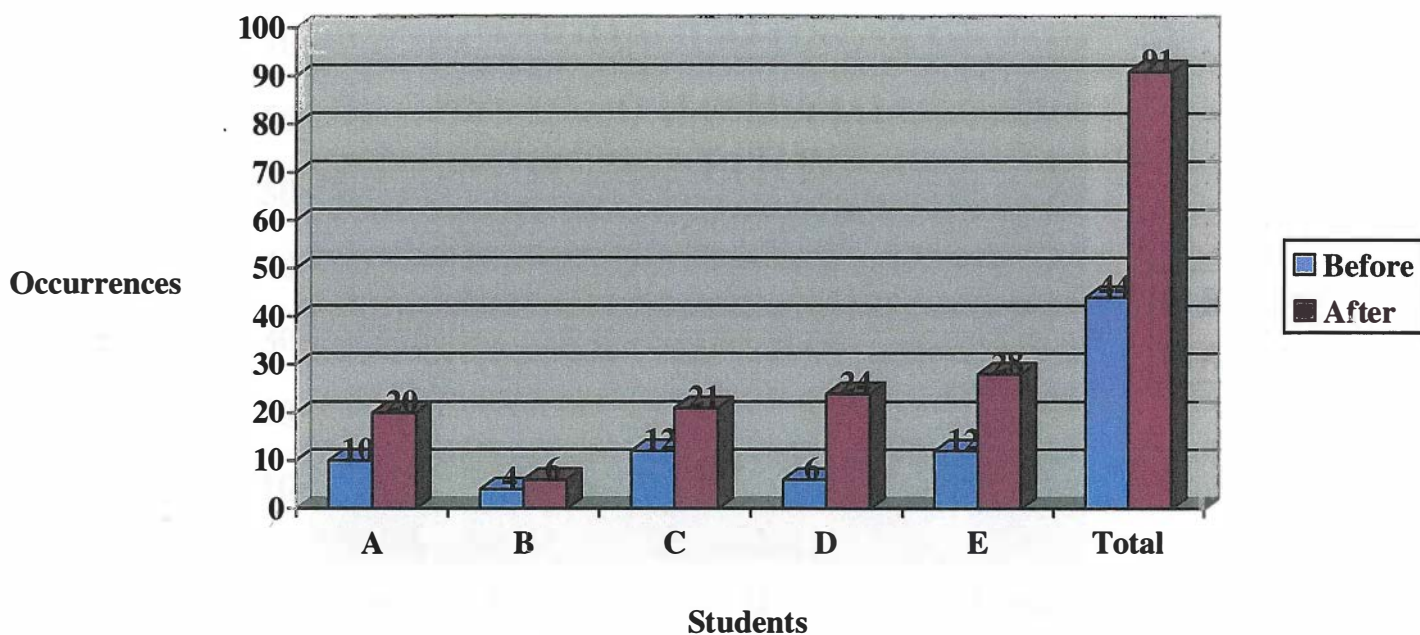


Table 2

Table 2 represents students' positive participation before and following the Extended Day Program. Table 2 shows that each student made gains in the amount of positive participation that they displayed in the classroom after taking part in the Extended Day Program. Student D made the greatest gains, raising his participation from six to twenty-four participation points. The totals of all students are also displayed and the graph shows that positive participation increased from 44 to 99 occurrences.

Table 3, below, presents data regarding student behavior gathered from independent work periods during the Extended Day Program regarding positive participation.

Positive Participation Before and After the Extended Day Program, During Independent Work Periods

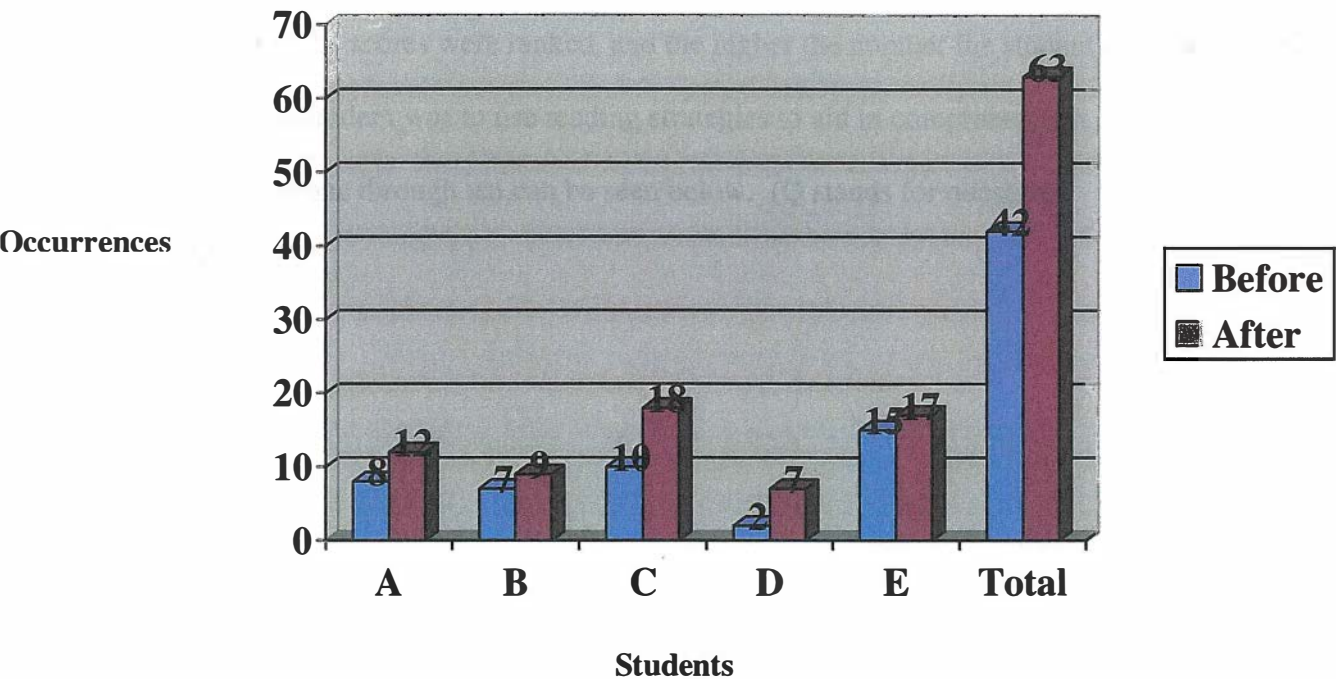


Table 3

Table 3 represents students' positive participation during independent work periods while taking part in the Extended Day Program. Table 3 shows that each student made gains in the amount of positive participation they displayed in the classroom. Student C made the greatest gains, raising his/her participation from ten to eighteen participation points. A participation point was given for each time a student participated in the classroom. The totals of all students are also displayed and the graph shows that positive participation increased from 42 to 63 occurrences.

Table 4, found on the following page, presents data from the Student Questionnaire regarding interests and attitudes about reading. Questionnaires were distributed to students prior to the program and at the completion of the program. This questionnaire was trying to assess the level of interest in reading. (To see each of the ten questions refer to Appendix C). Each question was scored on a lickert scale with point values ranging from zero to four. The data was compiled and a score was given to each student. The scores were ranked, and the higher the number the student received, the more likely the student was to use reading strategies to aid in comprehension. The results of questions one through ten can be seen below. (Q stands for question).

Results from Student Questionnaire Regarding Interests and Attitudes about Reading

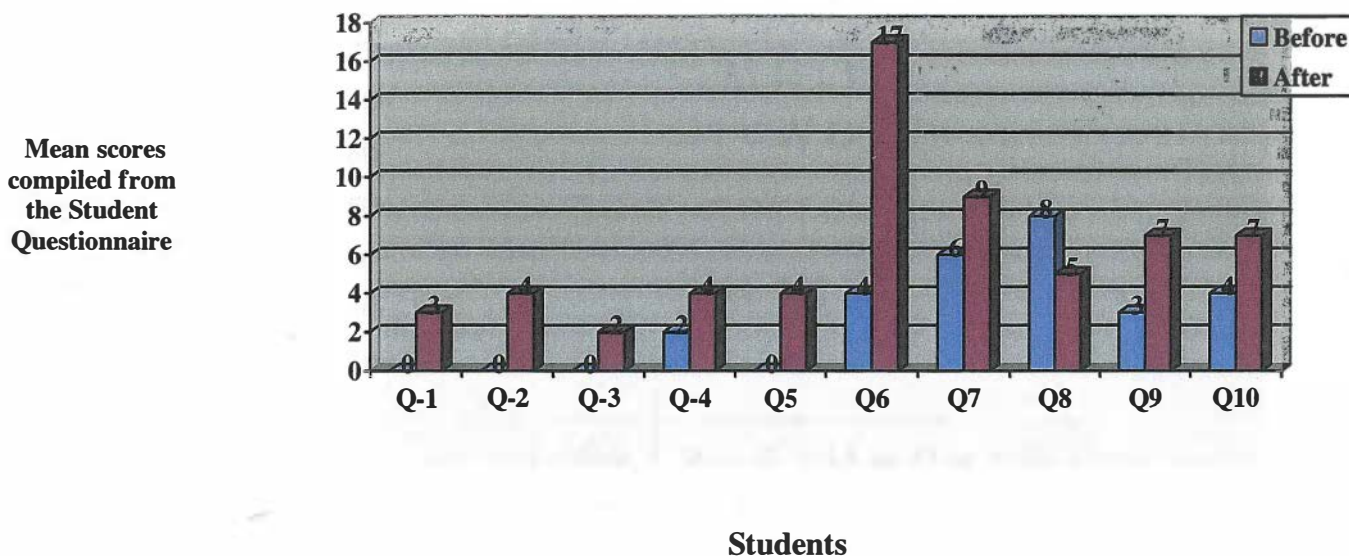


Table 4

Table 4 shows all students were more inclined to use reading strategies in and out of the classroom after attending the Extended Day Program. Questions 1, 2, and 5 had the most significant change on their questionnaire. For each of those questions, the students originally stated that they “rarely” used reading strategies before the program, but after the program their answer changed to that they “often” used reading strategies.

Table 5, found on the next page, presents data regarding the work samples that were collected before and after the Extended Day Program. A quality work sample includes work that was organized, included developed ideas, and made effective use of relevant and accurate examples. If the student did not include those elements they did not get credit for the assignment.

**Quality Student Work Samples Before
and After the Extended Day Program**

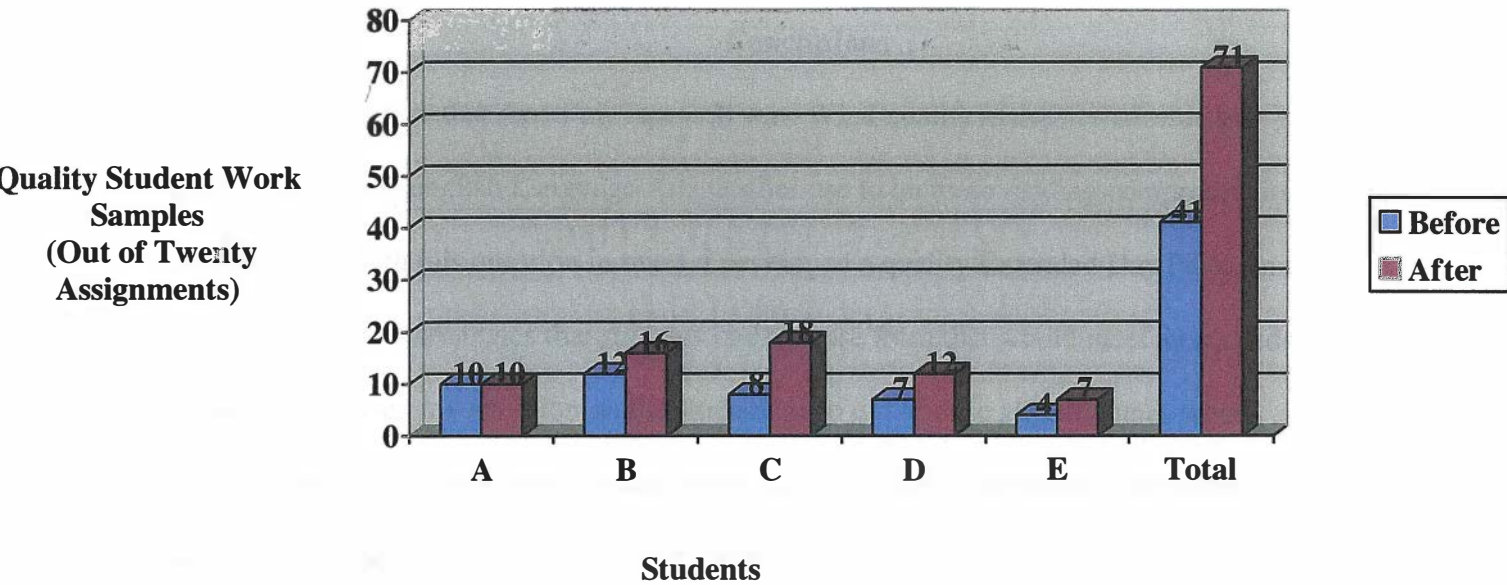


Table 5

Table 5 represents the number of quality student work samples before and following the Extended Day Program. A quality work sample includes work that was organized, included developed ideas, and made effective use of relevant and accurate examples. Twenty assignments were given to these students before and after attending the Extended Day Program. Table 4 shows the majority of the students increased the amount of quality work they completed (Student A had the same score prior to and after participation.)

A discussion about the conclusions reached and recommendations for additional research is available in the next chapter.

Chapter V Conclusions and Recommendations

Conclusions

The question that drove my research was: What quality instructional strategies can a general education English Language Arts teacher use to increase reading comprehension in all students? With this question in mind, I developed a quality Extended Day Program that introduced various strategies that students could choose from that would meet their needs as a reader. I focused my attention on the students who did not use any strategies when reading and who seldomly participated in the classroom during literature discussions. This data and my experiences with the students throughout the school year allowed me to reach some conclusions regarding instructional strategies that motivate students as well as help them complete quality work.

The first conclusion that I reached was that my Extended Day Program did have a positive effect on the students who participated in the program. This is supported by my data (see Chapter IV). The majority of the students (four out of five) who rarely participated in the classroom prior to participating in the program showed an increase in positive participation after the program was completed. The increase in participation was quite significant, with all but one student increasing their participation by at least ten instances.

It is my belief that these students began to see reading as more than just a chore that they had to endure each day. In fact I heard many students comment on how reading was more fun when they used these strategies and how using these strategies, “made them think more.” The participants also started to feel more confident in their abilities both as readers

and problem solvers, as reflected in their pre- and post interviews and questionnaires. Students who were normally quietly and reserved started to participate in classroom discussions, as well as encourage other students to do so. Students who seemed disinterested in reading before beginning the program, now enjoyed problem solving which strategies would work best for particular literature selections.

I strongly believe that the interpersonal relationships these students made in the Extended Day Program helped them begin to feel more capable as readers and critical thinkers. Using their peers to share and discuss their thoughts on literature gave students confidence in areas that they once felt inadequate in.

The drastic increase in participation during independent work periods also showed me that these students had a better idea of expectations and were more focused on how to achieve those expectations on their own. Rather than not using time to their best advantage as I had seen prior to the program, students were more aware of the steps that would take them to the end product of each task and how to achieve their goals independently. Avoidance techniques and distractions were kept to a minimum. Students also became aware of their teacher's desire to help them succeed. The importance of teachers showing an interest in their students outside of the classroom cannot be overstated. Once students realized that I was willing to put in the extra effort to help them improve, they, in turn, started to put forth the extra effort to help themselves as well.

There has been a great deal of research regarding quality literature strategies (see Chapter II). The research focused on the potential benefits gained by using particular strategies, as well as the course of action a teacher should use when a student struggles with a particular skill. I narrowed the focus of my study to the strategies that I felt would benefit

all students. After introducing these strategies I then allowed the students to take control of their learning by letting them chose the strategies that worked best for them. One of the main challenges that I faced was choosing strategies that I felt were compatible with the needs of the students in this program but would still benefit students that were more advanced in my classroom. I tried to address this concern by modifying these strategies in the classroom in case a strategy was too basic for any student.

Recommendations

While the Extended Day Program that I developed and implemented provided the intended results, I have recommendations for future research. The following recommendations should be considered.

First, this program was run during the second half of the school year. I believe that this type of program would be more beneficial if it was run at the beginning of a new school year after strengths and weaknesses had been considered. Running an after school program at the onset of a new school year may lead to greater gains because attitudes could be changed for the better and this may lead to a more effective school year. By the time my program started, students already had pre-existing attitudes regarding the literature we had read and the skills that were introduced. These attitudes were difficult to change in the short time frame of this program, which brings me to my next recommendation.

A second recommendation that I have is to consider the length of this program. Even though six weeks is a significant amount of time to see noteworthy changes, based on my experiences I have come to the conclusion that students would have benefited from a longer Extended Day Program. This would have given me time to introduce even more comprehension techniques, so that students would have more

opportunities to think back upon when comprehending various genres of text. A longer program would also give me more time to model these techniques more in depth. The more the students have to apply these techniques under supervision, to ensure accuracy, the longer they will be able to achieve the academic benefits in their studies.

Other recommendations I would make include the following. I think it is important for the classroom teacher to run the Extended Day program. The classroom teacher knows the student's strengths and weaknesses and can modify the curriculum based on the information they gather about each student during the Extended Day Program. The classroom teacher can also alter the program based on what knowledge they see has transferred over into the classroom and reteach the information that students still struggle with. The classroom teacher knows the students better and can therefore modify the program based on individual needs.

It is also important for the attendance of the Extended Day program to be consistent week to week. If students are missing sessions, they are not getting the full advantages of this program. To make this program beneficial the students must be there every day. This increases the amount of time they have to practice these strategies, as well as learn what works best for them as individuals.

Transportation is also an issue because students often do not have a way to get home. This is also a common reason why students do not join programs like this . Too many programs struggle to provide transportation after normal school hours. One question I asked myself is , how can schools provide transportation? Are buses available, and if so who would pay for this extra bus run? These questions need to be answered to allow all students the opportunity to take part in an after-school program to benefit their education.

After conducting this study I am much more confident that running an Extended Day Program does benefit my students. I will continue to teach my students various comprehension techniques in this small group setting and vary my classroom instruction accordingly. Seeing the changes in my students was not only rewarding but extremely interesting, especially regarding the students who made the greatest gains. The conclusions that I came to were not necessarily surprising to me, but the amount of change was. I never would have imagined the dramatic changes in these student's behaviors and attitudes, especially towards a subject they once claimed to hate.

As a teacher it is extremely important to continue to learn and grow as a professional. This study has opened my eyes to just some of the differences that increasing reading comprehension can make for a student. This study will be a constant reminder for me to continuously strive to meet the needs of each individual learner. Unfortunately, reading strategies are only going to benefit a student if they understand the most effective way to utilize them, and more importantly if they make the extra effort to use them on a regular basis. Continuing to help students realize these benefits is what I intend to do in the future.

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Appendices

Statement of Informed Consent

To be read to Sixth Grade Students

My name is Mrs. Gahagan. I am a graduate student at SUNY Brockport. I am studying strategies students can use to help them comprehend literature better. During this research project, students will work with me during Extended Day sessions on comprehension strategies. At the beginning and end of this project students will be asked how they feel about the strategies we learned about.

I will ask you to complete an interview and a questionnaire. I will also take notes and look at some of your work. Some of your work may be copied, but don't worry, I won't have your names on these items.

If you decide to participate in this project, I will identify you with a letter, not your name. (For example: Student A, Student B etc). I will not use your name when I share the data and results with others. Your parent/guardians have given their permission for you to take part in this project, but it is up to you to decide if you want to.

If it is okay with you to participate in this project and for me to share your results with others, please write your name below. Beside your name, please print the date.

Thank you,

Mrs. Gahagan

I give my permission for Mrs. Gahagan to do her project with me, ask me questions, and share my work and results with others.

Name: _____

Date: _____

Student Interview Questions

Student A B C D E

Interview conducted on _____

1. What types of literature do you enjoy reading?

2. Are there any types of literature that you do NOT enjoy reading?

3. What is the title of the last book you read for pleasure? What was this book about?

4. What is your definition of a “good reader”? Are you a good reader?

5. What is most difficult for you when it comes to reading?

6. What do you do when a literature selection you are reading is too hard for you? Are there any strategies you can put into place?

Name _____

Date _____

**Student Questionnaire
Regarding Attitudes and Interests about Reading**

1. I am able to comprehend a majority of the literature pieces we read in English Language Arts class.

<i>0</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>4</i>
<i>Strongly Disagree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Unsure</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Strongly Agree</i>

2. The majority of vocabulary words presented within the literature pieces we read are familiar to me.

<i>0</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>4</i>
<i>Strongly Disagree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Unsure</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Strongly Agree</i>

3. I am familiar with ways to help increase my reading comprehension.

<i>0</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>4</i>
<i>Strongly Disagree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Unsure</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Strongly Agree</i>

4. I often use reading strategies while reading literature in and out of the classroom.

<i>0</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>4</i>
<i>Strongly Disagree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Unsure</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Strongly Agree</i>

5. I only use reading strategies when I am stuck on a vocabulary word or section of a literature selection.

<i>0</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>4</i>
<i>Strongly Disagree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Unsure</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Strongly Agree</i>

6. I use different reading techniques depending on what genre I am reading.

<i>0</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>4</i>
<i>Strongly Disagree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Unsure</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Strongly Agree</i>

7. I would use a graphic organizer or other reading strategy if one was offered to me while reading.

<i>0</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>4</i>
<i>Strongly Disagree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Unsure</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Strongly Agree</i>

8. I feel comfortable using charts, graphs and other organizers to help aid in my reading comprehension.

<i>0</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>4</i>
<i>Strongly Disagree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Unsure</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Strongly Agree</i>

9. I feel comfortable discussing my thoughts/opinions about literature selections with my peers and/or teacher.

<i>0</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>4</i>
<i>Strongly Disagree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Unsure</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Strongly Agree</i>

10. I would enjoy learning more reading strategies to help me increase my comprehension.

<i>0</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>4</i>
<i>Strongly Disagree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Unsure</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Strongly Agree</i>

PARENT/GUARDIAN CONSENT FORM
REGARDING THE EFFECTS OF USING VARIOUS INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES
TO IMPROVE LITERATURE COMPREHENSION

1. I understand that my child/ward will participate in research to study the effects of using various instructional strategies to improve comprehension. The research includes:
 - A. One interview and one written questionnaire completed by my child/ward.
 - B. Some of my child's class work may be photocopied and used in data collection.
 - C. My child's teacher will be taking notes on observations of my child's participation during literature discussions and activities.

2. The results of this research may be published or presented at professional conferences, as well as in the class for which the research is being done. The following steps will be taken to protect the confidentiality of my child's identity and the information he or she has contributed:
 - A. Names and any other personally identifiable information will be deleted from all written documents.
 - B. Students will be identified by a letter, rather than using their names. The school will not be identified.
 - C. Data collected from students will be kept in a locked drawer in my desk that is located in my classroom. After the study is complete, data will be shredded.

3. Participation in the research project is voluntary. If I do not give permission for my child to participate in the study, my child will not be penalized in any way. My child may withdraw from participation in the research study at any time during the project and will not be penalized in any way. I can contact Mrs. Gahagan at any time with questions about the project.

Please return the bottom portion of this letter informing Mrs. Gahagan of your decision regarding your minor child/ward's participation this study.

____ Yes, I hereby consent to allow my minor child/ward, _____
to take part in the research project directed by Mrs. Gahagan.

Signature _____ Date _____

____ No, I do not consent to allow my minor child/ward, _____ to
take part in the research project directed by Mrs. Gahagan.

Signature _____ Date _____

March 13, 2007

Dear Parent or Guardian,

I am in the process of completing my Master of Education Degree at SUNY Brockport. A requirement for the successful completion of this program means completing a thesis or project representing original research in an area that contributes to my teaching discipline. For this project I have decided to study what types of instructional strategies I can implement within the classroom, in order for students who are reading below grade level to improve reading comprehension. As part of this project, I would like to give a questionnaire and an interview to the students and take notes on my observations during the instruction throughout the Extended Day program.

If you grant consent for your child to participate in this study, he or she will be involved in the following:

- I will give your child a brief written questionnaire at the beginning of the study, as well as at the end of the study. For confidentiality purposes, students will be referred to by using letters. (For example: Student A, Student B, etc)
- I will interview your child at the beginning of the study, as well as at the end of the study.
- I will collect and photocopy work samples completed by your child.
- I will take notes and observations during instructional time during the Extended Day Program and at other related times.
- The questionnaire and interview will be arranged with your child so that his or her classroom learning experiences are not disrupted.

I will use the data gathered to assess and analyze the effects of using varying instructional strategies to improve literature comprehension.

The enclosed Guardian Consent form includes information about your child's rights as a project participant, including how I will protect your child's privacy. Please read the form carefully. If you are willing for your child to participate, please indicate your consent by signing the attached statement.

Thank you in advance for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Sarah E. Gahagan
English Language Arts-6