Guided Reading Group Instruction and Reading in Studies

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Guided Reading Group Instruction and Reading Success in Students

by

Jennifer L. Sonricker

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A thesis submitted to the
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Master of Science in Education
Guided Reading Group Instruction and Reading Success in Students

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Chapter One: Introduction

Reading is a fundamental part of children’s lives. They are expected to be able to read at a young age, and they need the skills attained during reading in order to function during every academic subject. Children are taught when they are very young by listening, and speaking. Later on, the beginnings of reading and writing are added. Parent interactions, as well as interactions with others, lead to the foundations for literacy. There are many aspects that a student must learn in order to become a literate person. They need to first learn that letters have sounds that create words. They also need to learn about phonemic awareness. Reading is a very difficult subject to both learn and teach. There are many aspects to reading that need to be addressed: letter-sound correspondence, phonemic awareness, vocabulary, spelling, comprehension, as well as many others. Many students are set up for failure in reading simply because teachers are not using best practices and not teaching all aspects effectively. If a student does not learn to read in first and second grade, they are likely to struggle with reading throughout their entire lives. Students who struggle with reading need effective, research-based instruction that helps develop their ability to decode words automatically and independently.

Since I believe that learning is very socially-based, students should be taught reading in a socially-based setting, as this will help them learn more effectively. Social constructivism is at the heart of guided reading. Knowledge is shared, new meanings are made and constructed, and knowledge is conferred when students are involved collaboratively in the classroom. Students can learn more when they are socially involved in the classroom. Guided reading groups allow for students to
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become more responsible for their own learning. Students learn to interact with the text, with the teacher, and with other students through the use of effective guided reading groups.

Problem Statement

I am a fourth grade consultant teacher. As a special education teacher, I work with many struggling readers. I work with students who range from an early second grade reading level to a middle fourth grade reading level. Students who struggle with reading often continue to struggle with reading as they move on through school. Another issue in this fourth grade classroom is that many students are often inappropriate and unkind to each other. Many of the fourth graders I work with do not have compassion for others, and they complain when they are not able to pick the groups in which they want to work. There is a true lack of empathy and understanding amongst the fourth graders. Several students refuse to work with others in the classroom, and this creates a negative classroom environment.

Significance of Problem

Recently, one girl would not work with her group, and she actually pulled her desk apart from everyone else’s desks. She stated that she was not going to work with her group because she was smarter than everyone else in the group. This created a lot of contention and resentment amongst her group. The classroom teacher and I had to take her into the hallway to address the situation. We explained that students need to learn to work with others because in the real world, you will not get to choose with whom you will work. We also addressed how inappropriate she was being, and how her words could hurt others. We made her apologize to her group because she deeply
hurt their feelings. Lately, many students have been having conflicts with one another. It is extremely important to address these situations as they arise; I want to alleviate any future issues that may come up as well.

**Rationale**

I am pursuing this topic because I feel that guided reading groups can be a very successful method of teaching reading in the classroom. It is important for me to continue guided reading groups in my fourth grade classroom due to the negative social behaviors I have witnessed when my students are working in groups, as well as the lack of literacy strategies many students have. Some students are very rude, unkind, and deliberately hurtful to one another. I want to alleviate this problem, and I will use a research-based method of teaching to do so. Guided reading groups could affect their academic achievement as well.

Fountas and Pinnell (2001) described guided reading as one part of a literacy program that includes independent reading, guided reading, literature study, comprehension and word analysis, and writing. Guided reading is an instructional setting where the teacher can work with a small group of students. In this small group setting, Fountas and Pinnell described how the teacher can help students learn effective strategies for processing text with understanding. They have created a highly efficient and research-based format for teaching reading. My concerns in the classroom also mirror concerns of other researchers. Andrusyk and Andrusyk (2003) believe that many students lack the ability to use appropriate social skills in a cooperative-based group setting. Although I will be working with a group of students in a guided reading group situation, their principles of working together cooperatively
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will shape my study. Burnes (2003) discovered that students tended to have positive results, such as higher self-esteem, and more developed social skills when cooperative learning groups were used in the classroom.

Definition of Terms

To define guided reading, running records, and struggling reader, I looked at the research of Fountas and Pinnell (2001). Guided reading is a teaching approach designed to help individual students learn how to process a variety of increasingly challenging texts with understanding and fluency in a small group setting. A running record is an assessment that tracks how well a reader can read independently; the percentage of words a student reads correctly, miscues, and errors are analyzed. A struggling reader is someone who is not able to read independently without a lot of support and help from a teacher.

To define cooperative learning, I looked at the research of Veenman, van Benthum, Bootsma, van Dieren, and van der Kemp (2002). They defined cooperative learning as the instructional use of small groups in which pupils work together to maximize their own and each other's learning. Cooperative learning is considered to have five components: positive interdependence, individual accountability, face-to-face promotive interaction, social skills, and group processing. Veenman et al. researched Johnson and Johnson (1999) to define these five components. Positive interdependence meant that pupils see themselves as linked to the others in the group in such a manner that they could not succeed unless other members of the group succeed. Individual accountability meant that the performance of each individual was assessed and that the results were reported to both the individual and the group. Face-
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to-face promotive interaction meant that the groups must be small in number and
seated in an arrangement that promoted interaction with one another. Social skills
must be taught for high quality collaboration. The final component, group processing,
occurred when members of the group discussed progress towards the achievement of
their goals.

Summary

I am interested in achieving the outcomes of becoming better readers, as well
as more developed social skills, and higher self-esteem for my fourth grade students.
My main research question is: How can guided reading groups affect student
achievement in reading? The first sub-question is: How does directly scaffolding
instruction in a guided reading group at the readers’ levels help their comprehension
and fluency? The second sub-question is: What happens to students’ attitudes towards
each other and towards working cooperatively when students work in small guided
reading groups at their reading level? These research questions will help address the
situations in my own classroom, but I hope it will also offer more information on how
guided reading groups could affect reading instruction. I want to show how guided
reading groups can specifically affect students’ comprehension and fluency levels. I
will also focus on how effective guided reading groups can be for teaching reading to
students with disabilities. Data will be collected through student surveys, running
record assessments, and the reading Benchmark Assessment.
Guided Reading Groups

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Guided reading is a form of explicit and scaffolded reading instruction. The most important outcome of any literacy program is that it meets the needs of the students. Much research on guided reading has been done. Guided reading groups require students to have the social skills necessary for peer interaction. Students in guided reading groups also are emergent readers; they have learned the skills and strategies necessary for decoding and encoding words. During guided reading groups, students work on construction of meaning, vocabulary, spelling, and writing. Reading fluency and reading comprehension are also included in guided reading instruction. By building these components into scaffolded instruction in a small group setting, teachers can focus on the reading skills that students need.

The concept of group learning is not new; many authors have researched the role of group learning in the classroom. Guided reading groups and collaborative learning groups are similar models for student learning. Collaborative and cooperative learning groups have specific components for group interaction. Collaborative group situations are designed for students to succeed in the classroom. Guided reading is designed to target specific skills that students need to become better independent readers. Students with learning disabilities can benefit from involvement in group situations. Students with different disabilities can also grow socially when they learn in a social setting that is group based. Building student confidence in reading can help them to enjoy reading more. Having a positive learning environment can help all students grow academically and make them feel like part of a community.
Guided Reading Groups and Reading Success

Guided Reading Groups can be an effective way to promote reading success for children. Foorman and Torgesen (2001) recognized that effective reading instruction focuses on phonemic awareness, phonemic decoding skills, fluency in word recognition and text processing. Reading instruction should include construction of meaning, vocabulary, spelling, and writing. By being explicitly taught these components by a classroom teacher, students would be less likely to fail at reading. The authors completed an overview of research on effective classroom reading instruction to show the instructional practices necessary for promoting reading success.

To address the needs of children most at risk of reading failure, students needed to be taught in explicit, comprehensive, intensive, and supportive small-group formats. Teachers should utilize a best practice approach, or balanced literacy approach by using authentic literature, conducting read-alouds, working in small guided reading groups, and leading discussions. This balanced literacy approach in the general education classroom with skillful instruction would cut down on reading failure at the younger elementary grade levels. Struggling readers required more explicit and comprehensive instruction than what was delivered in the regular classroom; they needed small group instruction. The authors concluded that by coordinating research evidence from effective classroom reading instruction with effective small-group reading instruction, that teachers could meet the literacy needs of all children.
The use of guided reading can meet the literacy needs of all children. Fountas and Pinnell (2001) were pioneers in the field of literacy and guided reading. The authors researched the role of group learning in the classroom, and stressed how group learning could help struggling readers and writers. A comprehensive language and literacy program was created based on classroom teaching experience and field-based research. The basic structure of the language/literacy program was within a framework that includes the building of community through language, word study, reading, writing, and the visual arts. The three methods for reading workshops were independent reading, guided reading, and the use of a literature study. Independent reading was an important part of a reading workshop. Independent reading included mini-lessons, teacher-student conferences, group sharing of books, and the use of a response journal. Guided reading plans needed to include specific ways to plan guided reading lessons, effective ways to group students for successful guided reading groups, and the use of leveled texts. The final portion of the reading workshop included the use of a literature study. Through literature studies, students would be given choices for reading and then discuss the chosen literature in student groups.

Fountas and Pinnell viewed guided reading as an important part of the reading curriculum for students in third, fourth, fifth, and sixth grades. They stated that “learning how to read, and then using reading to learn are inseparable” (p.190). Explicit reading instruction was essential for most students, and it would make reading more powerful for all students in the class. Meeting the instructional needs of all students in the classroom is the purpose of guided reading. Guided reading would
allow all students to construct meanings from the texts used, and make connections to the text. Grouping students correctly was also an essential component of guiding reading; students of similar reading behavior, text-processing needs, and reading strengths would be grouped together. Fountas and Pinnell stated that this specific grouping is important so that instruction is “specific and focused, finely tuned to the needs and challenges of the particular group of students with whom you are working” (p. 191). Russian psychologist Lev Vygotsky’s theoretical idea of the zone of proximal development was related to guided reading groups. The learner would be able to do more with the support of a more experienced person, than on his or her own. This learning zone would help students to branch what they could do independently to what they could do with the support of an expert. In guided reading groups, the support given by the teacher is minimal. Students would be problem solving together, as well as on their own; the students would also be able to read more productively and intensely after being part of guided reading groups.

Guided reading can also be used to improve students’ reading comprehension and fluency. Gabl, Kaiser, Long, and Roemer (2007) used a program to increase students’ reading comprehension and fluency through the use of guided reading. The authors targeted students in second and fourth grade, in a northwest suburban area of a large city in the Midwest. These districts were chosen for the study based on the schools’ overall low reading comprehension and fluency scores. District provided comprehension and fluency assessments were used, as well as teacher surveys for documentation. Factors that contributed to the problem of low reading fluency and comprehension scores were researched. These factors included individual students,
school curriculum and classroom environment, teacher training, and family involvement. Increasing family involvement, teaching thinking skills, and creating flexible groups in the classroom were found to help raise the low reading fluency and comprehension scores. Using a more meaningful reading curriculum, improving teacher education, and creating a more positive classroom environment could also help alleviate the problems. A sixteen-week program that included lessons, in which the students would work in reading centers and guided reading groups, were used to try and raise the students’ comprehension and fluency scores.

When the authors focused on guided reading as an instructional method for reading, they discovered that the use of leveled texts, graphic organizers and flexible groups were important factors for the success of working in guided reading groups. Through the use of small teacher-led flexible guided reading groups, an increase in both the second and fourth grade students’ comprehension and fluency scores was found. The intervention of guided reading, through the use of the leveled texts, flexible grouping, and graphic organizers yielded positive results for the second and fourth grade students. Small group instruction could help target students’ comprehension and fluency difficulties.

Small group instruction can be highly beneficial for struggling readers. The size of the reading groups can vary. Vaughn, Linan-Thompson, Kouzakanani, Bryant, Dickson, and Blozis (2003) set out to identify which group size would be most effective for reading instruction. They assigned three different group sizes to second grade readers: 1:1, one teacher with one student, 1:3, one teacher with three students, and 1:10, one teacher with ten students. The effects of these three grouping formats
on the reading outcomes of the struggling second grade readers were studied. All students received the same supplemental reading intervention for the same number of sessions. The students received instruction five times per week for 30 minutes, for a total of 58 sessions over a thirteen week time period. The students were chosen for their instructional groups based on their phonemic segmentation skills; the groups were made up of students of mixed-level abilities. They specifically received intervention in phoneme blending and segmenting skills in their respective groups. Standardized tests were used to complete pre-test and post-test assessments.

Vaughn et al. found that students made significant gains in the areas of phoneme segmentation, fluency, and comprehension. To ensure the success of the study, a follow-up session was completed four weeks later. This proved that the gains had been maintained. The 1:1 and 1:3 groups were highly effective compared to the 1:10 group. The gap between the 1:1 group and the 1:3 group was not significant. The implication of the study was that struggling readers benefited from an intensive, explicit approach. Small groups that received instruction in an intensive, explicit approach were found to be as effective as 1:1 groups. Both 1:1 and 1:3 groups were highly effective intervention group sizes for supplemental reading instruction.

Students, who are at risk for reading failure, need effective teaching strategies in place in order to succeed at reading. Mathes, Torgesen, Clancy-Menchetti, Santi, Nicholas, Robinson, and Grek (2003) wanted to provide more definitive answers about how to best teach and meet the needs of struggling readers—peer-assisted instruction or small-group teacher-directed instruction. The peer-assisted instruction used carefully prescribed materials and routines to reach all students. Twenty-two
first grade teachers in six schools were selected for the research study. Seven teachers were assigned to utilize first grade PALS (Peer-Assisted Literacy Strategies), seven teachers conducted small group sounds and word lessons, and eight teachers served as the contrast group that conducted traditional instruction. All of the schools used literature based reading programs, and all of the students were students at risk for reading failure. Pre-test and post-test assessments were utilized in the form of standardized tests.

The PALS and teacher-directed instruction groups outperformed the traditional instruction group. Instruction given by a teacher was found to be somewhat more beneficial than instruction directed by peers. Students in the TDI (teacher-directed instruction) group performed significantly better than the contrast group on word identification, word efficiency, passage comprehension, and CPM (continuous progress monitoring) words per minute. Both PALS and teacher-directed instruction groups felt the intervention was beneficial to both the students and the teachers. The implications of the study were that the TDI group yielded better results because the teachers were able to reteach areas where students were having difficulty arriving at mastery. The PALS group was not able to focus on errors and teach the errors to mastery. It was recommended that if students were lower-level readers, they would benefit from TDI, and that middle to higher-level readers could benefit from the PALS program. Working in a group was found to be far more effective for students than working alone.

*Working Collaboratively and Academic Achievement*

Working with others is an important skill that students need to learn. Working
with other students can also enhance the learning of all. Being able to work as a group is fundamental for students to work together successfully in guided reading groups.

Billmeyer (2003) stated that students needed interaction to learn because learning was a socially interactive process. Because real-life situations often require individuals to work together, collaboration with other students on learning tasks or in shared problem solving was important. Billmeyer (2004) also found that creating student-centered classrooms can put the emphasis on the learning process. A student-centered approach emphasized the development of strategic readers. Creating a student-centered classroom emphasized how students interact with text, with other students, and with the teacher in order to create productive learning. Reading was seen as an act of human communication, so it required a social setting. It was important that students view themselves as part of a cooperative learning environment, rather than as part of a competitive environment. This was especially important for struggling readers, who were struggling to comprehend, and they needed to feel that they were part of a cooperative environment. Readers could experience the stress of a competitive environment if they were struggling with reading. It was found that students who interacted cooperatively with others achieved more and had more positive attitudes toward school and themselves as learners. One great aspect of a cooperative group was that all students have opportunities within the group, including students with disabilities, to take leadership roles.

Another essential part of working together effectively during guided reading groups is the appropriate use of social skills. Guided reading groups and cooperative learning groups are very similar in their setup. Both require students to use the correct
social skills in a group setting. Andrusyk and Andrusyk (2003) recognized that many students lacked the ability to use appropriate social skills in a cooperative-based group setting. The lack of appropriate social skills was affecting the academic growth of students, so a research study was designed to determine whether the appropriate social skills were lacking in a fourth grade classroom. The research question was to determine how to improve students' social skills by using cooperative learning strategies. Research was conducted using teacher observation and student surveys to see in what ways students were lacking the appropriate social skills. Johnson, Johnson, and Holubec (1994) were studied as a primary source for cooperative learning methods and information.

Andrusyk and Andrusyk stated that students learn best when they are actively involved in the learning process. According to Johnson et al., students needed to feel that their participation was valued and necessary for the group to succeed. Cooperative learning was defined as having five essential elements: positive interdependence, individual and group accountability, interaction, social skills instruction, and group processing. Having students sitting in a group or giving them permission to talk during an assignment was not cooperative learning. Unless cooperative learning was executed properly, cooperative learning might not work effectively in the classroom. Appropriate social skills were crucial for cooperative learning to work. Teaching appropriate social skills and correctly establishing cooperative learning base groups was researched. Data from the classroom was used to determine how to best to alleviate the problem with an intervention plan.
Andrusyk and Andrusyk's research was designed to gradually incorporate cooperative learning into a fourth grade classroom over a twelve week period. The students would be taught a series of lessons about social skills, would establish base groups, and would be assessed to measure changes in student behavior. Progress in students learning and using the appropriate social skills was seen during the twelve week period. Before the intervention was introduced, students lacked the appropriate social skills, but after the plan was introduced, students were encouraging one another, listening, and resolving conflicts. Data was collected through teacher observation checklists during the first, third, sixth, ninth, and twelfth weeks of the intervention. Several of the skills observed were listening, encouraging, not using put-downs, and disagreeing with the idea, not the person. Throughout the intervention time period, there was improvement in every single category observed. For example, there were 32 put-downs observed during week one and only eight in week 12. There was only one instance observed of encouraging teammates during week one, but there were 38 instances during week 12. Also, students were surveyed about working in a group; pre-intervention only 60% preferred to work in a group, at the end, 81% reported they preferred to work in a group. Based upon the intervention action plan, it was recommended that for cooperative learning to work, direct instruction of social skills needed to be done in the entire community school building. Teachers could not assume that their students came to school with the correct social skills in place. Direct instruction of social skills needed to be taught for students to have the appropriate social skills needed for cooperative learning.
When students cannot work together in group situations because of a deficiency of social skills, it can lead to poor academic achievement in the classroom. Teaching students how to work together in group situations is essential for guided reading groups to work effectively. Caparos, Cetera, Ogden and Rossett (2002) were interested in studying the poor understanding of group skills in an elementary class. Caparos et al. believed that the lack of social skills was resulting in poor achievement in group learning situations. The research question was whether the use of appropriate social skills could be increased, and academic achievement could be improved by using cooperative learning strategies and specific social skill lessons. Even in some second grade classrooms, a negative atmosphere and an unfair hierarchy were found. An individualistically focused environment was not found to be conducive to a positive learning environment. Off-task behavior could be caused by poor social skills because many students come to school with different social values. Slavin (1996) was also researched, and it was found that cooperative learning has been shown to increase the social acceptance of mainstreamed students, and that cooperative learning could positively affect students’ attitudes towards school.

Caparos et al. designed a research study that encompassed many types of data collection and analysis. The study focused on first, second, and third graders in four separate communities located in northeast Illinois. A 12-week intervention was used, consisting of a problem-solving approach that incorporated lessons built on cooperative learning. Within these lessons, there was increased emphasis on positive social skills to improve academic achievement. Eighty-seven teachers completed surveys about the cooperative learning strategies used in their classrooms, and 105
students completed pre-test and post-test surveys about their attitudes towards cooperative versus individual instruction. For baseline information, a KWL chart was completed to assess what students’ knowledge was before the intervention. The action plan consisted of creating cooperative learning base groups, observing on-task and off-task behavior with a checklist, a teacher observation journal, teaching with cooperative learning strategies, self evaluations, conflict resolution strategies, as well as student surveys.

Caparos et al. found in their results, that many students’ attitudes towards cooperative learning had changed for the better. In the pre-test survey for students, 47% of students stated that it was undesirable to work with teacher selected groups, whereas in the post-test survey, only 28% of students felt that way. Through the cooperative learning techniques, the students no longer found working alongside non-friends as so difficult. A checklist with six categories of off-task or socially inappropriate responses to others was kept. These categories were wandering from the group, interrupting others, putting others down, not participating within the group, not using an appropriate voice level, and touching others. At site A, while in week one there were 50 occurrences of such behavior, during week five there were 42 occurrences, and in week ten there were only ten occurrences of off-task behavior.

Based on the results of the students’ surveys and teacher observations, and the records from teacher journals and student work, the targeted students exhibited marked improvement in their use of appropriate social skills. Also, due to the specific cooperative instruction, more positive student social interactions were taking place, and a more positive working atmosphere had developed in the classrooms at all sites.
As a result of the cooperative learning interventions, students were given the opportunity to make positive behavior choices while working together to achieve academic success. Social skills and academic achievement could be improved through cooperative learning.

Students with disabilities need to be implicitly taught the appropriate social skills needed to work in guided reading groups effectively. Wolford, Heward, and Alber (2001) recognized that cooperative learning was an effective method of instruction for doing so. Cooperative learning groups could provide students with opportunities to practice social skills while engaging in academic tasks. Simply placing students with disabilities into groups with their peers would not ensure that they would interact in socially appropriate and instructionally beneficial ways. It was considered that teaching students to recruit positive attention and instructional feedback from peers might promote appropriate social interactions. Recruiting positive attention and feedback from peers could also increase academic productivity during peer-mediated instruction. The first research question was to find out what the effects of training middle school students with learning disabilities to recruit peer assistance during cooperative learning groups were on the rate of recruiting responses emitted by the students. The second research question looked at what the effect of peer recruitment was on the rate at which the students received instructional assistance from peers. The third research question was to find out what the effect of peer recruitment was on the productivity and accuracy with which students completed their language arts assignments.
Peer recruitment was vital to the study. Recruiting was defined as politely seeking attention from others for the purpose of obtaining feedback or praise. Cooperative learning was defined as a peer-mediated instructional arrangement in which small groups or teams of students work together to achieve team success in a manner that promotes the students’ responsibility for their own learning, as well as the learning of others. It was found that cooperative learning correlated with increased academic achievement across student ability levels, content areas, and school settings.

Wolford et al. developed a research study that focused on four eighth grade students with learning disabilities. These students were chosen because they were performing below grade level academically, and were usually unproductive in their general education classrooms. Twelve eighth graders without disabilities were also included in the study. The cooperative learning groups were set up with one target student with a learning disability, and three peers. There were four experimental conditions: baseline, recruitment training, generalization, and maintenance. The baseline data was taken during cooperative learning group in the language arts classroom; this data was taken before information, training, or feedback regarding recruitment was provided to target students or their peers. The second part of the study involved training students in appropriate recruiting for peer attention. The rationale for recruiting was addressed with each student as when to ask for help, how to ask for help. Recruitment was then modeled and students role-played the recruiting procedure. The final part of recruitment training was to remind the student to recruit during cooperative learning group, and to report his or her recruiting efforts to the
special education teacher at the end of the day. If the student’s self-report corresponded with the observer’s report, an inexpensive reward such as a pencil, stickers or computer time was given.

During the generalization condition, recruiting was observed and recorded during cooperative learning group sessions. Students’ efforts to recruit peer assistance were recorded as either appropriate or inappropriate. Appropriate recruiting consisted of signaling an available peer, waiting quietly for the peer to answer, and verbally requesting academic assistance or feedback from the peer. Inappropriate recruiting consisted of signaling a peer who was not available, signaling by shouting or speaking too softly, or requesting attention for nonacademic reasons. During the generalization condition, the reward component continued for five weeks. During the final condition of maintenance, the end of the day review and reward procedure was discontinued. If the student independently reported his or her recruiting efforts, the special education teacher praised the student for continuing to recruit assistance.

Wolford et al. found that before training, students infrequently recruited peer assistance. During baseline sessions, the four students recruited assistance during three of seven sessions (43%), two of ten sessions (20%), four of fourteen sessions (29%), and nine of seventeen sessions (53%) respectively. During baseline sessions, all four students recruited at mean rates of less than one per ten minutes. After training, all four students recruited at the desired rate of one to three times per ten minutes. During the generalization condition, the students recruited peer assistance during 13 of 14 sessions (93%), ten of ten sessions (100%), eight of eight sessions
(100%), and five of seven sessions (71%), respectively. As a group, the four students recruited assistance during 24 of 28 (86%) total maintenance sessions.

Well-designed and properly monitored cooperative learning activities could increase academic engagement and achievement of students while providing an opportunity for social development. Teaching students with learning disabilities to recruit positive attention and instructional feedback from peers was found to be a successful way to increase desired social interactions and academic performance during cooperative learning groups. For cooperative learning to work effectively, all students needed to be prepared and taught the appropriate social skills.

Not only can working in groups affect students’ social skill usage, but it can also impact their academic achievement. Burnes (2003) sought to find out which teaching techniques work well in the classroom. Cooperative learning and lecturing were compared to see which would provide more positive academic achievement from students. The research question was to find out which teaching techniques provided the greatest academic achievement from students. In order to accomplish this goal, what encompassed cooperative learning and how cooperative learning is established in the classroom was researched. Direct instruction was defined as a teacher sharing ideas about a topic with her students. Cooperative learning was defined as group learning, based on a task designed around shared learning goals and outcomes. It was found that some people used the words: group work, collaborative learning and cooperative learning interchangeably. According to Slavin (1996) these were similar learning approaches, but they had different aspects. It was also found that students tended to have positive results, such as higher self-esteem, and more
developed social skills when cooperative learning was used in the classroom. Direct instruction could provide a great deal of information in a short time span. This study mirrored the research of other constructivists; students were constructing knowledge even while listening. Students working together could make new connections to previously learned material.

As part of the study, two sixth grade classes were taught a unit of geometry. The first group was taught with direct instruction through lecturing, and the second group received the same material, but through a cooperative learning approach. Both groups were given a pre-test and post-test to assess the students' knowledge. Data was analyzed and compared to determine which teaching technique was more successful. The first group that learned through direct instruction received scores ranging from 17 to 70 on the pre-test, and 42 to 110 on the post-test. The first group's class average went from 41 to 85. Overall, the first group improved 107% from the average of the pre-test to the average of the post-test. The second group was taught using cooperative learning techniques. The second group of students received scores ranging from 11 to 50 on the pre-test, and 33 to 95 on the post-test. The class average on the pre-test was 32, and the class average on the post-test was 80. Overall, the second group improved 158% from the average of the pre-test to the average of the post-test. The author found that the overall scores of the cooperative learning group were lower, but the improvements were greater.

Students improved their scores using both methods of teaching. Although the direct instruction group did receive higher grades, there was less overall improvement. Based on this study, the students, who received instruction through
cooperative learning, were more interested in the information and lessons than students taught by direct instruction. Students who work in cooperative learning groups were more engaged and got a better grasp of the materials. Teaching with a variety of techniques would reach more students and was more effective than solely using one type of instruction.

Students with learning disabilities could also benefit academically from engaging in group situations. Students with learning disabilities can gain many advantages when they learn in a social setting that is group based. McMaster and Fuchs (2002) researched 15 studies from 1990 to 2000 examining effects of cooperative learning strategies on the academic achievement of students with learning disabilities. A meta-analysis was conducted by reviewing the work of other researchers. The goal was to find what research had been done about using cooperative learning to improve the academic achievement of students with disabilities since Tateyama-Sniezek had conducted a review of such literature in 1990. The recommendation to use cooperative learning with students with learning disabilities was based on hundreds of studies of cooperative learning’s effects on student achievement. Johnson and Johnson (1986) were found to be proponents of using cooperative learning with students with disabilities because it provided an alternative to ability grouping and competitive environments. Cooperative learning also improved nondisabled children’s acceptance of students with disabilities.

McMaster and Fuchs found that out of the 15 studies on cooperative learning they researched, there were seven different approaches to implementing cooperative learning. The first method was cooperative learning with computer-assisted
instruction. The second method was cooperative learning combined with strategy instruction; the third method found was cooperative learning combined with cross-age tutoring. The fourth method was cooperative homework teams. The fifth method was the learning together approach. The sixth method was cooperative learning as part of school-wide restructuring programs, and the final method was structured versus unstructured cooperative learning. Through the use of all of these methods, it was established that when cooperative learning included empirically supported elements, such as individual accountability and group rewards, greater effects were demonstrated.

Overall, cooperative learning strategies that incorporated individual accountability and group rewards were more likely to improve achievement of students with disabilities. More research needed to be done before cooperative learning would be viewed as an effective strategy for students with disabilities. The authors stated that because of their inconclusive findings regarding how effective cooperative learning was with students with learning disabilities, that teachers should use caution in deciding whether to use cooperative learning to improve those students’ academic performance.

**Group Learning Structure**

Both guided reading groups and cooperative learning groups required a specific structure. The students needed to be placed in groups in a very strategic way. Cooperative learning was very specifically structured to allow for group interaction and positive outcomes. If cooperative learning groups and lessons were not structured in a specific way, they might not be as effective. Millis (2002) prepared a
methodology paper about cooperative learning based on the theory and research behind cooperative learning. Cooperative learning was defined as small groups working on specific tasks in a structured way. There were three premises underlying cooperative learning: respect for students, promotion of a shared sense of community, and that learning is an active, constructive process.

Theory and research were used to explain why cooperative learning could be effective. One of the major reasons for using cooperative learning was that interaction with others was essential to the learning process. The use of cooperative learning was based on the concept that deep learning was reinforced using a connected, cooperative approach. The foundation for setting up an effective cooperative learning experience was laid out. Four major parts of a cooperative learning approach were explained: conducting the cooperative classroom, establishing a cooperative activity, organizing groups/teams effectively, and managing group activities. A how-to approach to each of these topics was given. Millis concluded that working in a group satisfies a human desire for connection and cooperation.

In order for teachers to be effective when using group settings, they need to ensure they are correctly teaching and employing the social skills needed by students the classroom. Guided reading groups require that teachers take the time to promote positive interactions during group meetings. Howe (2003) decided to research how science knowledge could be promoted by collaborative group work between children. The research question was to find out whether collaborative group work would trigger the productive use of post-group experiences. Post-collaborative growth happened after the students collectively shared insights. The author also stated that knowledge
can grow over time due to an incubation phenomenon. Yaniv and Meyer’s ideas for incubation to group work in science was referred to for several explanations. The first explanation was that collaborative group work could lead children to fixate on unhelpful ideas which they needed an interval to move away from; the strongest fixations were broken within hours of group work. The second explanation was that group work could stimulate productive post-group appraisal of collaboratively generated ideas, which was no more effective than appraisal without collaboratively generated ideas. A third explanation was that group work in science could result in frameworks which helped children make productive use of subsequent experiences.

The study focused on understanding the factors relevant to floating and sinking. There were four separate conditions. Condition A received an individual pre-test, collaborative group task, demonstrations of potentially relevant material, and an individual post-test. Condition B received an individual pre-test, demonstrations of potentially relevant material, and an individual post-test. Condition C received an individual pre-test, collaborative group task, and an individual post-test. Condition D received only an individual pre-test, and an individual post-test. There were 48 fifth-graders, 50 sixth-graders, and 46 seventh-graders included in this study. Groups were formed randomly from each grade level.

The results showed that Condition A responded more productively to the demonstrations than Condition B, the only difference being that Condition A had a collaborative group task before the demonstration. The results also showed that Condition A surpassed all other conditions over pre-test to post-test change. Collaborative group work could lead to frameworks of knowledge, which facilitated
the productive use of subsequent events. It was likely that when group work triggered conceptual growth that was independent of collective insights, it was because these frameworks had been created. Collaboration could help students learn more effectively. The collaborative group task helped to establish a framework for understanding.

When teachers are using collaborative groups, it is important to ensure that they are effective. It is important to understand whether groups are working effectively, as well as to correct any problems that may occur in the classroom. Quek and Wong (2001) decided to research how effectively students were working in collaborative groups of four to five students. The research question was to find out how students perceived one another while they worked within their groups. Research on student and teacher perceptions of classroom learning environment were used in this study. The students and teacher used the My Class Inventory (MCI) to assess their opinions of the learning environment. The My Class Inventory (MCI) was created from an earlier inventory called the Learning Environment Inventory (LEI). Essentially, the MCI was a classroom environment questionnaire given to students. Using the MCI, the students would assess cohesiveness, friction, satisfaction, difficulty, and competitiveness within the classroom while working collaboratively. Cohesiveness was defined as how well students worked together. Friction was defined as the degree to which students did not get along and were unfriendly to one another; satisfaction was defined as the degree to which students enjoyed learning and their class. Finally, difficulty was defined as the degree to which students felt a sense of belonging, and competitiveness was the degree to which students experienced
difficulty in their learning tasks. Strong links were found between elementary school classroom environment and student achievement. How others used the MCI to investigate the connection between students' cognitive learning outcomes and how they perceived their classrooms were researched as well.

The study worked with 39 sixth graders from an all-girl school. The students and teacher completed the MCI for the actual way they perceived that the class worked collaboratively and for their preferences for working collaboratively. Overall, the results for the actual version of the MCI ranged from a Cronbach alpha reliability scores of 0.25 to 0.82, and 0.47 to 0.92 for the preferred version of the MCI. What this meant is that students preferred a lower level of friction and competitiveness than was present, and a higher degree of satisfaction and cohesiveness than was present. This perceptual information showed that there were gaps in the learning environment. The MCI showed there were differences in satisfaction, friction, competitiveness and cohesiveness scales. It was determined that students working in collaborative groups needed to work on team-building activities at initial stages in order to reduce competitiveness and friction. Teachers also needed to meet with their students one-on-one often to better understand the learning needs of the students. Students had to write in their reflection logs to open up lines of communication. Because one of the learning outcomes in school was collaboration, the classroom teacher needed to emphasize collaboration more. Collaboration and a healthy learning environment were essential for cooperative learning to work effectively. The students needed to feel that they had a safe environment with little friction and no unhealthy competitiveness in order to learn.
In order for guided reading groups to work together successfully, there needed to be a sense of community within the groups. Students needed to be working together, and cooperating with one another. Yamaguchi and Maehr (2003) were interested in how children conceptualize emergent leadership in collaborative learning groups, and whether emergent leadership was associated with student achievement motivation. How children defined and described emergent leadership in a collaborative learning group setting was researched. Gender, achievement orientations, and group compositions were also researched to find out if they were associated with task-focused emergent leadership and relationship-focused emergent leadership. While the potential benefits of collaborative learning have been well documented, group learning was often hard to navigate socially. Groups could have problems with dominators, as well as individuals who did not contribute to the group in a meaningful way. There were two types of leadership behaviors found that helped the group process. The first type was task-focused leadership; task-focused leadership was defined as accomplishing the task at hand. The second type of leadership was relationship-related leadership. Relationship-related leadership was defined as building strong working relationships and affiliations.

The research study included 294 fourth and fifth grade students in 98 three-person learning groups. Data was collected during the 1999-2000 school year, with students from three elementary schools in a metropolitan area in the Midwest. A pre-test survey, a collaborative group task, a post-test survey, and a post-test interview were used to gather data. The students had to work on a group math task, and when they completed, they were given a post-test survey to assess self-perceptions of the
task-focused and relationship-focused emergent leadership and achievement motivations during the group task. Eighteen students were randomly selected for interviews. The interview consisted of six questions. The first question asked what the student thought about the math task. The other questions asked about who participated the most and least, and if the student was ever frustrated at times with their group. The students were also asked who they would nominate as a leader, and if they would work with their group again. Interview data was coded and analyzed. Each transcript was coded into phrases students used most, such as talking the most, being nice, and doing the most work.

The results of the study showed that only three out of the 18 (17%) students interviewed, selected themselves as the emergent leader of their group. All students insisted that they participated in the task, even though several clearly did not. The survey data indicated that mastery and performance goal orientations were associated with self-perceptions of leadership. Task-focused leadership was found to be associated only with performance goal orientations, while relationship-focused leadership was associated with both mastery and performance goals. While teachers and researchers might have had anecdotal evidence of emergent leadership among children, emergent leadership should be studied to understand how the peer learning process could be improved. The specific nature of how students perceived others in a collaborative learning group were studied.

In order for teachers to effectively employ group learning methods in the classroom, they needed to be educated properly on how to do so. Veenman, van Benthum, Bootsma, van Dieren, and van der Kemp (2002) looked at the effects of a
course on cooperative learning for student teachers. Veenman et al. wanted to find out how cooperative learning affected not only the student teachers, but also how it affected the students, and affected the students’ perceptions of working in cooperative learning groups. The research questions focused on how a course on cooperative learning affected pupil engagement rates in classes with student teachers who participated in the course. Whether student teachers showed a more positive attitude toward cooperative learning after following the course in cooperative learning was examined. Also looked at was how the pupils of the student teachers, who participated in the course on cooperative learning, perceived working in cooperative learning groups.

Johnson and Johnson (1999) were used to define cooperative learning as the instructional use of small groups in which pupils work together to maximize their own and each other’s learning. When properly implemented, pupils in cooperative learning groups made sure that everyone in the group has mastered the concepts being taught. Placing pupils in groups and telling them to work together did not constitute cooperative learning. Cooperative learning was defined as having five components: positive interdependence, individual accountability, face-to-face promotive interaction, social skills, and group processing. Positive interdependence meant that pupils see themselves as linked to the others in the group in such a manner that they could not succeed unless the other members of the group succeed. Individual accountability meant that the performance of each individual was assessed and that the results were reported to the both the individual and the group. Face-to-face promotive interaction meant that the groups must be small in number and seated in an
arrangement that promoted interaction with one another. Social skills must be taught for high quality collaboration. The final component, group processing, was defined as members of the group discussing their progress towards the achievement of their goals.

Primary school student teachers, in their second or third year, from two different teacher education colleges were the subjects of the study. The student teachers were teaching first through sixth grade classes. At each school, four sub-studies were done. The first sub-study was an observational study of the implementation of the desired cooperative learning teaching behaviors and pupil engagement rates during cooperative learning activities. The second sub-study was a questionnaire study of the student teachers’ attitudes toward cooperative learning. The third component was a questionnaire study of the pupils’ attitudes toward cooperative learning. The final component was a questionnaire study of the reactions of the student teachers to the course on cooperative learning. A student teacher perception of cooperative learning scale was used to determine the results of the student teacher attitude toward cooperative learning questionnaire. The scale contained 70 items to be rated between one (strongly disagree), and five (strongly agree). A pupil perception of cooperative learning scale was also developed; this scale included 22 items to be rated one (not so nice or never) through three (very nice or always).

The results of the study found that the course on cooperative learning appeared to have a significant effect on pupil’s engagement rates. Pupils exhibited increases in their time-on-task levels, 84% before the course and 94% after the
course. The results found that there were significant effects on four out of the five basic elements for cooperative learning: positive interdependence, face-to-face interaction, social skills, and group processing. The student teachers valued cooperative learning as found in the course evaluation questionnaire data. The student teachers also appreciated the opportunity for more direct interaction and cooperation with fellow student teachers and the opportunity to experience cooperative learning firsthand. Cooperative learning could promote the learning of pupils, as well as the student teachers' own learning.

Social Constructivism and Learning

Social constructivism is the construction of knowledge and how people share their knowledge and negotiate knowledge with others. Social constructivism is the foundation for guided reading groups. Saab, van Joolingen, and van Hout-Wolters (2005) recognized that constructivist approaches to learning focus on learning environments in which students are given the chance to construct knowledge for themselves. Their first research question was to find out which communicative activities between two students, working collaboratively in a computer-based discovery environment, are frequently used in the discovery learning process. The second research question was to find out which communicative and discovery activities co-occur during this learning process. Jonassen (2000) was researched for constructivist approaches to learning. When students were in learning environments where they had the opportunity to construct knowledge themselves, they could also negotiate this knowledge with others. Discovery learning and collaborative learning
were examples of learning situations that provided for knowledge construction processes.

For the research study, computer-based learning environment, in which the two forms of learning were implemented at the same time, was introduced. The interaction between discovery learning and collaborative learning were examined. The authors also investigated which communicative activities were frequently used in the discovery learning process and which communicative and discovery activities happened at the same time. Twenty-one pairs of tenth grade students enrolled in pre-university education were the subjects of the study. The study participants worked in pairs on separate computer screens in a shared discovery-learning environment. The students completed a pre-test and a post-test individually. The participants communicated using a chat box. In order to find a relationship between communicative activities and discovery learning processes, correlational analyses and principal component analyses were performed.

The results of the study showed significant relationships found between communicative and discovery activities, as well as between the communicative process and the discovery learning processes. Communicative activities were linked to cognitive processes, associated with the goals of working within the collaborative learning environment of scientific discovery. The social constructivist theory of learning stressed both the importance of discovery learning, where students could construct their own knowledge actively, and collaborative learning, where students could share their meanings. The results of the study connected these two approaches
of learning. The authors concluded that further research must be done to reveal the causal structure of these relationships.

Cooperation and social constructivism are intertwined in order for successful group learning to occur. A person’s learning is affected by their own experiences and previous knowledge base, as well as negotiating knowledge with others. Siegel (2005) decided to research how an eighth grade mathematics teacher defined cooperative learning and the enactment of cooperative learning in his classroom according to that definition. The research question was to look at how a teacher conceptualized and enacted cooperative learning in his classroom. How cooperative learning differed from what might happen in actual classrooms and schools was investigated. Grossen (1996), who found that cooperative learning might produce different effects when implemented by practitioners rather than researchers, was researched.

Constructivist psychology provided the framework for the research study. This study was part of a larger project titled: The Model Project for the Reform of Special Education in the Iroquois School District. In that larger project, researchers looked at the reform efforts and instructional innovations that were designed to change the overall education system of a school district. Qualitative methods were used to collect data. Data was collected by participating in and observing project leader meetings, and observing middle school classes. Another way data was collected was through interviewing project leaders, middle school teachers and middle school students. Data was analyzed by coding data into cooperative learning methods and lesson plan format; descriptive statistics were also used for data
Guided Reading Groups

reduction. The results of the study found that the project leader’s conceptualization of cooperative learning was consistent with a research-based model. In the study, the teacher adapted the Johnson and Johnson (1983) model of cooperative learning, to fit the needs of the classroom. A constructivist framework would suggest that a teacher’s prior knowledge of teaching and experience as a teacher would affect the teacher’s use of cooperative learning. Based on a constructivist framework, a teacher’s use of cooperative learning would be influenced by his or her teaching context. Researchers needed to use a constructivist framework and qualitative methods, in order to examine cooperative learning.

The literature in the field of group and collaborative learning comes in a wide array of subtopics. There are many things that a researcher must look into in order to investigate and examine the differing parts of guided reading groups and its effects. The appropriate use of social skills in a group setting is essential and fundamental. Collaborative learning cannot occur without the use of appropriate social skills; social skills are also built into effective group learning lessons in order to teach social skills. Academic achievement is impacted by group learning as well. If students are working together cooperatively, their academic achievement can be positively affected. Guided reading groups are structured in a very specific way in order for students to obtain the benefits from guided reading. If students are working in a group, but not structured in a specific way, it would not be effective. Teachers need to be educated about guided reading groups and collaborative learning in order to successfully implement guided reading groups in their classroom. The final, most fundamental part of guided reading groups is that the ideology of social constructivism is
incorporated into the classroom. Students learn more when they are socially involved in the classroom. Knowledge is shared, meanings are made, and knowledge is negotiated when students are involved collaboratively in the classroom.
Chapter Three: Applications and Evaluations

Introduction

Guided reading is a strong method of instructing students in reading. They receive direct instruction, guided practice, and independent reading skills during guided reading lessons. Students should then be able to carry over the skills taught in guided reading groups to their independent work. My research questions are focused on how guided reading groups can affect student achievement of greater reading comprehension, greater reading fluency, and greater success when working with others. These research questions will help answer whether guided reading is an effective method for teaching reading in the classroom. The research questions will help address the situations in my own classroom, but I hope it will also offer more information on how guided reading groups could affect reading instruction. I want to show how guided reading groups can specifically affect students’ comprehension and fluency levels. I will also focus on how effective guided reading groups can be when teaching reading to students with disabilities. My study will address how guided reading groups affect students’ attitudes towards working with one another. The study will also find out how guided reading groups will affect academic achievement in reading.

My fourth grade students are currently working within guided reading groups. Some students have great difficulty when working with others. I want my students to become better readers, develop greater social skills, and have higher self-esteem. Many of my students struggle with reading comprehension and fluency. I will focus on how comprehension and fluency can be affected when guided reading groups are
used in the classroom. Guided reading groups are designed to allow the reader to work at his or her reading level with a group of students at the same level; the students are there to support each other and make meaning together. Working with students at a similar reading level can help readers have confidence when reading aloud in a group situation. The main research question for the study is: How can guided reading groups affect student achievement in reading? The first sub-question is: How does directly scaffolding instruction in a guided reading group at the readers’ levels help their comprehension and fluency? The second sub-question is: What happens to students’ attitudes towards each other and towards working cooperatively when students work in small guided reading groups at their reading level?

Participants

The participants of the study are fourth grade students in an inclusive classroom. There are nineteen students in the classroom. There is a classroom teacher and consultant teacher in the classroom all day for every subject. I am the consultant teacher, and I have nine students with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) in the class. There are seven girls and twelve boys in the class. There is one student who is an ESL student. The students’ disabilities range from seven students with Learning Disabilities, one student who has a Speech and Language Disorder, as well as one student who is Hearing Impaired. All special education students receive Consultant Teacher minutes on their IEP for reading and language arts. Several of the students also have Consultant Teacher minutes for spelling and mathematics on their IEPs. The students, with whom I work in guided reading groups, range from reading at a late second grade reading level to a middle fourth grade reading level.
This is my first year as a full-time teacher in the classroom. Recently, I taught sixth grade science as a long-term substitute. I was in this position for three months this past spring to cover a maternity leave. Before the long-term position, I was a per diem substitute in two elementary and middle schools, and one elementary, middle and high school. I have worked with guided reading groups before during student teaching and subbing. This is the first time I have implemented my own lessons for several different reading groups at once. The classroom teacher I work with is in her first year as a fourth grade teacher. Last year, she had the same class as third graders. This class was a looping class, and they stayed together for the second year. Before she was an elementary classroom teacher, she was a consultant teacher for three years in the same building. She is an excellent consultant teaching resource. The literacy specialist for the room is in her first year as a reading teacher; previously, she taught first and second grades for six years at a different school. The reading teacher that pulls two students out for one-on-one instruction is in her fifteenth year as a special educator.

Procedures of Study

In order to successfully monitor how guided reading groups affect student achievement in the classroom it would take at least eight weeks to complete the beginning surveys, and to properly observe and record how students are doing with reading comprehension and fluency in guided reading groups. Guided reading groups meet in the morning for one hour and ten minutes every day. During this time, the literacy specialist is in the classroom for the first half hour of guided reading groups. There are three rotations during guided reading groups, ranging from twenty to thirty
Guided Reading Groups

minutes each. I take one group, the classroom teacher takes one group, the literacy specialist takes a group, and we have a parent volunteer who comes in during this time to work with each student one-on-one for spelling practice. The students, who are not working in a group, work independently on the different learning center activities. They are held accountable for what work they get done independently during this time. I see my three reading groups: group one, group two, and group five every day. The classroom teacher sees three groups every day and it varies between the five groups.

The classroom has five guided reading groups. Groups one, two, and five receive guided reading group instruction from the classroom teacher, the consultant teacher, and several of the students also receive reading instruction from the literacy specialist. The first group is made up of four students, two girls and two boys. They are reading at an approaching fourth grade level. The second guided reading group is made up of four students, all boys. They are currently reading at a fourth grade level, but two of the students receive Consultant Teacher minutes on their IEPs. The third guided reading group is made up of four students, two boys and two girls. They are reading at a fourth grade level, and they receive guided reading group instruction only from the classroom teacher. The fourth guided reading group is made up of four students, three girls, and one boy. They are reading at a beyond fourth grade level, and they receive guided reading group instruction only from the classroom teacher as well. The fifth guided reading group is made up of three students, all boys. They are reading at a range of middle second grade to an early third grade reading level. All students in guided reading group five also receive reading instruction in a group.
setting from the Literacy Specialist. Two of the students in guided reading group five also receive one-on-one reading instruction from another reading teacher. When working with group five, much of my time with them is spent on letter-sound correspondence, phonemic awareness, vocabulary, spelling, and comprehension. I still work with them as a guided reading group with a book at their level, but their group receives much more explicit instruction for reading than my other guided reading groups.

For this study, students will continue to function in guided reading groups as they have all along. This is the third year the students have worked in guided reading groups. I will be using information from running records that are done on a monthly basis for the study. The design of the study was greatly influenced by Andrusyk and Andrusyk's (2003) design, as well as by the design of Caparos et al. (2002). In order to answer the research question: How can guided reading groups affect student achievement in reading? I will look at how students are doing in reading assessments from the beginning of the school year up until the end of the study. To address the first sub-question: How does directly scaffolding instruction in a guided reading group at the readers' levels help their comprehension and fluency? I will look at students' scores on reading assessments and reading accuracy percentages on my students' running records. To answer the second sub-question: What happens to students' attitudes towards each other and towards working cooperatively when students work in small guided reading groups at their reading level? I will look at student answers on the surveys taken at the beginning of my study, and then I will
look at student answers after the same surveys are completed by students at the end of the study.

**Instruments for Study**

For the study, data will be collected about academic achievement that occurred before the study takes place, and during my study, while guided reading groups are examined in the classroom. Data will also be collected that shows how the students' attitudes toward working with others are affected. My role in gathering data for the study will be as a participant-observer. I have incorporated triangulation, in order to overlap data. There are several data collection methods for the study. The first method is using student surveys. The student surveys consist of how students feel about working in group situations and guided reading groups. The surveys will be given twice, both pre- and post- study. Caparos, et al. (2002) were the inspiration for this survey. They used the same type of survey for their study examining cooperative learning. The survey questions had a range of choices: agree ☑️, not sure ☐, or disagree ☐️.

The other methods for collecting data include examining student assessment scores. My school uses the *Treasures* reading series by MacMillan/McGraw-Hill. The books that will be utilized for the guided reading groups will come from this reading series. The Benchmark Assessment and the running record assessments will come from this reading series. Student achievement during the study will be compared by looking at the grades that students earned throughout the entire school year. Assessment scores and students' grades from the beginning of the year would then be compared with the scores at the time the study concludes. The assessments that will
be used for this study include the Benchmark Assessment that is given to the students at the beginning of the school year and again during the spring. The Benchmark Assessment will be used for baseline information. I will also use the Benchmark Assessments given in the spring to see how students are performing with reading comprehension.

Running records are another form of assessment that will be used for data collection. Running records allow teachers to assess a student’s reading performance as he or she reads aloud from a book. A book that is at the student’s reading level is used. As the student reads, each word is marked off with a checkmark above each word that is read correctly. If a student reads incorrectly, the word or sound that the student reads is recorded. After students are done reading, there are comprehension questions about the stories that they answer to assess comprehension. The use of a running record is an easy, convenient way to quickly assess how well a student is reading. During guided reading groups, running records are used for each student to assess how well they are reading the weekly book. The running record shows how well the students are doing with fluency, and the comprehensive questions about the stories from the reading series help assess how students are progressing with comprehension. Running records will be completed every other week throughout the study.

After data has been collected, each method will then be analyzed. Data will be reviewed periodically to see if any trends or patterns emerge. Each component of data will be analyzed individually. I will then look for triangulation and see if the data collection has been done successfully. To analyze the student surveys about working
in group situations and guided reading groups, the data will be graphed to look for emerging patterns or trends. Student achievement will be analyzed by quantifying the students’ scores on assessments and grades throughout the school year. The initial scores would be compared with the results at each interval to see if student achievement in comprehension and fluency was increased. Data would be analyzed to see if the students made any gains during the study as well. A t-test will then be run on the achievement scores to see if the findings were statistically significant. To analyze the student surveys, the individual answers will be examined, and the written responses will be reviewed to look for significant findings, as well as to look for progress from the pre-test survey to the post test survey.

I am studying guided reading groups because I feel they can be a very successful method of teaching reading in the classroom. Continuing guided reading groups in my fourth grade classroom is important because of how students are working together, as well as the problems with reading many of my student have. Improving students’ reading comprehension, reading fluency, and ability to work with others are important outcomes. I strive for my students to make gains in each of these areas. My study will allow me to analyze how well my reading instruction helps my students. I will use a research-based method of teaching to complete my research study.
Chapter Four: Results

The objective of this project was to improve students’ reading comprehension and fluency, and to make students’ attitudes towards each other more positive through the use of guided reading groups. The established guided reading groups were utilized in order to meet the desired objective. Throughout the research study, students participated in guided reading lessons and district-wide reading assessments. Student improvement was measured through running records that measured reading fluency and comprehension. Student surveys (see Appendix B) were given to determine students’ attitudes towards each other and towards working in guided reading groups. Students’ scores on the Benchmark Assessment, given at the beginning of the school year and in the spring, were also collected and analyzed to show academic improvement. The results of my study demonstrated that I met my objective.

To obtain parental consent, parent and student permission slips were sent home with the students. Once the consent forms (see Appendix A) were returned, the research study began. To gather baseline data for the study, the students’ fourth grade Benchmark Assessment scores were collected from the September 2007 test administration. The Benchmark Assessment from the fall gave information regarding students’ ability to read passages at the fourth grade level and correctly answer questions. Students’ monthly running records scores were also collected starting with the September 2007 running records that were given. This information gave the approximate levels at which the students were reading at the beginning of the school year, and the percent of accuracy at which the students were reading in the fall. The
running record assessments, as well as the Benchmark Assessment, were used as baseline data and to determine the effectiveness of the study.

While the surveys were completed and all assessment scores were collected, students took part in guided reading groups as they did before. The regular routines of guided reading groups were maintained during the study. The only main difference in the classroom, during the study, was that working together more positively in groups was stressed by the teacher. Students were encouraged to contribute more to guided reading group sessions, and the importance of working together positively and putting forth great effort were impressed upon the students. Group discussions, sharing ideas and welcoming other students’ opinions were discussed at the beginning of each session. Students also discussed interacting positively and giving their best with one another during guided reading groups. They remained in the same guided reading groups throughout the study, and the procedures of guided reading lessons were consistent. The compositions of the guided reading groups were based on the students’ individual needs for reading.

During the first week of the study, students were administered a survey about working in guided reading groups. To ensure that all students understood the questions, the survey was read aloud as students answered the survey entries. If needed, clarification was given, so that the students would understand what was being asked. The purpose of the student survey was to question the students about their feelings towards their peers and working in guided reading groups. The survey data was then compiled and graphed. At the beginning and conclusion of the research
Guided Reading Groups

study, the same survey was administered. Effectiveness of the study was also determined by the student surveys.

In order to analyze effectiveness, student surveys about working in groups were carefully administered in a pre-test, post test method. The students were given surveys in written form, and the surveys were read to students. Questions about students' attitudes towards one another, and group learning were included in the surveys. The students were asked about their preferences for learning, being part of a guided reading group, and working in groups with people who were not friends. Responses to survey items were answered with either agree ☑, not sure ☐, or disagree ☐. Several written response questions were also included in the survey. The questions included giving examples of something either positive or negative students had seen when working in guided reading groups. Students could also write a response about something they liked or disliked about guided reading groups. The final written response question asked students if there was anything that made it difficult to work with others in a group. The results of the student survey are shown in Table 1 on page 50.
### Table 1

**Student Survey on Working in Groups Results, March 2008**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Not Sure</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Before</td>
<td>After</td>
<td>Before</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1) Can learn from kids my own age:</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2) Working in groups is boring:</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3) Working in groups makes me think more:</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4) Working in a group makes me feel good about myself:</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5) Want to be with friends in groups:</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6) Working in groups is a waste of time:</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7) Learn more from teacher than other students in group:</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8) It is hard to work with kids I don't like:</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9) I don't like when the teacher chooses group members:</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10) Other students help me learn in a group:</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11) I help other group members with what I am good at:</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12) Learn to work with different students:</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13) I enjoy the material more in a group:</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14) Help me learn the material better:</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15) I become a better group member:</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16) I do not want to become better friends with others:</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17) I want to work more with groups:</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18) I can work with anyone in a group setting:</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Results of the surveys revealed that some of the survey questions were not clear enough for students. I had to explain items four and twelve during administration of the survey. Some students did not understand what was meant by feeling good about themselves when working in a group. We had a class discussion about this survey question, as well as what was meant by working with students who are different. I chose to look only at the agree responses due to the amount of students who responded not sure to survey items. As seen in Table 1, the post-survey results showed that two more students agreed that they could learn things from other students (question 1), and two more students responded that they felt guided reading groups made them think more (question 3). Another positive response was that two more students felt they could work with anyone in the classroom in a group setting (question 18). Many of the students' post-survey responses changed for the positive.

There were also responses that seemed to be more negative about working in groups. Several survey question responses challenged the positive results seen in other student responses. Three more students felt that working in groups was boring (question 2) on the post-survey than on the initial survey, and two more students thought that working in groups was a waste of time (question 6) on the post-survey. The students' responses may have been inconsistent, as shown in Figure 1 on page 52, because some survey questions were worded positively, while others were worded negatively. The results of the student survey showed there was a slight improvement in students' attitudes about working with others in guided reading groups. Through the specific components of guided reading groups, as well as the focus on positive
Guided Reading Groups

group skills, the survey revealed that many students felt working in guided reading
groups was beneficial.

Figure 1

![Bar Chart]

**Figure 1.** Student responses agreeing with survey items from the surveys given in January 2008 (Agree Before) and March 2008 (Agree After).

The written responses from students gave more insight into how they felt
about guided reading groups. Not all students responded to the four final survey
questions. On the first survey given, only nine students answered the written response
questions. Many of the students’ responses were not very detailed. Several of the
students who answered the written response questions did not list anything positive
they had seen during guided reading groups, but they took the opportunity to discuss
negative things seen during guided reading groups. One student complained about
how he was unable to work with his friends in guided reading groups. He requested “Could you please change groups?” This shed light on how students struggled when they were not able to work with their friends during groups. There was another response with a similar suggestion; a female student requested that she be removed from her guided reading group, and then to “Switch me with someone else” and naming another student. The final written response question from the survey had eight student responses about difficulties when working with others in a group. The common theme for this question was that many students felt their voices were not being heard during guided reading groups. There were three responses that discussed how one student was trying to control group discussions during group sessions. This was a situation that the classroom teacher and I were aware of and trying to alleviate.

On the post-survey given, there were twelve students who completed the written response questions. On the question about something positive witnessed during guided reading groups there were several insightful responses. Post-survey, one student stated that another student “helps me when I don’t understand.” Another student said, “We help each other.” A third student responded, “I understand more when we talk about the stories. I like to hear what my friends think too.” When students responded to the negative question on the post-survey, it showed that many students still had difficulty working with others. One student’s name came up several times in other students’ responses. After analyzing the survey results, this trend became obvious. Responses about this student included, “She talks the most and doesn’t let me talk,” and “I don’t like working with her she is mean and bosses me around.” This response was an example of a specific student situation we have been
working to improve since September through behavioral contracting and parent collaboration. There were still classroom issues that some students still felt very strongly about, that stemmed from the student in question, who has behavioral issues.

The second tool used for the study was running records. To analyze running records given on a monthly basis, the accuracy rates that measure reading fluency were graphed with the reading levels at which the students were reading. The students in our classroom ranged from reading level of J through R. The letters correspond to the Fountas and Pinnell (2001) reading levels that are then correlated to a grade level through our reading series. The second grade reading level ranges from the letter J to the letter M. The third grade reading level ranges from the letter N to the letter P, and the fourth grade reading level ranges from the letter Q to the letter S. Our students have fallen within those reading levels, as shown in Table 2, on page 55. Some students moved into our district during the school year, so their running record information was unavailable until running records were given at our school. Every student was assigned a number from 1 through 19 to protect student confidentiality. Their monthly running records scores and reading level were compiled from September 2007 until March 2008.
Table 2

*Running Records Scores and Book Levels from September 2007 to March 2008*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>92% P</td>
<td>94% P</td>
<td>97% Q</td>
<td>95% Q</td>
<td>97% Q</td>
<td>96% R</td>
<td>98% R</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>90% N</td>
<td>92% N</td>
<td>92% N</td>
<td>94% O</td>
<td>96% P</td>
<td>98% P</td>
<td>98% P</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>89% O</td>
<td>92% O</td>
<td>92% O</td>
<td>96% O</td>
<td>94% P</td>
<td>95% P</td>
<td>99% P</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>94% P</td>
<td>96% P</td>
<td>98% P</td>
<td>95% Q</td>
<td>96% Q</td>
<td>98% R</td>
<td>99% R</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>96% P</td>
<td>97% P</td>
<td>99% P</td>
<td>100% P</td>
<td>98% Q</td>
<td>99% Q</td>
<td>96% R</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>98% Q</td>
<td>96% R</td>
<td>98% R</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>91% N</td>
<td>94% N</td>
<td>96% O</td>
<td>97% O</td>
<td>92% P</td>
<td>95% P</td>
<td>95% Q</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>94% J</td>
<td>96% J</td>
<td>97% K</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>99% O</td>
<td>94% P</td>
<td>95% P</td>
<td>97% Q</td>
<td>98% Q</td>
<td>95% R</td>
<td>96% R</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>93% P</td>
<td>96% P</td>
<td>99% P</td>
<td>94% Q</td>
<td>97% Q</td>
<td>94% R</td>
<td>98% R</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>93% N</td>
<td>95% N</td>
<td>96% N</td>
<td>98% N</td>
<td>95% O</td>
<td>96% O</td>
<td>95% P</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>98% N</td>
<td>98% N</td>
<td>96% O</td>
<td>97% O</td>
<td>95% P</td>
<td>97% P</td>
<td>95% Q</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>99% P</td>
<td>96% Q</td>
<td>99% Q</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>95% N</td>
<td>96% N</td>
<td>98% N</td>
<td>96% O</td>
<td>98% O</td>
<td>93% P</td>
<td>95% P</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>97% J</td>
<td>94% K</td>
<td>97% K</td>
<td>94% L</td>
<td>94% L</td>
<td>96% L</td>
<td>98% L</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>95% N</td>
<td>96% N</td>
<td>98% N</td>
<td>96% O</td>
<td>97% O</td>
<td>95% P</td>
<td>98% P</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>94% O</td>
<td>97% O</td>
<td>99% O</td>
<td>96% P</td>
<td>98% P</td>
<td>95% Q</td>
<td>95% Q</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>94% J</td>
<td>96% J</td>
<td>95% K</td>
<td>98% K</td>
<td>99% K</td>
<td>93% L</td>
<td>94% L</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>96% J</td>
<td>97% J</td>
<td>100% J</td>
<td>94% K</td>
<td>98% K</td>
<td>99% K</td>
<td>94% L</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As seen in Table 2, tremendous growth was shown in the students' reading levels and accuracy scores from September 2007 through March 2008. The reading accuracy percentages give important information alone, but when paired with the reading levels correlated from Fountas and Pinnell (2001) it reveals immense increases in student achievement. As shown in Table 2, student 1 started the school year at a late third grade level of P, and is now reading very strongly at a middle fourth grade level of R. Both students 7 and 12 began the school year reading at an early third grade level of N, and they are both reading very fluently at a fourth grade level of Q, as illustrated in Table 2 as well. Student 19 began the year reading at an early second grade level of J, and was a very insecure and choppy reader. Now, student 19 is reading at an early third grade level of L and is a confident and smooth reader. The reading fluency and comprehension growth seen in class has been very encouraging.

The third and final tool used in the research study was the Benchmark Assessment from the reading series. The Benchmark Assessment assisted in answering the main research question as well. Student achievement in reading was greatly influenced by student participation in guided reading groups. Guided reading instruction allowed the teacher to pinpoint reading difficulties that students were struggling with, and enabled individualized instruction. Every student raised their scores on the Benchmark Assessment by at least 20.3% as illustrated in Table 3 on page 58. The highest amount of growth on the Benchmark Assessment was an increased percentage of 116.1%. The overall average percentage increased from the
fall scores from the Benchmark Assessment to the spring scores was 60.24%. This average increase of scores was remarkable.

Certain students’ scores rose dramatically between the fall and spring Benchmark Assessments. Student 2 more than doubled the score of the fall Benchmark Assessment for a percentage increased of 116.1%, as shown in Table 3. Student 15 was also able to increase the Benchmark Assessment scores by 107.4%. Some student percentage increases were not as significant as others, but every single student showed growth in reading achievement from September 2007 to March 2008 through the Benchmark Assessment. By directly scaffolding instruction in a guided reading group at the readers’ levels, students were able to improve their reading comprehension and reading fluency. The data from the Benchmark Assessment was analyzed by using a t-test. The fall Benchmark Assessment scores were greatly increased on the spring administration of the same assessment. The t-test ran on the students’ scores showed that the probability that the increase of scores were due to chance was $1.5423^{-10}$. This p-value confirms that students’ achievement results could be credited to successful guided reading group instruction.
Table 3

2007-2008 Fourth Grade Benchmark Assessment Scores

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Students</th>
<th>9/2007 Test Scores</th>
<th>3/2008 Test Scores</th>
<th>Percentage Increased</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>41.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>116.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>58.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>29.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>60.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Not here</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>Unavailable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>46.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Not here</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>Unavailable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>60.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>53.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>45.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>20.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Not here</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>Unavailable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>89.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>107.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>59.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>36.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>58.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>82.1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Triangulation of data was allowed through the use of a variety of data collection methods. Quantifying and qualifying data was used to show the dramatic rise in student achievement in reading. Using student surveys, running records, and Benchmark Assessment scores were sufficient enough to compile and organize guided reading group information. Students' unit test scores from the reading series were not utilized because they are still modeled as a whole group through guided practice at this point. The unit test scores would not have been an accurate method of assessing student achievement and growth in reading comprehension and fluency.
Chapter Five: Conclusions and Recommendations

Discussion

The methods used during the study were student surveys, running records results, and Benchmark Assessment scores. All three methods of data collection helped me to thoroughly study guided reading group instruction. Although there were only nineteen students involved in the research study, the information collected revealed significant findings. The main research question was: How can guided reading groups affect student achievement in reading? The students’ running records greatly facilitated answering this question. Student achievement is positively influenced when students are engaged in guided reading groups. Running records taken throughout the school year recorded student growth in the areas of reading fluency and comprehension. Every student was able to greatly increase their reading levels throughout the school year. By explicitly instructing students in a guided reading group setting, individual students’ reading needs are addressed and met.

Guided reading group instruction is designed to meet individual needs of students in reading. The first sub-question was: How does directly scaffolding instruction in a guided reading group at the readers’ levels help their comprehension and fluency? By analyzing students’ scores on reading assessments and reading accuracy percentages on students’ running records, the affirmative results of the research study were revealed. Every student was able to significantly increase their reading fluency levels, as well as reading comprehension levels. The Benchmark Assessment was an effective tool to measure student growth in reading comprehension. A t-test was run on the students’ increased scores from the fall
administration of the Benchmark Assessment to the spring administration of the same assessment. The t-test ran on the students’ scores demonstrated that the probability that the increase of scores were due to chance was $1.5423^{-10}$. This p-value reaffirms that students’ achievement results could be attributed to guided reading group instruction. Students’ scores on the Benchmark Assessment were shown not to be increased by chance because the p-value showed the increase was statistically significant. The difference in students’ fluency and reading comprehension levels were significant enough to show that students can be very successful in the classroom when instructed with guided reading groups.

Survey responses were also insightful and showed the classroom teacher and I some areas on which we need to continue working. The student surveys were given to see how students initially felt about working in guided reading groups and how they felt towards other students in the class. The survey provided detail into how students felt about their reading group members and how well the groups interacted with one another. The second sub-question for the study was: What happens to students’ attitudes towards each other and towards working cooperatively when students work in small guided reading groups at their reading level? The students’ answers from the surveys taken at the beginning of my study, and then at the end revealed there was some positive improvement of student attitudes overall. Examining the data offered substantiation that students, as a whole, felt positive about working in guided reading groups. Their attitudes towards one another changed slightly for the better as a result of this study.
Action Plan

Findings from studying guided reading group instruction revealed what I already presumed. I felt that students would be successful while participating in guided reading groups, but seeing specific data collected and analyzed made known the achievement of students. This information has been shared with the classroom teacher, reading teachers, principal, and the Director of Special Services. Their interest in this study allowed me to complete my research and apply findings throughout the school. Guided reading has been an essential part of reading instruction at the school for several years, and seeing quantitative and qualitative results has reaffirmed the effectiveness of guided reading. This study has greatly impacted my instruction in the classroom. Focusing on my students' individual needs is essential as a consultant teacher. Continuing with guided reading will allow me to individualize and deliver instruction in a research-based method.

Recommendations for Future Research

Although the results from the study revealed positive findings, improvements to the study can be made. Additional research needs to be conducted to further delve into how guided reading groups affect students with disabilities in the classroom. Also, I have begun utilizing the Basic Reading Inventory (BRI) assessment to obtain greater detail in students' reading levels. This is one component I wish I had used to gather initial reading information, and then periodically used to better assess student growth. The BRI is given from kindergarten through eighth grade, and it addresses reading comprehension, decoding, concepts about print, letter knowledge, phoneme awareness, and phonology. The BRI is a reading test that is given to students several
times every school year to assess the students’ independent level of reading, instructional level of reading, and frustration level of reading. This specific information would give more insight as to the appropriate instruction needed for each individual student. The independent level is the overall goal for students when using the BRI; this is the level at which students are able to read fluently and make few word recognition and comprehension errors. Students would be able to independently read materials at this level. The instructional level is the level at which students make a few errors when reading, but it does not affect reading comprehension. This is the level at which students will benefit most from explicit guided reading group instruction. The BRI measures the word accuracy and comprehension levels, as well as a rate of words per minute; students are assessed as above average, average or below average. By utilizing this method of measuring students’ reading levels, instruction can be better suited to individual student needs. This would be a very effective method of evaluating areas of reading that students would need addressed during guided reading groups. In the future, the BRI will allow me to pinpoint areas that students struggle with, and I will be able to apply the assessment data in planning guided reading lessons.

Conclusions

Researching the topics of guided reading groups and cooperative groups was very important for creating this study. There are many previous studies that examined guided reading groups and the effects of utilizing guided reading groups. Finding out how others used social skills in a group setting was essential for creating the study. Knowing what worked for other researchers, as well as different things that did not
work was important. Students cannot work effectively in group settings without using the appropriate social skills. Looking at students’ academic achievement was also important to find out how it was impacted by group learning.

Furthermore, becoming more educated about guided reading groups and collaborative learning in order to successfully implement guided reading groups in my classroom was fundamental. Running records are an essential component of any successful reading program. Guided reading group instruction takes into account the reading levels of each student and allows the teacher to specially design instruction to focus on the skills necessary for becoming a successful reader. If students are struggling in a particular area of reading, scaffolding instruction within a guided reading group setting helps students improve their reading comprehension and fluency. Knowing how students work together best, as well as how different teaching approaches affected student academic achievement was vital. Understanding how students with special needs were affected by working group situations was another important topic to research. Guided reading groups help to create a better classroom atmosphere because it allows students to develop better group processing skills. When students are able to work together cooperatively, it helps the teacher to facilitate effective guided reading group instruction. Students then develop better reading skills and social skills in the process. The successes of my students could be replicated in other classrooms with an appropriate review of literature, knowledge, and research design.
Guided Reading Groups

References


Culminating Experience Action Research Projects, 3, Spring.

Caparos, J., Cetera, C., Ogden, L., & Rossett, K. (2002). Improving students’ social skills and achievement through cooperative learning. (Master of Arts Action Research Project, Saint Xavier University, 2002).


Vaughn, S., Linan-Thompson, S., Kouzekanani, K., Bryant, D. P., Dickson, S., & Blozis, S. (2003). Reading instruction grouping for students with reading


Appendix A: Parental Consent Form

Dear Parent or Guardian,

I am currently enrolled in a master’s degree program at the State University of New York at Brockport. I am required to study and design a research plan as part of my program. For my research study, I have decided to examine guided reading groups.

As part of my project, I will have a small group of students complete a survey about working in groups. I will also be researching how guided reading groups affect reading comprehension and fluency. I will be looking at class assessment scores to determine how guided reading groups can affect student achievement. No names will be used, and all information will be kept confidential. When my project is completed, I will destroy all materials using a paper shredder.

Participation in this study is completely voluntary. You may choose to withdraw from the study at any time. If you choose not to participate, information gathered about your child will not be included in the report. There are no anticipated risks from involvement in the study.

If you have any questions or would like further information about my project, please contact me at keyo_30@hotmail.com. My faculty advisor from Brockport is Professor Jill Zarazinski. You can contact her with any questions at jzarazin@brockport.edu. Please sign the statement below and return it to me if you agree to have your child participate in this study. Please have your student sign below if they consent to be part of the study. Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

Mrs. Jennifer L. Sonricker

I, ________________________________, the parent/legal guardian of the student named below, acknowledge that the researcher has explained to me the purpose of this research, identified any risks involved, and offered to answer any questions I may have about the nature of my child’s participation. I certify that I am 18 years or older. I freely and voluntarily give consent to my child’s participation in this project. I understand all information gathered during this project will be completely confidential. I also understand that I may keep a copy of this consent form for my own information.

Signature of Parent/ Legal Guardian ___________________________ Date __________

Name of Student: ____________________________________________
I, __________________________________, the student of Mrs. Sonricker, agree to complete the survey about working in groups. I understand why the study is being done, and I voluntarily agree to be a part of the study.

Signature of Student ______________________________ Date ____________
Appendix B: Student Survey

Student survey about working in groups

Circle your responses

1. I can learn things from kids my own age.
   Agree ☑ Not Sure ☐ Disagree ☒

2. Working in a group is boring.
   Agree ☑ Not Sure ☐ Disagree ☒

3. Working in guided reading groups makes me think more.
   Agree ☑ Not Sure ☐ Disagree ☒

4. Working in a group makes me feel good about myself.
   Agree ☑ Not Sure ☐ Disagree ☒

5. When I work in a group, I want to be with my friends.
   Agree ☑ Not Sure ☐ Disagree ☒

6. I feel like working in groups is a waste of time.
   Agree ☑ Not Sure ☐ Disagree ☒

7. I learn more from the teacher than from other students in the group.
   Agree ☑ Not Sure ☐ Disagree ☒

8. It is hard to work with kids I don’t like.
   Agree ☑ Not Sure ☐ Disagree ☒

9. I do not like when the teacher chooses group members.
   Agree ☑ Not Sure ☐ Disagree ☒
10. When I work in a group, the other students help me learn.
   Agree ☑  Not Sure ☐  Disagree ☒

11. When in a group, I help my group members with what I am good at doing.
   Agree ☑  Not Sure ☐  Disagree ☒

12. When I work in groups, I learn to work with students that are different from me.
   Agree ☑  Not Sure ☐  Disagree ☒

13. I enjoy the material more when I work with other students.
   Agree ☑  Not Sure ☐  Disagree ☒

14. When I work in a group, my group members help me learn the material.
   Agree ☑  Not Sure ☐  Disagree ☒

15. The more I work in groups, the better a group member I become.
   Agree ☑  Not Sure ☐  Disagree ☒

16. I do not care to become better friends with some of the kids in class.
   Agree ☑  Not Sure ☐  Disagree ☒

17. I would like to work more with groups.
   Agree ☑  Not Sure ☐  Disagree ☒

18. I am able to work with anyone in my class, in a group setting.
   Agree ☑  Not Sure ☐  Disagree ☒
Please give an example of something positive you have seen when working in guided reading groups:


Please give an example of something negative you have seen when working in guided reading groups:


Is there anything you enjoy about guided reading groups?


Is there anything that makes it difficult to work with others in a group?


