The Impact of Fountas and Pinnell's Leveled Literacy Intervention (LLI) Program on Student Learning in a Multi-Age, Special Education Classroom

Leigh Anne Shaffer

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.brockport.edu/ehd_theses

Part of the Educational Methods Commons, Elementary Education Commons, Language and Literacy Education Commons, and the Special Education and Teaching Commons

To learn more about our programs visit: http://www.brockport.edu/ehd/

Repository Citation
Shaffer, Leigh Anne, "The Impact of Fountas and Pinnell's Leveled Literacy Intervention (LLI) Program on Student Learning in a Multi-Age, Special Education Classroom" (2012). Education and Human Development Master's Theses. 913.
https://digitalcommons.brockport.edu/ehd_theses/913

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Education and Human Development at Digital Commons @Brockport. It has been accepted for inclusion in Education and Human Development Master’s Theses by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @Brockport. For more information, please contact kmyers@brockport.edu.
The Impact of Fountas and Pinnell's Leveled Literacy Intervention (LLI) Program on Student Learning in a Multi-Age, Special Education Classroom

By

Leigh Anne Shaffer

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

May 1, 2012
The Impact of Fountas and Pinnell’s Leveled Literacy Intervention (LLI) Program on Student Learning in a Multi-Age, Special Education Classroom

By Leigh Anne Shaffer

APPROVED BY:

Advisor

Chair, Education and Human Development

Date

11
ABSTRACT

The Impact of Fountas and Pinnell's Leveled Literacy Intervention (LLI) Program on Student Learning in a Multi-Age, Special Education Classroom

by

Leigh Anne Shaffer

University of New York College at Brockport, 2012
Under the Supervision of Dr. Novinger

The primary purpose of this research was to investigate the impact Leveled Literacy Intervention (LLI) had on a multi-age, special education classroom. LLI can be used and is appropriate for students with special needs, English Language Learners and/or struggling students in regular education classrooms.

This research study was implemented into a multi-age, special education classroom. The students participating in the study were in grades 3, 4 or 5 during the study. The study lasted six weeks.

The data were collected using a variety of methods. Developmental Reading Assessments (DRA) were used twice in the study. Running records were taken as the students reread daily. Informal observations were done frequently throughout the study. Notes and observations were recorded on a double sided-journal entry. Throughout the study photographs of student involvement in the LLI program were taken as well. Finally student work was collected and analyzed. Thoughts and observations were recorded on a double-sided journal entry. Upon completion of the study all data was shredded.

The findings of this study suggest that LLI had a positive effect on student learning in this particular multi-age, special education classroom. Most of the students improved their overall reading level as well as specific skills and strategies taught and used daily in the program. The students in the study seemed to respond well and overall engagement took place on a daily basis.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Copyright .................................................................................................................... i
Signature Page ........................................................................................................... ii
Abstract ......................................................................................................................... iii
List of Tables ............................................................................................................... 2
List of Charts ............................................................................................................... 3
List of Graphs ............................................................................................................... 4
List of Photographs ...................................................................................................... 5
Chapter One: Introduction .......................................................................................... 6
Chapter Two: Review of Literature ............................................................................. 12
Chapter Three: Methodology ...................................................................................... 35
Chapter Four: Results and Findings .......................................................................... 46
Chapter Five: Conclusions and Recommendations .................................................. 85
Appendices................................................................................................................... 102
  IRB Online Training Course .................................................................................... 102
  Parent Letter ............................................................................................................ 103
  Consent for Observation ........................................................................................... 104
  Statement of Assent ................................................................................................. 105
  Principal Letter ......................................................................................................... 106
Bibliography ............................................................................................................... 107
LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: Initial DRA scores found in January ................................................................. 48
Table 2: Final DRA scores found in March ................................................................. 50
Table 3: DRA records from previous years ............................................................... 53
LIST OF CHARTS

Chart 1: DRA Conversion Chart.................................................................................................................. 49
LIST OF GRAPHS

Graph 1: Before and after DRA scores for each child ......................................................... 51
| Photograph 1: | Word work activity from the orange group; adding endings (suffixes). | 64 |
| Photograph 2: | Word work activity from the yellow group; sorting the sounds of y. | 65 |
| Photograph 3: | Word work activity the blue group: homophones. | 66 |
| Photograph 4: | A student reading an independent level book. | 70 |
| Photograph 5: | A student writing in his writing journal. | 74 |
| Photograph 6: | A student working independently on an extension activity. | 78 |
| Photograph 7: | Student work from a riddle extension activity | 79 |
| Photograph 8: | An extension activity where the student had to remember and write all the materials a boy took camping within a story. | 80 |
| Photograph 9: | A word work extension activity (ar & ay). | 81 |
| Photograph 10: | An extension activity where the student wrote two sentences about her reading. | 82 |
| Photograph 11: | Students reading independently by choice during the classroom morning routine. | 83 |
CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

There are multiple ways to teach reading at the elementary level (grades K-5). Many school districts and classrooms implement an instructional practice known as guided reading. Guided reading is a small group instructional method where students are homogeneously grouped and work on similar needs in reading. Students benefit from this small group instruction, known as guided reading because “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” (Fountas & Pinnell, 2001, pg. 193). Some students need extra support in their younger years through the use of early interventions. Providing early intervention for struggling readers can be critical to children’s future success in school. Studies have suggested that many children who fail to read and write well in their early school years will most likely continue to struggle as readers and writers in later grades (Juel, 1988).

A possible early intervention program that can be implemented by school districts and teachers is the Leveled Literacy Intervention (LLI) program (Fountas & Pinnell, 2009). LLI is a series of short, structured, guided reading lessons that use specific books, language, components and strategies. According to Heinemann’s official website, the LLI program consists of small-group instruction that provides supplementary learning for students. “The program is designed to help teachers provide powerful, daily, small-group instruction for the lowest achieving children in the early grades.” (http://www.heinemann.com/fountasandpinnell/lli_overview.aspx)

The LLI program is intended for children in kindergarten through second grade and is to be used with students who are having difficulty learning early reading and writing skills. There are three different systems that can be used as part of the program. For kindergarten students, the
Orange system is recommended (levels A-C). For first graders, the green system is
recommended (levels A-J). Finally for second graders, the Blue system is recommended (levels
C-N). The LLI program is not only appropriate for struggling readers in general education
classrooms, but for students with special needs and English Language Learners as well.

As a new teacher in a small rural school district, I had the opportunity to implement this
program in my special education, grade 3-5 multi-age classroom. Even though my students did
not exactly match the typical student population this program was intended for because of their
age, they fell within the students with special needs category. My students’ reading levels were
between kindergarten and second grade. Based on the students’ reading levels, they were
appropriate for the LLI Blue system. The Blue system was purchased to use in my school
through a special education grant. In implementing the program, I was curious to see how the
program impacted student learning in my classroom. When I implemented this program, I
incorporated it into my already scheduled guided reading centers. Through the research study, I
anticipated answering the following questions:

1. What impact does LLI have on student learning in a multi-age, special education
classroom?
2. What impact does LLI have on student comprehension, self-correction rates, and
fluency in a multi-age, special education classroom?
3. How are multi-age, special education students engaged with the different components
of LLI?

This research study was developed and intended to serve several purposes. First, I wanted
it to be a resource for teachers and administrators. Since LLI was a relatively new program, there
was not a lot of research out there yet. I think LLI could be a valuable program to consider when
thinking about struggling readers. Secondly, I wanted to show what impact (if any) LLI could possibly have on student learning over all. Finally, I wanted to discover how the students were engaged with all of the different components of LLI. The components of LLI include book talks, reading familiar text, reading new text, writing about reading, phonics/word work and independent extension activities.

Although there is extensive research on guided reading, including studies by Fawson and Reutzel (2000), Juel (1988), as well as Kaye (2002), there is very limited research on the specific LLI program. The program is relatively new, only published and released in 2009 by Irene C. Fountas and Gay Su Pinnell. The two main research studies so far on LLI were conducted by the Center for Research and Education Policy (CERP) at Memphis University. The first study was conducted before the program was publically released, as a way to collect initial data on the effectiveness of the LLI program. This study was performed by Harrison, Peterman, Grehan and Ross from the University of Memphis, along with Dexter from Lesley University and Inan from Texas University (2008). The second study was developed by Ransford-Kaldon, Flynt, Ross, Franceschini, Zoblotsky, Huang and Gallagher (2010). Both studies found positive results and effects on literacy behaviors for struggling readers and writers in grades K-3 through the use of this small group intervention program, LLI. First, children who struggle with literacy need to learn fast ways to automatically process oral and written language. Harrison, et al. found LLI provided opportunities for rapid processing through fast paced daily lessons (2008). Secondly, struggling readers also learn best when lessons follow a predictable sequence. In the LLI program, all lessons have the same basic structure, which allows the children to focus less on what comes next in the lesson and more on his or her processing, attention on reading, writing, and phonics and word study activities. (Harrison, et al., 2008). Finally, Ransford-Kaldon, et al.
found LLI to be effective in increasing literacy behaviors such as decoding, fluency and comprehension in a wide range of students. Some of these students included ELL students, students with special needs, and minority students in both rural and suburban settings, as well as economically disadvantaged children in both rural and suburban settings (2010).

In this particular research study I conducted in my classroom, I not only will hopefully give teachers valuable information about the LLI program, but give myself as the classroom teacher who is implementing the program, a more in depth knowledge of the impact it can have on student learning.

For the purpose of this study the following definitions were used:

1. Guided reading is defined as a teaching approach that is designed to help students learn how to process a variety of texts with accuracy, understanding and fluency. In the book, *When Readers Struggle: Teaching that Works*, guided reading is officially defined as:

   The teacher works with a small group of children who have similar enough needs that they can be taught together. From a series of texts organized by level of difficulty, the teacher selects a book that the children can read with support. The teacher provides explicit instruction to help the children read the text proficiently and at the same time learn more about the reading process. Guided reading usually included several minutes of explicit word work at the end of each lesson (Fountas & Pinnell, 2009, pg. 8).

2. The *Leveled Literacy Intervention* program by Irene Fountas and Gay Su Pinnell will also be referred to as LLI throughout the study. According the *Leveled Literacy Intervention: Program Guide* by Fountas and Pinnell, "Leveled Literacy Intervention, or LLI, is a small group, supplementary intervention designed for children who find reading and writing difficult. These children are the lowest achievers in literacy in their grade level and are not receiving another intervention" (2009, pg. 3).
3. Daily components of the LLI program will include the following; book talks, reading familiar text, reading new text (instructional and independent), writing about reading, phonics/word work, letter/word work, and independent extension activities (Fountas & Pinnell, 2009).

In this study, the program was taught daily in a center rotation throughout the six-week study. Students were taught in guided reading centers using LLI lessons. The lessons were short, intense 20 minute lessons. As the primary researcher, I followed the program guide to implement the specific structure and incorporate all parts and components of the program.

The structure of the program was very specific. First, the program had the students read one or two familiar texts to start each lesson. These texts were from previous lessons. Students were also introduced to new instructional level texts every other lesson. These texts were taught by teacher scaffolding before the student read the text independently. The students also wrote about their new text the day after it was introduced in a writing journal. On these days, the students read an independent level book as well. Students had opportunities for phonics and word work on a daily basis. Finally the students worked independently on extension activities. It took about two 20 minute guided reading lessons in my classroom to get through an entire lesson in the program manual. The lessons were numbered. Odd numbered days introduced a new text at the students' level and even numbered days had the students write about their reading while also introducing a text that was considered an "easy text", about one to two levels below their reading level.

Throughout the study, I explored the research questions through observations, which I made daily. I collected developmental Reading Assessments (DRAs), running records,
photographs and student work samples as well. These methods allowed me to collect data from multiple sources, and to be viewed from many angles, therefore creating triangulation.
CHAPTER TWO
REVIEW OF LITERATURE

While developing this study on *Leveled Literacy Intervention* (Fountas & Pinnell, 2009), I reviewed literature related to the topics of guided reading, early intervention and the specific *Leveled Literacy Intervention* (LLI) program. With the program being relatively new to my school district and new to me as a first year, full time special education teacher, I was interested in finding out how LLI impacted student learning in the area of literacy. I was looking at overall levels of reading through the use of Developmental Reading Assessments (DRA). I was looking at accuracy, as well as fluency, comprehension and self-correction rates on the DRAs. I also wanted to know how the program engaged the students in the different daily components it offered: book talks, reading familiar text, reading new text, phonics/word work, writing about reading and individual extension activities. All of the research done in this literature review had something valuable to offer in the areas of guided reading, early intervention or *Leveled Literacy Intervention*. In this review of literature chapter, I looked first at research on guided reading, then research on early intervention programs and finally research on the specific LLI program.

*Guided Reading*

Frank Smith (1979) maintains the idea that people learn to read by reading. The problem is that there is no guarantee a child will develop effective reading strategies by choosing and reading a book. Students will not develop strategies needed to be proficient readers by being assigned to read a passage and answer questions, either (Fountas & Pinnell, 2001). Smith believes that a teacher must create conditions to support the child’s development of effective reading strategies throughout this process (1979). Guided reading is a way to support students in this process. According to Iaquinta, “one particular research-based strategy, guided reading, is an
important “best practice” associated with today’s balanced literacy instruction” (2006, p. 413).

Guided reading is a teaching approach that can be used with a variety of readers, whether they struggle or are independent (Iaquinta, 2006). Fountas and Pinnell believe the guided reading approach has three fundamental purposes. First, the purpose is to meet the varying instructional needs of students. Next, the purpose is to teach students to read increasingly difficult levels of text. Finally, the purpose of guided reading is to allow the reader opportunities to construct meaning while using problem solving strategies (Fountas and Pinnell, 2001). Guided reading also provides opportunities for teachers to select books that are “just right” for their students. “The careful selection of “just right” texts together with your skillful introduction of the text provided ideal conditions for your students as they develop their reading skills” (Fountas & Pinnell, 2001, pg. 206). Through thoughtful planning and careful organization a teacher can guide students through lessons to support their growth in literacy on a daily basis.

Typically there is very limited time in the school day for guided reading. Most reading blocks average around an hour to an hour and a half. Since students are carefully grouped in small numbers by similar reading abilities in guided reading, a teacher usually has multiple groups a day to meet with. In order to meet with all the groups, lessons tend to be 20-30 minutes in length. Lessons should be well planned and highly organized to provide powerful, effective instruction. Lower-achieving students generally need more guidance and instruction; therefore a teacher should plan to meet with them every day. Higher achieving students can handle more on their own and generally won’t need to meet every day; however it is important to meet with them as often as possible to help refine and extend their skills and strategies (Fountas & Pinnell, 2001).
In well planned, organized guided reading lesson, there is a general framework to be followed. The structure of the framework can be found in Fountas and Pinnell’s book, *Guiding Readers and Writers: Grades 3-5: Teaching Comprehension, Genre, and Content Literacy* (2001). The first step in the process is to select an appropriate text. When selecting a text, it is important to remember three main points. First, a teacher must know and understand detailed information about all the students in the group, which includes levels, strengths, needs and interests. Secondly, a teacher should have knowledge on the texts that are available for use. A teacher can obtain this information by exploring school book rooms and/or talking to the reading teachers in the school. Thirdly, a teacher needs to have knowledge of the reading process and general principles of reading development (Fountas & Pinnell, 2001). This knowledge will support and guide daily lessons. The second step in the guided reading framework process is to introduce the text. This can be referred to as book talks, but Rogoff (1990) described introductions to text as “guided participation”. Students need good introductions to challenging texts to activate background knowledge. Book talks also provide an opportunity to discuss new vocabulary words, make connections and talk about text features and genres. Book talks allow scaffolding to take place, introducing a student to a text, which without a good introduction, may be too challenging to decode and process independently. “The “scaffold” provided by the text introduction will support effective processing of the text” (Fountas & Pinnell, 2001, pg. 209). The third step in the guided reading framework is to actually read the text. This is where a teacher can offer different levels of support to meet the needs of each student in the group. In a guided reading lesson, all students participate and all students read the entire book. There is no “round robin” reading, where each student takes a turn reading only part of the book. When each student takes a turn reading only part of the book, students are not provided with an opportunity
to process the text as a whole. By having each student read the entire book quietly, the teacher can listen and interact briefly with each student in the group as they read, but also spend more time with students who need more support. After the text is read, it is discussed and revisited as part of the framework. The discussion helps the student summarize and synthesize information, express connections, confirm and extend understanding, think critically, and converse with other students about understandings (Fountas & Pinnell, 2001). The final mandatory step in the guided reading framework is to teach for processing strategies. It is here where teachers highlight one or two strategies to work on for the day based on the groups’ needs. The strategies can come from observations or on-going assessments. In addition, there is an option to extend the meaning of the text through extension activities, as well as opportunities for additional word work if the teacher chooses.

Currently, reading instruction seems to be a routine part of the day for most children in the elementary grades in the United States of America, based on the No Child Left Behind Act and a push for higher standards by the U.S Department of Education (2002). During reading instruction, some teachers use a balanced literacy approach to reading instruction. One of the components includes guided reading. Other components include shared reading, independent reading and read aloud. According to Vacca, Vacca, Gove, Burkey, Lenhart and McKeon (2003) balanced literacy is defined as “a philosophical stance that recognizes the contributions of many different approaches and perspectives to teaching reading and writing” (p.607). When talking about guided reading, it is important for teachers to have a similar definition. According to Fountas and Pinnell, “guided reading is small-group instruction for students who read the same text. The group is homogeneous: the students read at about the same level, demonstrate similar reading behaviors, and share similar instructional needs” (2001, pg. 17). Guided reading offers
teachers an opportunity to work with smaller groups of students, typically three to eight students with similar levels and needs in reading. Some of these needs include, but are not limited to comprehension, decoding, self-correction and self-monitoring, fluency, phonics/word work and/or practice on a certain genre of reading. In guided reading the students should be working with both fiction and non-fiction text.

Guided reading groups should be flexible to allow for students to grow and develop. When students are working in guided reading groups, there need to be opportunities for the students to move either up or down based on progress. According to Fountas and Pinnell, “guided reading groups are temporary, an important difference from traditional grouping practice. Dynamic groups avoid the traditional problems of grouping because teachers change the composition of groups regularly to accommodate the different learning paths of readers” (2001, pg. 218). In traditional groupings, children were set into groups based on ability level only and rarely moved. Groups were often inflexible and more often than not, once a student was in a low group, they stayed in the low group (Hiebert 1983; Good & Marshall 1984). This can have detrimental effects on a student’s confidence level as well. Students in the low group tend to have lower self-esteem about their abilities. They often feel dumb, and less capable than their peers in the higher groups (Bossert, Barnett & Filby, 1984). In addition, Fountas and Pinnell state “grouping that is flexible and varied allows students to support one another as readers and to feel part of a community of readers” (2001, pg. 219). Iaquinta agrees with Fountas and Pinnell’s statement, saying students support each other and feel part of a community in dynamic, flexible groups (2006). With careful thought and planning, groups can be formed and re-formed for a variety of purposes throughout the school year.
Guided reading offers teachers an opportunity to work in the child’s zone of proximal development (ZPD). The Russian Psychologist, Lev Vygotsky (1978) presented educators with the idea that children have a zone of learning. When the child is working in that zone with the support and scaffolding of an adult, they grow and learn to their potential. Eventually the child can do independently what he or she could do with support only a few days or weeks prior. Gradually the learner takes over the new task and the teacher or adult will work to extend the learner even further on a new skill or area (Fountas & Pinnell, 2001). When the student is learning in her or his ZPD, it is believed the student is able to make the most growth, not just in reading, but in all subject areas. “Guided reading allows you to help students move forward in their reading development. Through specific teaching and careful text selection, you make it possible for students to learn more than they could on their own” (Fountas & Pinnell, 2001, pg. 191).

There is extensive research done on guided reading. Some of the well-known research on guided reading includes articles by Schirmer and Schaffer (2010), Stinnett (2009), Avalos, Plasencia, Chavez and Rascon (2007), and Yoon (2007).

In Stinnett’s 2009 article, two research articles were reviewed. Both studies were found in publications of The Reading Teacher. The first article reviewed was by Yoon (2007). The second article reviewed was conducted by Avalos, Plasencia, Chaves, & Rascon, (2007). In Yoon’s study, research was conducted on the teachers’ approaches to teaching. The focus was on opportunities for English Language Learners (ELLs) and their participation in literacy learning. The study compared two 6th grade teachers in the area of working with his or her ELLs in reading. Within the two classes, there were four ELLs, two in each room that participated. The major finding of the first study is that there is a direct link between the teacher’s approach and
level of participation by the students. Teachers play a vital role in offering opportunities for students to participate within classroom settings. This is important for teachers to remember when implementing a guided reading lesson. Teachers need a positive, supportive approach to instruction for most students to willingly participate. In the study, when the teacher provided a positive, supportive approach, like guided reading, the students were more willing to participate. The study found the students taking more risks when decoding new words, instead of just looking for a teacher to give the answer. The students made progress at a faster rate in terms of overall reading level, when involved in guided reading. The students also included more detail in retellings, showing greater comprehension through the use of guided reading (Yoon, 2007).

In the Avalos, et al., (2007) study, the authors described how teaching guided reading in a modified way can emphasize language and literacy for ELLs and other students. During the study, guided reading was taught in a modified way for nine months. Many opportunities were added for conversation and making text to self-connections. Shared reading was also added, as well as opportunities for read aloud to allow the teacher to demonstrate fluency. Word work and phonemic awareness were added to the modified guided reading approach in the study. Finally, the use of journals and writing were encouraged (Stinnett, 2009). The study found guided reading to be successful for the ELLs because they were motivated to learn. “All of the students enjoyed participating in the intervention and felt that they learned a great deal about reading, writing, and speaking English during the MGR sessions” (Stinnett, 2009, p. 78). This can make a difference on long-term literacy and reading skills. The students seemed to build confidence through the use of guided reading, which would hopefully continue to push their growth in literacy behaviors in the future. When the researchers looked at data throughout the study, they found an increase in overall literacy behaviors, like fluency, accuracy and comprehension. The
students were making gains and becoming better readers! Stinnett’s 2009 article was important to review for this literature review because it reviewed two other articles to show how teachers’ have an important role in motivating students in guided reading lessons as well as how students benefit from modified guided reading programs that include multiple components.

In Schirmer and Schaffer’s 2010 article, a study was conducted on a new teacher, Isabella, while she implemented the guided reading approach in her classroom. The students in the study were either deaf and/or students who struggled with reading. In the beginning of the study, Isabella sought out a model for teaching reading while also looking for a model which had a strong research base (Schirmer & Schaffer, 2010). She was interested in an approach that didn’t require a huge investment in new materials or additional training. Schirmer and Schaffer state “Fountas and Pinnell’s (1996) guided reading approach caught her attention; popular among general education teachers, Isabella also found that the guided reading approach is recommended by the Laurent Clerc National Deaf Education Center to use with Deaf students (Gallaudet University, 2009)” (2010, p. 53). In the study, Isabella found the guided reading approach to be successful with her deaf students and her struggling readers. She found her students were making improvements in their literacy behaviors, more specifically comprehension, fluency and word recognition during the study. The reason she believed guided reading to be successful with her students was because of the lesson structure guided reading provided. Schirmer and Schaffer state “one of the characteristics of the guided reading approach that Isabella particularly liked was that she could develop a template lesson structure for a week of reading instruction that she could adapt for each group” (2010, p. 55). Her template could include the four steps of guided reading and was flexible to meet the needs of her students. The four steps included in the article were: group students and select leveled books, introduce the
book, ask the students to read silently, and discuss (Schirmer & Schaffer, 2010). These steps matched Fountas and Pinnell’s previously mentioned framework (2001). In the study, guided reading was found to be flexible enough to use with any type of reading material. It also allowed flexibility in decisions about the selection of strategies for teaching word recognition, fluency, and comprehension on any given day. Finally, Schirmer and Schaffer state “the teacher can provide exactly the level of supportive instruction needed by students who are deaf and others who struggle with reading” (2010, p. 57).

Early Intervention

Powerful early intervention can change the path of a child’s journey in education, more specifically in the area of literacy. Bierman, Domitrovich, Nix, Gest, Welsh, Greenberg, Blair, Nelson and Gill (2008) state “in general, research suggests that comprehensive, high quality preschool programs can improve the school readiness of disadvantaged children, and have extended benefits over time (Barnett, 1995; Ramey & Ramey, 2004)”. Children who experience difficulties early on tend to continue to fall further behind their peers as they move through their educational journey (Stanovich, 1986). Early intervention programs offer children who may be or are prone to struggle with learning and reading, an opportunity to “catch” up to their peers. Some examples of familiar early intervention programs include Universal Pre-Kindergarten (UPK), Head Start, Reading Recovery and Leveled Literacy Intervention. The UPK and Head Start programs are designed to provide support and early learning in all areas of education to children before entering kindergarten. Reading Recovery and LLI are specific programs in the area of literacy designed to support students in the beginning years of elementary school, generally kindergarten through second grade. In UPK and Head Start, literacy is only one area of focus on the broad spectrum of early learning. “The early years of school are important for every
child, but for those who find literacy learning difficult, every one of these years is critical” (Fountas & Pinnell, 2009, pg. 3).

Head Start and UPK programs are both examples of early intervention programs offered to preschool age children. Head Start is a program developed in the United States designed to help children from birth to age five, who come from families with incomes below or at the poverty level. Head Start has been referred to as the nation’s “premier” federally sponsored early childhood education program by the U. S. Department of Health & Human Services. It was developed to reduce socio-economic disparities in school readiness (USDHHS, 2005). The major goal of Head Start is to help children from a lower socioeconomic status become ready for kindergarten, who would otherwise be at an unfair disadvantage compared to peers of a higher socioeconomic status. Head Start provides needed requirements like health care and food support for these children as well. President Lyndon Johnson approved Head Start in 1965 as part of his more comprehensive program that he termed the War on Poverty. UPK differs from Head Start in the fact that it is strictly a preschool program designed for four-year old children. The UPK program offers one year of support for preschoolers to get ready for kindergarten. Children who attend UPK can come from every socioeconomic status. Universal Pre-Kindergarten (Pre-K) programs differ from widely known programs like Head Start because availability and access is open to all children of the appropriate age and socio-economic status (Fitzpatrick, 2008). With the popularity of UPK increasing, most school districts place the names of interested UPK students in a lottery system in order to be selected to attend.

There are studies that demonstrate that both UPK and Head Start are successful programs. One study, done by Gormley and Phillips (2005), found success for UPK children in Tulsa, Oklahoma. The study compared groups of the same race; Caucasian students were
compared to Caucasian students, Hispanics to Hispanics, etc. The study looked at UPK children entering Kindergarten and assessed them on the Woodcock Johnson III test. The Woodcock Johnson III test measures many aspects of academic achievement with a wide variety of relatively brief tests and is generally used by special education teachers. Some aspects the Woodcock Johnson III measures include; letter-word identification, reading fluency, passage comprehension, word attack strategies, reading vocabulary, spelling, writing fluency, writing samples, editing, spelling of sounds, punctuation and capitalization, story recall, understanding directions, picture vocabulary, oral comprehension, math calculation, math fluency, applied problems, quantitative concepts, sounds awareness and academic knowledge (http://alpha.fdu.edu/psychology/woodcock_ach_descrip.htm). The UPK students were then compared at the end of the year to see if the scores were on average higher than the kindergarten students tested previously. They compared results for each. On average the students who participated in Tulsa’s UPK program scored 1-3 points higher in each section of the Woodcock Johnson III test, results being even higher for the Hispanic and African American students. The Tulsa pre-K program is one example of success where a systematic program can launch four-year-olds on a promising route into the elementary and secondary school years. Minority children within the study showed dramatic gains in cognitive and language skills, more than any other group studied. These gains can be used to predict solid kindergarten achievement (Gormley & Phillips, 2005). Although the results of this study are helpful to show that UPK can be successful, it does not mention any specific programs used to teach literacy. The study mentions the specific parts of the Woodcock Johnson III used to test the students for data. The three subtests selected in the study were the Spelling Test, which measures pre-writing skills; the Letter-Word Identification Test, which measures pre-reading skills; and the Applied Problems
Test, which measures pre-math skills. Gormley and Phillips selected these particular subtests because they are thought to be especially appropriate for young, preschool aged children.

The next successful early intervention program according to Puma, Bell, Cook, Heid and Lopez (2005), is the Head Start program. Head Start, like UPK is a broad program set up to cover multiple areas of support in education to lower socioeconomic preschool children. Overall, the study conducted by Puma et al. (2005), found significant impacts on the Pre-Reading Skills of children in two groups; the 3-year olds and the 4-year-olds. The skills of children in the Head Start program became evidently more advanced than those of the children who did not participate in the Head Start program. Significant differences were found both in children’s performances on the Woodcock-Johnson III Letter-Word Identification test and on the Letter Naming task (Puma et al, 2005). This study is similar to the previous study cited on UPK in terms of showing that the early intervention program is successful, but it does not mention specific literacy programs used. These programs are broad programs that include literacy as part of the intervention and support, but it is only one aspect of the program as a whole. Both studies show a benefit to the children’s learning as a whole for preschool age children. Both studies also show growth in the area of literacy based on the Woodcock Johnson III which is used to test multiple areas of literacy.

Reading Recovery is another early intervention program available. Reading Recovery is designed for school aged students. Reading Recovery is a program used with the lowest achieving readers in first grade. It is a short, intensive individualized program to help struggling readers gain knowledge and skills in reading to get them up to the same level as their peers. According to the Reading Recovery Council, the goal of Reading Recovery is to reduce the number of first graders who have extreme difficulty learning to read and write and in return
reduce the cost of these students to the educational systems. The intervention is most effective when it is available to all students who need it and is used as a supplementary program to good teaching already being done in the classroom. (http://www.readingrecovery.org/reading_recovery/facts/index.asp). When a child receives Reading Recovery support, the child works individually with a trained adult daily for a 30 minute session. The student works on texts at an individual level, phonics and word work and writing about reading. According to the Reading Recovery Council, there are two positive outcomes. The first positive outcome is since 1984, when Reading Recovery began in the United States, approximately 75% of students who complete the full 12- to 20-week intervention have been proven to meet grade-level expectations in reading and writing during his or her first grade year. Follow-up studies indicate that most Reading Recovery students continue on in higher grades to do well on standardized tests and maintain their success throughout their school years. (http://www.readingrecovery.org/reading_recovery/facts/index.asp). The second positive outcome is the few students who are still having difficulty in reading and writing after a complete intervention cycle are recommended for further evaluation. Recommendations may be made for future support in his or her learning career, including classroom support, Title I, learning disability referral, and or other special education recommendations. Reading Recovery represents a positive, supportive action on behalf of the child and the school. Diagnostic information obtained from Reading Recovery can be used to make informed decisions about future actions by the general education teacher, special education teachers, support staff and parents (http://www.readingrecovery.org/reading_recovery/facts/index.asp). According to the Reading Recovery Council, Reading Recovery is beneficial as an effective early intervention
program. It is more specific to literacy than UPK or Head Start. It is also used with older children and is a shorter, much more intense program.

Leveled Literacy Intervention is a similar program to Reading Recovery. They both use similar components. Both programs offer short intensive lessons by a trained professional. Both programs provide early intervention support. Instead of an individual program like Reading Recovery, LLI provides support to two or three students at a time.

**Leveled Literacy Intervention**

Although there is extensive research, including the articles by Stinnett (2009), Avalos, et al., (2007), and Yoon (2007) on guided reading as an instructional practice and early interventions for students, there are limited research studies on Fountas and Pinnell’s *Leveled Literacy Intervention* (LLI) as a specific program. According to the *Leveled Literacy Intervention Program Guide* by Fountas and Pinnell, “Leveled Literacy Intervention is a scientifically-based system that is designed to prevent literacy difficulties rather than correct long-term failure. It has been highly successful in achieving its goal of cutting across the path of literacy failure and bringing children to grade level performance in hundreds of school” (Fountas & Pinnell, 2009, pg.1). Initially, Fountas and Pinnell based the positive findings on a study conducted prior to the release of the program (Harrison, et al., 2008). LLI was published in 2009 and is still a relatively new program in education today. According to Fountas and Pinnell, “Leveled Literacy Intervention, or LLI, is a small group, supplementary intervention designed for children who find reading and writing difficult. These children are the lowest achievers in literacy in their grade level and are not receiving another intervention” (2009, pg. 3). LLI was developed to be used with a small group, two to three students at most. It is set up to run very
similar to a Reading Recovery lesson. When a reading teacher is using LLI as a supplementary program, he or she is able to service more struggling readers at one time.

The program was developed to support multiple areas of literacy development according to Fountas and Pinnell (2009). The first area of literacy the program was designed to support is oral language. The program makes instruction highly interactive, more like a conversation between adult and student, rather than a lecture lesson. The children are conversing and interacting on a daily basis to develop their speaking skills during LLI lessons. It expands a child’s vocabulary and knowledge of the spoken English language. It also gives children a chance to practice with the English language, learning the meaning of words and the structures of sentences (Fountas & Pinnell, 2009). Next the program supports reading. It uses a variety of reading engagements. The children are involved in shared reading, read aloud, independent reading. The students read both instructional level text as well as independent level text in the program. The students are exposed to both fiction and non-fiction texts. While the students are reading, they are working with comprehension skills, decoding skills, fluency skills as well as many other reading strategies on a daily basis. The LLI program also supports writing development. The students respond to their reading frequently in writing journals. The responses can be through shared writing or dictated sentences. Through the use of interactive writing lessons, students are guided through difficult writing procedures with teacher support. Finally the program supports phonics and word study skills. Each day the students are involved in a word study activity where they look at and manipulate words. This is done in a variety of ways, including the use of magnetic letters, word sorts, writing, worksheets and/or games. The students could potentially work with beginning sounds, prefixes, suffixes, blends, digraphs, vowel teams, word patterns, etc. at any given time. By incorporating all these areas of literacy, the program is
set up to support struggling readers and English Language learners as a whole, inclusive program.

The program is designed to be used with small groups of students in kindergarten, first or second grade, who need intense, additional support in literacy. There are three systems of materials available for LLI instruction. The systems are color coded and vary in levels. There is an Orange system, Green system and Blue system. Leveled Literacy Intervention is based on Fountas and Pinnell’s idea of gradient of text difficulty (2009). “Each level of text makes increasing demands on the reader, but the change is gradual. By engaging in intensively supportive lessons on each level, young readers have the opportunities to expand their reading and writing abilities. With the support of instruction, they stretch themselves to read more complex text with accuracy, fluency, and comprehension and to write more complex messages” (Fountas & Pinnell, 2009, pg.3). The Orange System is designed for Kindergarten students. “The books and lessons in the Orange System provide a large amount of easy reading for children who are having difficulty becoming oriented with print and learning the function of letters and sounds. The Orange System is designed to prevent future confusions by establishing a strong foundation at easy levels” (Fountas & Pinnell, 2009, pg. 8). There are 70 lessons on levels A through C in the Orange System. These lessons contain extensive work on phonological awareness, letters and phonics. The Green System provides 110 lessons on levels A through J. The Green System is developed to work with first grade students who are identified as reading below grade level. The Green System supports students with extensions of Orange System skills but adds the component of shared reading and interactive writing. First grade is where students become more familiar with print and develop early reading behaviors. Finally there is a Blue System in the LLI program. The Blue System contains 120 lessons between levels C through N.
The Blue System is helpful to second and third graders who are reading below grade level. The Blue System focuses on phonics, word work, comprehension and writing. The Blue System may also be used for students in higher grades that are reading below a level N. The Blue System has also been effective for students who have special needs and the activities within the system meet their program specifications (Fountas & Pinnell, 2009).

The LLI program is designed to help struggling readers achieve grade level requirements. As a whole, the program is designed to support the lowest achieving children in a classroom who are not receiving additional support. The program is also designed to support English language learners and special education students in any grade as well. A teacher may decide to include children who are identified as having special needs if the content of LLI meets the Individual Education Plan (IEP) of the student (Fountas & Pinnell, 2009). Even though the program is designed to be supplemental for the general education classroom, if a special education teacher decides to use it as his or her guided reading program with all the students, it fits nicely into a guided reading time block of 30 minutes. The lessons are designed to last 30 minutes but are very intense and fast paced. According to Fountas and Pinnell (2009), the lessons are split into odd and even day lessons. On odd days, the main focus is to have students working with a new text at their instructional level. On even days, the focus is on writing about the new text from the previous day. On even days a new, “easy” level text is introduced. These texts are generally about one to two levels below the student’s instructional level (Fountas & Pinnell, 2009).

There are several components involved in the LLI program. Students work with a variety of these components on a daily basis, but cover them all over two to three days. The first component is reading new texts at the student’s level (instructional level). This component provides teachers an opportunity to support and scaffold to push the students’ reading abilities.
The teacher introduces the text using a rich, in-depth book talk. A good book talk provides an opportunity to move through the text, introduce the students to new vocabulary words, new sight words and new concepts. The students can make connections to activate any background knowledge. After a good book talk, the students go back and read the book independently in a “whisper” voice. This allows the teacher to listen to each student read and offer support where each student needs it. This is one way the LLI program works in the child’s Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). “More challenging texts, which children read with scaffolding and support from the LLI teacher, give children the opportunity to acquire higher-level reading skills (Harrison, Grehan, Ross, & Inan, 2007, pg. 4). In addition, the students have opportunities every other lesson to read a new text that is 1-2 levels below their instructional level. When a student reads a text that is one to two levels below his or her guided reading level, he or she has an opportunity to boost his or her confidence. “Easier texts build fluency and give children success at reading that builds confidence and positive self-esteem” (Harrison, et al., 2007, pg.4). The children get the opportunity to work with both kinds of reading experiences during LLI (Harrison, et al., 2007, pg. 4).

The next component of the program is daily phonics/word work. Students are involved in some variation of word work on a daily bases through the use of LLI. Some lessons include work with beginning sounds, vowel teams, blends, diagraphs, vowel teams, ending sounds, etc. LLI emphasizes phonological awareness and phonics, fluency, comprehension, and other lessons around oral language skills, including vocabulary. More specifically, phonics instruction is a vital component of the program and follows a prearranged sequence of sound-letter relationships and spelling patterns used commonly in daily reading and writing. (Harrison, et al., 2007).
Children who struggle with reading often need that extra daily phonics and word work to make connections to their reading.

The program also offers writing support as an important component. Children who struggle with reading often struggle with writing. Reading and writing are interdependent processes but are essential to each other and beneficial to each other (Holt & Vacca, 1984). Every other lesson in the LLI program offers an opportunity to write about the instructional level book from the previous lesson in a writing journal. The program has the students involved in two types of writing, dictation and shared writing. Occasionally the students listen to dictations; this is more frequently found in the lower levels of text. As the students increase their reading ability, writing lessons begin to incorporate shared writing in the higher levels. When the teacher and students are composing sentences together it offers opportunities for shared writing. Once the children have their journal entry completed, the student reads the entry to the teacher and conventional corrections are made using correction tape. Finally the student can draw a picture to illustrate his or her writing.

Lastly, according to the program and lesson guides for LLI, the program has the students complete extension activities (Fountas & Pinnell, 2009). These activities are often completed independently. They help the students practice skills or remember texts on their own. These activities are aimed to push comprehension. An example of an extension activity for working at a level D (beginning of first grade) is to have the child draw a picture of character in the story. This pushes the child to think about and remember all the characters from the story. An example for a higher level text is to have the students label a diagram from a non-fiction text. In extension activities, students can also be working with word work, for example short or long vowels and
digraphs. The extension activities are all found in the lesson guide that comes with the program and can be printed from the program disc.

Although LLI and guided reading can sound very similar, they are different. Guided reading is the broad term used for small group reading instruction where LLI is a specific program used to teach reading. LLI is used as an intervention program for struggling readers (Fountas & Pinnell, 2009). It is a scripted, fast paced, intense program. It does not offer flexibility, teachers use the program guide and lesson book to teach with LLI. Generally, when a teacher creates guided reading lessons, there is flexibility in selecting books, teaching strategies, and providing a wide range of lessons. LLI is not the same, the teacher follows along in the lesson guide from day to day and implements the lesson already designed. Ideally LLI is used in addition to good guided reading instruction. LLI is a supplementary intervention program to be used in addition to guided reading (Fountas & Pinnell, 2009).

There are two well-known research studies on LLI. Both studies were conducted by the Center for Research and Education Policy (CERP) at Memphis University. The first study was conducted before the program was publically released, as a way to collect initial data on the effectiveness of the LLI program. This study was performed by Harrison, Peterman, Grehan and Ross from the University of Memphis, along with Dexter from Lesley University and Inan from Texas University (2008). The second study was developed by Ransford-Kaldon, Flynt, Ross, Franceschini, Zoblotsky, Huang and Gallagher (2010). This study was conducted after LLI was released for public use and is the study Fountas and Pinnell link to the LLI website to demonstrate effectiveness. Both studies found positive effects for struggling readers and writers in grades K-3 through the use of the small group intervention program. In the first study, pre-LLI tests showed only 5% of the students were reading at grade level. The study used the Gates-
MacGinitie Reading test. After the LLI intervention was used with the students, post-LLI tests showed 34% of students reading at grade level (Harrison, et al., 2008). In the second study, a randomized control-group study, LLI students in grades K-2 gained more in reading (decoding, fluency and accuracy), as measured by the Benchmark Assessment and/or DIBELS, than students in the control group (Ransford-Kaldon et al., 2010). The authors of the second study wrote: “across the three grade levels, the current study found that LLI positively impacts K-2 student literacy achievement in rural and suburban settings. Further, we determined that LLI is effective with ELL students, students with special needs, and minority students in both rural and suburban settings. Finally, the current study showed that LLI is effective with economically disadvantaged children in both rural and suburban settings” (Ransford-Kaldon, 2010, pg. 53).

According to the study done by Harrison et al. (2008), there are four main components behind the program’s success. First, the program follows a very structured predictable pattern. Struggling readers learn best when lessons follow a predictable sequence. In the LLI program, all lessons have the same basic structure, which allows the children to focus less on what comes next in the lesson and more on his or her processing attention on reading, writing, and phonics and word study activities. (Harrison, et al., 2008). Next the program offers the children an opportunity to learn with a fast paced intervention. Children who struggling with literacy, reading and writing more specifically need to learn fast ways to automatically process oral and written language. For this reason, LLI lessons are designed to be fast-paced, with specific literacy activities for each lesson of the program. The fast pace of the LLI program and individual lessons allows opportunities for rapid processing, and keeps children engaged in the lessons and motivates him or her to participate in the literacy activities and discussions. (Harrison, et al., 2008). The third key component in the program’s success is the link between
LLI, the classroom and home. “Literacy interventions should be linked to classroom instruction and the home environment. Children take LLI books home to read aloud to their parents, along with simple homework assignments, and they also may take books back to the classroom” (Harrison, et al., 2007, pg. 4). The LLI program offers opportunities for the student to take books home to share with his or her parents. This study suggests and demonstrates how this is a way for the parents to see and listen to the child read at his or her level. Finally the study presents one last key component in success. “A system of ongoing formative assessments gives teachers information about the student learning that can inform their instructional decision-making” (Harrison, et al., 2008, pg. 4). The study shows how assessment can be used to drive instruction, especially in the area of literacy. The study draws upon the running records, informal observations and Developmental Reading Assessments as ways to assess the participants.

*Guided Reading, Early Intervention Programs and Leveled Literacy Intervention*

Through many research studies, it has been shown that reading support can be carried out in multiple ways. This literature review looked at a wide variety of programs used to promote early literacy development. First, guided reading was reviewed to demonstrate the program as a whole and its possible effectiveness. A specific study by Stinnett (2009) was reviewed, which analyzed two additional studies on guided reading. The studies examined demonstrated how students were positively affected from being involved in the small group reading instruction. In addition, a study by Schirmer and Schaffer (2010) was reviewed, finding positive results for students who are deaf and/or struggle with reading. Guided reading is an appropriate support strategy to use with students all the way through high school and with a variety of readers, struggling or independent. Secondly, for younger preschool age children, broad support systems such as UPK or Head Start are beneficial for providing support to lower socioeconomic families.
Studies reviewed demonstrated the positive effects both UPK and Head Start programs have on preschool children. Although the programs vary, both provide support to develop early literacy behaviors in children prior to elementary school. Finally, when a child attends elementary school, early literacy programs can be provided through the school district. Some of the programs reviewed were Reading Recovery and LLI, which offer intense reading support. Reading Recovery and LLI are similar programs, the biggest difference being in how many students the program can support. Reading Recovery is an individualized program, where LLI can service two to three students in one group. LLI is a relatively new intervention program, only released in 2009. There are two main research studies completed at this point. One was completed before the study was released to collect data on initial effectiveness. The other study was completed after the release of the program and is now the study Fountas and Pinnell use on the LLI website to demonstrate effectiveness. My research study will look to investigate how LLI can impact student learning when implemented in a multi-age, special education classroom during guided reading time.
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to explore how Fountas and Pinnell’s guided reading program, *Leveled Literacy Intervention* (LLI) impacted student learning in a multi-age, special education classroom. According to the *Leveled Literacy Intervention Program Guide* by Fountas and Pinnell, "Leveled Literacy Intervention, or LLI, is a small group, supplementary intervention designed for children who find reading and writing difficult. These children are the lowest achievers in literacy in their grade level and are not receiving another intervention" (2009, pg. 3). *Leveled Literacy Intervention* is based on Fountas and Pinnell’s idea of gradient of text difficulty (2009). "Each level of text makes increasing demands on the reader, but the change is gradual. By engaging in intensively supportive lessons on each level, young readers have the opportunities to expand their reading and writing abilities. With the support of instruction, they stretch themselves to read more complex text with accuracy, fluency, and comprehension and to write more complex messages" (Fountas & Pinnell, 2009, pg.3).

The LLI program was purchased by my school district two years ago. There are three possible kits to use with struggling readers. The first and lowest kit is the Orange system. This kit is typically used with kindergarten students and contains leveled books between A and C. The second possible kit is the Green system. This kit is generally used with first graders and contains levels A through J. The final kit is the Blue system. This kit is used with second graders and contains levels C through N. Multiple kits in all varieties were purchased for use by the reading and special education department in the district. The Blue system was specifically purchased for the Intermediate building (3-5) to be used with struggling special education students. As a special education teacher in the building, I was one of the few selected to have the opportunity to
implement the program in my classroom. I was happy to have this opportunity and developed my research study around it. I used the Blue system in my research study. Throughout the study, I was interested in discovering the impact this program could possibly have on the struggling readers in my multi-age, special education classroom.

Throughout the study, I collected data and looked explicitly at whether and how the program impacted student learning. I focused on reading levels and literacy behaviors exhibited by the participants. I also looked closely at how the students were engaged with all the different components of the program. Some of the components of the LLI program included book talks, reading new instructional level text, reading independent level text, rereading familiar text, writing about text, word/phonics work and extension activities.

In completing this study, I hoped to discover valuable, in depth information about my students as well as see an improvement in their overall reading abilities. I was also hopeful this study would be valuable to other professionals upon completion because of how in depth I looked at the program. I was hopeful the study would demonstrate how the program could be successful in a classroom as well.

The research question(s) for the study were:

1. What impact does LLI have on student learning?
2. What impact does LLI have on student comprehension, self-correction rates, and fluency?
3. How are the students engaged with the different components of LLI?
Participant Selection and Research Environment

The school district I used in this study was located in a small rural area. The school district was made up of four schools; one primary school building (K-2), one intermediate school building (3-5), one middle school (6-8) and one high school (9-12). The study took place in the intermediate building. The school district was made up of around 2,100 total students at the time of the study, and about 500 of those students were in the Intermediate building.

The sample for this study was my own multi-age, special education classroom. It was in this room that all the data collection occurred and observations took place. The students were placed in this special education classroom based on their specific learning needs. All of the students had Individual Education Plans (IEPs). Most of the students had severe learning disabilities and/or speech impairments that affected their learning. The students could not function to their full potential in a general education setting because of intense academic needs and/or behavioral issues. In this classroom, most of the students were performing about two grades below grade level in all academic areas. My classroom also consisted of numerous support staff that either pushed in or pulled out during the school day. Some of these teachers consisted of the occupational therapist, physical therapist, speech and language therapist and school social worker for counseling services. My classroom was also made up of two full time teaching assistants (TA), as well. This classroom was a 12:1:1 classroom, which meant there could be up to twelve students, one teacher and one teaching assistant. During the time of the study, my classroom only had eight students, one teacher and two teaching assistants.

Of the eight students in the classroom, two were female and six were male. Seven of the students were Caucasian and came from English speaking families. One of the students was
African American, and also came from an English speaking family. Most of the students came from middle to lower socioeconomic status, based on free and reduced lunch status. All of the students lived within the school district boundaries.

As the teacher researcher in this public school classroom, I had the wonderful opportunity to apply my findings directly to my work with my students. At the time of the study, I had three teaching certifications; early childhood (B-2), childhood education (1-6) and students with disabilities (1-6). I was also eligible for my students with disabilities (B-2) certification as well. At the time of the study I was pursuing my Master’s degree in childhood literacy. I am a 27 year old, Caucasian, middle class, English speaking American female. During the study, I lived in a suburban town about 25 minutes away from the in which school I taught. As the main teacher in this classroom, I was beginning my fourth year teaching, but my first full year as a special education teacher in this 12:1:1 classroom. The two teaching assistants were also Caucasian, middle class women. One was in her middle forties and lived within the school district boundaries. This was her fourth year in this classroom. The other TA was in her early thirties and lived in a rural town about 20 minutes outside of the school district. This was her second year in the classroom.

Before I began my study, I was approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) to conduct this study in my classroom. At the beginning of the study, the children received a letter to bring home to their parents/guardians explaining the research study taking place in the classroom (Attached in appendices). The letter was attached to a consent form, which explained the study, student confidentiality, and observation methods (Attached in appendices). Parents could choose to sign and return the consent form if they gave permission for their students to participate. If the consent form was returned, I read an assent form to the student so he or she
understood the study (Attached in appendices). After the assent form was read, I asked the student to sign his or her name on the form. If the student did not want to participate in the study, he or she could chose not to sign the assent form. At any time during the study, the student could decide if he or she wanted to stop participating. If a student was not participating in the study for any reason, he or she was still involved in the LLI guided reading program; I just did not collect data on that student. Seven of the eight students ended up participating.

In order to ensure confidentiality, I assigned pseudonyms to all students who participated in the study. When discussing findings, I used pseudonyms to refer to participants. I was the only person who had access to the names that corresponded to the pseudonyms. I kept all the data in a locked filing cabinet during the study and destroyed all materials upon completion of the study.

*Instructional Methods for Study*

The study took place in my grades 3-5 multi-age, special education classroom. Since the study began in January 2011, I was able to incorporate the LLI program into already scheduled guided reading centers set up in the beginning of the school year. The reading centers took place in the morning from 9:00am to 10:00am. The students were involved in three reading related centers. In this study the centers were LLI, a *Fundations* reading program which focused on phonics (Wilson, 2004), as well as another academic center. Each week during the six-week study, I taught three different LLI reading centers on a daily basis. I saw each guided reading group for 20 minutes.

Throughout the study, two groups had three students and one group had two students. During the sessions I observed and reflected on how the students were learning and/or being impacted, materials being used and how the students were engaged in the components.
Data Collection

Throughout the study, I used a qualitative research methodology. I collected data using naturalistic observations, documentations, student work, photographs and self-reflections. I was able to examine how the program involved students in different areas and components of guided reading using LLI.

During the study, I collected data through DRAs, running records, observations, double-sided journal entries and photographs. Throughout the study, I tried to minimize the interruption of data collection during LLI instruction. LLI data collection naturally fell into previously determined guided reading time. Data were collected during the study on average three days a week. I collected data on each guided reading group separately. Informal observations took place during each LLI lesson and recorded on an as-needed basis.

To begin my data collection, I collected a Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA) on each student participating in the study. I collected another DRA upon completion of the study. I collected the DRAs outside of reading centers to minimize interruption to the LLI instruction. To collect DRAs this often was more than I typically collected them, therefore only the students participating in the study had the extra DRAs. The DRAs were taken to collect information on each student’s reading level, including accuracy, fluency and comprehension. I used the two DRAs to compare and contrast to analyze for any growth at the end of the study.

Throughout the study, I also used running records as part of the LLI program, as well. Every other lesson, there was a running record form to be printed and given to the student on the new instructional level guided reading book. I gave those running records as they were designed to be. Throughout the study, the running records taken were collected and analyzed at a later time in the school day. I kept thoughts and responses to the running records on a double-sided
I was collecting data on accuracy rate, fluency and comprehension through the use of the running records. I also looked closely at data on errors and self-corrections. This provided me with a window into the child’s thinking process by using miscue analysis on the running records. Collecting data using the running records helped me begin to answer my first research question: What impact does LLI have on student learning? As well as my second research question: What impact does LLI have on student comprehension, self-correction rates, and fluency?

During the study, I made observations during the LLI lessons as well. Throughout the study, most of my data came from observations during the LLI lessons. I informally observed the students as they were participating in the program. Observations were recorded approximately three times per week for each LLI guided reading group. I recorded observations upon completion of the lesson, within the same day. I recorded observations on how the students were engaged with the LLI components and/or how student learning was impacted by the LLI lessons. I recorded the informal observations on a double sided journal entry.

I used the double-sided journal entries as another form of data collection throughout the study. My observations, thoughts and reflections were made on the double-sided journal entry. I used one side for my observations and one side was for my thoughts and responses. I was able to revisit these entries after some time to make connections or record new thoughts or responses. Double-sided journal entries were noted at any point in the study where I needed to record something, for example after a DRA, after a running record, after a lesson or making notes about photographs or student work samples. I kept the double-sided journal entries in a small three ring binder for the entire study. Data collected using the double-sided journal entries allowed me to
capture how the students were impacted by the program as well as how the students were engaged with the different components of the program.

Additionally, I took photographs throughout the study. I used the photographs to capture the students working on a daily basis within the LLI program. The photographs I captured hopefully showed how the students were engaged with the LLI components. Once the photographs were captured, I used my double sided journal to reflect on the photographs. Although I had my camera present during each LLI lesson, I only collected photographs periodically. I used my personal judgment to take a photograph as I saw necessary, while trying to minimize the possibility of distraction to the LLI lesson.

Finally, I collected student work samples throughout the study. The work samples were collected after the student had completed them. I collected most of the work samples on extension activities included as part of the program. The students completed the extension activities independently at the end of each lesson. The extension activities provided data on how student learning was impacted by the program and how the students were engaged with this specific component of the program.

Data Analysis

The data analysis began at the start of the study and done through a constant comparison method. When I made observations on the DRAs, running records or daily lessons and recorded my questions and thoughts, I used them to further push my data collection. I aimed to clarify those questions and thoughts, which in return, pushed my future data collection. It was an ongoing cycle that took place throughout the study. This method offered me an opportunity to get even more in depth with my research and data collection.
Data were also analyzed by looking for emerging patterns and common themes that came out of observations, work samples, running records, DRAs and photographs. Throughout the study I was constantly comparing double-sided journal entries for any common themes to emerge. Once I had a good amount of data collected, I began to see a lot of my entries had to do with increased confidence. As this pattern began to emerge, entries were color coded in order to help organize for this common theme, and possibly more. I created a chart to assist with comprehension and organization of the data. I looked for patterns in how the students were impacted by the LLI program as well as how the students were engaged with the program. Data were analyzed throughout the study as well as upon completion of the study. Data were analyzed until no new patterns emerged.

I also used charts and graphs to compare and contrast data. I used the chart to analyze and compare students’ reading levels using the DRA data. I entered the initial level on the chart as well as the level at which the student finished the six-week study. I also used a bar graph to compare and contrast growth. All the students who participated in the study were included on the chart and bar graph.

I used miscue analysis to analyze the running records in the study. Miscue analysis was developed by Kenneth Goodman (1982) and developed by other researchers (Goodman, Watson & Burke, 1987) as an assessment tool. “It provides an in-depth analysis of a student’s reading behavior and text processing, yielding specific information about that student’s reading ability and also helps you to add your own knowledge of the reading process” (Fountas & Pinnell, 2001, pg. 489). I used miscue analysis as an in depth way of looking at the running records in my study. I used miscue analysis to analyze if the student was making miscues (reading errors) using the visual, semantic and/or syntactic cueing systems. The visual cueing system looks at how the
student is using the visual information while reading. Some questions I asked myself when looking at visual information included: Was the student using the first letter to solve a word? Was he or she using familiar “chunks” to solve words? A student can also use semantic information when solving unknown words. When a student was using the semantic cueing system during the study, the miscue still made sense. The student was reading for meaning. Finally a student can use the syntactic cueing system to solve a word. When a student used the syntactic cueing system the miscue was still grammatically correct. By using miscue analysis I was able to see if a student was over using one cueing system and/or possibly not using one of the other cueing systems at all. If this was the case, strategies needed to be taught during guided reading using LLI to teach the students how to use other cueing systems. As miscue analysis was done, I began to compare and contrast running records to look for growth in the students’ reading process. When a child was making miscues that were visually, syntactically and semantically correct, it was considered a high quality miscue. As a teacher, if my students were making miscues, I wanted them to be high quality. I recorded and reflected about the miscue analysis in my journal entries. Again, I was looking for patterns to emerge.

Finally, I analyzed photographs and student work samples for patterns to emerge as well. I was looking for how the students were engaged in the components of LLI and how students were impacted by the program overall. I color coded photographs and work samples to show any common themes or patterns that emerged. The photographs and work samples are included in my results and findings section.

Triangulation occurred as a result of multiple methods of data collection and analysis methods, providing results that were both valid and reliable throughout the study. I was looking for patterns and themes across all of the data I collected during the six weeks of the study.
Limitations

Throughout the study, there was one significant limitation I found. Research using this multi-age, special education classroom was being completed on a very small population of students. There were only seven participants in this study. This population was not a typical, general education classroom. Results and findings will allow educators who work with a special education population to make comparisons to their classrooms or experiences through the use of a thick, descriptive write up in the results and finding section of this research study. However, the results and findings section will still be helpful to general education teachers who are either unfamiliar with the program, looking for a way to help struggling readers and/or have the opportunity to implement LLI in their own teaching.
CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS AND FINDINGS

The objective of this project was to examine the impact of *Leveled Literacy Intervention* (LLI) on student learning in a multi-age, special education classroom. The research was conducted in a rural public school in Western New York. The entire study took place in my own classroom. I used the *Leveled Literacy Intervention* program during scheduled guided reading time with seven students in my multi-age, special education classroom. The students were taught and observed for six weeks during this research study. The main research question I was hoping to answer throughout the study was: What impact does LLI have on student learning in a multi-age, special education classroom? There were also two sub-questions I was trying to answer throughout the study as well: What impact does LLI have on student comprehension, self-correction rates, and fluency in a multi-age, special education classroom? How are multi-age, special education students engaged with the different components of LLI? The results in this study were consistent with previous studies (Harrison L., Grehan, A., Ross, S. & Inan, F, 2007; Ransford-Kaldon, C.R., Flynt, E.S., Ross, C.L., Franceschini, L., Zoblotsky, T., Huang, Y., & Gallagher, B., 2010); LLI impacted student learning and increased literacy behaviors.

This project was intended for me to reflect and modify my guided reading centers to better meet the needs of my special education students. I wanted to better scaffold my students’ literacy understanding and was hoping the use of LLI could help me accomplish that. Furthermore, through personal reflection on my own teaching and my students’ engagement and learning, I wanted to know ways I could change my teaching practices to have guided reading centers benefit students’ understanding of reading skills and strategies as much as possible.
Throughout this LLI research study the students were divided into three groups. Each group had two to three students in it. Each student was given a pseudonym to be used throughout the study. The groups were labeled by colors. The orange group consisted of Tom, George and Isaac. This group was the “lowest” guided reading level group. They are reading at a low first grade level. The orange group consisted of two fourth graders and one third grader. The next group was the yellow group; this was the “middle” group. This group consisted of three students, but only two participated in the study, Jake and Bob. Jake is a fourth grader and Bob is a fifth grader. The last group consisted of two girls. It was the blue group and it was the “highest” reading level group. Sally is a fifth grader and Holly is a fourth grader. The students rotated through the guided reading center among other centers, including a phonic based program known as Fundations (Wilson, 2004). Depending on the day, the students were also possibly participating in a push-in speech center or a pull-out math center.

As part of the research study, the participants were given an initial assessment using the Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA) on January 31, 2011. I reviewed each of the DRAs for accuracy, self-correction rates, miscues, speed and comprehension. The students’ instructional level was determined from the assessment. The DRA level was used to determine a starting level and group placement for this LLI research study. The initial instruction levels can be found on the table below and were used as base scores throughout the study.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Pseudonym</th>
<th>Grade Level in School</th>
<th>Initial DRA Score</th>
<th>Grade Level Equivalent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sally</td>
<td>5th Grade</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>2nd Grade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Holly</td>
<td>4th Grade</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>2nd Grade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jake</td>
<td>4th Grade</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>1st – 2nd Grade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bob</td>
<td>5th Grade</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1st Grade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tom</td>
<td>3rd Grade</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1st Grade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>George</td>
<td>4th Grade</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1st Grade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isaac</td>
<td>4th Grade</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1st Grade</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1. Initial DRA scores found in January

As the results from the initial DRA shows, all of the students in the multi-age classroom are reading below grade level. According to DRA/grade level conversion chart found as Chart 1 (http://www.perfectionlearning.com/images/products/pdfs/rlChart.pdf), the students in this classroom were reading on average two to three grade levels below their same aged peers.
### READING LEVEL CHART

This leveling chart approximates how these leveling systems relate to grade levels and one another.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GRADE LEVEL</th>
<th>GR</th>
<th>EI</th>
<th>DRA/EDL</th>
<th>LEXILE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>K</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K-1</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K-1</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>3-4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-2</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>5-6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>E</td>
<td>7-8</td>
<td>5-8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>9-10</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>11-12</td>
<td>12</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-2</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>13-14</td>
<td>14</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-2</td>
<td>I</td>
<td>15-16</td>
<td>16</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>J</td>
<td>17-18</td>
<td>18</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>K</td>
<td>19-20</td>
<td>20</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2-3</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>24</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2-3</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>28</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>30</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-4</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>34</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-4</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>38</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Q</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>40</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>R</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>40</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-5</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>44</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-5</td>
<td>T</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>44</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>U</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>44</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-6</td>
<td>V</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>44</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-6</td>
<td>W</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>50</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-8</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>60-65</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-8</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>65-70</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7-8</td>
<td>Z</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>70-80</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**GR—Guided Reading Level**


Titles have been leveled by Perfection Learning according to the guidelines recommended by Fountas & Pinnell.

**EI—Early Intervention Level**

**DRA—Developmental Reading Assessment Level**


**EDL—Evolution del Desarrollo de la Lectura**

The Spanish version of the Developmental Reading Assessment Levels.

**Lexile—Lexile Level**

"Lexile" and "The Lexile Framework" are trademarks of MetaMetrics, Inc.
As the study came to a conclusion, the six participating students were assessed again using the DRA assessment. This allowed me, as the primary researcher to compare overall growth in the students’ reading level using the LLI program. Again, different factors such as accuracy, speed, comprehension, self-corrections and miscues were being assessed to find the students’ instructional reading level. The students’ final DRA instructional levels were determined as follows.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Pseudonym</th>
<th>Grade Level in School</th>
<th>Final DRA Score</th>
<th>Grade Level Equivalent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sally</td>
<td>5th Grade</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>2nd Grade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Holly</td>
<td>4th Grade</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>2nd Grade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jake</td>
<td>4th Grade</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>1st Grade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bob</td>
<td>5th Grade</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>1st Grade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tom</td>
<td>3rd Grade</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1st Grade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>George</td>
<td>4th Grade</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1st Grade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isaac</td>
<td>4th Grade</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1st Grade</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. Final DRA scores found in March

According to the data collected at the beginning of the study and at the end of the study, six of the seven students participating in the study made growth in the overall DRA scores. LLI impacted six of the seven students positively. Below is a graph further comparing the initial and final DRA scores for each student participating. The first bar is the initial DRA score and the second bar is the final DRA score. The chart is organized by descending scores.
Five of the seven participants grew one level in reading and one student grew two reading levels. According to the data, one student also went down one reading level. For the students participating in this study who have compounding learning needs, any growth made was considered to be significant. According to student files and records, some of these students in previous years would increase one DRA reading level in an entire school year (Table 3). This will be expanded upon below. These results show six of the seven students making progress and being positively impacted by the involvement in the LLI program.

As shown in the data above, two of the three groups had steady growth. The students in the blue group (Sara and Holly) and the students in the yellow group (Jake and Bob) all increased their reading levels by one over the six-week study. The orange group was not as consistent throughout the study. The orange group seemed to have more factors that played into their guided reading time. First of all, Isaac actually fell one level in his DRA instructional level score. Throughout the study (and school year) Isaac had very poor attendance as well as many behavior issues. Isaac is very low in his reading; he is a fourth grader reading at a kindergarten
level. He was making steady progress in the beginning of the school year (September –
December) when his behavior was under control and he was attending school more consistently.
Since January Isaac began a steady downward slide in his learning, which was displayed in the
results of this study. Throughout the school year, Isaac missed 21 days of school and was tardy
33 days. The majority of those days took place between the months of January and May, which
affected his participation in this study (January-March). Since his guided reading group took
place from 9:00 to 9:20 each morning, when Isaac came to school late he missed LLI reading
instruction completely. He also was very inconsistent with his medication therapy during
February and March, which affected his behavior and participation in guided reading as well.
There were days were he would lie on the carpet in the classroom and refuse to participate in any
activity. Often he would need to be removed from the classroom because of unsafe behavior and
distraction to the other students. Behavior issues took place seven times in February and five
times in March. Often the behavior issues started when he came to school and lasted the majority
of the school day. This is a student who needs to get his attendance and behavior under control
before he will make progress in his reading, no matter what program is being used in the
classroom. He simply needs to be in school and ready to learn before he can make growth
academically.

Another factor that affected the orange group was three of the five guided reading days
George rotated through centers with the Blue group to accommodate the speech teacher’s need to
see him with certain students outside the classroom. George was not able to work in the blue
group during guided reading because the levels were so far apart (DRA 18 versus DRA 6) so he
often worked on his lessons one on one with one of the teaching assistants in the room during
morning centers. She is a certified teacher and was able to carry out his lessons to accommodate
his needs. He maintained steady growth throughout the study and increased his reading level by one. This left Tom as the third participant in the orange group. Due to Isaac’s inconsistencies and George’s situation, Tom and I often worked one to one during his guided reading lessons. With all the extra support, Tom grew two reading levels in six weeks using the LLI program. Tom was getting an experience much closer to Reading Recovery than any of his classmates and it was displayed in the results of the study.

As mentioned above, some of the students only made progress of one reading level over an entire year prior to LLI. I was able to retrieve the students’ DRA records from previous years in the intermediate building (3-5). Results are shown below in table 3. I was also able to include data from where the students ended in June of 2011 with the continued use of LLI even after the study ended in March.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Pseudonym</th>
<th>2008-2009 DRA Range (Beginning to End)</th>
<th>2009-2010 DRA Range (Beginning to End)</th>
<th>Fall 2010 DRA Range</th>
<th>Ending DRA in June 2011</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sally</td>
<td>14 - 16</td>
<td>16 - 18</td>
<td>18 - 18</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Holly</td>
<td>Out of District</td>
<td>14 - 18</td>
<td>16 - 18</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jake</td>
<td>Primary School</td>
<td>12 - 14</td>
<td>14 - 14</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bob</td>
<td>6 - 8</td>
<td>8 - 10</td>
<td>8 - 10</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tom</td>
<td>Primary School</td>
<td>Primary School</td>
<td>6 - 6</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>George</td>
<td>Primary School</td>
<td>4 - 6</td>
<td>6 - 6</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isaac</td>
<td>Primary School</td>
<td>3 - 3</td>
<td>3 - 4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3. DRA records from previous years
According the results of the study, LLI had much more of an impact on the students’ learning in literacy than their guided reading instruction had in previous years.

Emerging Themes through the use of LLI Components

Throughout the study the students were involved in multiple components as part of the curricular structure of the program to help increase overall reading levels. It is important to understand these components as part of the study because they were included in the everyday instruction of the students. The components of the LLI program were the intervention of my study. The instruction, through the use of components, is what helped the students grow and develop throughout the study on a daily basis. Some of the components frequently implemented within the LLI lessons were: book talks to activate background knowledge (schema), daily word work, reading instructional level texts, reading independent level texts, rereading familiar texts, writing about reading and extension activities. Not every component was a part of every lesson, but every two to three days each student would be exposed to all the components. All of these components of the LLI program matched with daily teaching of self-correction and monitoring, reading for meaning and fluency helped impact the students’ learning during this six week study. For each example of the LLI component I discuss in this section, I will write about an emerging theme I found as well.

Developmental Reading Assessments were used in the LLI study as well, as mentioned above. Not only were the DRA scores used to find initial and final reading levels for each student, the DRAs were analyzed for much more in this LLI study. If the DRA is further analyzed for accuracy, self-correction rate, fluency and comprehension a teacher can gain further insight into the students’ reading behaviors. In this study the DRA number score was my starting and my ending point as mentioned above, but the DRA offered so much more to me as the
teacher researcher. I analyzed the specific accuracy rate, self-correction rate, fluency and comprehension to gain more information for the study and to attempt to answer my second research question: What impact does LLI have on student comprehension, self-correction rates, and fluency in a multi-age, special education classroom? Analyzing the initial DRA also gave insight into where additional instruction should take place for each student as well. If a student had a low comprehension score on the initial DRA score, during the study that would be an area of focus. I could navigate through the components of LLI to make sure I was helping the students in his or her area of need as much as possible in daily lessons.

Moving through the study and teaching with the components of LLI, I found two emerging themes. The two themes were an increase in students’ self-confidence while reading and an increase in students’ ability to make relevant connections. One of these connections allowed the students to increase their comprehension while reading during LLI lessons. Another connection was between the Fundations program and the LLI program, mostly during word work. As I write about the specific components below and how they were used in LLI, I will also be writing about the themes and the different situations in which I saw them emerge. I will write about the components in the following order: book talks, word work, reading different levels of text, writing about reading and extension activities.

Book Talks

In the LLI program, in each lesson where a new book was introduced there was an opportunity for a book talk. The teacher’s lesson guide book states exactly what the teacher is supposed to say but allows for discussion to take place to involve the students as much as possible. The goal of the book talks in each lesson was to activate background knowledge, make connections, introduce new vocabulary words and get the students “hooked”. The students and I
as the teacher researcher would look at the pages in the book and discuss important parts, but the ending was usually saved for the student to read independently. During the study, all of the groups were antsy to read the ending during a book talk because they wanted to find out what happened. The LLI book talks got them engaged and interested in the reading. It truly was a "hook" for the students and I saw increased engagement on several occasions. I also found it increased the students’ excitement to come to guided reading each day. I made a lot of observational notes of smiles and excitement through body language when the students would come to my LLI center. On many occasions, Tom would run from his previous center to my LLI center because he was so excited. The students seemed to enjoy the stories and series that were used in the program. I found the books to be cute and engaging stories with a lot of animal characters. The non-fiction stories were usually interesting and engaging as well. A lot of non-fiction stories were about animals too which this group of students seemed to respond well to. As the teacher researcher I could understand why the students seemed to enjoy them, I enjoyed reading the books during the lessons with the students as well. The majority of the discussion took place as part of the introduction to the book in the daily lessons. Discussions and book talks took place daily for all the levels of books being introduced (instructional or independent). The discussion allowed the students to talk with each other and the adult leading the lesson about any background knowledge they may have. There are key points written in the lesson book to help the adult facilitate the discussion, but the children were able to talk freely about their background knowledge and any connections or questions that came up.

I found throughout the study the children were making a lot of good connections to the books to activate their schema. For example, they often discussed other books in familiar series or personal connections. The students’ favorite series were the Meli Series, the Fox Family series
and the Fix-It Family series (Heinemann, 2011). There are multiple books in all of the series throughout all of the reading levels. The students would often revisit a new book in each series as they moved up in reading levels. It was the book talk part of the lessons that allowed the students to make those rich text-to-text connections and text-to-self connections. I did not find the students making many text-to-world connections during the study. The study revealed text to world connections as an area of weakness for the students and we can focus on this strategy in future lessons. I found that the students in the orange group were able to make the most connections, both text to text and text to self. The orange group was the “lowest” level of readers participating in the study, so this was an interesting discovery for me as their teacher. In all of the book discussions I observed and recorded, George and Tim were consistently contributing to the discussions. They enjoyed talking about text to self-connections and experiences. Although they were my group to consistently activate their schemas, they were also the group that most frequently went off on tangents. In many discussions, they needed to be “pulled” back into relevant conversations that pertained to the book. The blue group struggled the most with this strategy. Sally was able to make basic connections and occasionally went off tangent with text to self-connections. Holly really struggled with this strategy. In the yellow group, Bob was able to make vague connections and talk about his background knowledge briefly. Jake had a difficult time with this task. Jake has a love for snakes. He was able to make any connections from any book to snakes, and then he would go off topic about snakes until an adult brought him back to what the book was really about.

One example of a really great book discussion that took place during the study was with the orange group on February 9, 2011. The new book was titled *Fishing*. The students all had a lot of background knowledge about this and they were all interested in making text to self-
connections to share a personal story. George discussed how he goes fishing with his grandpa. They live right by the Erie Canal and they frequently wake up early on the weekend to go fishing for fun. Isaac talked about how he goes fishing with his brother and his dad in the summer. Tom discussed how he fishes with family in the summer when they go on a family vacation. All of the boys stayed on topic and the personal connections helped push their understanding of the story before they even read it. As we looked at the pictures together it allowed for more discussion to occur. The author in this story used the word fishing rod instead of fishing pole. We read and discussed this vocabulary word. Once our discussion was done, the boys read the story in a whisper voice as I listened to each of them. All the boys read the story with 100% accuracy and high comprehension. Each of the boys was able to retell the story with details and in sequential order. This included the characters (a dad and a girl) got up, ate breakfast, packed a lunch, put on their boots, fished with a fishing rod and caught a fish. The dad had a big breakfast, a big lunch, big boots and a big fishing rod. The girl had a small breakfast, a small lunch, small boots and a small fishing rod. In the end the dad caught the small fish and the girl caught the big fish. Some of these things were discussed during our book talk but the rest, the student had to read and understand. Through the use of LLI, I found when the students are introduced to the book, it took away the extra element of surprise and struggle in trying to think about what was going to happen next. It allows the student to focus on reading the story for meaning. They tend to be more confident in their reading within the LLI framework. When the student had already made the text to self-connection during the book talk, they can use that to push comprehension and remember the story when it came time to retell. It also engaged them in the story when they made a text to self-connection.
As I taught using the LLI program during this study, it made me think back upon my first year of teaching when I thought I knew what a good book talk was. I often found myself going through a book, looking at the pictures and maybe discussing a few new words the student would be introduced to. No real discussion ever took place. I was always baffled when the student got done with the story and couldn’t demonstrate good comprehension in his or her retelling. Come to find out, my book talks weren’t working because all the dialogue and important parts of a good book talk weren’t there. LLI was able to provide me with the language of a good book talk. It demonstrated to me as a teacher when students get a good book introduction that activates their schema; they are more likely to be accurate in their reading and retelling. Comprehension tends to be higher.

Another example I found during the study where the students’ understanding was pushed through the use of book talks as a component happened on March 3, 2011. I was working with the yellow group and introduced the new book called Plants That Eat Bugs. None of the students had ever heard of a plant that eats bugs. Bob and Jake had so many questions about plants eating bugs, they were wondering all about what came next as we went through the pages of the book. The students were completely engaged in the book introduction and I believe it helped pushed their comprehension of the non-fiction story in the end. Throughout the entire book talk, they were asking questions about the different plants in the story. Bob wanted to know specific names of the plants. The specific names were introduced through inquiry, instead of me just telling them, which I think helped with their learning of the new vocabulary words. Jake wanted to know where the plants lived and if he could see them around here. The students were wondering and questioning throughout the entire book talk. This book talk was a great example of how books talks can be (and should be) much more like a dialogue between teacher and students.
rather than the teacher just giving the student information about the book. Once we had discussed the book, the boys actively read the book and I believe got so much more out of it because of the rich book talk we had. They wanted to read the story long before we finished talking about it!

Both Bob and Jake could give me an adequate retelling of the different facts they learned to demonstrate excellent comprehension. They could tell me the three different ways plants could catch bugs in sequential order from the story (stick, slide and snap). The boys could also tell me the name of the plant that snapped (Venus Fly Trap). They could also both tell me the plants that stick use their leaves to catch the bug and then wrap the leaf around it. After the discussion took place, the boys were each able to complete an extension activity independently to write and draw the three ways plants can catch bugs.

On a side note, this book was very interesting when looking at it used with a different group. I read it a few weeks prior with the group of two girls and they thought it was disgusting, while the boys absolutely loved it! The boys loved the pictures of the plants and bugs. The girls were not as engaged with this LLI book and their comprehension was not as great; it was adequate but the boys’ was far better. This example from my study proves that when a reader is more engaged, they can get so much more out of it. Students should be introduced to different types of books to help them find what they like to read about. In LLI the students did not get a choice of the books read in daily lessons, but as the teacher researcher it was my hope to spark an interest in a potential new topic. For example through this *Plants that Eat Bugs* book, Bob wanted to go to the library and find a book on Venus Fly Traps; this is a boy who very rarely reads for fun. I was happy to see him so engaged and seeking out books to read during his free time. This proved to me that his confidence was increasing and he wanted to read more as a result of LLI instruction.
Finally on February 23, 2011 the blue group demonstrated another way in which the book introduction helped push learning. We were reading a new book called *Kim's New Shoes*. It was a fiction story about two friends. One friend has to get new shoes because her pink sneakers were worn out. At the store she wanted the same exact sneakers, but could not pick a color. She went back and forth between blue and red. Finally she picked the red, but was not completely happy with her choice. Meanwhile her friend did the same thing. Her friend ended up picking the blue shoes. When the girls saw each other on the first day of school they ended giving one shoe to the other friend so they each had one blue and one red shoe. As Sally, Holly and I were going through the book introduction; Sally made a text to self-connection to push her thinking. She told me that one time she wanted a pair of cowboy boots. She could not decide between a pair of brown ones and a pair of black ones. She picked the brown ones but when she got home she wondered if she should have picked the black ones, just like Kim had wondered if she should have picked the blue ones in the story. Sally seemed to enjoy making this connection and it put her in the character’s place momentarily. I know when I do that as an adult reader I am able to remember what I am reading better. At the end of the story when it was time for the retelling, Sally was able to tell me all the important details in sequential order to demonstrate excellent comprehension. The following day she was able to complete an extension activity that went with the story independently. I believe she was able to remember the story in greater detail because of the text to self-connection she made. Holly had the same introduction, but really wasn’t able to make a text to self-connection. She had adequate comprehension, but the next day needed to look in the book as a reminder before the extension activity. In situations where she made a text to self-connection, she could retell the story many days later.
Word Work

In addition, the students were involved in word work on a daily basis as another component of LLI. Word work activities varied from lesson to lesson. Some examples of word work included whole group activities, independent activities, white board work, cut and paste activities, discussions, review, long vowels, short vowels, blends, and or common word patterns. The different activities seemed endless in the program. Throughout the LLI program the students were consistently involved in these activities on a daily basis. It did not matter if it was a reading day or a writing day; word work went with every lesson.

As the six weeks progressed, I began to see an improvement in the students’ ability to decode unknown words in their reading. The students were beginning to recognize patterns and known chunks to help them. Many of the students moved away from relying on picture cues to solve unknown words and relied more on using beginning sounds and patterns (chunks) to help them. For example on February 10, 2011 the orange group was working on vowel patterns “ee” and “ar”. When the students were reading their new story that day, Meli at the Pet Shop, they were able to remember the new vowel patterns. George even made a comment about it. He said “Here is the “ee” pattern in street like we practiced.” He was able to make the correct sounds to read street.

Another example where a student was using a new “chunk” from LLI word work happened on February 18, 2011. The yellow group was working on “ish”, “atch” and “ath”. During the independent reading part of the lesson I was listening to Jake whisper read. He came to the word path. He wanted to say road but realized it did not start with an “r”. He went back and tapped “p” as a sound and then “ath” as a sound. He was able to put the word together using the known chunk from his word work practice.
After some daily reflections, I found the LLI program matched with the Fundations program, a specific phonics program (Wilson, 2004) impacted the students’ learning throughout the study with even greater impact than LLI word work alone. The students began to make connections during the LLI lessons to their daily word work in their Fundations center. After discussions with the Fundations teacher, she and I began to notice an increase in the students’ understanding of sounds, digraphs, vowel teams and welded sounds overall. The programs were working in sync for the students in this study and I believe they were making connections between the two programs. LLI has a tremendous amount of word work, but with the daily Fundations practice, I think the students were able to learn and connect so much more. The connections they were making were helpful in pushing their overall understanding and their ability to use the sounds and patterns in context. Sally even verbalized once that she remembered the “ch” digraph from her Fundations center. It helped her solve the word “hatch” in her LLI book.

One example from a word work activity can be found below in photograph 1. This is an example of a word work activity completed by Tom from the orange group. Tom was adding suffixes to the end of given words. He had to write the words eat, play, sit, jump, sleep and hide with the ending “s” and ending “ing”. He was able to complete the first five words independently, he asked to go ahead and “do it alone” in his words. He was confident in his abilities. When he was on the last word, he asked for assistance (hide). He followed the pattern and wrote hides correctly (adding the suffix s). He went ahead and wrote hideing instead of hiding. I was able to then work with him to explain the rule for adding “ing” to words ending in a silent “e”. All the boys in this group needed the explanation. It was a good word work activity to help them learn this new rule. After talking to the Fundations teacher, they did not get to this
skill yet in the program so LLI was the first time they were introduced to it. I will be curious to see when they do come upon the skill in Fundations if the boys will remember the work from LLI and make the connection.

[Table]

<p>| | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>eat</td>
<td>eating</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>play</td>
<td>playing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sit</td>
<td>sitting</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>jump</td>
<td>jumping</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sleep</td>
<td>sleeping</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hide</td>
<td>hiding</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Photograph 1. Word work activity from the orange group; adding endings (suffixes).

In Photograph 2, Bob from the yellow group was sorting the sounds y can make. He had to determine if the y made an i sound or an e sound. I had him read all the words to me first. Then I had him sort the words. Before he was able to glue, he had to read the words in each column to me one more time. Bob previously worked with this skill in Fundations. As Bob was completing this activity, I was thinking a few things could have happened here. He remembered the skill and that is why it was easy for him. He was possibly making the connection in his head, connecting to my first theme. If he was making the connection and finding the task easy, his confidence level could have, connecting to my second theme. Since he did not verbalize any of this to me, after he completed the task I asked about his thinking during the activity. He told me
it was easy for him because he knew what to do; he already did it in Fundations. He was making the connection and his confidence to do it was high, connection to both my themes. This was an easy word work activity for him but still allowed him to practice with the sounds of y.

In the final photograph of this word work section below (Photograph 3), Sally from the blue group was working with homophones. She was sorting by endings. I read the endings to her, which allowed her to hear the pronunciation. After that she read the words to me and placed them in the correct column. She needed some assistance with this task. We referred back to the chunk and then broke the word apart. After all the words were placed and she read them to me one more time, she glued the words down on the paper. As she worked with me she became more confident in the activity. She was hesitant in the beginning but then was able to participate more by the end.
Overall the variety of word work activities used throughout the LLI lessons really helped push the students’ learning in reading. They were decoding, working with suffixes, chunks, vowels, etc on a daily basis. They were always practicing something that would be helpful to their reading. It is another reason why the students progressed during the use of the LLI program. The daily use of Fundations was also beneficial to these students during the morning center rotations as well. This just happened by chance in my study. I think LLI provides a great deal of word work within the program, but combined with Fundations, I believe the students were getting an even deeper understanding. I think they were beginning to make connections between LLI word work and daily Fundations work during the six week study which pushed them so much further. I noticed the students were beginning to use those skills and strategies in the context of their reading in LLI. Through conversations with the Fundations teacher, she was beginning to see an increase in knowledge and skills during her Fundations center as well. The
students were becoming more independent in the skills and transferring the knowledge between centers. The students recalled blends, digraphs and welded sounds on a more consistent basis as a whole group in both Fundations and LLI.

*Reading Different Levels of Text*

Throughout daily lessons the students were also asked to read a variety of texts as another component of LLI. First the students read familiar text to get the LLI lesson started. They read one to two books completed in a previous lesson as a warm up. As the teacher researcher, I referred to it as “getting the brain ready for reading”. The students seemed to respond well to that phrase. The students always had two books in their reading folders to complete the familiar reread. The books are exchanged as new ones were taught and read. In the odd numbered lessons the students were introduced to an instructional level text. A book introduction took place, as well as independent reading and a check for comprehension during the lesson. The same sequence takes place on an even lesson day, only the book is at the student’s independent level. When the student is working on an even day the focus was on the student’s writing in the writing journal.

On the day where the student was reading instructional level texts, I was the facilitator in his or her learning. They were being introduced to a text that required them to slow down and carefully read and decode. After a good book introduction the student should have been able to read this level of text with 95% accuracy. There were words that the students needed to spend more effort decoding. Comprehension may have been more difficult on these days because the students may be more focused on the decoding. As the teacher researcher, I was there to help work through strategies to keep the students in their ZPD. The students were being asked to work in their zone of proximal development according to Vygotsky. This is where the teacher
scaffolds and the most learning takes place to push the child’s learning. Throughout LLI study, the students were working at an instructional level most of the time.

On the other days of LLI the student was working at an easier level, known as an independent level. Usually the independent level in LLI was one to two levels below the student’s instructional level. This allowed the student to gain confidence in his or her reading. It also allowed the student to enjoy stories without having to work at decoding extensively. For so long, many of the students participating in this study struggled with reading, it was not fun for them anymore, and it was too hard. On these days I could tell the students were enjoying the stories and reading was not “such hard work” for them, as Sally once said to me. The students would often have smiles on their faces when they completed a story and felt confident in retelling the story to me to demonstrate comprehension. After reviewing my observation notes, I was able to conclude all of the students had different situations where the exhibited an increased level of confidence during odd lesson days. The student who I found to make the biggest gain in her confidence level was Holly. At the beginning of the study she was very timid and shy when she came to LLI. By the third week she began volunteering more, by the fourth week she knew the LLI routine and was the first to get her materials ready. By the fifth week she was the most independent student in the study. She also showed the most excitement to volunteer, share or answer questions.

Overall confidence in reading was being built by reading a variety of text levels during the study. By the end of the study, the students’ confidence was carrying over into the days where instructional level texts were being read. The students as a whole group were more willing to try these texts without complaining. The students were not exhibiting as many frustration behaviors which came out in the form of tears, anger or refusal. These behaviors were exhibited
in guided reading before the study began and even in the first couple weeks of the study. The students were more willing to try unknown words using different skills and strategies they were learning in LLI as the study went on. They made a shift in their independence. They stopped relying so much on me as the teacher and started becoming more independent readers.

In addition I saw this independence and confidence carry over outside of LLI lessons as well. For example, during a science lesson, grade level text needed to be read to introduce the topic of animal adaptations. The lesson was being taught as a whole group lesson. Five of the six students raised their hand to volunteer to read the introductory paragraph. I selected Holly to read; she needed some assistance with a few vocabulary words but was so happy with herself when she was done. After the lesson I was able to take a minute to talk with Holly and tell her what a great job she did and that I was so happy she took the risk to read in front of the class. She told me she was happy and she felt proud of herself. As a teacher researcher, I could see her confidence carrying over into other areas of the school day outside of LLI centers. I was so happy to experience this growth within Holly and be a part of this transformation with her.

In addition, through reflecting on daily observation notes I found other reasons I could tell confidence was being built. I made comments about body language, which changed from stiff and nervous to comfortable and happy during reading activities. The students also seemed more engaged in the stories and lessons by the third to fourth week of the study. When asked to retell or summarize a book, the students were volunteering to retell instead of all looking at each other and waiting (and hoping) for someone else to volunteer. Toward the end of the study, many times when I asked for volunteers, Tom would huff and puff if I didn’t call on him. The students genuinely wanted to participate. They had excitement and confidence in their voices which was a shift from the timid retellings in the beginning of the study which I felt like I was forcing them to
do because no one would volunteer. Also their retellings were more in the form of questions, looking for reassurance from the teacher when the study first began. I think this component of reading a variety of text as part of LLI helped make major shirts for all of the students in their overall confidence. They were beginning to see that reading wasn’t as difficult anymore. They were blossoming into readers who enjoy reading right before my eyes.

![A student reading an independent level book.](image)

Writing about Reading

As another component of LLI, every other lesson in the LLI program focused on writing about the students’ reading from the previous day. Each student was given his or her individual writing journal at the beginning of the LLI research study. Each child had an opportunity to pick his or her own color and decorate the journal with drawings and pictures of his or her choice. I found this to be another engaging part of LLI for the students. The students seemed to enjoy making the journal personal. I could assume this by their body language. They were engaged and smiling as they were drawing the pictures, they were taking their time and putting effort into
their drawings. The students were discussing their drawings with me and other peers; they were excited to show them off. We even did a sharing circle with the other groups. I believed this helped make guided reading using LLI fun and engaging for them from the beginning. Every time the student was asked to take out his or her writing journal it was personal to him or her.

The writing lessons in LLI are very structured. There are two options for writing. The teacher guide book describes what type of writing to use during the lessons. The first option was the students listened to sentences as the adult dictates. The student was required to write the sentences in his or her journal one at a time as the teacher read them. This allows an opportunity for the teacher to see what sight words or word patterns are difficult for the student. When the sentences were complete, the student and adult would conference one on one to fix misspelled words while the other students independently illustrated.

During other writing lessons the students were involved in shared writing. I found that the students participating in the study preferred the days where the sentences were dictated over the shared writing days. I found they were more willing to write and more engaged and they actually finished the writing task before shutting down and refusing. Many shared writing days resulted in tears, aggressive erasing of writing or a head down on the table from at least one of the students. Shared writing days took a lot more encouragement and refocusing from me as the teacher, especially in the beginning of the study. The students also wrote more quickly on the days where I dictated to them. We could get through more of the lesson.

Even though shared writing days were more challenging for the students and me, as the teacher researcher, they were so important in pushing the students in literacy abilities. Shared writing allowed the students to be responsible for the ideas of the sentences. The students had to remember the story and then get ideas and thoughts onto the paper, both being extremely
difficult tasks for these students. Typically the students and I would compose 2-4 sentences together, depending on the group. On the days of shared writing I believe they found it more challenging, as it was a lot more for them to think about and more for them to be responsible for. The reason I believe it was more challenging for them was because of some of the behaviors the students exhibited (tears, anger, frustration and or refusal).

As the researcher, I found shared writing days pushed comprehension more because it was up to the students in the group to remember the story and come up with detailed sentences about the story. Occasionally I could get some of the students to independently write 2-3 sentences to demonstrate comprehension. For example, in the beginning of the study I could get Tom to write one sentence independently. He was a student who would get very angry when writing, though. His frustration behaviors would come out in the form of aggressive erasing. He would write, erase, try again and then erase again. By the end of one sentence he would be so mad and erase harder and harder that he would erase a hole into his paper. Then he would be mad at himself for doing that and cry. He was not getting much out of this activity and it was not pushing his comprehension. After a few weeks of working through his frustrations by practicing writing skills during LLI, he made growth in his ability to complete a shared writing activity. By the end of the study he was able to retell the story and discuss his ideas for writing. He would come up with sentences and then he would write them on a much more independent basis. Once he became more independent and he worked through his anger and frustrations during the beginning of the study, he wrote great sentences to demonstrate his knowledge and comprehension of a story. Once Tom got to this point, he was pushing his comprehension much more than when I dictated sentences to him. It was more beneficial for him to take ownership of his writing instead of me telling him what to write. By the end of the study, he actually wanted to
write his own sentences instead of me telling him what to write on dictation days. His confidence level increased in his writing tremendously, as well, by completely transforming his behavior towards writing activities.

For all the students in this study, writing was a very challenging activity. Many struggled to get ideas from their brain to the paper. That level of processing was very difficult. Many have processing delays and are speech and language impaired. On most days, I found it was beneficial for the students to come up with sentences as a group; usually each student was responsible for one sentence idea. As the teacher, I wrote the sentences on a small white board with the students’ assistance on known sight words and words they could tap out using Fundations or LLI word work skills on shared writing days. From there, each student would transfer the sentences into his or her writing journal. Once the sentences were complete the students were required to illustrate in his or her journal.

Overall, I found that the students preferred writing during LLI lessons compared to writing tasks throughout the rest of the school day. As the study progressed, negative behaviors or comments about writing decreased when it was time to get writing journals out. I think this engaging form of writing was another way LLI positively impacted the students’ learning throughout the study. Photograph 5 shows a student working hard in his writing journal. He was completing his sentences from a shared writing activity and then illustrating a picture to go along with his writing.
One example of a student’s writing took place on February 18, 2011. Jake, a member of the yellow group, was responsible for independently writing three sentences about the book *The Rabbit and the Coyote*. The three sentences he wrote were: Rabbit and Coyote had a race. Rabbit’s brothers help trick Coyote. Rabbit came out of the last hole and won the race. Jake made two spelling mistakes while writing, *lets* for *last* and *has* for *had*. He illustrated a beautiful picture of the end scene from the story where the rabbit won and the coyote lost. This student increased his confidence in his writing through the use of LLI. This was the student who loved to write about snakes. He was confident in writing about snakes, but never demonstrated confidence in other writing pieces. After this particular day he wanted to share his writing with one of the assistants in the class who doesn’t work with us during LLI. In his words he was “so happy to do a good job in writing when not writing about snakes!”

Another example from the students’ writing journals came from the orange group. On February 1, 2011 the three boys had to listen to dictation and write along with it. I dictated the
following sentences: A night worker brings food to stores. A night worker takes care of sick people. A night worker fixes the roads. George made the following spelling mistakes: *bringe* for *brings*, *stors* for *stores*, *fo* for *of*, *takes* for *takes* and *workers* for *worker*. Tom made the following mistakes: omission for *sick*, *pikle* for *people* and *ros* for *roads*. Isaac made the following mistakes: *Brruans* for *brings*, omission for *food*, *two* for *to*, *sors* for *stores*, *taks* for *takes*, *if* for *of*, *sik* for *sick*, *riads* for *roads* and *peole* for *people*. All of the boys wrote this dictation willingly, demonstrating an increase in confidence. The orange group was the group in the study that would demonstrate the most refusal behaviors during writing activities in the beginning of the study. Isaac would put his head down on the table and completely refuse to write in his journal on many occasions. Tom would cry when the writing was too difficult and George would write carelessly all over the journal just to get something down. For all three boys to write in this example, when I could tell from the mistakes that it was difficult for them, tells me as the researcher that they were making improvements in their behavior. LLI pushed them on a daily basis to try things that were challenging which in return eventually built their confidence to try more challenging tasks.

Finally the blue group had a great example from a writing activity. On January 31, 2011 the girls used shared writing to write six sentences from the non-fiction book, *Road Builders*. This was a lot of writing for the girls but they did it and were proud of their writing when finished. Holly’s sentences included: The bulldozer cleared the trees. Then they made a path with stones for the road. The paver paved the road. The new road is smooth. The workers work at night so there was no traffic. The road was busy at the end of the book. Sally wanted two different facts from the story in which she really used her book as a reference to look up unknown words. In this example the girls were demonstrating more confidence in their writing.
In the beginning of the study both girls would have relied heavily on me as the teacher to tell them what to write or help develop their writing. Never would they have written six sentences, before the study the girls would willingly write 2-3 sentences before shutting down and becoming really sloppy with their writing. Here they really worked to together to come up with most of the sentences. They were confident enough in their own ideas to share them out loud. Sally was confident enough to choose two sentences of her own and use her resources to help her develop those sentences. She independently learned how to do that during LLI. This was one of the first days where the girls took charge of their learning and I was able to step back and completely observe the interactions and the growth in confidence that had taken place in both girls.

All of the groups did excellent with their writing activities. The writing every other day helped the students push their comprehension and make connections to the reading. They were asked to remember stories from the previous day and form at least three sentences to write about the story. As the study came to a close I really noticed a difference in their confidence to do this. They began to rely on me less for reassurance of the story and became excited to write. By the end of the study, Tom often wanted to write about every story he read. He would independently during his free time write about the LLI stories we didn’t write about (even day lessons).

*Extension Activities*

Finally, the students were involved in extension activities as another LLI component. At the end of every lesson the students had an extension activity. The extension activities were designed in the LLI program to push comprehension of a book they read previously. Occasionally the extension activities were designed to go along with the word work taught in the lesson. Throughout the study I found the extension activities to be beneficial for the participating
students in many ways. Most activities related to a story from a previous lesson and they were able to discuss the book in more detail to complete the activity. It brought the student back to the book and they had to remember information from the story. It pushed the comprehension of the story by revisiting it after the lesson was done. A lot of the books were part of a series in LLI and the extension activities helped the students store more information from the books in their long term memory. I found when a book was read from the same series in later lessons the students were able to discuss previous stories in great detail which helped with their confidence.

Extension activities also allowed a student to deepen his or her understanding of word work taught in a lesson. All of the extension activities were to be completed independently, but because of the structure and support of LLI, the adult is there to assist a student if needed.

In Photograph 6, Holly was working on an illustration to go along with a previous book she read. The sentences were given to her, two in this case, and she was responsible for illustrating a picture for each sentence. By illustrating, she had to visually remember the story. I believe this helped to make the story “stick” with her. I know the more I am able to visualize as an adult reader, the better comprehension and understanding of the story I have. Visualizing is a strategy in reading for all ages. In this activity Holly was asked to complete a task that was easy for her, she had to illustrate. The writing was already done for her. By completing a task that was a little bit easier, she was able to build confidence in her abilities to complete the extension activities. The next extension activity might be a little more challenging but the hope is that she will remember the success from this one and that will help push her in the next one.
In Photograph 7 Jake had to read a riddle and then solve the riddle. It went along with a story about animals, but it was not about grasshoppers. He was responsible for illustrating a relevant picture. Here he drew a grasshopper with some trees, grass, sky and sun. Jake loves animals, especially bugs, snakes and reptiles. Having animals as part of this extension activity allowed him to make the connection to something he loves, building his confidence in the finished product of this activity. He also knows a lot about many different types of animals, allowing him to be confident in his writing and picture in this activity. This activity focused more on illustrating which is easy for Jake and something he enjoys. I found LLI as a program did a good job of integrating many different topics and themes for the students to read and write about. By finding something the student enjoyed writing or reading about, they exhibited more confidence through their body language.
In Photograph 8, Bob had to remember a story titled, *Going Camping*. There were multiple items the characters brought camping. He had to list at least nine of those items and illustrate a small picture for each item. Bob was able to remember 7 items independently, but then needed assistance on the last two. It helped push his understanding and comprehension of the story to have to retell the items verbally and independently write them on his paper. By illustrating, Bob was also having to visualize the story (like Holly) to push his understanding. By doing more with the stories in the form of the daily extension activities, it seemed to prove that the students were deepening their understanding. I found this to be true through informal conversations I was having with the students throughout the study, even after the stories were long over.
In Photograph 9, Tom had to read a poem. He then had to use a pink highlighter to mark all the words he could find that ended in “ar”. He then used a yellow highlighter to mark all the words that ended in “ay”. We read the poem three times before highlighting. Once I read it, once we read it together and once Tom read it independently. To finish the activity Tom had to think of “ar” and “ay” words independently. He did very well with this extension activity. It allowed him to work with word patterns in another form and make the connection back to working with words with “ay” and “ar” patterns in the beginning of the lesson this extension activity came from. By having a better understanding of word patterns, Tom was given the opportunity to hopefully increase his confidence in reading when he comes across those patterns again. In a later lesson, Tom was able to read the words bay, hay and cart in LLI books, showing an understanding of “ar” and “ay” words from this lesson.
Finally in Photograph 10, Sally was working on an extension activity from a panda book. She had to finish two sentences, one from the beginning of the book (when the panda was born) and one from the end of the book (when the panda turned one). She then had to illustrate a picture for each sentence. This activity allowed Sally to increase her confidence by pairing something that was easy for her and something that was more challenging to her together. Drawing the pictures was easy and more exciting for her while writing the sentences was more challenging for her. I believe putting them together in this extension activity allowed her to complete the task more independently and confidently. Sally also used her resources in this extension activity and referred back to the book for the sentences. This was a known task that she learned during LLI lessons. I think because she knew she could do this independently, it allowed her to feel confident as well. She then was able to independently illustrate the picture. Sally was
excited to show me her finished paper, I could tell by the excitement in her voice and the smile on her face. Sally enjoys activities like this, building her confidence in reading!

Photograph 10. An extension activity where the student wrote two sentences about her reading.

Summary

After completing the six week LLI research study I found that six of the seven students made an overall increase in his or her DRA reading level. Not only did I see an overall increase, I found two common themes among the individual LLI lessons that impacted the students’ reading behaviors. The themes emerged through daily use of the LLI components. Through the use of the components of LLI, the students increased confidence in their reading as well as the ability to make connections. I saw an overall change in all of the students’ confidence as a whole, which was linked to their attitudes toward reading. All of the students enjoyed coming to
guided reading. The students also improved their ability to make relevant connections to push their comprehension and understanding of stories and word work on a daily basis.

After a few lessons they became familiar with the routine and knew what was expected in each lesson. The element of any surprise was taken out and I believed it allowed them to focus on his or her reading instruction. Before the LLI research study the students very rarely would volunteer to read as a preferred activity and after five weeks of the study six of the eight students in the classroom chose to read as their morning activity on a daily basis as shown in Photograph 11.

As the study came to a close I also began to see the students’ confidence in reading carry over into other subject areas and activities. Many of the students began to volunteer to participate in read aloud retellings as well as make relevant connections to read aloud books in front of their peers. The students also volunteered to read aloud in front of peers during a science or a math lesson, lessons outside of their “comfortable” LLI groups. As the study came to a close, I found
that Leveled Literacy Intervention impacted student learning and increased literacy behaviors in this special education multi-age classroom!
CHAPTER FIVE
CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The research study I conducted focused on seven of my students. The seven students all varied in academic strengths and needs in literacy. Over the course of six weeks, students participated in small group LLI lessons during guided reading centers. My main research question was: What impact does LLI does have on student learning in a multi-age, special education classroom? The following two sub questions were also used to guide the study: What impact does LLI have on student comprehension, self-correction rates, and fluency in a multi-age, special education classroom? How are multi-age, special education students engaged with the different components of LLI?

Throughout the research process, I found reflecting on my teaching practice as well as my students' learning helped me to achieve a deeper understanding of my students as readers and writers. As I was completing this six-week study, I found myself revisiting my review of literature from chapter two and comparing my data to find possible connections. I used these connections to push my research further each day within the LLI guided reading centers. The role of reflection in my research became evident as I began to answer my research questions.

One way I strived to answer my research questions was to take daily observation notes. I made observations about what the students were doing and learning during LLI lessons. I recorded notes on the different components they were using and/or involved in, how they were interacting with each other, how they were interacting with me as the teacher, miscues they were making while reading, connections they made, and overall comprehension. As the study progressed, I answered the research questions by looking at student work and reflecting on my observation notes. The reflections would generally happen after the students left school for the
day and I had some quiet time to review my notes. It was important for me to do this daily so I didn’t miss or forget anything as the teacher researcher. The lessons were still very fresh in my mind. I observed, took notes and reflected on each group separately.

My reflection began by thinking about how student learning was impacted through the use of the LLI program. What impact does LLI have on student learning in a multi-age, special education classroom? This was a very broad, general question that could simply be answered by an assessment in this study. I used DRA scores to determine overall student learning at the end of the study. The students were assessed before the study took place and then reassessed as the study came to completion. Six of the seven students increased his or her DRA score in the six short weeks of this study. Because six of the seven students made progress in reading over the six weeks, I concluded as a researcher the students in my multi-age, special education classroom were positively impacted through the use of LLI.

In addition, I found that using the LLI program during guided reading allowed me to meet the diverse reading needs of my students. I had seven students participating in this study, all of whom had a wide range of abilities. Using LLI allowed me to break the students into groups and teach to the individual levels and needs of each student. It allowed me to offer more support as the teacher researcher. It also allowed the students to be working at their individual level in groups of two or three, with peers whom had similar needs. I think the students participating in this study were getting their needs met. As a result, the students benefited from the small group instruction, known as guided reading with the use of LLI according to my findings.

I think the students were successful in this study because guided reading is a specific instructional approach intended to help students learn how to process a variety of increasingly
challenging texts with understanding and fluency while increasing their knowledge of skills and strategies. (Fountas & Pinnell, 2001). Adding LLI to this instructional approach pushed the students even further. My findings matched the two main research studies completed on LLI by the Center for Research and Education Policy (CERP) at Memphis University that I reviewed in my literature review. The first study, conducted before the program was publically released, was completed as a way to collect initial data on the effectiveness of the LLI program. This study was performed by Harrison, Peterman, Grehan and Ross from the University of Memphis, along with Dexter from Lesley University and Inan from Texas University (2008). The second study was developed by Ransford-Kaldon, Flynt, Ross, Franceschini, Zoblotsky, Huang and Gallagher (2010). Both studies found positive results and effects on literacy behaviors for struggling readers and writers through the use of the small group intervention program, as did I.

By using LLI in small guided reading centers, the students were allowed time to work through their own difficulties and frustrations while being offered support to match their individual needs through the structure of the LLI program. Many of the students in this classroom were passive learners before the study began. They would sit back in guided reading groups and wait for another student to hopefully retell or answer my questions. I often saw this in whole group settings as well; most would sit back and let the other students participate in discussions, activities and questions. I found that using LLI helped bring almost all of students out of their shell and increase confidence. The students began to participate more, interact more and read more confidently both in and out of reading centers. In fact, increased confidence in the students was one of themes that emerged throughout my study.

Still, there were some complications that surfaced during the study. When completing the study and analyzing data, I found that the students moved and progressed at different rates even
though they were receiving the same guided reading lessons. This finding allowed me to conclude that each student was affected differently and moved at his or her own rate. This study only lasted six weeks, but as a researcher and a teacher I would recommend assessing the students often to keep pushing and moving them at the rate they are developing to keep them in their Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD).

The Russian Psychologist, Lev Vygotsky (1978) presented teachers with the idea of ZPD. He believed children have a zone of learning and should always be working in it. Every child’s zone is different and as a teacher, it is important to find the zone for the student. He believed that when a child is working in that zone with the support and scaffolding of an adult, they grow and learn to their full potential. I believe my findings from completing this six-week study matched the research of this famous philosopher. I found LLI kept the students in their ZPD and as a result, progress was made for most of the students. The progress also varied for each student, fitting with Vygotsky’s notions that individual’s ZPDs are different. The final DRA scores indicated the students made growth in reading overall. Guided reading using LLI allowed me as the teacher researcher to help students move forward in their reading development. Through specific teaching and careful text selection, a teacher can make it possible for his or her students to learn more than they could on their own. (Fountas & Pinnell, 2001).

After careful reflection of the program and my observation notes, I think the key to LLI is making sure the students are working at the correct instructional reading levels at all times. One way to do this is to assess the students often. As mentioned, based on my findings, LLI helped push my students forward and make progress over the six week study. If this study was longer, I would be hesitant to wait more than six to seven weeks to retest. Because I found the students moved at different rates, groupings were ready to be adjusted based on the final DRA scores.
Guided reading groups should be flexible because students are moving at different rates. Students should be moved up or down as frequently as they need to be based on assessments done in the classroom. This finding matches the belief of Fountas and Pinnell. The authors of *Guiding Readers and Writers: Grades 3-5* suggested, “Guided reading groups are temporary, an important difference from traditional grouping practice. Dynamic groups avoid the traditional problems of grouping because teachers change the composition of groups regularly to accommodate the different learning paths of reader” (2001, pg. 218). In traditional groupings, children were set into groups and rarely moved. Groups were inflexible and more often than not, once a student was in a low group, they stayed in the low group (Hiebert 1983; Good & Marshall 1984). This can affect a student’s confidence level as well. Students in the low group tend to have lower self-esteem about their abilities. They often feel dumb, and less capable than their peers in the higher groups (Bossert, et al., 1984). I found this to be true when I started the LLI program. The students in the orange group were the most reserved, lacked the most confidence in their reading and were the least likely to participate. As the study progressed, their confidence increased. The students started to participate more, tried harder tasks, answered more questions and were volunteering on a regular basis. Additionally, I found this to be true with all the groups, not just the orange group. Overall I watched their confidence increase as the study progressed in almost all the participants. It was amazing to see this shift take place throughout the study. As the teacher research I was so happy to find increased confidence was a major theme to emerge from the study!

When my study was completed, I adjusted the groupings to continue with LLI as part of my guided reading program. So often teachers will set guided reading groups at the beginning of the school year and then keep the students in those groups for too long following the traditional
grouping pattern. I was personally guilty of this during my first few years of teaching. I assumed the students would move with each other as I taught them. This research study allowed me to see first-hand that was not true. It opened my eyes to a shift in my own thinking. Through the study, I found students will progress at their own rates and teachers need to be sure to provide opportunities to allow students to grow and develop as much as possible. After completing the study, I believe LLI provides students with an opportunity to grow and develop. To keep the students growing and a developing, frequent assessment needs to be done along with flexible groupings. As mentioned previously, upon completion of my study, I adjusted my groups and continued teaching with LLI since I found it was positively affecting the students in my classroom. One student was moved out of the orange group (low). He was happy and excited! His overall attitude and confidence level increased tremendously in that moment! I have never seen him smile so brightly.

In addition to my first research question, *What impact does LLI have on student learning in a multi-age, special education classroom?* My reflection also focused on *What impact does LLI have on student comprehension, self-correction rates, and fluency in a multi-age, special education classroom?* Students' overall reading levels and skills in self-correction, fluency and comprehension increased during the study, according to initial DRAs. For the students to be making progress in his or her reading level, generally they need to be making progress in all of these specific areas. The study allowed me to really analyze the DRAs. Before the study I would analyze them but not in the depth I did for this study. It helped me get an understanding of my students as individuals. I was able to use the knowledge I was gaining from the DRAs to help push individual instruction. It allowed me to support and teach the diverse learners in my
classroom. All teachers need to really examine the assessment of his or her students to help push them forward as much as possible.

As a teacher it is important to help guide the students to a better understanding of skills and strategies when reading based on his or her needs. If a student had low comprehension score on a DRA, I knew that was an area that needed to be worked on. I would use the Fountas and Pinnell prompting guide that came with the LLI program to teach, prompt and reinforce comprehension. This guide is a tool for teachers to use to support their students as they read and write. Specific language is used to teach for strategies in reading and writing (Fountas & Pinnell, 2009). This was the case for all areas of this research question: self-correction, fluency and so much more. For example, during the study, one of my students really struggled with fluency. I used the prompting guide daily with him to help push him further. During centers, while he was reading, I went to the fluency section in the guide, looked at the prompt, teach or reinforce section depending on what he needed that day. The guide would give specific language for each of those tasks. In the beginning of the study I would use the language from Fountas and Pinnell’s prompting guide to teach, such as “listen to how I read it and then can you read it the same way” (2009, pg. 20). As the study progressed, I would use the language to prompt, such as “read it all smoothly” (2009, pg. 20). As the student started independently reading with fluency I would use the language to reinforce “you sounded smooth that time” (2009, pg. 20). Using the prompting guide as part of the program made a huge impact in this area and on these specific skills.

Finally my reflection also centered on the question: How are multi-age, special education students engaged with the different components of LLI? The LLI program offered multiple components that the students were involved with daily. Some of these components included books talks, reading instructional level texts, reading easy level texts, word work, discussions,
retellings, writing, and extension activities. The students responded well to the components. All of the students were engaged throughout the lessons during the study. Most made improvements through engagement in the components, which was demonstrated in student work and reflected in observation notes. The students were exposed to so much literacy content on a daily basis through the components and responded positively. I think this program was intense and more in depth than most guided reading programs and instruction. Students learned in a variety of ways. In this type of classroom (and any) meeting the diverse needs of the students was a very important aspect. LLI offered opportunities for the students to work with a wide range of components daily to increase their knowledge and skills.

One of the components that stuck out the most to me was the book talks. Fountas and Pinnell believed, "talking about books is a way to spark students' interest and introduce them to new texts they might otherwise miss" (2001, pg. 120). I found this to be true in my study. As mentioned in my findings, it sparked Bob's interest in Venus Fly Traps by reading the book *Plants that Eat Bugs*. He was so interested; he went to the library to do his own research. This newfound interest Bob wanted to explore was all because of the LLI book. In my study, book talks allowed me to do so much with my students. It allowed me to see and hear what my students' background knowledge was on many different topics. It allowed an insight into the world my kids come from: rural, low income vs. suburban, middle class. I really had to step back and understand that different worlds can offer very different experiences. As a teacher I had to learn to facilitate learning by using book talks and help students make relevant connections to things that they may not have been so familiar with. Before the study, I would sometimes just assume the students would know the topics and ideas because that is what I knew as a kid. On many occasions the books talks sparked impromptu discussions and questions about unknown
topics. In some cases I taught lessons outside of guided reading based on a lack of knowledge or understanding of a topic brought up during LLI.

Book talks were also such an important part of the study because it is where I found my second emerging theme. Students were able to make connections during the book talks on a daily basis. I found these connections allowed the students to strengthen their comprehension and understanding of the stories that were being read. With the connections, the students learned to make the stories became more real and interesting to them. I know when I am able to do this as an adult I remember what I have read on a much deeper level. The students were also making connections during the word work component, as well. The students were able to independently connect to the Fundations program (Wilson, 2004) used in the classroom on a daily basis. By making this connection, the students were internalizing some of the rules and strategies for decoding unknown words. This theme, along with how the program built the students’ confidence mentioned previously, is another reason I found the LLI program to be successful with my multi-age, special education students. I would highly recommend this program to other teachers and classrooms with struggling readers.

Overall all I found LLI to be tremendously successful. I found the students growing and developing throughout the entire six-week study. Students worked through their frustrations and difficulties. The students increased their knowledge in reading and writing. Students grew in literacy behaviors displayed on DRAs. Students increased their confidence levels and abilities to make solid connections. I feel confident this program would be beneficial to any student who is a struggling reader and writer.
Finally, my reflection on the overall study taught me a lot about myself as a teacher. A reflective practice allows teachers an opportunity to learn from personal experience. Throughout the six-week study, I was able to reflect on my own planning skills and strategies. I was never confident in my planning. First of all, I always tend to plan way too much to accomplish in a lesson. I have a time management fear. I never want to be in a situation where a lesson finished early and then there is unstructured, down time, even if it is only for a few minutes. The kids in my classroom do not respond well to unstructured time. Because of this fear, I plan too much. When I don’t get to everything, because it is nearly impossible, I feel like I failed in a way. It has created this lack of confidence in me as a planner. LLI helped me build this confidence in myself. During the study, I was able to use the lesson guide to plan time appropriate lessons. Once the lessons were planned, I was able to teach effective lessons for each of the groups that rarely resulted in too little or too much content. LLI allowed me an opportunity to gain confidence in my lesson planning and in my own teaching. I was impressed with my time management skills through out the study! There was a lot to accomplish in one LLI lesson; it needed to keep moving at a fast pace. I was able to get through what I planned for the day with all groups on most occasions.

Teaching with LLI allowed me to get to know my students on a much more personal basis through book talks and small group lessons (2-3 students) as well. I liked gaining that connection with them. I have my students for three years and already felt like I got to know them well. LLI allowed a safe, comforting situation and I found I was learning even more about them through this program. I was learning about them personally; some of the stories and connections they shared would not have come up in other situations. Plus I was learning so much about each student as a reader because of how closely I was working with them. I was reflecting on the
behaviors and analyzing the data of each student often. It helped build my confidence when I met with a parent or went to Committee on Special Education (CSE) meeting. I knew my kids so well I could talk and present about them in great detail. As a teacher I was able to provide more information on the student’s reading and writing abilities than before. It also helped build the trust factor between the students and I, which carried through the entire school day and year.

During the study, I also discovered that I needed to back off a little bit during my instruction. Before the study I was never good at wait time. I was always quick to offer support or an answer because I didn’t want my students to “suffer” or “struggle”. I think that contributed to their dependence on me as their teacher and unwillingness to try new strategies. It took a lot to bite my tongue and let them try a strategy we worked on during LLI independently. It was hard for both the students and me at first. Over time it became easier for us and I truly believe that was a major factor in what helped build their confidence level throughout the study. They had to begin to try and use their own strategies if I stopped giving them the answer.

Throughout the study, I found both the students and myself as the teacher researcher were positively impacted. The students made growth in their reading abilities and confidence levels. I made growth in my own confidence to plan and teach effective guided reading lessons. I was able to make adjustments in my teaching to better meet the needs of my students. The students and I were able to build a stronger relationship. I also felt more knowledgeable about each student’s reading ability as well. Overall LLI made a positive impact on all of us! I would suggest the program to any teacher who is looking for a way to increase reading abilities in his or her struggling readers.
**Recommendations**

Based on my analysis of the impact of Leveled Literacy Intervention on students’ reading level, comprehension, fluency and self-correction rate, students showed an improvement in their skills. As a result of the intense, structured lessons at the students’ ZPD that LLI offered, as well as teacher and peer modeled strategies, six of the seven students who participated in the study improved their reading level and skills. The student in the study who did not make progress had other factors that contributed to not making adequate progress during the six weeks. The most important factor was the student was not in school on a consistent basis to receive LLI instruction. When he was not there, I couldn’t teach him. He was not able to truly get an understanding of the effect of the program because of lack of participation. Therefore, based on the results of the students who participated daily, I would recommend using Leveled Literacy Intervention for future work with students with disabilities or struggling readers.

First of all, I recommend the Leveled Literacy Intervention program be used with struggling readers because of how structured the program was. When the program was initially started, time needed to be taken into account to allow the students to adjust to the structure of the program. The lessons are designed in a way to be similar from day to day. This offered an overall consistent guided reading structure during the study. The students participated in an odd and even day rotation of instruction. On odd days, the students read a text at their instructional level with scaffolding to push their skills and strategies in their ZPD. On even days, the students were writing about the instructional level book from the previous day. On even days the students were also reading a book at their independent level. Both days included word work as well as extension activities. All of the students in the study picked up on the structure and responded well to it. They knew what was expected of them each time they came to LLI centers. By the end
of the study, some students knew the structure so well they got their materials out before I asked them to. They knew what came next in the lesson. The students in my classroom do not like surprises in their learning or lessons. They like to know what is coming next. For some of the students, if they felt surprised they would respond with negative behaviors. There were far too many lessons where I found this to be true in my first few months of teaching in this room. When the element of surprise was taken out of the lessons during LLI, the students were able to focus on reading and the skills and strategies being taught. Most of the students improved their confidence and willingness to try different skills and strategies in the lessons. The focus was no longer on what was coming next. Most students volunteered more and were excited to have a turn to talk or share knowledge.

Secondly, I recommend LLI because it offered a cooperative group setting. This allowed students who were at similar levels to interact and learn from each other. Students responded well to the small group and more individualized attention from me, as their teacher researcher as well. I found the students like to read aloud to me and their peers in the small guided reading lessons. Most participants got a big smile on their faces when it was their turn to whisper read to me. As part of the program, the students were also able to listen to each other and share ideas and strategies on how they solved a “tricky” word. They heard each other retell stories day after day. They learned what a good retelling consists of through teacher and peer modeling. The program offered an opportunity to learn from each other, which was a positive outcome. “Readers learn how to talk with one another about their reading, sharing what they think things mean and helping others see things in a new way” (Fountas & Pinnell, 2001, Pg. 45).

I also recommend the use of LLI because the students learned strategies to become more independent with their reading. They learned how to break words apart, use picture clues, read
past the word to see what would make sense and self-correct for meaning as part of the program instruction. In addition, the prompting guide used in the program allowed me to teach, prompt and reinforce while the students were actually reading using Fountas and Pinnell’s specific language (Fountas & Pinnell, 2009). There was an overall increase in students’ knowledge and willingness to independently solve a problem or difficult word. They were being reinforced in the moments when they did something “right”. Before the intervention I found that the students would rely heavily on teacher assistance or simply wait for a teacher to give an answer to the unknown word. Their willingness try to solve unknown words was very low. By the end of the data collection period, very shy students who were hesitant to solve unknown words independently before the study, were trying and using new strategies, they appeared more confident to try new skills.

In addition, I recommended LLI based on my analysis because by the end of the study, students were participating more in lessons outside of the guided reading lessons as well. For example, the students were volunteering to read during a science lesson, as discussed in my findings. The content of this particular science lesson was at grade level. Five students had enough confidence to raise their hand to volunteer to read front of their peers. I found the students were volunteering to read in front of the class in all academic areas. Students were volunteering to summarize the read aloud book we read each day after lunch on a more consistent basis. Students were volunteering to answer questions based on their reading in and out of guided reading centers. The students were transferring their skills learned in LLI to other areas of the school day. Along with improving their reading ability through LLI, I was hopeful to find something to help these students who have struggled for so long. Now they are more confident in their abilities and more willing to try to participate in all content areas. It was
amazing to watch the students in the study began to demonstrate this ability by the end of the study!

Finally, I recommended LLI because it offers so much content instruction within the program. The students were working with all areas of reading on a daily basis. The students were reading, writing, speaking and listening during every lesson. They were involved in word work daily. The components of the lessons were so intense. The students were exposed to so much. In addition they were reading instructional level books as well as “easier” books to build confidence. They were interacting with each other and their teacher daily. New skills and strategies were always modeled. The books used in the program were at a high level of interest. The series were engaging. The students on multiple occasions showed excitement to see the new book they were reading for the day. Many of these students told me they hated reading when the school year began in September. In addition, the program was also very easy to use. As a relatively new teacher I was able to use the lesson guidebook and materials very easily. Everything was included in the program. The preparation work for the lesson is relatively easy with the CD-ROM. I was able to print everything from my computer in the classroom and I was lucky enough to acquire a full LLI kit to keep in my room by the end of my study that included all the books. I am fortunate enough to have all the books of this program at my fingertips now, instead of sharing with the reading room.

After completing the study, there are two concerns that need to be addressed. Firstly, like any guided reading program, teachers need to be conscious of regular assessments. I used DRAs in this study. Students move at such a different rate, which I found to be true with this program. Some students picked up the strategies at a quicker rate with daily practice and structured lessons much faster than their peers. Groups should be flexible to keep the students reading in their ZPD.
When students are working in their ZPDs, they are learning and growing to their full potential. (Vygotsky, 1978). Since ZPDs are individual, students move in their own zones at different rates compared to peers. I found it was very unlikely for two students to move at the same exact rate, especially the struggling readers I was working with in this study. It is important for teachers to keep pushing a student in his or her zone at all times. Because LLI is so intense, the students were moving at different rates, even if they were in the same group. It is important that if a teacher decides to use this program, he or she monitors how fast the students are progressing. If a student needs to move groups based on an assessment, it should be done.

Secondly, if a teacher is going to use this program in his or her classroom, it should be in addition to other reading instruction. The students in this study were also receiving additional whole group reading lessons, and whole group writing lessons along with writing centers. They were involved in read aloud daily. This program is considered a supplementary program to reading instruction already given in the classroom. “The LLI program is a small-group, supplementary intervention program designed to help teachers provide powerful, daily, small-group instruction for the lowest achieving children in the early grades” (http://www.heinemann.com/fountasandpinnell/lli_overview.aspx). Ideally struggling readers should receive LLI as a pull out session as a supplementary guided reading program. They should receive classroom guided reading as well. Because of the intense needs of my students in the study and the nature of my classroom, I was able to provide LLI to them as their classroom teacher and researcher. All students received LLI as their intense guided reading program for six weeks for the study. It is a great, intense, inclusive program, but the students need more reading instruction, based on my experience. If this was the only reading instruction I provided my students, it would have only been 20-30 minutes of reading instruction for the entire school day.
Students need more reading instruction than that, especially the struggling readers in my room that are already behind their peers.

Overall, I happily welcomed the success of the program. I had experimented with the program prior to the study. I hoped and expected positive results. I was happy to see an overall improvement for most of the students in just a short time. It is important to have to students immersed in an intense guided reading program on a daily basis, especially such struggling readers. It allowed opportunities to use newly learned strategies and skills in a comfortable setting. If six weeks improved and impacted the students' learning, I can’t wait to see what a whole year will do!
APPENDICES

IRB Online Training Course

CITI Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative

Human Research Curriculum Completion Report
Printed on 11/28/2010

Learner: Leigh Anne Dubois (username: ladubois)
Institution: SUNY - College at Brockport

Contact Information
Department: Literacy Education
Phone: 
Email: 

Group 2: faculty, staff, graduate students and undergraduate students

Human Research: This Group is appropriate for faculty, staff, graduate students and undergraduate students completing thesis or independent study projects. In addition to the required modules, complete any of the following modules applicable to your research:

- research with prisoners,
- Research with children,
- Research in public and elementary schools,
- International research,
- Internet research).

Questions? Send an email to the institutional coordinator at cdonalds@brockport.edu

Stage 1. Basic Course Passed on 07/08/09 (Ref # 2998835)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Required Modules</th>
<th>Date Completed</th>
<th>Grade</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>07/06/09</td>
<td>no quiz</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>History and Ethical Principles - SBR</td>
<td>07/06/09</td>
<td>4/4 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Defining Research with Human Subjects - SBR</td>
<td>07/06/09</td>
<td>5/5 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Regulations and The Social and Behavioral Sciences - SBR</td>
<td>07/07/09</td>
<td>5/5 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessing Risk in Social and Behavioral Sciences - SBR</td>
<td>07/08/09</td>
<td>4/5 (80%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informed Consent - SBR</td>
<td>07/08/09</td>
<td>4/4 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Privacy and Confidentiality - SBR</td>
<td>07/08/09</td>
<td>0/3 (0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SUNY College at Brockport</td>
<td>07/06/09</td>
<td>no quiz</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For this Completion Report to be valid, the learner listed above must be affiliated with a CITI participating institution. Falsified information and unauthorized use of the CITI course site is unethical, and may be considered scientific misconduct by your institution.

Paul Braunschweiger Ph.D.
Professor, University of Miami
Director Office of Research Education
CITI Course Coordinator

Return
December 1, 2010

Dear Parent or Guardian,

I am a graduate student in the department of Education and Human Development at The College at Brockport. I am conducting a study to discover how students are impacted by using Fountas and Pinnell's Leveled Literacy Intervention (LLI) program. LLI is used as our guided reading program on a daily basis. As part of my study, I will be observing how your child is impacted by the program during guided reading time.

If you grant consent for your child to participate in this study, she or he may be observed for 20 minutes during guided reading time. Observations will be recorded in writing on an observation sheet (double-sided journal entry).

I will be collecting data through the use of Developmental Reading Assessments (DRAs), running records, observations, double-sided journal entries and photographs. The collection of data will be approximately three days a week, or as needed, for six weeks. No information recorded will be assessed or graded for classroom purposes.

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

Thank you in advance for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Leigh Anne Dubois
Graduate Student, SUNY Brockport

Dr. Sue Novinger
Thesis Advisor at SUNY Brockport
snovinge@brockport.edu
(585) 395-5935
CONSENT FOR OBSERVATION OF STUDENT

The purpose of this research project is to explore the ways in which students are impacted using the Leveled Literacy Intervention program. I (Leigh Anne Dubois) will be conducting this research as a graduate student at The College at Brockport. If you agree to have your child participate in this research study, your child will be observed during already scheduled periods of guided reading in the classroom.

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

I understand that:

a. My child’s participation is voluntary and s/he has the right to refuse to answer any questions.

b. My child’s confidentiality is protected. Her/his name will not be recorded in observational notes. There will be no way to connect my child to the observation. If any publication results from this research, s/he would not be identified by name. Results will be given through the use of pseudonyms, so neither the participants nor the school can be identified.

c. There will be no anticipated personal risks or benefits because of participation in this project.

d. My child’s participation involves participating in regularly scheduled guided reading in her/his Multi-Age classroom.

e. The researcher will be observing my child’s guided reading lesson for approximately 20 minutes three times a week. The researcher will teach a guided reading lesson and make any written observations upon completion of the lesson.

f. The researcher will collect Developmental Reading Assessments (DRAs) at the beginning of the study and upon completion of the study. The DRAs will be analyzed by the researcher.

g. The researcher will take running records throughout the study. The running records will be analyzed

h. The researcher will use pictures to capture the use of the LLI program. The photographs will only be viewed by the researcher and the thesis advisor. The photographs will be shredded at the completion of the study.

i. The results will be used for the completion of a thesis paper by the primary researcher.

j. Data will be kept in a locked filing cabinet by the investigator. Data and consent forms will be destroyed by shredding when the research has been completed.

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

If you have any questions, you may contact:
Primary Researcher: Leigh Anne Dubois, Graduate Student, SUNY Brockport, Education and Human Development

Thesis Advisor: Dr. Sue Novinger, SUNY Brockport, Education and Human Development

snovinge@brockport.edu

(585) 395-5935

Signature of Parent: ____________________________________________ Date: ___________________
Child’s Name: ___________________________________________________
Statement of Assent
To Be Read to Multi-Age Classroom Students

My name is Leigh Anne Dubois (Miss D). I am a student at the College at Brockport, SUNY. I am going to be watching you for the next six weeks during guided reading time. I would like to find out what all of you do when you are at guided reading. You may see me writing in my journal or looking at what you are doing when you are in guided reading. You may also notice me listing to you read and see me taking notes on what you are doing. You may also see me taking pictures. I will use these things to help me if I can’t remember the great things you are doing after you leave the guided reading center.

If you decide to let me find out about the way you learning using our LLI program, I won’t write down your name or let anyone else know who you are. When I write about my study, I will only say what you and your classmates did in guided reading.

Your parent or guardian has given permission for you to take part in this study, but it’s up to you to decide if you would like to. If you would like to take part in my study, but change your mind later on, you can tell me that you have changed your mind. It is okay to change your mind at any time.

If it is okay with you for me to find out about how you are reading using the LLI program, you can write your name on the first line below. Under your name you can write today’s date which is _______.

Thank you very much,

Leigh Anne Dubois (Miss D)

Name: ____________________________________________

Date: _____________________________________________

__________________________________________ Date: ____________
Signature of witness (18 years or older)
November 1, 2010

Mr. X, Principal
Z Elementary School
Somewhere City Schools

Dear Principal X,

As you know, I am a graduate student at SUNY Brockport. I am currently developing my thesis on how children are impacted using Fountas and Pinnell’s Leveled Literacy Intervention (LLI) program in the multi-age classroom I teach in. I will also be investigating how the students are engaged with all of the components of the program which includes rereading familiar texts, phonics/word work, working with new texts, writing about reading and letter/word work. I will be using observation forms to record notes and observations. In conducting this research I would like to better understand how program impacts student learning and how they are engaged with the different components of the program.

As part of my study, I would like to observe in my multi-age classroom during guided reading three times a week for six weeks. A copy of my double-sided observation notes are enclosed, as well as the parental consent form of the student in my classroom which I am observing. I will also collect initial and final DRAs as well as running records throughout the study. I also plan to take photographs throughout the study as well.

I will be taking a participant researcher role in this research study. I will not record student names or professionals within the school. In my study, I will not disclose the name or location of the school, professionals, or student names.

In order to comply with SUNY Brockport Institutional Review Board, I must submit a letter from you, on school letterhead, stating your approval of this study. I must also submit informed consent forms from and the parents/guardians of students.

Please contact me at (585)747-4740, if you have any questions regarding my study. If you approve of my study, please mail a letter to me at the address below. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Leigh Anne Dubois
Primary Researcher

Sue Novinger
Thesis Advisor at SUNY Brockport
snovinge@brockport.edu
(585) 395-5935
BIBLIOGRAPHY


