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Reading, thinking, developing responses: an investigation of independent reading in a first grade classroom

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READING, THINKING, DEVELOPING RESPONSES: AN INVESTIGATION OF INDEPENDENT READING IN A FIRST GRADE CLASSROOM

by

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A Thesis

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Dedications

To my loving parents who have seen me through this journey from start to finish with words of encouragement and an endless supply of study chocolate.

Also to my first-grade students who show excitement and embrace the love for learning and reading. Always work hard and be the best you!

Acknowledgment

A special thank you to Dr. Susan Browne and the professors of Rowan University's Department of Education who guided me to become the professional educator I am today. I have learned an incredible amount and am ready to embark on a new chapter in the field of education continuing to impact the lives of young individuals.

Abstract

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READING, THINKING, DEVELOPING RESPONSES: AN INVESTIGATION OF
INDEPENDENT READING IN A FIRST GRADE CLASSROOM
2017-2018
Dr. Susan Browne
Master of Arts in Reading Education

What happens when first grade students engage in independent reading in which they are reading, thinking, and developing responses about texts at their independent reading level? The purpose of this study is to investigate what type of work and learning first grade students engage in during independent reading time. The focus will be on the type of thinking the students are engaging in and what strategies the students are utilizing while reading independently. This qualitative teacher research study consists of 12 first-grade students in the first-grade classroom during independent reading time of Reader's workshop. The data collected revealed students utilizing strategies and skills to accurately read and comprehend the text. The data analyzed showed students are engaging in both literal and inferential thinking as shown through their verbal and written responses, students are citing evidence from the text to support their thinking, and students are motivated to read by having choice texts that interest them. The conclusions drawn from the study reveal students purposefully select strategies and skills to use to critically think and respond to a text.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

As the light switch is flicked on, the teacher strides into the classroom ready to take on the day. An hour later, twelve small children with angelic faces come galloping down the hallway and into the room chatting about their latest excitement, ready to learn and be inspired.

As the students sit crisscross they listen attentively to the lesson at hand grasping onto the story as the teacher turns the page ready to see what will happen next. Will their predictions come true? Will the story take a turn of events and surprise us all? The students gasp in realization that Trixie has lost Knuffle Bunny.

"Turn and talk what will happen next? What is Trixie going to do?" The teacher directs the class to turn to their neighbor sharing their ideas.

The teacher finishes the story leaving the students with the happy ending of Trixie finding Knuffle Bunny at the laundromat and saying her very first words. As the students lived in the moment of the story, they were laughing and reacting with the characters feeling a love for reading. Through that experience, first grade students find true joy in reading a good book.

The teacher announces, "Off you go making predictions about what will happen next in the text as you read independently."

With the direction to begin, the he students stand up with that same excitement to gather their book bins to find their special comfy spot in the classroom to begin reading independently.

As a teacher, my goal is to extend the love of reading a good book to the students enjoying a good book independently. Students become lifelong readers as they feel the positivity and support behind their reading at this young age. Beyond the joy of reading, readers are thinkers. Students need to be thinking critically about the text, asking questions about the characters and events, arguing their point of view, and challenging the author's perspective. Students find meaning behind the text, connecting it to their world to learn and expand on their knowledge and views. Independent reading is their path to success providing unlimited access to their education and the world.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study is to investigate what type of work and learning first grade students engage in during independent reading time. First-grade students engage in both literal and inferential thinking while they read independently. Students read several texts and use strategies to read accurately and comprehend the text.

Even though independent reading time is a required daily component, students can become more involved through the power of choice. During independent reading, student have access to high-interest texts at appropriate reading levels. "Teaching includes helping students learn to recognize what behaviors support or detract from their own learning and to self-regulate. ISIR (In-School Independent Reading), when thoughtfully planned, provides those opportunities, perhaps making it the most important time in the school day" (Hall, Hedrick, & Williams, 2014). One purpose of my research study is to investigate the significance of student's controlling their learning during independent reading time.

Current research discusses the importance of motivation and engagement during reading. Students need interest, dedication, and confidence to feel motivated to read. Cambria and Guthrie (2010) discuss this in terms of five motivational practices: success, thematic-units, choice, relevance, and collaboration or teacher-student interaction. Students need to feel successful as readers to be motivated. Students can connect skills and common themes among content when it is taught through thematic-units. Students are provided with several choices as readers to provide them with more interest to engage in the task. Students choose the texts they are reading and place to read in the classroom to feel comfortable and ready to work. As students know the task is relevant to their lives, they will be motivated to read independently. Collaboration with others is a vital component to allow students to share their ideas and work with other peers and the teacher to feel valued as a learner. When teachers bring these practices into the classroom, students will be more empowered to read and feel confident in their work as motivated readers. With my study of independent reading, I feel these five practices support what I am providing students during Reader's Workshop.

Sanden (2012) names specific components for effective independent reading time in which a classroom culture needs to embody excellent classroom management, balanced literacy instruction, implementation of instructional density and higher order thinking activities, extensive use of scaffolding, encouragement of self-regulation of literacy skills and strategies, and high expectations for all students. My study considers the work the students are producing through verbal responses during individual conferences and written responses during independent reading time as a result of these

components. Sanden (2012) states, "Yes, the students are working by themselves, but in true actuality, they are not learning by themselves."

With direct instruction of skills and strategies, students need the time to practice those skills independently to reach mastery. Reutzel, Fawson, & Smith, (2008) concluded, "ScSR (scaffolded silent reading) improves third-grade students' fluency and comprehension growth as effectively as GROR (guided repeated oral reading)" (p 49). With the scaffolded support of the teacher, students are able to successfully practice the skills at hand. Connecting engagement and motivation to the utilization of skills and strategies, establishes an environment in which students are able to engage independently in a text in which they are reading, thinking, and developing strong responses.

As independent reading is a major component of Reader's Workshop used in our district, I will be able to gain deep insight on student engagement and effectiveness of the time students spend reading independently. I will be able to assess what types of tasks and thinking the students are engaging in on their own as well as the work they are conducting that supports lessons taught. I will be able to draw conclusions from the data collected on the students verbal and written responses during this time. This will lead to how teachers can better support students during independent reading.

Research Problem and Question

The research study explores what happens when first grade students engage in independent reading in which they are reading, thinking, and developing responses about texts at their independent reading level. The focus will be on the type of thinking the students are engaging in and what strategies the students are utilizing while reading

independently. This will provide research on the success achieved during independent reading time.

Story of the Question

As Reader's Workshop was implemented into the school six years ago, I did not know anything about it. I had become accustomed to following the instructions of the basal reading program. I was fortunate in that I was able to begin implementing the workshop model in steps. At this time, I was teaching third and fourth grade reading in the resource room with a small group of 5 students and a group of 3 students later in the day. The students were given time each day to read independently from books they selected on their independent level. I could not imagine how the students were going to sit and read in a manner that was effective and successful to progress them as readers. However, as the students became used to this time and expectations that were set, it became a productive and valuable component of our reading class. The students enjoyed the time to read as well as it gave me the opportunity to sit with each child and provide instruction they needed right then and there. As the year finished out, I implemented the other components of workshop and began to change the way instruction was provided. Each day started with a mini lesson utilizing mentor texts and creating anchor charts to display the content and strategies. I conducted guided reading and strategy groups during independent time. The students were given time with a partner to work together as readers and opportunities at the end of each reading session to share what they completed as a reader that day. The students began to claim more responsibility and control over their learning.

The following year, I changed positions and became a first-grade teacher in the regular education classroom. At this point, the school had provided several professional development workshops for Reading Workshop. I knew I no longer had a small group of students to instruct, but a whole class of students to inspire and support to become successful readers at a young age.

That summer prior to beginning the new school year as a first-grade teacher, I attended a week long professional development at Teachers College specifically for Readers Workshop. This was the moment that began a new journey for me and turned my focus to teaching reading. I was able to hear Lucy Calkins speak as a key note and sit in daily workshops provided by Kathy Collins. With the motivation and new learning, I was ready for the new school year, new position, and new students to provide the best reading instruction to pave the path of confidence and success as readers.

Over the next five years, I challenged myself as an educator to teach, assess, and reflect looking for ways to improve and better meet the needs of the students. I continued with professional development workshops and the school brought in a literacy coach to continue growth. The students were making wonderful progress each year and it was amazing to see the excitement for reading. However, I have wondered how effective is independent reading for students. With using the Reading Workshop model, independent reading is the component where students spend the most time. The students all have varying levels and behaviors. Students' reading abilities range from below grade level to over a year above grade level. Different students need instruction in different areas like fluency, decoding, or comprehension. I have observed students work hard and remain engaged while others are continuously off task. Independent reading is a time where

students need to take responsibility of their own learning and work. Each student is different and I want to explore how independent reading works for all types of learners. Motivation, engagement, text level, text choice, tasks, expectations, and classroom environment all play a major role. I want to explore the type of work and learning the students are engaging in during independent reading time. I will look at how students are responding to the text they are reading through oral and written responses. Students should be transferring their learning of strategies and concepts taught during whole group mini lessons, small group instruction, and individual instruction. This time should be productive for students as they are spending a sufficient amount of time reading and completing tasks that support their reading to most importantly progress them as readers.

Organization of the Thesis

Chapter two provides an overview of literature and current research explaining the success and challenges of independent reading. The chapter reviews and analyses the literature in the field as it connects to this research study. Chapter three explains the process of the study identifying the data sources and method of data analysis. The chapter also provides an understanding of the dynamics of the community and participants involved. Chapter four states the findings of the study. The chapter identifies the big ideas found among the data sources. Chapter five reveals the conclusions drawn, the implications the study holds for future practice and research, and the limitations of the study.

Chapter II

Literature Review

Independent reading is a time for students to practice the skills and strategies they have learned from instruction to become successful readers. It encompasses the key components of teacher instruction and classroom culture built through Reader's Workshop. Students are able to be successful during independent reading when they have learned the skills and strategies to support their reading. As students feel comfortable and confident in the classroom that is full of respect, value, and expectations, they are able to grow as readers. Students need the responsibility of expressing their learning as well as the expectation of working independently.

To engage in sustained independent reading, first grade students need to be motivated and involved in their own reading. Jenna Cambria and John T. Guthrie (2010) affirm, "It is not a one-way street. Children who grow rapidly in learning to read during the primary grades also grow in motivation" (p.21). Independent reading time is the opportunity for students to find the joy of reading and become accomplished readers.

Overall, the literature together reveals independent reading as an effective practice through the themes of choice, motivation, and engagement. Students need specific strategies taught to master the skill in their independent work. Miller (2013) compiled six strategies that research showed that active, thoughtful, proficient readers construct meaning using the following strategies:

- Activating relevant, prior knowledge (schema) before, during, and after reading text (Anderson and Pearson 1984).

- Creating visual and other sensory images from text during and after reading (Pressley 1976).

- Drawing inferences from text to form conclusions, make critical judgements, and create unique interpretations (Hansen 1981).

- Asking questions of themselves, the authors, and the texts they read (Raphael 1984)

- Determining the most important ideas and themes in a text (Palincsar and Brown 1984).

- Synthesizing what they read (Brown, Day, and Jones 1983). (p.14)

As readers utilize these strategies, they become aware of their reading and develop the skills needed to be successful. Readers need to the time implement these strategies into their own practice.

The text level utilized during this time is an important component for success. As students are motivated and engaged, they will utilize the time productively. As first grade students engage in independent reading in which they are reading, thinking, and developing responses about texts at their independent reading level, they are displaying the skills they have mastered. The literature supports the environment established for students to be productive and successful readers as they are thinking and responding to texts.

Supporting Factors for the Success of Independent Reading

Independent Reading is a large component of Readers Workshop. Calkins (2001) refers to independent reading workshop as "the heart of our reading work because it's the time in the day when children have the opportunity to orchestrate all they know about

reading in order to read their own just-right books." The workshop model consists of a mini lesson, small group instruction, independent conferences, mid-workshop teaching point, share, and, of course, independent reading. Each component supports each individual student and allows for the teacher to tailor to the needs of each individual to provide the best instruction. Serravallo and Goldberg (2007) believe to engage students in reading and teach them to read well, "Reading instruction should match the individual reader. Reading instruction should teach toward independence. Reading instruction should explicitly teach strategies to access skills" (p. 7). With these in place, students are able to engage in independent reading and grow as readers. The time provides students to work through problems they face. They learn how to work through unfamiliar words or misunderstandings as an example. Collins (2004) describes the value in independent reading time, "During the time when learners are working at a task independently they can learn to solve problems, develop resiliency, and become resourceful at helping themselves. This is not just learning to read: it's learning for a lifetime" (p. 8).

Following the gradual release of responsibility model of Pearson and Gallagher (1983), students are guided to independence using different skills and strategies as the teacher scaffolds support to complete release. The responsibility begins with the teacher and the direct instruction of key reading skills and strategies. Students take on responsibility with the support of the teacher and then finally they independently are able to master the skill or concept. With this model, it is imperative students are provided with the opportunity to work independently to show mastery of the skill or concept at hand. As students are provided the time to independently read they are provided the opportunity to complete the final phase to become proficient readers.

As students are reading independently, their text level is a significant component of their success and engagement. As students are reading a text at their independent level, they are successfully able to read accurately at an appropriate rate and comprehend the text. Cramer and Rosenfield (2008) find, "Although they can the read words in passages that are above their grade level, they have very low comprehension scores across word recognition accuracy levels. Thus, students' decoding abilities are not necessarily indicative of their comprehension" (p.134). To make independent reading effective, students need texts in which they are able to read accurately and comprehend. With this, they will engage in purposeful reading to think critically and construct meaningful responses. Law and Kaufhold (2009) confirm, "Students who engage in regular activities that promote the development of critical thinking skills performed higher on tasks that required higher-order thinking skills" (p.29).

Motivating and Engaging a Reader

With strategies and skills developed and opportunities provided for students to practice, students need to possess the desire and motivation to engage in the task. When students are engaged, they gain control of their learning and can embrace literacy. Guthrie (200) explained, "Engaged reading is strategic and conceptual as well motivated and intentional. The cognitive side of engagement emphasizes that effective readers are deliberately making choices within a context and selecting strategies for comprehending text content" (p.404). Research supports students with higher levels of engagement achieve higher levels of growth. When students feel motivated, they will be involved and invested in their reading.

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Motivation empowers engagement. As students are motivated to read, they are able to become engaged in doing so. Guthrie speaks on the power of students having positive motivation that surrounds reading. Three motivators for students are interest, dedication, and confidence. Guthrie explains (2013), "An interested student reads because he enjoys it, a dedicated student reads because he believes it is important, and a confident student reads because he can do it." Curriculum is continuously evolving and becoming more intense. To meet those expectations, students must feel motivated to raise to those expectations. As students are interested in the time to read and the text they have, they are intrinsically motivated and will be excited for the task. Students who feel confident in themselves will reach higher levels of success. They will believe they are able to achieve the task and therefore engage in the work with motivation. Students and people in general engage in activities they feel they are good at. This is true of readers as well. As a student feels he or she is able to read the text, they will work harder and use strategies to do so. Guthrie (2013) states, "There are books that do not appeal to some individuals, yet at a given moment in a given school, it is necessary to read them. What motivation enables students to read in this situation? The reason to read in this case is the students' belief that reading is important, and the students' persistence in reading, whatever the assignment." Students come to school already dedicated to the will of learning. They want to understand the concepts taught and want to learn. These dedicated students are motivated to continuously read independently, critically think about their reading, and respond to the text.

The positive impacts of motivational practices on students' interest, confidence, and dedication in reading can be effective through specific practices including making

reading relevant, affording choices, assuring success, arranging for collaborations, emphasizing importance of reading, organizing thematic units, and integrating multiple motivation supports during instruction (Guthrie, 2013). Guthrie has outlined how to set students up for success in the classroom. Through these motivational factors, classroom culture developed through these lenses that are established supporting independent reading is a critical component to the success of students.

Cambria and Guthrie (2010) stated, "A good reader has both skill and will" (p.16). It is easily understood and supported that good readers need the skills of reading. Students must know how to read words and comprehend the text. What pushes the skills and encourages a good reader is the will or motivation to do so. As students are reading independently they need to possess the "skill and will" to utilize the time productively. Students who stay on task are determined to work displaying internal motivation. These students have the importance of learning instilled in them through their family or own personal trait. They will work hard and give their best effort no matter the task at hand. Others who are engaged in independent reading may truly enjoy reading and have the interest to sit and read a good book. These students benefit from having choice to support their desire to read. They need a variety of genres and topics to choose from. Other students read because they are confident in themselves. They see themselves as good readers and therefore are motivated through the belief they can. Whether you are an adult or child, you like and engage in activities you feel you are good at. You will be more successful and achieve more if you believe you can. Students may encompass one or all three of these motivators to engage in a reading task.

The motivators work together to enable the student to achieve success. This works in opposition as well. Low-achieving students or students who have difficulty remaining engaged in independent reading, lack confidence, determination, and/or interest. A child who believes they cannot read, will have no determination or interest to read. A child who does not possess the determination, will not persevere as the task is difficult and halts the opportunity to become confident in themselves. As the same is true of interest. If a child is not interested in the text or task, they will not engage and avoid it all together. Cambria and Guthrie (2010) explain, "The real dilemma is that lower-achieving students often exaggerate their limitations. Believing they are worse than they really are, they stop trying completely. Retreating from all text interactions, they reduce their own opportunity to do what they want to do more than anything-to be a good reader" (p.17). When a student does not display the motivation to read, they in hand will not be confident, determined, or interested to read.

Even though independent reading time is a required daily component, students can become more involved through the power of choice. By providing students with choice during independent reading time, there will be an increase in their involvement in reading (Hall, Hendrick, & Williams, 2014). Increased reading involvement can be achieved through providing high-interest texts at appropriate reading levels, allowing students to independently listen to music, and providing time for students to talk about their books. Through looking at the effectiveness of independent reading for first grade students, enhancing student involvement during this time can be achieved with motivational techniques. "Teaching includes helping students learn to recognize what behaviors support or detract from their own learning and to self-regulate. ISIR, when

thoughtfully planned, provides those opportunities, perhaps making it the most important time in the school day" (Hall, Hendrick, & Williams, 2014). A significant increase of involvement has been established by student's controlling their learning during independent reading time. Pintrich and de Groot (1990) state, "Self-regulation was the best predictor of academic performance on all the outcome measures suggests that the use of self-regulating strategies, such as comprehension monitoring, goal setting, planning, and effort management and persistence, is essential for academic performance on different types of actual classroom tasks" (p. 38). As students self-regulate their reading, they are displaying cognitive awareness supporting their reading achievement.

Independent Reading Versus Reading Achievement

With the high interest and evidence that supports the increase of motivation and engagement during independent reading, the National Reading Panel conducted a study that challenges the actual success achieved during independent reading. Through a study of fluency, silent reading was analyzed to find there is not enough evidence to support an increase in reading practice will lead to better fluency and higher reading achievement. The National Reading Panel declares:

Despite widespread acceptance of the idea that schools can successfully encourage students to read more and that these increases in reading practice will be translated into better fluency and higher reading achievement, there is not adequate evidence to sustain this claim. Few studies have attempted to increase the amount of student reading. Those that have investigated such issues have tended to find no gains in reading as a result of the programs. This does not mean that procedures that encourage students to read more could not be made to work—future studies should explore this

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possibility—but at this time, it would be unreasonable to conclude that research shows that encouraging reading has a beneficial effect on reading achievement. (p.216)

This research shows a different perspective on independent reading. The research is valuable as it does not dismiss the importance of independent reading, but raises awareness for the need to further study students' reading achievement in direct correlation to independent reading.

In response to the National Reading Panel Report, Sanden (2013) conducted her own research to support reading achievement in the classroom among highly effective teachers. "These teachers did not view independent reading as a supplemental activity but rather as an integral part of their literacy programs. They utilized it to provide instruction or practice of reading skills and strategies, but embedded in the act of authentic reading" (p. 169). Independent reading goes beyond students reading a text by themselves with no instruction or support. Sanden (2013) further shows, "For all of the teachers, the focus of independent reading was student reading growth through utilizing purposeful instructional strategies and holding their students accountable for their reading" (p.169). The study showed the value in independent reading as a critical component of a literacy program that is backed by instruction and guidance with specifically selected skills and strategies for all students as a whole and individual.

The practice of independent reading is very different than SSR (silent sustained reading) time. Many factors are involved during independent reading time to establish an effective literacy program. Highly-effective teachers instruct students in a specific way to support their learning during that time. Sanden (2012) named for specific components for effective independent reading time as a classroom culture needs to embody excellent

classroom management, balanced literacy instruction, implementation of instructional density and higher order thinking activities, extensive use of scaffolding, encouragement of self-regulation of literacy skills and strategies, and high expectations for all students. Sanden does acknowledge that further research needs to be conducted to further examine the exact result of independent reading on student achievement. "Yes, the students are working by themselves, but in true actuality, they are not learning by themselves" (Sanden 2012).

In response to the NRP as well, Reutzel, Fawson, & Smith, (2008) concluded, "ScSR (scaffolded silent reading) improves third-grade students' fluency and comprehension growth as effectively as GROR (guided repeated oral reading). Thus, this finding provides teachers and children a complementary approach (ScSR for reading fluency practice) to the evidence-based and well-established GROR approach. We also found that having more than one effective way to provide young children reading fluency practice is important for reasons of engagement and motivation" (p 49). With the scaffolded support of the teacher, students are able to successfully practice the skills at hand. Connecting engagement and motivation to the utilization of skills and strategies, establishes an environment in which students are able to engage independently in a text in which they are reading, thinking, and developing strong responses. With direct instruction occurring in a whole group and small groups, students need the time to practice those skills independently to reach mastery.

Conclusion

With a structure to conduct effective practice, instruction that supports, and components to engage and motivate students, independent reading holds a valuable place

in the classroom to develop productive and proficient readers. As expectations are set,

students are thinking critically and growing as readers. The time provides students with

the flexibility to be themselves as readers by taking ownership of their tasks and

efforts. Students are set up with the strategies and skills to be successful as they work by

themselves. Teacher instruction of specific skills and strategies is valuable to enable

students to read independently. Reader's Workshop is a model that allows for the

instruction and guidance of teachers to support the time given to students. As students

are instructed and gradually released to practice independently, the instruction is

scaffolded. The independent time shows how students are using those tools to be

successful. When students are provided with a choice of texts that interest them at their

level, they can progress as readers and become confident in their work. As students are

motivated to be engaged with high quality texts, independent reading enables the students

to read and respond with depth and meaning.

My research explores how students are stretching their minds to dive into thinking

and responding about texts as they are engaging in and crafting quality work. The setting

of the study takes place in a first-grade classroom utilizing Reader's workshop to provide

students with direct instruction and teacher support during independent reading time.

Students are reading choice texts at their level. As the literature established the

importance of teacher instruction, choice, and motivation, my research explores how

these elements support students' engagement during reading while they are thinking and

responding to the text. My research study will work towards an improved understanding

of reading achievement during independent reading time through the type of work

students are conducting.

Chapter III

Research Design and Methodology

The research study utilizes the qualitative research paradigm. As a teacher researcher in the classroom, qualitative research enables the classroom teacher to gain an in depth understanding of the students' learning. It provides an explanation as to how, what, and why the students are performing the classroom. As Shagoury and Power (2012) explain, "Research is labor intensive, and so is good teaching. And the labor is similar for teachers, because the goal is the same-to create the best possible learning environment for students" (p.3). The teacher researcher has the motivation and knowledge to turn inquiry into a process that results in a better education for students by diving into the tasks performed by the students and teacher practice. It lays the framework for teachers to provide the best learning environment for all students.

Cochran-Smith, M. & Lytle, S. (2009) reveal "By learning from teachers about what inspires them, how they relate to their students, how they create learning environments that make time and space for thoughtful, engaged work, and what they value about being educators in these times provides emic perspective on theorizing teaching through the teacher researcher movement" (p.17). The significant component of teacher research is that it is personal. When the teacher who is conducting the study is truly invested in their work, it makes a difference for students' learning. Teachers are compassionate about their career and with that, it provides a strong foundation and reason to conduct teacher research.

Teacher research provides a professional benefit to improve the field of education. Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2009) also state, "The efforts of action researchers

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center on altering curriculum, challenging common school practices, and working for social change by engaging in a continuous process of problem posing, data gathering, analysis, and action (p.40). As teachers live it daily, they know how classroom practices and curricula impact student learning and the purpose for teacher research is to improve just that.

Procedure of Study and Data Sources

The study will be carried out during the independent reading component of Reader's Workshop utilizing several forms of qualitative data sources. The Reader's Workshop model is based on the work of Lucy Calkins and the Teachers College of Columbia University. The model begins with whole group direct instruction referred to as the mini lesson. This is followed by students reading independently in their "comfy spots" around the classroom. During this time the teacher is conducting small group instruction through guided reading groups and strategy groups and independent instruction through individual conferences. The model finishes with the opportunity for students to share their thinking and/or work they performed as a reader with the whole class.

As independent reading is a major component of Reader's Workshop, the first-grade students read for a maximum of thirty minutes every day. This time consists of approximately 25 minutes of reading texts at their independent level and 5 minutes of a non-leveled choice text. The students are dispersed around the classroom in their self-selected "comfy spots." The students choose where they would like to sit each day. This may be at a student desk, table, rocking chair, stool, or on the floor. The students have various rugs and pillows to choose to provide a comfortable and relaxed environment to

read. Each student has their own reading bin. The reading bin consists of five texts on their independent level, one choice text, and a shared reading notebook. The shared reading notebook is a compilation of poems the class reads together and receives instruction on at a separate time of the literacy block.   The students shop for new books in their reading bin once a week. The students choose from two to three baskets full of texts from various genres at their independent level. The students choose one choice book which may be any level or genre from the classroom library that interests them.   With these opportunities of choice, the students are provided with structure, motivation, and a positive learning environment to engage in independent reading.

Through the student's responses, I will be looking at their engagement and motivation during independent reading. I will be observing students and conducting individual conferences to discuss their work and engagement during this time. The students will be collecting data such as completing a reading log, and writing in their reader's notebook about their books and what they are thinking. I will be able to gain deep insight on student engagement and effectiveness of the time students spend reading independently. I will be able to assess what types of tasks and thinking the students are engaging in on their own as well as the work they are conducting that supports lessons taught. This will lead to how teachers can better support students during independent reading.

Data Collection

As the teacher researcher, I individually confer with the students to collect data through the use of the audio recording of the conference and written conferring notes. The audio recording provides documented conversations about the students' thinking and work they engaged in. I ask questions to gain an understanding of the type of thinking

the students are doing. Through the conferences, I check in to see what books the students are reading and the other tasks they are completing such as stopping and jotting and responding in their reader's notebook. As I am conferring with the students, I am writing personal notes of my perspective and observations of the conference. I document the objective taught during this time as well as future goals for the student. This tracks the student's work over the course of the school year. I will observe participants working independently and chart the time and specific observation. I will track the amount of time the students are continuously working. This will provide insight to the level of time on task versus distractions and off task behaviors. Through these data sources, I am later able to analyze the students across the study as well as make comparisons between students for findings of similarities and differences.

The students' work provides another data source. While working independently, the students are completing a reading log for each text they read. This holds the students accountable to read and provides me with how many texts they are reading during this time of independence. As the students are reading, as they are thinking about the text, they are documenting it through the use of stop and jots on post-it notes and their reader's notebook. The stop and jots are a quick response to the exact page they are on. This shows their thinking across a text. The reader's response notebook is a drawing or written response. As I analyze the data, I will be looking for patterns of literal or inferential thinking. The data source will show the strategies the students are using such as making predictions and connections. As a result, I will be able to identify the type of work and thinking the students are performing and be able to establish areas of strength

and weakness. This will allow me to develop future instruction to challenge the students to the next level of higher thinking and progress them as readers.

During the research study, I keep a teacher research journal to record my own observations and perspectives that stand out to me each day. I am able to reflect upon my own teaching practice and the time spent with the students during independent conferences. I am able to record successes or problems that stand out during observations and the study. The journal is an invaluable tool to reflect upon my work as a teacher researcher.

Data Analysis

As I analyze the various data sources, I utilize an inductive and deductive qualitative approach. The data collected throughout the research study will be used to draw conclusions and identify specific findings significant to student learning and performance. I will be able to gain deep insight on student engagement and effectiveness of the time students spend reading independently. I will be able to assess what types of tasks and thinking the students are engaging in on their own as well as the work they are conducting that supports lessons taught. This will lead to how teachers can better support students during independent reading

The individual conferences and audio recordings is the most significant data source as I can gain an understanding of the student's thinking. Through the conversation, I listen to their verbalized responses and pose questions to dive in deeper for more information to further analyze. Through the conferences, stop and jots, and reader's notebook, I will be to analyze the documentation of students' engagement in literal and inferential thinking as well as the strategies students use to accurately read and

comprehend a text.   The reading logs and observation of students will provide

documentation to draw conclusions about the level of engagement and time on task. In

the teacher research journal as I move through the process of analyzing the data, I record

patterns, common themes, and significant differences among the students and data

sources that I recognize.

Context

      Community. Springside township is located in Central New Jersey. The

community has a strong history of agriculture and still continues today as the township

preserves farmland and open space with only 46 businesses within Springside. The

township consists of 3 towns. According to the 2010 Census, Springside is 30 square

miles with only 0.06 square miles water and the rest 29.94 square miles land. It has a

population of 3,414 people with 1,217 housing units. Of the 3,414 people, 90.6% are

white or Caucasian, 3.8% are Black or African American, 2.5% are Asian, and 3.7% are

Hispanic or Latino. 91.2% of the population speak English only at home. Springside is at

a low poverty level as the 2015 American Community survey estimates 6.1% of the

population is at a determined poverty status. According to the 2010 Census, the median

household income is $69,268 with 87.3% of the population high school graduates or

higher.

      School. Small Town Elementary School is a single school district consisting of

preschool through sixth grade. In the school year 2015-2016, the school had 227 students

enrolled. The school consists of 16 homerooms with other rooms providing additional

services for the students. According the 2016 National Center for Education Statistics, the

student to teacher ratio is 9:1. Small Town Elementary is one of 5 townships that are

sending districts for one middle school and high school. According to the New Jersey

Performance report, in the 2015-2016 school year, the school consisted of 49% females

and 52% males. As defined by the ESEA Waiver, 85% of students are White, 6.6% are

Black, 5.7% are Hispanic, 1.8% are Pacific Islander, and 0.9% are Asian. In the homes of

these students, 96.9% speak English, 2.2% speak Spanish, 0.4% speak Polish, and 0.4%

speak Portuguese. At Small Town Elementary School, 22% of the students have a

disability, 19% are at an economic disadvantage, and 1% is an English Language

Learner.

Content area curriculum is aligned with the New Jersey Student Learning

Standards. The workshop model has been implemented for reading, writing, and

mathematics instruction. Science curriculum is aligned with the Next Generation Science

Standards. As a priority for the school, the technology initiative has provided an

interactive Smart Board in every classroom along with a 1:1 ratio for a technology device

providing every student in Kindergarten through 2nd grade with an iPad and

Chromebooks for every student in grades 3-6.

In 2017, the students performed above state average for all grade levels in both

English Language Arts. Grades 3-5 scored above the state average for Mathematics. For

English Language Arts, 62.5% of third grade students, 68% of fourth grade students, 75%

of fifth grade students, and 54.8% of sixth grade students met or exceeded

expectations.   For Mathematics, 65.6% of third grade students, 56% of fourth grade

students, 59.4% of fifth grade students, and 38.1% of sixth grade students met or

exceeded expectations.

Classroom. There are 12 students in the first-grade classroom in which all are participants of the research study. There are 10 White students, 1 Black/African American student, and 1 Hispanic or Latino student. All students speak English at home. The class consists of 6 females and 6 males. There are no special education students. One student receives speech services. Three students receive Basic Skills services and one student is part of the Reading Recovery program. Ten students are at or above grade level in reading at this time.

The students are kind towards each other and supportive of each other's learning and friendships. The students work well in groups and independently. There are no major behavior concerns in the classroom. All students have supportive families that participate in school related activities regularly. As a class, the students enjoy learning and value school thus having a strong classroom community.

Chapter IV

Data Analysis and Findings

The research study explored what happened when first grade students engaged in independent reading in which they were reading, thinking, and developing responses about texts at their independent reading level. Through data collection, the focus was on the type of thinking the students were engaging in and what strategies the students were utilizing while reading independently. Through analyzing the data, three major recurring themes evolved. The first finding was that students were engaging in both literal and inferential thinking as shown through their verbal and written responses. Secondly, students were citing evidence from the text to support their thinking. Thirdly, students were motivated and engaged in their reading during independent reading time. With these findings, students were using the time of independent reading effectively to improve their reading achievement.

Literal and Inferential Thinking

The data collected revealed the first-grade students were engaging in both literal and inferential thinking. Law and Kaufhold (2009) confirm, "Students who engage in regular activities that promote the development of critical thinking skills performed higher on tasks that required higher-order thinking skills" (p.29). Students expressed their thinking through verbal and written responses, reading independently provided the students with opportunities to think critically. The data sources revealed the students responded through discussion during independent conferences and written responses. These were documented through audio recordings, teacher conferring notes, stop and jots, and reader's response notebook.

As first-grade students engaged in reading and thinking, they responded literally. Through asking what the students were thinking while they were reading, several responded with retelling the events from the text naming characters, the setting, and key ideas. Nevi began with, "It's about a ladybug and the ladybug was saying that he is like I am big and then the other bug is saying I am bigger than you and there is this other bug that is saying well I am the biggest of all biggest bugs in the world. These bugs want to be in a parade of bugs of different sizes." Nevi was able to name the characters in the story and retell the key ideas. Patrick also retold the events of the story as he said, "The camel and the pig met on the road. They got hungry and they walked down the road and on the road they stopped for a garden. The camel reached over for a plant. The pig went under the gate to get some food. And then they ran off and became best friends." Lila wrote in her reader's response notebook, "the elephant was let for scol and the elephant wus asin pepo wiy." As New Jersey Learning standard for first-grade, students are instructed to retell stories including key details. The students were able to retell the text naming the character and key ideas to name the important events.

As the students respond with literal understandings, they utilize it to make inferences about the text. In a independent conference, Belle recognized the problem of David always getting in trouble at school. She continued explaining that if David made friends, they could help him be good. Belle was able to identify the problem in the text and think about a good solution for the character. In another independent conference Patrick was sharing his story explaining, "Elsa was locked up in the ice jail so she couldn't hurt anybody. It is really sad because if Elsa hurt somebody they could die. If I was Elsa I would just try and get one hand out and I would try and get the other hand

out." Patrick was thinking critically as he was thinking beyond the text and explaining his feelings and providing a solution for Elsa's problem. As a way of thinking about the text, Nevi concluded the big idea after reading. I asked, "What did you notice?" Nevi responded, "I noticed that they're talking about what they are called. If there are a group of zebra, they are telling us it is called a herd. If there is a big group of wolfs, 3 wolfs together, 8 wolfs together it is called a wolf pack. The story tells us about what they are called when they are all together. If a big group of family, soccer team, animals are together, they can be called something." Nevi was able to use what the text taught her and conclude the big idea. Through these findings the students are utilizing their understanding of the text, to think and respond in more critical ways.

One of the most common patterns supporting students thinking and responding inferentially was the students' ability to make connections to the text. They took what is directly stated in the text and made meaning of it from their perspective and understanding. Through their thinking and responses, the students made connections from their comprehension of the text to their own personal experiences.   Students made text to self and text to world connections. Stephanie explained, "Freddy doesn't have a friend, but at the end Freddy did have a friend." I then asked, "What does that make you think about?" Stephanie responded, "I think about my first day of school, I didn't have a friend. Then I made friends." I asked Save, "When you were reading this story, does it make you think about anything?" Save answered, "Um, me and my friend playing soccer once. There is a couple people (names three friends) on my birthday, we put on the sprinklers and we played soccer. And we had to run through and kick the ball and there were two goals. I wanted to the goalie because I didn't want to really get wet, but then we

were going to have a race to get the goal first and they would be the goalie. We did it. And I wasn't the goalie." The students were able to make connections to the text from their own personal experiences. With their connections, the students are able to have a purpose for reading and making meaning of the text. Steve made a text to world connection as he discussed the problem and the solution of the text and related it to society. Steve explained, "They saved each other and became friends. It is important because you are saving their lives. It's just not like saving you. Its saving them." As Steve made the connection, he was able to think critically and relate the solution to a social issue in our world. It appears as students are connecting the text to their own life and the world, they are becoming more engaged as readers.

Citing Textual Evidence

The type of thinking and responses about the text is a vital component of reading. The underlying support is the textual evidence that leads the student to their thinking. An important finding in my research study was students citing evidence to support their thinking and responses. The students cited evidence as they used different strategies to help them as readers. Save wrote in his reader's response notebook, "I Dont like this prt Bekase the mome trtdose (Mommy turtle) gos Bake to the Sea and the Babe trdls (baby turtles) stay thar." Save expressed his thoughts about the text by supporting it with what specifically happened that made him feel that way. Lila wrote in her notebook, "evrone was heping pepol they wr heping pepol pic pupcins." By citing they were helping with pumpkins, Lila is able to support her thinking.   As Steve was reading the text, he utilized the strategy of noticing rhyming words to help him read. During his independent conference, Steve pointed to each and named each rhyming word. By

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naming the words, Steve supported his decision to use the strategy to help him read. In the individual conference after reading the text, Jaden concluded the puppy was good and listening to the girl. He supported this by citing the evidence and saying, "The dog came to the girl when she called and the dog was walking on the leash." Jaden supported his conclusion he drew by citing evidence. Steve used evidence to support his strategy he chose to read accurately and Save cited evidence to support his reaction and feelings about the part of the text. As shown through the findings, citing evidence to support a reader's thinking and response can be utilized in many ways to help in reading achievement.

Motivation and Engagement

Engagement is a result of the students being motivated to read. Several key factors evolved to show how students were motivated and engaged through their thinking and responding. Students displayed motivation to read and engagement through strategic reading by using strategies to monitor their own reading. Students documented being motivated through their interest and enjoyment of the texts. Students were asking questions and evaluating their reading and the text. Collins (2004) describes the value in independent reading time, "During the time when learners are working at a task independently they can learn to solve problems, develop resiliency, and become resourceful at helping themselves. This is not just learning to read: it's learning for a lifetime" (p. 8).

As the students self-regulated their reading and chose strategies to support their work and thinking, they were improving their overall reading achievement. Save jotted on a post-it and place it in his text, "I dot undrstad tise worl aim." The student recognized

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he did not know the word and used the learned strategy of jotting it down to get help from the teacher or his partner. Through the use of this strategy, Save was aware and engaged in his reading when he was reading independently. During the independent conference, Belle was also aware of her reading as she came to an unknown word. Belle sounded out the word set to solve it. She reread the sentence smoothly. Belle turned the page and began reading, but came to another tricky word. She recognized it as the same word as the previous page. Belle turned back and reread the sentence on the last page. She said the word "set" and was able to read this next page. Through this engagement, she was successful as a reader by solving the unknown word. Nala used the learned strategy of "chunking it" to solve a tricky word. Nala came to the word rubberband. Without any prompting, she began to chunk it. She broke it into parts: rub/ber/band. She repeated the word and said it smoothly to correct her reading. Through the use of strategies, the students displayed a level of motivation to understand what they were reading and engagement by continuing to persevere through the task. Guthrie (200) explained, "Engaged reading is strategic and conceptual as well motivated and intentional. The cognitive side of engagement emphasizes that effective readers are deliberately making choices within a context and selecting strategies for comprehending text content" (p.404). The students deliberately chose a strategy to help them be successful as readers.

Through students' reaction and feelings connected to the text, they displayed a motivation to read. As documented earlier, the students made connections to the text. As students are personally connected, they are motivated through comparing their life to the text. Students showed their love for the books and specific parts of the story through stop

and jots and written responses in their reader's response notebooks. Belle drew hearts on

post-its to stick on the page of her favorite part. As shown in Figure 1, students write and

draw about their favorite part in their notebooks. Cole writes, "I like the prt ubout wrv

david eats Egg and he ses no." As the students are excited to share their thinking, they are

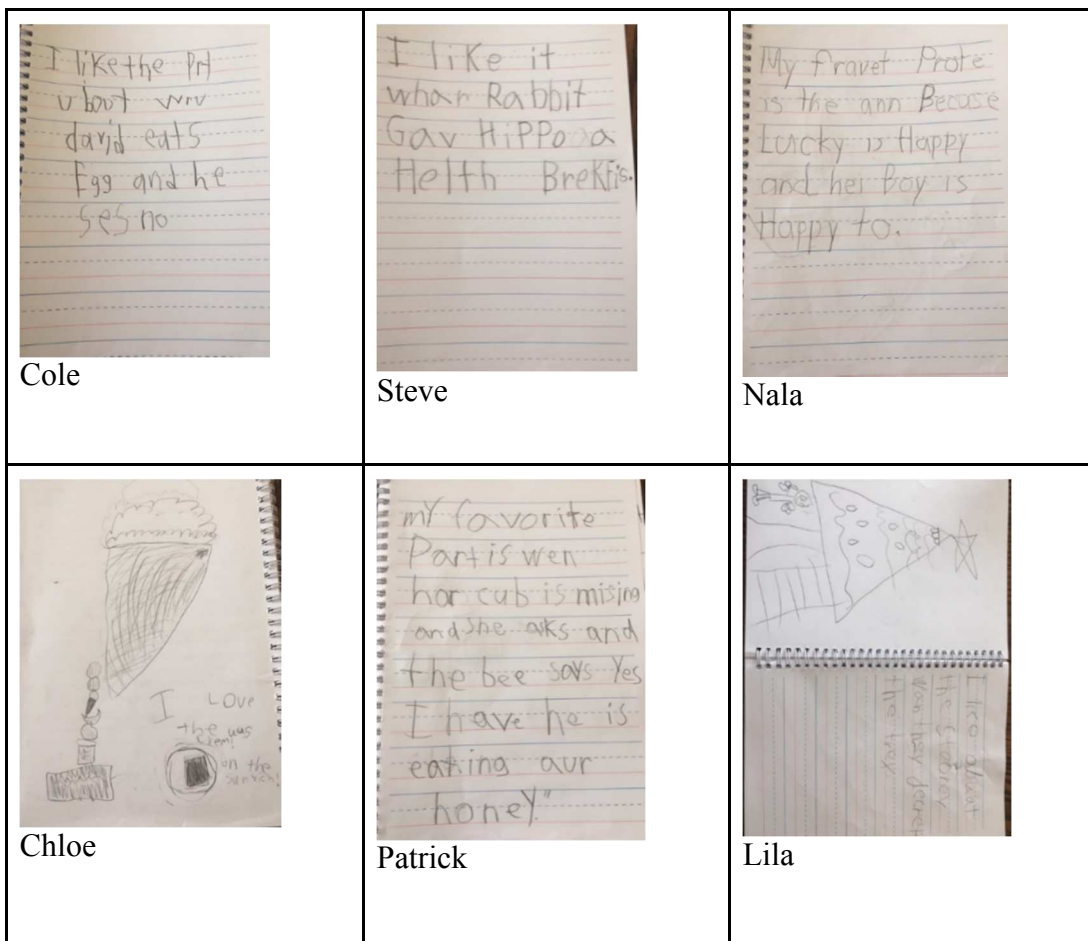motivated to write about their favorite parts and remain engaged in their work as readers.

Figure 1. Reader's Response Notebooks

Readers ask questions. Students who are engaged in their work and are thinking will wonder about the text. During an independent conference, Cole was reading the text to me. He stopped in the middle of the page, and asked, "How did the worm talk?" Cole was thinking about his reading and asked a question to make sense of his thinking. During another independent conference, Steve finished reading the poem and said out loud, "I wonder what kind of moon there will be tonight?" Steve connected the text to his world. As both boys asked questions, they showed an interest in their texts and were engaged in what they were reading about.

Cambria and Guthrie (2010) stated, "A good reader has both skill and will" (p.16). It is easily understood and supported that good readers need the skills of reading. Students must know how to read words and comprehend the text. What pushes the skills and encourages a good reader is the will or motivation to do so. The findings showed students evaluated themselves as readers through understanding the text. Self-evaluation is a motivational tool that displays understanding of their own skills and the will to become a better reader. Lila evaluated herself through a written response in her reader's response notebook. Lila wrote, "it wus a wile hrd stroorey it wus hord bcus it is hor to finde the things in the store." She felt the story was too hard for her because she was unable to complete the task. This was an I Spy book where she had to read the sentences that directed her to find the items on the page. This was a choice book in which she has a few minutes at the end of independent reading to read any book from the classroom library. She did decide the book was too hard, but not for reasons of word accuracy or comprehension. Lila evaluated her text and ability to work with the text. Chloe evaluated her ability to read the text. During an independent conference, Chloe

explained, "I think that it is a little bit hard and a little bit easy. Some words I have to figure out. It was easy because I saw sight words and I knew them." As a reader engaged in her work, Chloe was able to recognize she needed to solve some tricky words, but also identified sight words she has learned. The students were aware of their reading and using strategies to improve their skills as reader. By evaluating themselves and their texts, they are motivated to recognize the easy and difficult areas to improve their reading. Through this the students are engaged and see reading as an important component of their learning.

Conclusion

The first-grade readers engaged in various types of thinking and utilized strategies to comprehend the texts during independent reading. The students developed responses that displayed their comprehensive work as a reader. Three themes evolved as the first-grade students engaged in independent reading in which they were reading, thinking, and developing responses about texts at their independent reading level.

First, the students were engaging in both literal and inferential thinking as shown through their verbal and written responses. The students were able to retell the text naming the character and key ideas to name the important events. Through identifying the problem and developing probable solutions and concluding the big idea of the text, the students are utilizing their understanding of the text, to think and respond in more critical ways. Students made text to self and text to world connections to relate to the text from their personal point of view. Secondly, students were citing evidence from the text to support their thinking. The students cited evidence as they used different strategies to help them as readers. Thirdly, students were motivated and engaged in their reading

during independent reading time. The students self-regulating their reading by choosing strategies to help them be successful as readers. Through their responses, the students expressed their reactions and feelings about the text. They asked questions and evaluated themselves as readers. In their awareness, students expressed the skill and will to read. Their interest and motivation kept the students engaged in their work supporting their reading achievement.

From these findings, Chapter Five will explain the conclusions and limitations of the research study. The chapter will provide implications for future research.

Chapter V

Conclusion

Summary of the Findings

The research study explored what happened when first grade students engaged in independent reading in which they were reading, thinking, and developing responses about texts at their independent reading level. The focus was on the type of thinking the students are engaging in and what strategies the students utilized while reading independently.

The research study utilized the qualitative research paradigm. There were 12 students in the first-grade classroom in which all are participants of the research study. The classroom followed the Reader's workshop model to provide students with direct instruction and teacher support during independent reading time. Students were reading choice texts at their level. As the literature established the importance of teacher instruction, choice, and motivation, my research explored how these elements support students' engagement during reading while they are thinking and responding to the text.

As the teacher researcher, I individually conferred with the students to collect data through the use of the audio recording of the conference and written conferring notes. The audio recording provided documented conversations about the students' thinking and work they engaged in. As I conferred with the students, I wrote personal notes of my perspective and observations of the conference. I observed participants working independently and charted the time and specific observation. I kept a teacher research journal to record my own observations and perspectives that stood out to me each day. While working independently, the students completed a reading log for each text they

read.   As the students were reading and thinking about the text, they documented it through the use of stop and jots on post-it notes and their reader's notebook.   As I analyzed the data, I looked for patterns in the documentation of the students' engagement in literal and inferential thinking as well as the strategies students use to accurately read and comprehend a text.

As a result of the study, three major recurring themes evolved.   The first finding was that students were engaging in both literal and inferential thinking as shown through their verbal and written responses. Through asking what the students were thinking while they were reading, several responded with retelling the events from the text naming characters, the setting, and key ideas. Students recognized the problem in the text and developed a probable solution based on the character's personality and situation. Students made text to self and text to world connections. Secondly, students were citing evidence from the text to support their thinking. Students cited evidence supporting different strategies to help them as readers. Thirdly, students were motivated and engaged in their reading during independent reading time. Students displayed motivation to read and engagement through strategic reading by using strategies to monitor their own reading. Students responded with reactions and their feelings about the text showing an interest in the story. Students asked questions to clarify and deepen their understanding. Students evaluated their text and ability to read the text displaying their motivation to improve their reading skills and engagement in the task of reading. These findings revealed the type of work and learning first grade students engaged in during independent reading time.

Conclusions

The research study provides an understanding of reading achievement during independent reading time through the type of work students are conducting. As the literature has established the importance of teacher instruction, choice, and motivation, my research explored how these elements support students' engagement during reading while they were thinking and responding to the text.

Independent but Not Alone: Readers Utilizing Skills and Strategies

The time provides students with the flexibility to be themselves as readers by taking ownership of their tasks and efforts.   Calkins (2001) refers to independent reading workshop as "the heart of our reading work because it's the time in the day when children have the opportunity to orchestrate all they know about reading in order to read their own just-right books." Students are set up with the strategies and skills to be successful as they work by themselves. Students displayed specifically selected skills and strategies to accurately read and comprehend the text.

Miller (2013) compiled six strategies that research showed that active, thoughtful, proficient readers construct meaning using the following strategies: activating relevant, prior knowledge, creating visual and other sensory images, drawing inferences, asking questions, determining the most important ideas and themes, and synthesizing. Through the students' responses, their thinking displayed these strategies. The students selected strategies that purposeful to their need. As students needed strategies for word accuracy, they utilized stop and jots to ask for help, chunking it, and noticing repeating words and rhymes. Students carefully chose the strategy to help them in the moment. They

synthesized all the skills and strategies they have learned through instruction, to decide what would work best to help them be successful.

Along with the students' ability to accurately read the text, the students select strategies and utilize skills to comprehend the text. The students were drawing conclusions, summarizing the big idea, and asking questions. The level of motivation and engagement allows for readers to control their time and the choices they make to be successful readers. Students have choice in the text, the strategies and skills to problem solve and how they spend their time reading independently. By providing students with choice during independent reading time, there will be an increase in their involvement in reading (Hall, Hendrick, & Williams, 2014). The students remain engaged with purposeful thinking and meaningful work because they are invested in the work they do. As you walk into the classroom and see the students all sitting by themselves, the work they are engaging in has been constructed through instruction and their decisions as a reader to achieve the goal of reading accurately and comprehending the text.

Above and Beyond: Thinking Critically

Independent reading is a time for students to become involved in their reading. They think critically about their texts. The students use a literal understanding to dig into inferential thinking. The students utilized text evidence to support their thinking. As students react to the text with feelings and connections, they begin to develop solutions for the character and take on their point of view. Guthrie explains (2013), "An interested student reads because he enjoys it, a dedicated student reads because he believes it is important, and a confident student reads because he can do it." As students are interested in the time to read and the text they have, they are

intrinsically motivated and will be excited for the task. Students who feel confident in themselves will reach higher levels of success. They will believe they are able to achieve the task and therefore engage in the work with motivation. This motivation enables the students to think critically and perform successfully while reading independently leading to a higher reading achievement.

Limitations

The limitations of the study involved time constraints affecting data collections. Three weeks provided opportunity to understand how students were engaging in thinking during independent reading, however over a longer course of time, I could have collected more data on each participant resulting in a more in-depth analysis comparing individual students to the class.   The setting of the study limited the range of results across the data. The setting in a classroom with 12 participants limited the study to a smaller range of results. The class follows the Reader's workshop model limiting the study to that framework for instruction and independent reading.   As a new teacher researcher, my inexperience limited the study as well in locating well-documented research specific to first-grade students and independent reading.

Implications

The research study implies students are engaging in literal and inferential thinking to respond to texts. Students' thinking and responding is resulting in students' self-selecting strategies to be effective readers.   With discovering the amount of support and teaching involved in being successful as an independent reader, future research needs to be conducted to establish the type of reading achievement gained. Also, the study was conducted within the model of reader's workshop in school so further research needs

conducted to determine if the students are utilizing the same skills and strategies while

reading in other settings such as at home or other subject areas during the school day.

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