Everyone engaged and excelling : assessing the efficacy of Triple E Reading to create opportunities for improved literacy

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Everyone Engaged and Excelling:
Assessing the Efficacy of Triple E Reading to Create Opportunities for Improved Literacy

By

Lindsay Pinkelman

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty as partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Education Middle Childhood Education

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The University of Toledo
May 2010
An Abstract of

Everyone Engaged and Excelling: Assessing the Efficacy of Triple E Reading to Create Opportunities for Improved Literacy

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This qualitative study was designed to assess the learning that occurred when a teacher-designed independent reading program, Triple E Reading or “Everyone engaged and excelling,” was implemented in a rural, Midwestern public school classroom. Eighteen regular education fifth grade students participated in the program for four months. The data collection consisted primarily of authentic student writing and written field notes. An inductive and deductive content analysis of student writing found that the students’ writing exhibited not only comprehension strategy usage, but also richness of thought. Students were regularly engaging in and writing about their comprehension strategy usage such as, re-telling, making predictions, questioning, visualizing, forming personal and literary associations, discussing story structures, and self-monitoring strategies. The results of this study reaffirmed the importance and effectiveness of engaging students in written response; moreover, when utilizing Triple E Reading, the study revealed that students have the potential to be successful, independent learners motivated to engage in future reading.
This work is dedicated to my past and present students who have presented me with a tremendous amount of knowledge about what it means to be both at teacher and learner.
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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Problem

Pflaum and Bishop (2004) believe reading experiences at school are the building blocks for learning how to read and reading to learn. Reflective and responsive literacy educators across all grade levels question the effectiveness of current reading instruction. With an increasing collection of research regarding adolescent reading difficulties, attention is being given to this unique age group. For example, the United States Department of Education reports that more than 8 million students in grades 4-12 are struggling readers (Grigg, Daane, Jin, & Campbell, 2003). National Assessment of Educational Progress shows that 33% of eighth grade students performed at or above the “proficient” level (Snow & Biancarosa, 2003). These data illustrate that 67% of students are not achieving minimum literacy standards.

Researchers have also found a significant association between the early cultivation of children’s reading habits and their future success (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2007). Unfortunately, an international survey conducted in fifteen countries revealed a startling outcome: most children spend more time watching television than reading (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2007). Kubey and Csikzentmihalyi (1990) reported “the average American teen watches more than 21 hours of TV each week but only devotes 5.6 hours a week to homework and a mere 1.8 hours to pleasure reading” (p. 24). Surveys of schoolchildren’s reading practices have shown that young people across all age groups devote little time to recreational reading, and this had been true since the 1940s (Neuman,
Increasing reading time should be encouraged because it has the potential to “nourish emotions and psyches as well as their intellects” (Moore et al., 1999, p.102). In *The Power of Reading*, Krashen (1993) concluded that children who frequently read for pleasure “will become adequate readers, acquire a large vocabulary, develop the ability to understand and use complex grammatical constructions, develop a good writing style, and become good (not perfect) spellers (p.84). Furthermore, those who do not develop a habit of reading may have “a very difficult time reading and writing at a level high enough to deal with the demands of today’s world” (p. x). These findings support the need to continue investing time and effort into designing effective reading programs that cultivate positive reading habits among youths.

Guthrie and Anderson (1999) asserted “reading should be conceptualized as an engagement. Engaged readers not only have acquired reading skills, but use them for their own purposes in many contexts. They possess beliefs, desires, and interests that energize the hard work of becoming literate. From this perspective, motivation and social interactions are equal to cognitions as foundations for reading” (p. 17). In order to see gains in achievement and motivation, reading instruction must be authentic and engaging. Guthrie (1996) believed that “when children read merely to complete an assignment, with no sense of involvement or curiosity, they are being compliant. They conform to the demands of the situation irrespective of their personal goals. Compliant students are not likely to become lifelong learners” (p.433). This information leaves literacy educators wondering how to increase students’ engagement to create lifelong readers.
There is strong evidence to suggest that time spent reading separates good readers from poor readers (Allington, 2001). If struggling readers are going to become more successful, they have to be given opportunities to read. Fisher and Ivey (2006) thought reading should be the focal point of instructional time. Unfortunately, Johnston and Allington (1991) found that many older readers that are still struggling were in special programs in elementary grades that focused on skill and drill and excluded authentic reading and writing. When practicing strategies and skills, students should be reading authentic texts, not passages created for drill. Researchers suggest that the amount of time students read and write should considerably outweigh the time they spend focused on skills and strategies (Fisher & Ivey, 2006). The utilization of an independent reading program can help to normalize ability differences within a regular education classroom, leading to a more successful inclusion setting for students identified with learning disabilities as well as gifted students.

Nagy and Herman (1987) estimated that children encounter 15,000 to 30,000 unfamiliar words a year from reading only 25 minutes per day, arguing that up to one half of student vocabulary growth is a result of reading. Miller and Gildea (1987) concluded avid readers acquire larger vocabularies than less frequent readers. Worthy, Moorman, and Turner (1999) summarized that when students read about topics that truly interest them, their effort, motivation, and attitudes about reading improve. They also found that allowing children to read simpler texts like comics and magazines, can lead to an increase in basic reading skills and confidence. This knowledge suggests that reading should be encouraged not just as a school-based activity, but a leisure activity as well.
Given that research suggests powerful links between time spent reading and reading achievement (Cunningham & Stanovich, 1997; Guthrie, Wigfield, Metsala, & Cox, 1999) and that students who read more perform better on standardized reading tests (Gottfried, 1990) and achieve higher grades in school (Sweet, Guthrie, & Ng, 1998), the need to take a closer look at effective practices for reading instruction is substantial. The research leads many educators and researchers to the question, what can literacy educators do to improve reading instruction with the ultimate goal of creating a firm foundation of building blocks that ensure reading success for the future?
Chapter 2: Review of Related Literature

Introduction

This chapter begins by providing a description of current independent reading programs and citing research assessing their efficacy. I then describe Triple E Reading (Everyone engaged and excelling), the teacher-designed independent reading program that is the basis of this study. The subsequent sections present the current literacy research that served as my guiding force as I created the framework of Triple E Reading.

Independent Reading Programs

Researchers have found that in order to become better readers, students must spend time reading. In response to the research, numerous programs have been implemented to increase the time students spend reading text at school. Some of these programs include sustained silent reading (SSR), free voluntary reading (FVR), drop everything and read (DEAR), daily independent reading time (DIRT), and uninterrupted sustained silent reading (USSR) (Chua, 2008). Although there are some differences between the programs, the basic features include students reading silently, freely, and uninterrupted.

Researchers have reported positive findings about the implementation of sustained silent reading (Yoon, 2002 & Cynthia, 2000); however, there have also been negative outcomes such as the lessening of interest through the repeated practice of SSR (Parr & Maguiness, 2005). The National Reading Panel conducted a review of studies of SSR and did not find any positive influence of independent reading on reading
achievement (National Institute of Child Health and Human Development [NICHHD] 2000). In response to the contrasting studies, Siah Poh Chua (2008) used a time-series design to examine the effects of an SSR program on cultivating students’ habits and attitudes regarding books. The findings concluded that the percentages of students who read books leisurely increased throughout the SSR program and the number of students who agreed that reading books was pleasurable increased after a twelve-month implementation. The number of students who reported that reading for pleasure was useful and meaningful did not change significantly. It seemed that the SSR program improved affective reasons for reading but did not help students understand the cognitive reasons for reading, which proved to be of concern to the researcher. Siah Poh Chua (2008) hypothesizes that it may mean students did not find value in or a rationale for reading.

Confusion over independent reading programs, mostly in response to the controversial National Reading Panel’s report, has lead some educators to abandon independent reading programs in their classrooms. In an article attempting to clarify the National Reading Panel’s findings, Garan and DeVoogd (2008) state that the panel did not find SSR ineffective; rather, they did not find enough studies that met their methodological requirements, leaving them unable to draw conclusions. The National Reading Panel prefaces its results by stating, “It should be made clear that these findings do not negate the positive influences SSR may have on reading fluency, nor do the findings negate the possibility that wide independent reading significantly influences vocabulary development and reading comprehension. Rather, there are simply not sufficient data from well-designed studies capable of testing questions of causation to
make substantial causal claims” (NICHD, 2000, p.13). The National Reading Panel also mentioned that “literally hundreds of correlational studies find that the best readers read the most and poor readers read the least” (NICHD, 2000, p.3-21) and “the more you read the better your vocabulary, your knowledge of the world, your ability to read, and so on” (NICHD, 2000, pp. 3).

Stahl (2004) articulated several concerns and criticisms of customary SSR programs. These concerns include the absence of teacher and student interactions centered around literature and the lack of monitoring and accountability for reading engagement. In summary, SSR is harshly criticized for lacking teacher guidance for choosing appropriately challenging texts, having poor control of allotted reading time, showing little interaction with students, neglecting to provided feedback to the students about the quality or quantity of student reading, ignoring student accountability, not setting a purpose for reading, and failing to establish clear literacy goals. Worthy and Broadus (2002) do not recommend teachers modeling reading during independent reading time, which is a common practice in SSR. Stahl (2004) also states that teachers should forgo the practice of modeling and should monitor students reading through brief, interactive reading conferences with individual students. Recent research (Bryan et al., 2003) shows that “when classroom teachers monitored their students reading during SSR using brief interactions and accountability conferences in which they also provided feedback, even the most disengaged students in the class remained on task for up to three weeks without additional monitoring visits” (p.195).

Consequently, the controversial results compelled educators and researchers to look at the shortcomings of the traditional independent reading programs and revise the
reading block into something more effective and beneficial. Gambrell (2007) supports
the innovations asserting they may actually enhance the benefits of silent reading. Garan
and DeVoogd (2008) also feel that “such extensions of SSR do not detract from the value
of independent reading. Rather, they can be unobtrusive and natural and serve to increase
student engagement as well as afford teachers a way of monitoring student involvement”
(p. 324). Research shows that it is possible to successfully adjust literacy frameworks
and instructional methods to meet the unique needs of the students as well as the beliefs
and teaching styles of teachers (Fisher & Frey, 2007).

During independent reading, teachers may witness an array of student behaviors. Some students will dive into a text and read as much as possible, while others will try to appease the teacher by quietly reading with one eye fixed on the clock. Unfortunately, there will also be students who avoid the act of reading entirely. These students will go to the bookshelf numerous times, ask to use the restroom, blankly stare at the words on the page, quickly flip through the pages, or try to talk to students around them. To assist educators in becoming more aware of the events occurring during independent reading, Kelley and Clausen-Grace (2009) identified a continuum of reader profiles from the least engaged to the most engaged. The classifications are as follows: fake readers, challenged readers, unrealistic readers or “wannabe readers,” compliant readers, “does non-fiction count readers,” “I can but I don’t want to,” “stuck in a genre or series,” and book worms. They believe that by being aware of students’ habits, teachers can differentiate independent reading to meet everyone’s needs. Furthermore, they agree that with the right classroom environment and management techniques, all readers can become engaged readers.
Pilgreen (2000) reviewed research regarding successful SSR programs and found eight common factors. These factors include access to books that appeal to students, a conducive learning environment, encouragement, staff training, student accountability, follow-up activities, and time to read. Using these guidelines, Kelley and Clausen-Grace (2006) conducted a study of the effectiveness of their transformed version of sustained silent reading to include reading, relaxing, reflecting, responding, and rapping (sharing). Their adaptation is called R⁵ and was found to increase students’ wide reading, metacognitive awareness, and comprehension.

Another redesign of SSR, ScSR (Scaffolded Silent Reading) was developed by Reutzel and his colleagues (Reutzel et al. 2008) with the intent of becoming a suitable alternative to the Nation Reading Panel’s recommended Guided Repeated Oral Reading (GROR) strategy. Taking into account the concerns and criticisms of SSR, they developed a program that eliminated the past ineffective practices of SSR. ScSr provides students with support, guidance, structure, accountability, and monitoring. It teaches students how to choose appropriate books and incorporates individual reading conferences where students are held accountable for their reading. In a yearlong controlled experiment, ScSR was compared to GROR. The analyses demonstrated that there were no significant differences in improving third grade students’ accuracy, reading rates, expression, and comprehension re-telling scores. Initially disappointed by the findings, the researchers decided to look at the results in a different light. When properly viewed, the data indicates that the ScSR approach was found to be equal to the effects of the evidence-based approach of GROR. In conclusion, the ScSR proves to be a “viable,
complementary, and motivating approach that is comparable to the NRP recommended reading practice of GROR for the sample third-grade students” (p.205).

A New Approach: Triple E Reading

In light of the previously cited research regarding the controversial National Reading Panel study that did not find positive results between independent reading and reading achievement, many teachers and administrators questioned the use of independent reading programs. I believe that in the case of independent reading, it is not a question of whether or not to utilize the practice, but how to make it more meaningful and implement it more effectively. After considering the pitfalls of independent reading programs and studying transformations of traditional SSR such as Reading Workshop, R5, and ScSR, I developed a program that accounted for the shortcomings and aligned with the needs of my students. Some of the weaknesses of silent reading programs that I addressed in the design of Triple E Reading included a lack of purpose and focus, deficiencies in explicit strategy instruction, the absence of teacher feedback and student accountability, and students attempting to read inappropriate texts (too easy or too hard).

The following is a description of the SSR transformation called Triple E Reading, which is the basis of this study. The objective of Triple E Reading is that “Everyone is engaged and excelling,” leading to the name Triple E Reading. The program reflects the expectation that all students will become engaged in reading and can excel when reading texts of their choice at their independent reading level. To better understand the differences and similarities between silent reading programs, Table One provides a brief outline of each program.
As the first step in Triple E Reading, students participated in mini-lessons focused on specific comprehension strategies such as visualizing, summarizing, identifying main ideas, questioning, and making connections to texts. Explicit strategy instruction was presented for approximately ten minutes, which may have included lecture, modeling, and class discussion. Mini-lessons were included in Triple E Reading because explicit instruction regarding comprehension strategies benefits students. The students learn about the strategy and then practice utilizing it, gradually releasing responsibility back to the students (Pearson, 1985).

After the lesson, students silently read a book of their choice (at their independent reading level) for at least 20 minutes. Students were taught to choose books using the “five finger test.” If they could not recognize five or more words on one page of the text, they were instructed to choose an easier book. Book choices were also monitored during individual conferences with students. Students were able to sit anywhere in the room as they read. Comfortable chairs, carpet squares, and some large pillows were provided for students to use during this time.

While students were reading independently, I conducted one-on-one conferences to provide feedback to the students and hold them accountable for the learning that takes place during the reading time. The conferences allowed time for me to give students individual attention, have engaging discussions, and provide support based on the needs of the student.

After the independent reading time, students met with a previously assigned partner to re-tell what they read. Knowing they are expected to retell the text to their partner, students had a clear purpose for reading. Partners were assigned based on
reading level or common interests to promote the most meaningful conversations. Each student received two minutes to give a brief re-telling to his or her partner. They were given the opportunity to converse about the books for an additional five minutes.

Finally, to increase student accountability and responsibility for their own learning, students wrote to me in their Student Response Journals using a friendly letter format. At the conclusion of Triple E Reading, I collected the journals and provided written responses to what the students wrote. In the journals, I asked questions, commented on the use of strategies, or posed things for the students to think about. After students finished writing, we had a class discussion about their experiences utilizing the comprehension strategies. They also had the opportunity to share information about the books they were reading and made book recommendations to other students. As a part of Triple E Reading, students kept a Reading Record (a list of all the books they read).

In addition to the program utilized within the classroom, students were responsible for maintaining a monthly independent reading calendar at home. They recorded the minutes spent engaged in reading (on the calendar), which encouraged students to read outside of school and established a literacy link to the home environment. The students were given the opportunity to set reading goals for themselves each month and strived to meet them. Goals were set on an individual basis, but in general, an acceptable goal was to read at least 400 minutes. Parent signatures were required to verify the number of minutes engaged in reading, and students who met their goal received a small reward such as a cookie or a cupcake.
Improving Reading Instruction

A task force in Colorado reviewed the research on adolescent reading instruction (Quate, 2000) and found information necessary to create an effective literacy program. This task force suggests ten key elements that should be increased in classrooms today. These are considered best practices based on the work of Zemelman, Daniels, and Hyde (1993). Some of the most relevant practices include increased time reading, student choice of reading materials, exposure to a wide range of literature, teaching reading as a process with an emphasis on comprehension, writing before, during and after reading, teaching skills in the context of meaningful texts, collaborative activities, and evaluation that focuses on higher order thinking processes. The task force further advocated the importance of explicit instruction of comprehension strategies, which includes the teacher modeling strategies, providing direct instruction and scaffolding, giving time for practice, and monitoring the mastery of each strategy. They noted that special attention should be paid to increasing student motivation for literacy and learning styles should be considered. They also believe that assessing reading is a form of inquiry and should always guide further instruction.

In a study designed to improve reading achievement, Baumgartner et al. (2003) incorporated flexible grouping, student choice on a variety of tasks, increased self-selected reading time, and access to a variety of reading materials in three suburban Midwestern classrooms. The analysis of data showed that there was a rise in the instructional level of the targeted students and an increase in the number of comprehension strategies used by the students. Both the students’ attitudes towards reading and their perceptions of their own reading abilities improved after the
implementation of the program. Similarly, Bullard et al. (2001) concluded that by using a balanced reading program with diverse activities, group interactions, guided reading, small group instruction with instructional level texts in addition to the core curriculum, independent-study, and reading centers designed for various learning styles, students also showed substantial improvement in reading achievement and engagement. Schunk and Rice (1993) found that students who received guidance in increasing their reading self-efficacy and strategy use were also higher achievers in reading.

Every child deserves a competent reading teacher because teachers make a difference in children’s reading achievement and motivation to read (International Reading Association, 2000). The International Reading Association has provided a statement including a research-based description of qualities of excellent reading teachers. The statement asserts that there are six critical and distinguishing qualities of an outstanding reading teacher which include: an understanding of reading and writing development, continual assessment of student’s individual progress and consequently relating the results to instruction and student’s previous experiences, knowing a variety of ways to teach reading, offering a variety of materials and texts to be read, using flexible grouping strategies, and being good reading “coaches.” Furthermore, the statement adds that excellent reading teachers also have characteristics of good teachers in general such as strong content and pedagogical knowledge, manage classrooms where there is a high level of engagement, use strong motivation strategies that encourage independent learning, have high expectations for achievement, and help children who are having difficulty. These characteristics and qualities are evident in a classroom that utilizes Triple E Reading.
Ivey (2000) believes in developing better reading teachers instead of looking for better programs while Duffy and Hoffman (1999) hold that searching for the perfect program for reading difficulties is the pursuit of an illusion. No single method, program, or book will effectively meet the needs of all children in today’s pluralistic society, however; knowledgeable reflective teachers can respond to the diverse and ever-changing needs of students. The Triple E Reading program allows teachers to connect with students through Student Response Journals, respond to and reflect upon students’ writing, allow interests to become part of instruction and practice, provide appropriate texts, and to be flexible in an effort to meet ever-changing needs.

Students’ Motivation To Read

Because reading requires active thinking and often involves choice, motivation is crucial to reading engagement. According to Wigfield and colleagues (2004), motivation is domain specific leading children to be more motivated in particular areas and less in others. In a few studies, researchers determined that motivation is strongly influenced by the experiences they have in schools (Stipek, 1996, 2002, Wigfield, Eccles, & Rodriguez, 1998). Students who believed in their ability to accomplish a task or activity, tried more difficult activities, did better on assessments, and persisted even if they struggled to complete an activity (Bandura, 1997). Acknowledging that students perform activities such as reading for both intrinsic and extrinsic reasons, it is unreasonable to expect that students will always be intrinsically motivated to read or complete activities in school (Lepper & Henderlong, 2000, Brophy, 1998). With that said, an increasing amount of research suggests that instructional practices can enhance motivation so a decline in motivation does not have to occur (Maehr & Midgely, 1996; Stipek, 1996).
Buzard et. al (2001) showed that after the use of various instructional strategies and student choice, there was an increase in the number of students who found books exciting, who thought books could teach them new vocabulary, who felt books connected to their lives, and that said reading was enjoyable. The results documented that over-all, students had an increased motivation to read, a more positive attitude about reading, and increased the amount of reading done outside of school.

Strommen and Mates (2004) conducted a study to determine attitudes toward reading and identify factors associated with the development of a love of reading. Through questionnaires and interviews, the findings indicate that readers (as opposed to non-readers) regularly interact around books with other members of a social circle who love to read, see being an active member of a community of readers as an important part of their identity, have access to plentiful, varied reading materials, and genuinely love reading. In addition, the research showed that school is not the critical factor for developing a love for reading; however, a teacher’s enthusiasm for reading might be. None of the students interviewed mentioned instruction or skill as something that encourages enjoyment of reading. Only two readers said the novels assigned in school were enjoyable.

In a study regarding reading preferences, Nippold, Duthie and Larsen (2005) indicate the most popular reading materials of older children and young adolescents were magazines, novels and comics, while the least popular were plays, newspapers and technical books. Time spent and interest in reading for pleasure declines in the age range 11-15. Another notable finding of this study was that boys were more likely than girls to report that they never read as a leisure activity.
Considering the previously stated research, Triple E Reading allows students to read books of their choice to increase motivation and raise the level of reading enjoyment. Triple E Reading creates a community of readers and allows them to socially interact with others about literature.

**Explicit Strategy Instruction**

Comprehension was once thought of as the natural result of decoding and oral language; however, it is now thought to be a more complex process involving knowledge, experience, and thinking. Comprehension involves inferential and evaluative thinking to go beyond the literal words of the author. Fielding and Pearson (1994) found that comprehension can be taught and successful comprehension programs include the following four components: large amounts of time for actual text reading, teacher-directed instruction in comprehension strategies, opportunities for peer collaboration, and occasions for students to talk to a teacher or one another about their response to reading.

Dewitz and Dewitz (2003) stress that “Strategy instruction is an indirect force on cognition—a cognitive catalyst that promotes a disposition to close, careful reading” (p.432). Guthrie and colleagues (1996) feel that when teachers ask readers to engage in specific strategies like self-questioning, clarifying, summarizing, and making predictions, students are pushed to become purposeful and thoughtful in their reading. Consequently, they are more engaged in the text. Research shows that students’ comprehension is increased by utilizing combinations of reading strategies such as imaging, mnemonic techniques, self-monitoring, graphic organizers, asking and generating questions, understanding story structure, summarizing, activating prior knowledge, and particularly applying multiple strategies (National Institute of Child Health and Human Development,
Pressley (2002) stresses the value of comprehension strategies such as predicting, questioning, imaging, seeking clarification, using prior knowledge, summarizing and interpreting (p. 280). He suggests that teachers should model as they read, scaffold students, help them apply strategies, and talk explicitly about strategy use. He encourages teachers to give students experiences with independent, silent, free choice reading and in conjunction with explicit teaching of skills. Furthermore, a report by the RAND Corporation (Snow et. al., 2002) focused attention on the reality that many children who read at a third grade level in grade three will not automatically become proficient in later grades; furthermore, teachers must teach comprehension skills explicitly, beginning in the primary grades and continuing through high school.

Numerous studies highlight the need for explicit strategy instruction, especially for struggling readers. Swanson and De La Paz (1998) suggest that “Good readers sometimes engage in strategic behaviors while reading but seldom recall being explicitly taught how, when, and where to use the metacognitive strategies” (p.209). While the evidence shows that strategy instruction improves reading comprehension (Brown et al., 1996; Rosenshine & Meister, 1994) it is desirable to modify strategy instruction to meet the specific needs of students, something that reflective and responsive teachers have always done. Because all students are different, Dewitz and Dewitz (2003) find it crucial to tailor the strategies being taught to the needs of the children.

Instruction in comprehension can be presented to students as individual strategies. Atwell (1998) calls this instruction time a “mini-lesson” and recommends it is between five and twenty minutes long, depending on the topic. According to Atwell (1998), mini-lessons are designed to introduce and highlight concepts and techniques that will help
readers and writers grow. They can also be used as a forum for students to share what they know and for the class to collaboratively figure out what they know together. Mini-lessons may be procedural, related to literary craft, address conventions of written language, and teach about strategies of good readers. Mini-lessons are almost never centered on commercial programs or textbooks because they do not emulate reading in the real world. During mini-lessons, students are encouraged to think deeply and produce knowledge together, forming a community of literacy learners. Topics for mini-lesson usually come from the educators’ analysis of what the students need to learn next, based on their reading and writing.

Explicit strategy instruction is an integral part of Triple E Reading. The mini-lessons provide students with clear and direct literacy instruction. These lessons are flexible and student-centered to provide students with the information they need to be successful. As students read, they practice the comprehension strategies using authentic texts that interest them.

Issues with Ability Grouping

Ability grouping is a common reading instructional strategy utilized in many schools today. In a qualitative study looking at mixed-ability fifth grade reading groups (Poole, 2008), evidence suggests that putting students of different ability levels together for instruction does not necessarily help struggling readers improve. For example, when the reading groups were observed, low-ability students got to read considerably fewer words orally than their higher ability peers, answered far fewer follow-up discussion questions, and were corrected, assisted, and interrupted more by their higher level peers and the teacher. According to the study, the hierarchy of ability was indicated repeatedly
throughout their reading turns; therefore, participating in a mixed ability group did not diminish the stigmatizing effects of being a less proficient reader.

Negative outcomes are also evident when using homogeneous grouping. Over time, participating in a low ability group is said to have a negative effect on self-esteem leading and a loss of motivation to learn (e.g., Reutzel & Cooter, 1991). Many believe that ability groups are especially detrimental to low income and students of color because they are usually assigned to lower-level reading group. This type of ability grouping is said to continue and reiterate the inequalities that are evident beyond the school setting (e.g., Braddock & Slavin, 1993). Illustrating the complexity of educating students with mixed abilities in the regular education classroom, this study shows the need for effectively utilizing other methods for reading instruction.

By employing the Triple E Reading program in a regular education classroom, each student is able to read material at his or her instructional level. Higher level and lower level readers have equal opportunities to read. Giving each student the same reading strategy instruction and then providing time for practice using appropriate texts allows all students to learn at their own pace, avoiding the negative effects of ability grouping.

**Diverse Students within the Framework of Triple E Reading**

Teachers are charged with the responsibility of meeting each student’s individual needs despite the increasingly diverse student population. Classrooms are becoming culturally diverse and include a variety of ability levels, such as gifted and special education students. Modifying reading instruction is one way to respond to the numerous variables affecting how students learn in contemporary society.
Starko and Schack (1989) concluded that the learning needs of gifted and talented students go beyond what is traditionally found in the regular classroom. Because gifted students require less drill than other students to learn a skill, have longer attention spans, and are able to retain larger quantities of information, they are often not challenged in the regular education setting (Mills & Jackson, 1990). It is important to consider, as research shows, that holding an advanced reader to grade-level reading curriculum can have a negative impact upon his or her above-average reading development (Gentry, 1999).

Equally worrisome is the study conducted by Chall and Conrad (1991) that determined language arts texts provided gifted students with little or no challenge, because they were matched to grade-level, not individual reading levels. Challenging gifted students in the regular education classroom is crucial because a lack of challenge is the most commonly and frequently identified cause for boredom, lack of motivation, and low self-image for gifted students (Keighly, 2003). Students with the potential to be high achievers are showing a rate of dropout rate characteristic of low achievers (Phillips, 2008). Gifted students have a dropout rate of 5% compared to the dropout rate of 5.2% for non-gifted students (Cloud & Thornburg, 2004). In a more recent study, Cloud (2007) reported that approximately 20% of school dropouts who were tested qualified as gifted.

To educate gifted children, teachers must provide challenging learning activities along with advanced texts to truly meet their needs. Abilock (2004) reported that programs for gifted readers should include inquiry reading, authentic research, working with mentors, community resources, extended independent projects of choice, ability grouping, critical reading guidance, guided discussion of genres, and asking and responding to higher level questioning. Sternberg (2004) holds that deep cognitive
learning takes place when students are fully engaged in a relevant and challenging experience, which can be made possible by utilizing Triple E Reading and individualized texts within a regular education classroom.

Along with children that excel in reading, the average classroom will also include students who struggle. Research has discredited the misconception that only able readers can benefit from time spent reading while less able readers needs to spend time focused on isolated skill instruction and workbook practice (Anderson et al. 1985). Mastering skills through worksheets and drill is often considered to be a prerequisite for allowing students to return to a regular education classroom. Unfortunately, skill-based instruction can result in what Goodman (1991) coined as the “scenario of failure.”

Less proficient readers are not always concerned that what they read makes sense (Moore & Brantingham, 2003). In addition, they do not appear to be monitoring their comprehension to the same degree as more proficient readers since they often do not correct miscues (Goodman, Watson, & Burke, 1987). With that in mind, a synthesis of literature by Fielding and Pearson (1994) found that explicit strategy instruction is especially effective for students with poor comprehension skills, probably because they are less likely to make up strategies on their own. They also found that in some studies, less able readers who were taught comprehension strategies were indistinguishable from more able readers who had not been taught strategies directly. If less able readers are denied opportunities to read actual texts, they will inevitably fall farther and farther behind (Stanovich, 1986).

One element of the No Child Left Behind Act (2002) is its affirmation that all students have the potential to succeed regardless of racial and ethnic backgrounds or
economic status. However, Klingele (1990) found distinct correlations between socioeconomic status and reading achievement in 333 Arkansas school districts. The data collected supports the view that low socioeconomic status and racial positionality are primary variables affecting reading achievement. These findings are in agreement with the findings of the Rand Review (2004), which established that in 65 Los Angeles neighborhoods, the two factors associated most strongly with school readiness were the educational attainment of mothers and neighborhood poverty. In a contrasting study, the PISA study (OECD, 2004) reported findings on the reading achievement of fifteen year olds resulted in the conclusion that “the level of a student’s reading engagement is a better predictor of literacy performance than his or her socioeconomic background, indicating that cultivating a student’s interest in reading can help overcome home disadvantages (p. 8). This is not surprising because the Rand Review (2004) illustrates the home literacy environment consisting of the number of books at home, time spent reading to children, visits to the library, and the amount of television children watch, is much different for students in low-income neighborhoods. Students in low-income neighborhoods are disadvantaged in terms of reading-related activities. They have fewer books at home, are read to less, and are less likely to use the library regularly; therefore, students in poverty are less able to engage in reading and not likely to cultivate a high level of interest in literacy recommended by the PISA study.

To further understand effective reading instruction in low-income schools, Taylor et al. (2003) designed a study based on a framework of maximizing engagement in literacy learning, supporting higher level thinking, encouraging independent use of word-recognition and comprehension strategies during literacy activities, using a student
support stance rather than teacher-directed, and promoting active rather than passive involvement in literacy activities. The study (Taylor et al., 2003), focusing on low-income students of color, found that higher-level questioning contributed to students’ growth in reading and writing. The more higher-level thinking that occurred in the classroom, the more growth the students experienced. In addition, the study suggests that routine practice of skills is not beneficial and frequent phonics instruction negatively affects reading achievement in grades 2-5. Lastly, high levels of coaching and involving students in active reading enhanced students’ growth in fluency.

In a similar study about low-income students in a variety of urban, suburban, and rural elementary schools, Knapp (1992) found that “instruction that emphasizes meaning and understanding is more effective at inculcating advanced skills and is at least as effective at teaching basic skills, and engages children more extensively in academic learning” (p.5). It also dispels the common myth that economically disadvantaged children need to wait until they have complete mastery of basic skills before they engage in challenging higher-level work. Highlighting the need to acknowledge student backgrounds, Knapp found that teachers who emphasize meaning and understanding rather than basic skills are mostly likely to find ways of connecting instruction to their home life and in turn, engaging them more successfully in learning (p.6). Triple E Reading, is in accordance with the research findings of Knapp (1992) and Taylor et al. (2003) in the sense that understanding students and capitalizing on their individual interests, actively engages them in a way that encourages optimal challenge and learning.

One-sized fits all education that is characteristic of the past does not provide each student with the individualization they deserve. Struggling to meet the No Child Left
Behind Act (2002), educators are pressured to raise student achievement and show adequate yearly progress for all students, regardless of their backgrounds. According to the National Education of Young People (2000), it is the responsibility of schools to adjust to the developmental needs of the students they serve, and schools should not expect students to adapt to a system that does not address their individual needs (LaParo & Pianta, 2000). Moreover, Jackson and Davis (2000) hold that classes should include students of diverse needs, achievement levels, interests, and learning styles. They believe that instruction should be differentiated to take advantage of the diversity, rather than ignore it. Diversity of students requires diversity of instruction.

The National Association for Secondary School Principals (2004) have set a reform goal to ensure that teachers teach in a way that accommodates individual learning differences. By including diverse learners and utilizing differentiated techniques, such as Triple E Reading, teachers can create a classroom community where authentic learning is exercised and where all students are successfully challenged in meaningful ways. Triple E Reading allows time for individual instruction, meeting the needs of both gifted and struggling students. No matter what level the students are working on, they can be challenged, encouraged to extend their thinking, and experience success.

Responding to Literature

Writing is commonly used to assess knowledge across all content areas and is a key form of communication in modern society; therefore, writing comprehensible written text is a crucial skill for students to possess. Lack of writing skills often limits students’ ability to articulate ideas and demonstrate learning (Gunning, 2002). In order to fully demonstrate their knowledge, students need to write efficiently and effectively (Mason,
Benedek-Wood, & Valasa 2009). On a recent U.S. National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) test, close to one third of the students taking the 2007 test wrote unacceptable responses to the extended constructed-response prompt. As evidenced, many students are unable to demonstrate comprehension through writing.

Triple E Reading incorporates the use of a Student Response Journal, or a literary journal. Literary journals are “a written record of personal responses to passages from literature” (Cobine, 1995, p.3). Cobine (1995) says when keeping a journal, students read actively and respond immediately to text. Writing responses to literature causes students to synthesize thoughts and translate them into words. Through journal writing, McGrath (1992) asserts that students will reflect upon their reading more deeply due to the increased “think time” given for responding in writing. There is evidence that writing leads students to extend their thinking and acquire multiple perspectives on a topic (Tierney, O’Flahaven, & McGinley, 1989); moreover, theorists believe that writing helps students make greater sense of their own learning (Halliday, 1975). Students can write about a whole host of topics in their literary journals. For example, they can explain their use of comprehension strategies, such as making predictions, respond personally to the text, or discuss the author’s technique. The topics are not assigned and prompts are not given. Although entries may include numerous topics, they should blend emotion and analysis.

Because literary journals are meant to provoke deep thought about the text and elicit topics of personal interest, the teacher should refrain from marking grammatical and mechanical errors. The teacher’s role is to comment on the content of the work and respond in a way to broaden students’ understanding. Halpern (1986) cautions against
overlooking the importance of responding in the students’ response journals. She suggests that writing for only oneself has a limited appeal, but writing for someone to respond in a personal, not critical way can make the difference between an average reading program and a program that achieves cognitive and affective results. Literary journals provide an avenue for teachers to interact with students in alternative ways. A closer, more personal relationship may evolve between the student and teacher (Wolter, 1986). Students often feel empowered by the experience because they are conversing with their teachers (McGrath, 1992). The journal provides an authentic writing experience where the exchange of ideas becomes a “written conversation” offering support and guidance for developing knowledge about literature (Farest & Miller, 1994). Danielson (1988) maintains that journals are an effective teaching tool because they allow children to write in a natural, non-threatening way, helps students gain confidence in their writing ability, and engage students and their teachers in a personal interaction that it mutually beneficial. Additionally, dialogue journals allow for the participation of shy and reserved students. Literary journals give students who would not participate in oral class discussions, the opportunity to express their ideas with others (McGrath, 1992).

Traditional approaches in responding to literature view meaning as residing in the text, with designated “correct” interpretations. Rosenblatt (1938, 1978) proposed a new theory of how readers make meaning that focuses on psychological processes and sees literature as a means for promoting critical thinking and multiple perspectives. Rosenblatt’s transactional theory proposed that readers bring personal experience, emotions, and knowledge to a text, causing each to respond differently. According to her theory, a reader’s response is individually and socially constructed. How to determine
the quality of a response in an unavoidable issue. Rosenblatt explained in an interview (Karolides, 1999) that “the interpretation that takes into account the text would have more weight than one that ignores part of the text” (p.163).

Duke (1982) believes that students need a variety of non-threatening opportunities to express their thoughts about literature. Giving students opportunity to respond to text is important because it captures variety and diversity and facilitates the metacognitive development of the response process (Asselin, 2000). In many instances, responding in writing is preferred because it gives the children an outlet to express their initial intuitive thoughts rather than answering specific questions given by the teacher (Blake, 1995). It is different from testing or quizzing students because journals reinforce the idea that good readers are able to hold conversations expressing their thoughts about what they read (Kaiser, 2003). Blake (1995) also states that through reader responses, children can build upon their feelings, memories, and associations. Additionally, journals reveal much about the reading behaviors students engage in (Roser & Martinez, 1985).

In a study looking at the qualitative aspect of literary journals, Farest and Miller (1994) inspected children’s writing to reveal several patterns. Although each child’s individual voice was noticed, revisiting, predicting and inferring, personal association, literary association, wondering, and literary criticisms were reoccurring themes. Their work reaffirmed the work of others (Hancock, 1992), reporting the many benefits of using journals to encourage literary response. They support encouraging written response and see the need for teacher guidance and support.

Samione (2000) conducted a study to examine whether students’ reading ability affected their level of aesthetic response. Responses were scored using a rubric, giving
values to aesthetic response. The results showed strong correlation between reading ability and written responses; therefore, students who read at a lower level had difficulty responding aesthetically while the higher readers were more capable. The research shows higher aesthetic response correlates to higher understanding of texts (Cox & Many, 1992). Moreover, the study found that reading responses can be an important evaluative tool in assessing comprehension of text.

Barton and colleagues (2001) conducted a study to increase students’ comprehension and their ability to respond in a reflective manner. After explicitly teaching, modeling, guiding, and giving students time to practice the strategies of sensory imaging and making literary connections, post-intervention data indicated an increase in reading comprehension. Through Student Thinking Logs and Student Thinking Interviews, researchers demonstrated an increase in understanding and use of metacognitive strategies. Students’ written responses gradually became more detailed, elaborate and reflexive, and some of the students used the name of the strategy specifically. The analysis showed that the students reading below grade level showed the most improvement in reading comprehension, supporting the previously mentioned research.

In Triple E Reading, a connection is made between reading and writing. Writing facilitates learning (Deshler, Palincsar, Biancarosa, & Nair, 2007) and promotes critical thinking (Tierney & Shanahan, 1991); therefore, providing students with opportunities to write is extremely important in supporting their learning. When comprehension strategies and response to text are combined, student engagement and understanding is
enhanced. The connection between strategy and response can enrich student thinking and improve awareness of their own strategic reading (Liang & Galda, 2009).

Summary

Educating a wide range of students with diverse needs is a pressing issue for teachers. Because they are charged with the responsibility of ensuring that all students pass state-mandated standardized tests, teachers seek ways to be more effective in their instructional practices. In addition to the growth of historically marginalized groups of color in schools, the inclusion movement has added to the diversity by encouraging the placement of students with disabilities in the regular education classroom (Foreman, 2001). Additionally, the gifted education movement claims that gifted children are not sufficiently challenged and are underachieving in the mixed-ability classroom (Cohen, 1992). A classroom utilizing Triple E Reading and focusing on students’ diverse strengths rather than deficits, and a philosophy that incorporates flexible content, processes and products are ways to meet individual learning needs. The composition of classrooms has changed and instructional practices should keep pace with those changes.
Chapter 3: Methodology

Introduction

Educating children is a complex, situation-specific challenge. Because instruction can positively influence the lives of others, teachers and administrators are becoming increasingly involved in conducting research. McMillan (2008) asserts that even informal, small-scale studies can provide knowledge and insight to improve student learning. He articulates that the current trend is to utilize research whenever possible to make decisions about effectiveness and to determine “what works” in schools. A common goal for educators is to increase the connection between research and educational practice to ultimately enhance student learning.

As a teacher relatively new to the profession, I intuitively sensed that the implementation of Triple E Reading was an effective way to teach comprehension and allow students to practice comprehension strategies. Integrating the knowledge I gained in graduate and undergraduate classes and professional development seminars, I had a hunch that Triple E Reading would be beneficial for my students. I utilized the strategy with students for two academic school years and observed numerous positive outcomes. Triple E Reading seemed to be successful, which increased my level of interest and curiosity. Knowing the importance of reflective teaching and utilizing data to drive educational decisions, I was compelled to conduct an in-depth analysis of Triple E Reading. Because my knowledge was based primarily on personal experiences and interpretations of my observations, I sought to conduct a systematic, disciplined, inquiry
of Triple E Reading. This study is designed to assess the learning that occurs when the Triple E Reading program is implemented in a fifth grade, mixed-ability classroom as well as to provide educators with information to make an educated decision regarding the utilization of the program. It is intended to demonstrate the learning that takes place during the program as evidenced in written journal entries.

Rationale for Qualitative Methods

McMillan (2008) writes, “Qualitative research stresses a phenomenological model in which multiple realities are rooted in the subjects’ perceptions” (p.11). A focus on understanding and meaning is based on narratives and observations rather than numbers. Qualitative research takes place in naturally occurring situations rather than controlled and manipulated settings. Utilizing qualitative methodology, the researcher can develop an understanding, describe multiple realities, and capture naturally occurring behaviors. Qualitative research is flexible and may evolve throughout the research process.

In order to better understand the learning that takes place during Triple E reading, a rich narrative description is required to truly exemplify what happens within the classroom. There is much more to understanding Triple E Reading than quantitative research allows. The scope of Triple E Reading cannot be portrayed by reducing journal entries, observations, and conversations to numbers. The students’ perceptions and usage of comprehension strategies, conversations between learners, teacher observations, and student journal writing are vital in compiling a report of Triple E Reading. By utilizing a qualitative approach, I am acknowledging that there are multiple realities represented in participant perspectives, and that the context is critical in providing an understanding of Triple E Reading. Excluding these important factors would be detrimental to providing
an accurate picture of students learning through Triple E Reading. According to McMillan (2008), every detail that is recorded is thought to contribute to a better understanding of the phenomenon. Peshkin stated, “The only instrument complex enough to understand human experience is another human being” (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992, p.89). Qualitative research provides the methodologies to construct understandings of human experience; therefore, it is logical to employ qualitative methodologies in this study.

**Case Study Approach**

According to Feagin, Orum, and Sjoberg (1991), case study is an ideal methodology when a holistic, in-depth investigation is needed. Yin (2003) defined case study research as “an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident” (p.13). Case study methodology provides tools for researchers to study complex phenomena within their contexts. Case studies lead researchers to an understanding of a complex issue or object, extend experience with the phenomenon, or add strength to what is already known. Because case studies take place in a natural setting, they strive for a more holistic interpretation of the situation. Yin (2003) also stated, “the case study inquiry copes with the technically distinctive situation in which there will be many more variables of interest than data points…” (p.13).

According to Yin (1984), a case study has

At least four different applications. The most important is to explain the causal links in real-life interventions that are too complex for the survey or experimental strategies. A second application is to describe the real-life context in which an intervention has occurred. Third, an evaluation can benefit, again in a descriptive mode, from an illustrative case study—even a journalistic account—of the
intervention itself. Finally, the case study strategy may be used to explore those situations in which the intervention being evaluated has no clear single set of outcomes (as cited in Lancy, 1993, p.140).

Case studies facilitate exploration using a variety of data sources, which enhances data credibility (Patton, 1990). Baxter and Jack (2008) suggest that using a variety of data sources ensure that the issue is not explored through one lens, but rather a variety of lenses, which allows for multiple facets of the phenomenon to be revealed and understood. Data from the multiple sources are converged in the analysis process rather than handled individually. Each data source serves as a piece of the “puzzle” adding to the understanding of the phenomenon as a whole. The convergence adds strength as the evidence is weaved together to promote in-depth understanding.

Role of the Qualitative Researcher

McMillan (2008) stated that an important aspect of observation is the extent to which the researcher is an active participant along with the subjects. The level of involvement ranges from passive participation to complete participation and is represented with a continuum. The continuum includes complete observer, observer participant, participant observer, and complete participant. Complete observers do not become a part of the process in any way, observer participants are identified as a researcher but do not take on the role of the participants, participant observer participates as a member of the group but is known as a researcher, and complete participants are members of a group and not identified as a researcher. McMillan (2008) noted that the level of participation may change throughout the study.

The quality of observational results depends on how the observer and the procedures of observing affect the subjects (McMillan, 2008). In this study, I would
classify myself as an “observer participant.” Beginning on the first day of school, I strive to establish a rapport with my students. As their teacher, I play a very specific role in their education. I set clear expectations and academic goals for students to achieve. Because I spend a ninety-minute block with all my language arts students, they become quite comfortable with me and view me as a constant in their daily educational experience. They do not perceive me as an “outsider” in the classroom; however, they do not consider me a part of their group, because I serve a different purpose than their peers. Teaching mini-lessons, having conferences with students, listening to conversations, and responding to journal entries makes me an integral part of the program being studied. Because I was the “teacher” and not a “researcher” in the eyes of the students, the observer effects are minimized.

Site Selection

The site of this research study is a Midwestern public school district that I will refer to as Maple Grove School District (a pseudonym for the district in which the study took place). I have been a fifth grade teacher in the Maple Grove School District for the past four years. I elected to teach in this district because it is located near my home and is very similar to the school district I attended from kindergarten through twelfth grade.

Because I was hired in the district before the research project began, I had easy access to the site. The principal of Maple Grove Elementary is supportive of Triple E Reading and eagerly approved the conduction of educational research within the school. With the administration encouraging me in my research endeavors, Maple Grove Elementary became the site of this study. As a full time teacher at Maple Grove
Elementary, convenience allowed me to dedicate the time required to conduct qualitative research.

**Maple Grove Community**

Maple Grove is a rural community located eleven miles from a large Midwestern city. The community is considered a “village” and is the home of 3,307 residents with a service area of approximately 10,000 people (U.S. Bureau of Census, 2000). Four major highways provide convenience for the residents of Maple Grove. Maple Grove is situated four miles from a small airport, and a double track main line railroad runs through the downtown area. In Maple Grove, 47.5% of the population is male and 52.5% is female, while, the median age of the residents is 37.4 (U.S. Bureau of Census, 2000).

Maple Grove is a racially homogenous environment. Ninety-eight and four tenths percent of the residents are white, while only .2% identify themselves as African American or black, American Indian or Alaska Native, or Asian. Seventy-two percent of the households in Maple Grove are occupied by traditional families, 38.2% of households have children under the age of 18, and 9.7% of the households are female without a husband present (U.S. Bureau of Census, 2000).

Maple Grove’s government consists of a mayor, a village council and an administration. There are five full-time and four part-time police officers and 53 fire and rescue personnel. Maple Grove supports a public library, a parochial elementary school, and one public school district consisting of a high school, a middle school, and two elementary schools. There are nine religious facilities in the community (seven Protestant and two Catholic). The civic and social organizations include a Chamber of Commerce, Rotary Club, American Legion, Elks Lodge, Knights of Columbus, Mason,
VFW, a senior center, Maple Grove Garden Club, and a Railroad Club. There are 4-H clubs, Boy Scouts, Cub Scouts, Girl Scouts, and a recreational sports group available to the children of the community. I have chosen to withhold the source of this information to protect the anonymity of the community.

The total labor force of Maple Grove is 1,358. The local industry primarily consists of manufacturing and service jobs. Within the community, there are two nursing homes, a chain grocery store, and a wholesale greenhouse. There are two concrete companies, two manufacturing factories, and a steel fabrication plant. In addition to the major employers, there are also a few restaurants, gas stations, and a drug store. The largest employer in Maple Grove is a nursing home that employs 125 people. Again, I am withholding the source of this information to allow the community to remain unnamed.

Maple Grove is generally regarded as a low to middle class community. According to the U.S. census data (2000), the median income for of households in Maple Grove is $44,127. The educational attainment is also a factor in the demographics of the community. Thirty eight percent of adult residents have a high school diploma, while 12% did not graduate. Twenty three percent have some college experience, but did not earn a degree, 10% earned an Associate’s degree, 13% received a Bachelor’s degree, and 4% have a graduate degree. The median listing price for a home for sale in Maple Grove is $89,900 (National Association of Realtors, 2010).

Maple Grove Public Schools

The Maple Grove School district operates four school buildings: an early childhood elementary school (K-2), an upper elementary school (3-5), a middle school
(6-8), and a high school (9-12). The average daily student enrollment for the district is 1,345 (Ohio Department of Education, 2009). The District Report Card rates the district as “Effective” for the 2008-2009 school year. Maple Grove schools, like the community, reflect a racially homogenous environment. Ninety and seven tenths percent of students were identified as “White, non-Hispanic.” The graduation rate of Maple Grove is 91.2%, which is below the 95.3% for districts with similar demographics, socioeconomic status, and geographic factors. The mean ACT score is a 21 (Ohio Department of Education, 2009).

Ohio Department of Education reports that 30.9% of Maple Grove’s students are considered “economically disadvantaged.” This is an increasing challenge for the district because families with low socioeconomic status often lack the financial, social, and educational support that characterizes families with high socioeconomic status. As a result, children from families with low socioeconomic status are at a greater risk of entering kindergarten unprepared in comparison to their peers coming from families with middle to high socioeconomic status. This puts them at a disadvantage before their formal education begins (North Central Regional Educational Laboratory, n.d.).

Maple Grove Elementary

Maple Grove Elementary has an average daily student enrollment of 301. The school houses third, fourth and fifth grades. There are 14 full time regular education teachers, two full time special education teachers, a music teacher, a physical education teacher, a Title 1 reading specialist, a part time gifted teacher, and numerous support staff. The school building was remodeled in 2004 making many improvements to the educational environment, such as the addition of a computer lab and the expansion of the
library. At Maple Grove Elementary, 100% of teachers have a Bachelor’s Degree, and 61.5% have a Master’s degree (Ohio Department of Education, 2009). Maple Grove Elementary has an “Effective” designation having met seven out of ten state indicators, met “Adequate Yearly Progress,” and exceeded the value-added measure. Eighty-three and five tenths percent of third graders, 82% of fourth graders, and 81.6% of fifth graders were considered at or above the proficient level in reading for the 2008-2009 school year (Ohio Department of Education, 2009).

The population of Maple Grove Elementary is reflective of the homogenous community. Ninety-one and nine tenths percent of students are White, non-Hispanic, 3.6% are multi-racial, and 17.1% of students have disabilities (Ohio Department of Education, 2009). Of particular importance, 33% of students educated at Maple Grove Elementary are considered “economically disadvantaged.” At the early elementary school, the rate is 38%, indicating a downward trend in the socioeconomic level in the community.

Sample

The study occurred during the first two quarters (approximately four months) of the 2009-2010 school year, in a regular education, fifth grade classroom. The participants included 18 fifth grade students (10-11 years of age) enrolled in a Language Arts class. There were nine female and nine male student participants. Each participant and his or her parents/guardians were informed of the study and provided consent for participation.

Eighteen regular education students participated in Triple E Reading as a portion of the Language Arts curriculum. Ninety minutes of uninterrupted Language Arts
allowed for the use of the required basal series and Triple E Reading within the time allotted instructional time.

Data Collection

Qualitative research data collection procedures were employed throughout this study. Data collection consisted primarily of document collection and written field notes. The major source of this study’s data was authentic student writing in Student Response Journals. As Triple E Reading was facilitated two to three times a week, most students composed about 18 journal entries. Some students may have fewer due to the occasionally unpredictable elementary school schedule, planned or unplanned variances in the day, needing the time to complete other assignments, illness, or absence. At the end of the Triple E Reading time, I gave the writing assignment. It was the same each day to provide consistency. I would say, “In your Student Response Journals, please write to me about your book.”

Numerous researchers and educators highlight the effectiveness of utilizing journal writing within the classroom. Forgarty (1994) states that students’ comprehension grows through reflection, and this growth can be observed and assessed through journal writing. Journaling allows students to reflect upon the literature they are reading as well as apply the strategies learned during the mini-lesson. Jennings (1991) asserts that journal writing is a valuable learning experience and has been used to effectively develop reading comprehension (Jennings, 1991).

Journal writing lends itself to evaluation by both the student (Hansen, 1992) and the teacher (Kintisch, 1996). Assessment of journal writing should be diagnostic and should lead to increased understanding of individual students’ progress and needs as well
as facilitate reflective teaching practice (Jewell & Tichenor, 1994). Documenting progress in student writing development through journal writing can be approached from various perspectives (Bingham, 1988). Teachers must examine their goals as they begin the evaluation. Journal writing has become widely accepted as a beneficial classroom practice and researchers have argued that a close analysis of student work is a powerful tool for assessment and for teacher learning (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999; Little, 1999).

I chose to analyze the Student Response Journals because Dewitz and Dewitz (2003) state that it is likely that comprehension instruction can be tailored to the needs of students more than what is currently occurring in classrooms. They believe that once teachers understand how their students think, they can use the knowledge to design more effective lessons. Instruction can and should be geared toward individual needs. By taking a deeper look at students’ writing, I can begin to understand how they think and use the knowledge to better educate them. I can assess their comprehension as they use written language to express themselves and reflect upon their reading.

Data Analysis

According to Marshall and Rossman (1995), “data analysis is the process of bringing order, structure, and meaning to the mass of collected data” (p.111). With the previously stated definition in mind, I derived meaning and formulated conclusions from the data collected in student response journals using content analysis, which is a method of analyzing written, verbal, or visual communication messages (Cole, 1988). Content analysis is a systematic and objective means of describing and quantifying phenomena (Sandelowski, 1995). Content analysis makes it possible to organize and classify words into fewer content related categories. According to Krippendorff (1980), content analysis
is a method for making replicable and valid inferences from data to their context, with the purpose of providing knowledge, new insights, a representation of facts, and a practical guide to action.

Because my aim was to build a model to describe students’ comprehension in a conceptual form, I utilized the qualitative content analysis process described by Elo and Kyngas (2007). Content analysis offers several benefits that led me to utilize this type of analysis. For example, content analysis is content-sensitive (Krippendorf, 1980) and is flexible in terms of research design (Harwood & Garry, 2003). There are no systematic rules for analyzing data, but the key feature of content analysis is the texts are classified into smaller content categories (Burnard, 1996). The analytical process (Elo & Kyngas, 2007) is represented by three phases: preparation, organizing, and reporting. The following paragraphs will describe in detail, the three phases of the content analysis.

The preparation phase begins by selecting the unit of analysis (Cavanagh, 1997). According to Graneheim and Lundman (2004), the most suitable unit of analysis is whole documents, interviews, or observational protocols that are large enough to be considered as a whole but small enough to be kept in mind as a context for meaning. I decided to analyze the student response journals in their entirety. This allowed me to study the students writing over time and notice changes that occurred throughout the duration of the study. In order to get the most complete results, all students’ journals were analyzed, regardless of academic ability. Because I wanted to look at the comprehension of all types of learners, journals were not excluded.

In preparation for analysis, the researcher must decide whether to analyze only manifest content or the latent content as well (Burns & Grove, 2005). Including latent
content would allow the inclusion of elements such as silence, sighs, laughter posture, inferences, etc. (Burns & Grove, 2005). Because I am a teacher and I want my students to do well, I decided to include only manifest content. To ensure reliable results, I included only the students’ written words and did not infer what the student may have meant. The next step in the analysis process was to make sense of the data and obtain knowledge of it as a whole (Burnard, 1991). As suggested by Polit and Beck (2004), I immersed myself in the students’ writing, reading through the student response journals several times. After becoming completely familiar with the data, I decided to conduct the analysis by first using a deductive approach. After I coded the journals using the predetermined set of categories, I analyzed the writing that did not fit into the predetermined codes to find unexpected emerging themes, using inductive content analysis.

Deductive content analysis is often used in cases where the researcher wishes to retest existing data in a new context (Contanzaro, 1988). Marshall and Rossman (1995) stated that it may also involve testing hypotheses, categories, concepts, or models. Based on the information in the review of literature, explicit strategy instruction improves comprehension (Pressley, 2002). I believed that the students would apply the strategies that I explicitly taught them during the mini-lesson to their writing. Using the strategies that I taught and previously sighted research on explicit strategy instruction, I developed a categorization matrix to represent the comprehension strategies I taught. Because I planned to use inductive content analysis to organize the data that did not fit the categorization matrix, I chose to create a structured matrix. After the categorization matrix was developed, I reviewed all the data for content and coded for correspondence
with the identified categories (Polit & Beck, 2004). Only the aspects that fit the matrix of analysis were coded in the data (Sandelowski, 1995). After I coded the student response journal entries according to the categorization matrix, I looked for elements that did not fit the categorization matrix. Elo and Kyngas (2007) assert that when using a structured matrix of analysis, it is beneficial to analyze the aspects from the data that do not fit. Those aspects were then utilized to create their own codes, based on the principals of inductive content analysis.

The inductive content analysis included open coding and creating new categories. Open coding means that notes were written on the text while reading it (Elo & Kyngas, 2007). I read the open coding notes numerous times and wrote additional notes to describe all aspects of the content (Burnard, 1991). I then collected the notes from the margins and recorded them on coding sheets (Cole, 1998). From the coding sheets, new categories were generated. The purpose of creating the new categories was to provide a means of the phenomenon, to increase understanding, and to generate knowledge (Cavanagh, 1997). Tables two and three in the appendix show the categorization matrixes that were developed.

Trustworthiness

To ensure trustworthiness, Graneheim and Lundman (2004) believe the researcher should give a clear description of the context, the selection and characteristics of participants, data collection, and the process of analysis. GAO (1996) also stated that the analysis process and the results should be described in sufficient detail so that readers have an understanding of its strengths and limitations. Those aspects have been previously described in great detail.
When concerned with reliability, data analysis needs to be carefully examined. Successful content analysis requires the researcher to analyze and simplify the data to form categories that reflect the study in a reliable manner (Kyngas & Vanhanen, 1999). Weber (1990) asserted that the credibility of research findings deals with how well the categories cover the data; moreover, he states that it is important to make defensible inferences based on the collection of valid and reliable data. By utilizing both deductive and inductive content analysis, I have categorized and described the data as conclusively as possible. Despite the pre-existing list of codes, I kept an open mind to themes that emerged as I conducted the content analysis. Because there are no simple guidelines for data analysis, each inquiry is distinctive, and the results depend on the skills, insights, analytic abilities, and style of the investigator (Hoskins & Mariano, 2004). During the coding process, I engaged in writing memos, or reflexive notetaking, to describing the decisions I made and what I was learning throughout the process. I have reported the results using details and demonstrated links between the results and the data to increase reliability (Polit & Beck, 2004). Tables have been included to demonstrate connections between the results and the data.

One of the most common analytical techniques to enhance the credibility of a qualitative study is triangulation. Triangulation is the use of different methods of gathering data or collecting data with different samples, at different times, or in different places (McMillan, 2008). The reading response entries were collected over approximately a four-month time span. The multitude of journal entries accounted for variances in student attitudes and effort on a given day. Throughout the study, I listened to conversations between students and recorded them verbatim. I also kept detailed field
notes containing my observations of Triple E Reading. To increase the credibility of the study, I included authentic citations. Quotations from the student response journals and conversations are meaningful in understanding the students’ comprehension. Because the results of several data sources agree, this study has an acceptable level of trustworthiness.
Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

Liang and Galda (2009) asserted that when combining response activities and comprehension strategies, classroom instruction can enhance student engagement and understanding of text, enrich student response, and improve student’ awareness of their own strategic reading. In concurrence with the previous statement, the students’ journal responses not only exhibited comprehension strategy usage but also richness of thought. After a close examination of the journal entries, clear patterns that help to explain the ways students understand text emerged. A discussion of the patterns and examples from the journals will illustrate the knowledge gained during Triple E Reading sessions.

Frequency of Comprehension Strategy Usage

After analyzing the data, I decided to quantify the number of times students chose to write about each comprehension strategy. The students chose to re-tell 127 times, which was the most commonly discussed strategy. The students’ journal entries contained 100 literary criticisms; personal associations were discussed 66 times; and evidence of self-monitoring strategies was noted 31 times. The other comprehension strategies were written about less frequently including making predictions and self-questioning totaling 23 times each, discussing emotions and feelings 20 times, describing story elements 15 times, visualizing 13 times, and discussing vocabulary 6 times. Nine entries were considered “irrelevant” because they did not include information about the
text. Tables four and five represent the usage of comprehension strategies by students and give the total usage for each strategy.

Table six displays the total number of times each individual student utilized the comprehension strategies described in the categorization matrix. The average number of strategies used by each student was 31.2 and the median was 31. Considering that each student wrote approximately 18 journal entries, students exhibited a large amount of comprehension strategy usage.

The subsequent sections will describe the students’ writing in detail, give clear examples of how students utilized each strategy, and provide authentic quotations from Student Response Journals verifying that they are utilizing strategies to comprehend the text. All names are pseudonyms to protect the students’ identities.

Re-telling

Gambrell, Koskinen, and Kapinus (1991) describe re-telling as a generative task that requires the reader to construct a personal rendition of the texts by making inferences based on the original text and prior knowledge. They assert that re-telling requires organization of the text and focuses the readers’ attention on restructuring the text in a holistic fashion. Research suggests that engaging in re-telling after silent reading results in significant learning with respect to the comprehension and recall of prose (Gambrell, Koskinen, & Kapinus, 1991). According to Johnston (1983), “Re-telling is the most straightforward assessment of the result of text-reader interaction” (pp.54).

Students re-told what they read a total of 127 times. The scope of re-telling ranged from one simple sentence to a full paragraph recalling what they read. As I was analyzing the re-tellings, I noticed numerous elements worthy of discussion. When I
looked at the students individually, it was evident that the students’ ability to re-tell improved with practice. In the beginning of the study, the re-tellings were short and basic. With increased practice and instruction, the re-tellings towards the end of the study were longer, more detailed, and increasingly insightful. For example, Holly’s entry contained a re-telling that copied words directly from the book. By the end of the study, Holly was re-telling using her own words and including the most important events. The following is Holly’s first attempt at re-telling:

Dear Mrs. Vance,

This is the story. Ellen had just fallen asleep when she heard a strange voice. “Ellen,” it whispered. “I am coming up the stairs.” “I’m on the first step.” “Now I’m on the second step.” Ellen was scared and called for her parents but they didn’t hear her, and they didn’t come. The voice whispered, “Ellen, I’m on the top step.” “Now I’m in the hall.” “I’m standing right next to your bed!” “Now I’ve got you!”

Sincerely,

Holly

I responded:

Dear Holly,

In order to re-tell the story, you need to use your own words. Try to pick out the most important events that happened and give a description. You should not just copy what the author wrote. I want to know if you can recall the events in your own words. It’s just like when you retell to your partner. Keep working hard!
Sincerely,

Mrs. Vance

By the end of the study, Holly wrote the following in her Student Response Journal:

Dear Mrs. Vance,

This story is about a girl named Allie. She is moving but she doesn’t want to. She has close friends so I don’t think she wants to leave them. Her brothers were mean to people and didn’t have many friends so they are ok with moving. Allie is doing things to make her parents not move like being rude when people look at their house to buy it. Mary-Kay is Allie’s best friend and it is her birthday soon. They are just starting to think of a plan so Allie can stay for the party. I wonder if it will work. I hope so bc it would be sad to miss your friends party.

Sincerely,

Holly

Great progress was also observed in Melanie’s journal entries. For example, Melanie wrote:

Dear Mrs. Vance,

The book I am reading is captain underpants and the wrath of the wicked wedgie woman. I’ll tell you what I read today. Captain underpants teacher turns into a monster and gives every body a wedgie!

Sincerely,

Melanie

With some individualized attention and practice using the strategy throughout the study, Melanie was able to compose the following retelling:
Dear Mrs. Vance,

So far I have read that Judy Moody read the newspaper and saw there was a contest. The contest was where you make your own band-Aid and whoevers is the best gets to have their band-Aids at the store for a year. Judy Moody is done with her band-Aid idea and mailed it in. She will have to wait and see who will win. I think Judy Moody’s brother will win but I really hope Judy wins. Hopefully I will find out who wins next time I read. I am nervous for Judy!

Sincerely,

Melanie

Making Predictions

Effective readers use pictures, titles, headings, subheadings, and personal experiences to make predictions about texts. Predicting encourages a higher level of thinking because it involves both thinking ahead and anticipating information and events. Making predictions also actively engages students and connects them to the text by leading them to think about what may occur next. Providing time for students to make predictions before, during, and after reading activates prior knowledge and helps them formulate connections between what they already know and the new information they encounter. As students read the text, it is beneficial to refine, revise, and verify their predictions.

The students made a total of 23 predictions in their journal entries. Most students made at least one prediction in their journal throughout the course of the study. When analyzing the predictions students made, I noticed that they were good at “guessing” what would happen next, but their guesses were not often supported by the text or personal
experiences. I would often respond by asking them to clarify why they made the prediction. The following are some examples of the predictions made throughout the study:

Ben wrote at the conclusion of his journal entry:

*I think the Eagles are going to lose the game.*

I responded:

*Good prediction, but I am curious why you think that. Always try to explain why! Could you clarify why you made that prediction in your next entry please?*

Ben began his next entry:

*I think they will lose because Michael is out right now. Michael is a big part of the team. He is the QB and he got hurt. I did not think the team could pull together and win w/o him. I finished the book and they did win. I guess I was wrong!*

Another student, Mark wrote:

*I think Denny’s brother didn’t find Denny because he got locked up in the zoo.*

I responded:

*Mark, that’s a great prediction, but what makes you think that? It’s always good to have reasons to back up your predictions.*

Mark clarified:

*I think that becuz Denny was going to the zoo after it was already closed. Denny’s brother warned him but he didn’t listen. That’s why I think that he’s stuck at the zoo.*
As I looked closely at the predictions, my responses, and the students’ clarifications, it became clear that students’ often had reasons to support the prediction, but neglected to include them in their writing. Possible causes for the omissions could include that the students assumed that their reasoning for making the prediction was obvious, got tired or ran out of time for writing, or had difficulty articulating text-based information to support their prediction.

Questioning

Questioning is a meta-cognitive strategy that refers to the students generating and answering questions about a text rather than answering the teacher’s questions (Duke & Pearson, 2002). A study conducted with children in grades three through five demonstrates that elaborative questioning improves comprehension of texts during instructional and independent reading contexts (RAND Reading Study Group, 2002).

The questioning strategy was utilized 23 times throughout the study. Although it appears to be widely used, it is not as popular as the numbers suggest. For example, Molly utilized questioning ten times. When I verbally asked the class why they did not write about the questioning strategy more frequently, one student said, “I know I will find out the answer when I keep reading so I just write about other things.” Another student replied, “I know you didn’t read my book so I know you couldn’t answer it anyway.” When I discussed the strategy with Molly, she excitedly replied, “I’m a curious person and I have tons of questions when I read. The authors hardly ever put enough details in for me!” She also shared that, “When I write down the questions, I can remember them to look for the answers next time I read.”

For example, Molly wrote:
I wonder why Olive and Hattie keep commanding Ella to do something. They seem like nice characters but they are being bossy to her. Maybe the author will give me hints next time I read.

In another entry, she wrote:

I am not sure why this book had such a sad ending. Most of it was happy then all of a sudden it turned sad. The author tricked me. Do you know why authors do that Mrs. Vance?

Brittany questioned:

I wonder what will happen next. Crazy things keep happening so I have no idea what it will be next time I read.

Visualizing

Visualizing is a strategy that utilizes the mind’s ability to imagine what is being communicated by written words. Forming mental pictures anchors new ideas in a reader’s mind by linking abstract propositions to concrete experiences. Pressley (2001) asserts that students need to be taught to recall ideas in a visual way. Research demonstrates that competent readers create mental images before, during, and after reading to aid their comprehension (Sadoski & Paivia, 2001).

It seems that visualizing is a difficult strategy for students to articulate in their writing; however, when the class discussed visualizing, they could orally describe their mental images in great detail. A student stated, “I saw a large green fuzzy monster with creepy red eyes chasing after Max. He was kind of wobbling back and forth with his arms reaching out for him. I saw the buildings shaking around them. I even saw the fear in Max’s eyes, just like the story said.” He also expressed that, “This book is better than
a movie because I get to make my own movie. I like to tell you about what I see, but I see so many details that it takes to much time to write all them.” Students usually discussed their use of visualizing by naming the event they pictured. As the student explained, the descriptions often lacked detail because they did not want to write a lot. Although visualizing was discussed in the journals 13 times, it seems to be a strategy that is more commonly utilized than the journal entries show.

Wesley described his use of visualizing in the following way:

   *I got a picture in my head about what I read today. I could actually see the fight going on. It was so cool.*

I responded:

   *What exactly did you see when they fought? What details did you notice?*

Wesley replied:

   *Joey got into the fight with Fuller and it was a tie. I watched them punch and fall on the ground and kick and kids were yelling all around them. The author didn’t talk about blood but I saw it in my head anyway.*

**Personal and Literary Associations**

Schema theory explains how previous experiences, knowledge, emotions, and understandings affect what and how children learn. By teaching students how to connect to the text, they are able to better understand what they are reading. (Harvey & Goudvis, 2000). Research conducted by Keene and Zimmerman (1997) concluded that students comprehend better when they make different kinds of connections such as text-to-self, text-to-text, and text-to-world connections. Text-to-self connections are highly personal and make connections between text and the reader’s own experiences or life. When
readers are reminded of other texts they have read, other works by the same author, stories from a similar genre or literature on the same topic, they are making text-to-text connections. Text-to-world connections refer to a wide range of connections that a reader makes including ideas about how the world works, going beyond personal experiences. Tovani (2000) states that connecting to text helps readers comprehend because it helps them understand how characters feel and the motivation driving their actions, keeps them from becoming bored, sets a clear purpose for reading, forces readers to become actively involved, helps readers remember what they read, and leads them to ask questions about the text.

The analysis of the Student Response Journals showed that students could successfully make connections to the texts. Sixty-six personal associations were observed, and 14 literary associations were examined. The following are some examples of connections students made to the texts.

Comparing himself to the main character in his book, Christopher wrote:

My book makes me feel cloned. Because I have a big brother I just like Rodrick and I have a little sister that gets treated just like Manny.

Marissa wrote:

After reading that book I feel very lucky to have the life I have because I love my friends and my house and my parents and everything I have now. I would not want to live in the city she lived in. I would be scared all the time. She had a sad life so I feel thankful to be me.

To compare the current text to a text he read previously, James wrote:
I think this book is like Michigan Chillers. It is like Michigan chillers because they both have 2 kids that fight they are scary and they both make we want to keep reading till the end.

Jaci compared two Goosebumps books:

The goosebumps I am reading now is just like the one I read last week. They are both gross and scary and have both good and bad characters. If the cover fell off a goosebumps book I would be able to tell it was a goosebumps after I read the first chapter just because I know what they are like.

Expression of Feelings and Emotions

Often times, texts evoke emotions and feelings for the reader; however, in many classrooms, students are not given ample time to express how they feel about a text. Asselin (2000) writes that opportunities to represent feelings that arise during reading are important for two reasons: 1) to capture variety and diversity and 2) to facilitate metacognitive development of the response process. When given the opportunity, students frequently articulated how the text made them feel in their Student Response Journals.

Robert expressed:

My book makes me feel scared and nervous but I like it any way. I like to feel like that sometimes. Mrs. Vance I know it sounds crazy!

Zach shared:

My book makes me feel kinda good inside bc of the puppies. People do nice things for them and take care of them. It makes me happy.
Literary Criticism

As evidenced in the Student Response Journals, students were not hesitant to express their like or dislike for the text they read. Although they voiced their opinions openly and frequently, they were not often supported by specific details.

Brianna supported her opinion as she wrote:

*At first I thought my book was fantastic but then the end was terrible. The author didn’t tell how the book ends. I have no idea what happens at the end. The author probably wants me to make up my own ending but I hate books like that. If you are the same as me don’t read this book.*

Shane articulated with less detail:

*I like my book a lot. I wish we had more time to read so I could finish it.*

Some students critiqued more specific elements of the author’s style. James believed:

*The conversations between characters were realistic because it was like 2 regular boys talking. They talked like they were friends and families. There was a lot of dialogue but it was good.*

Story Elements

The identification of story elements such as plot, characters, setting, theme, problem, and resolution aids in comprehension, leads to a deeper understanding and appreciation of the text, and helps students learn to write stories of their own. Exploring the manner in which stories are organized is important to comprehension. According to Dickson, et al. (1998), teaching narrative text organization using characters, a setting, problems, solutions, gives students a frame of reference for processing and storing information. Irvin (2008) identifies awareness of text structures as an important skill to
comprehend text. Numerous students discussed story elements by describing the setting or the characters. Students did not write about problems or solutions in the Student Response Journals.

Mark described the main character of his book as follows:

The main character in my book is Georgie. He is a dwarf and that means he is really short. He is normal other than his height. He is mostly just like a regular kid. He is a very nice but some people pick on him. His mom is having a baby and he is worried that the new baby will get bigger than him. Georgie worries a lot like me. I think I would like to be Georgie’s friend if I were a character in the book.

Brianna describes the setting of her book:

The setting of my book is a haunted house. Haunted houses are good places for scary books to take place because they are so creepy and everyone has been to one before so everyone can picture them. This haunted house is extra scary and I worst one ever because it has lots of ghosts and cobwebs and noises. I cant read this book in the dark.

Choosing Books

Kelley and Clausen-Grace (2009) state that engaged reading is a critical goal for educators to set for their students. One way to promote engaged reading is to give students the opportunity to select their own texts to read during independent reading. Fielding and Pearson (1994) report that there are no studies that directly link choice to
reading growth; however, they suspect that choice is related directly to interest and motivation, both of which are related directly to learning (Anderson et al., 1985).

I was surprised to find discussion about making book choices within the students’ journal entries. Students asked for assistance in choosing books, expressed frustration in finding good books, and made suggestions to other readers.

Mark recommended his book to others as he wrote:

I am reading The Thing About Georgie and I would recommend this book to anyone age 8-14. This book is a girl book or a boy book because there are both boy and girls characters. It’s sad and funny so lots of people would like it.

Samantha elicited some assistance as she wrote:

I like fiction books, scary books, and mystery books. Do you know of any really good ones that you think I would like. You are good at picking books for me. I like the last one you told me to read.

There were also some students who found it difficult to find books they liked.

Shane wrote:

I only read football books. I couldn’t find any at the library so now I don’t know what to read.

To describe why she abandoned the book, Holly stated:

The book was boring. It was not keeping my attention. It was going to slow and was not exciting enough. My mom just bought me a new book and you told us it was ok if we abandoned books if we didn’t like it.
**Discussion of Vocabulary**

Research shows a strong relationship between vocabulary size and comprehension level (Snow et al., 2007). Because vocabulary size can predict comprehension (David, 2010), it is important for students to build their knowledge of words to increase their comprehension. Triple E Reading offers students the opportunity to notice words that are new, interesting, difficult, confusing, etc. and write about them in their journal. Students mentioned particular vocabulary words, and their questions about meaning were clarified by the teacher.

For example, Wesley said:

*When I read today I found the word commiserate and I don’t know what it means. I used context clues but it didn’t help. After I am done writing can I look it up in the dictionary?*

Brianna described a unique language:

*I am on chapter 6 and Ella is finding out how to speak in oger language. She only knows a little bit but she’s better than I could ever be. I can’t even pronounce these words. They are like evtooghbrazzy and ymmmabdeen. It makes me so confused.*

**Self-Monitoring Strategies**

Effective readers monitor and self-regulate cognitive processes such as reading. Readers with well-developed meta-cognition monitor their reading and evaluate whether the reading strategies they applying are effective for the given task (Manset-Williamson et al., 2008). Self-monitoring strategies may include but are not limited to, changing the
pace of reading, rereading, skimming, and having the ability to recognize if they understand the text.

Students showed evidence of self-monitoring strategies in the following ways:

Brittany expressed:

_I like this book but sometimes I don’t understand what’s going on. I try to reread and slow down when that happens. I may end of abandoning the book. It is so irritating!_

James shared:

_Today I tried to summarize after each page. I remembered what I read most of the time. That showed me that I was understanding and I am proud. I will use this strategy next time too. It helps me a lot._

Brianna realized important information about herself as a reader as she wrote:

_Today I noticed that I read better when I read slower. When I took my time and didn’t hurry to finish the book I remembered almost everything. I used the whole time to retell to my partner and I can never do that!_

Irrelevant Information

Although most journals entries focused on the text, nine were deemed “irrelevant” because they did not incorporate information concerning information about the text. Despite the fact that the irrelevant entries did not exhibit the students’ comprehension, they discussed pressing issues affecting the student. Over the course of the study, the students occasionally utilized the journals for personal communication with the teacher. The students wrote about personal problems, asked questions they were afraid to voice aloud, and requested advice or assistance. Even though the students did not always
remain true to the purpose of the Student Response Journals, the journals served as an avenue of communication, creating bonds between the teacher and students. The journals provided teachers with the opportunity to interact with students in an alternative way, forming a closer, more personal relationship between the teacher and the students (Wolter, 1986).

Shane shared some personal information:

I hope my life gets better soon because right now I do not like my life. I do not like how my dad acts and I sometimes get embarrassed of how he acts. He is mean but wants other people to think he is nice.

Samantha was also able to share some of her concerns:

I have been missing a lot of school since I have been sick. I don’t like missing school because I feel like I don’t know what’s going on. I’m having trouble doing my make-up work because I don’t understand. Can you help me maybe at recess?

Jaci communicated feelings that provided me with information on how to improve her learning environment:

I have been having trouble getting along with Brittany. She has been calling me names and picking on me at recess. I don’t like sitting by her in class. She pokes me and she looks at me when I’m trying to do my work.

Reading these “irrelevant” pieces of information allowed me to become aware of and address issues distressing the students. The journals helped students voice problems that could negatively affecting their learning.
Responding to Teacher Comments

Throughout the analytical process, the role of the teacher’s written responses in the Student Response Journals became quite clear. Nearly all of the students’ responses to the teacher’s comments resulted in strategy usage by the student. When the teacher posed thought-provoking questions, students were compelled to utilize comprehension strategies to compose their responses. The teacher’s responses proved to be crucial in eliciting higher-level thinking and pushing students to expand their thinking. Because Triple E Reading includes a teacher’s response, students are given an authentic audience. It was also evident that the journals gave the teacher the opportunity to offer support and guidance on an individual basis.

Haley was urged to make a prediction, support it with information from the text, and connect with the text.

I wrote:

*Do you think Holly will see Greg with the pink sweater on? What will she do if she sees him? How would you feel if that happened to you?*

Haley replied:

*I predict that she will see him because she has a class with him in the afternoon. When she sees him I am pretty sure she will laugh even though it’s not nice. If I were Holly, I would probably laugh at him because boys wearing pink sweaters are funny. I would know that it’s mean but I am being honest with you Mrs. Vance. When people laugh at me I get upset inside but try to ignore them like you and my mom say. Hopefully Greg can ignore them too.*
In a written conversation with Mark, I wrote:

*That is an excellent text-to-self connection you made! You told me how your life was similar to Georgie’s. Can you explain what is different? Can you think of any text-to-text connections to share with me?*

Mark replied:

*Georgie’s life is different from mine because he was in a school play and had to be Abraham Lincoln. I have never been in a school play and I don’t want to be either. Georgie was really nervous about it and that’s how I’d be too. This book is like a magazine article I read about the smallest person in the world. Both things were about dwarf people. I know it’s not a text but it also makes me think of the TV show Little People Big World.*

Nick was encouraged to think deeply about the setting of the book:

*The author chose the dungeon to be the setting. It was a good choice.*

I wrote:

*The setting is very important to the story. How do you think the story would be different if the setting changed to somewhere else?*

Nick replied:

*If the setting were changed to a different place like the beach, the story would not be as scary. Sun and sand and water are not creepy. The dungeon helps makes me scared and feel anxious. It’s always dark and damp and they can see shadows and hear creaking. For scary stories, you need to pick a creepy place or your story won’t be that good.*
Students’ Thoughts about Triple E Reading

At the conclusion of the study, I asked the students to express their thoughts about Triple E Reading in their Student Response Journals. Over-all, students really enjoyed the program, were thankful for time to read books of their choice, and liked re-telling and discussing their books with their partner. The following quotations from the Student Response Journals give a true representation of the students’ thoughts, opinions, and various perspectives.

“In Triple E reading, I learned how to read faster. I can tell I got faster because I don’t get stuck on words anymore. My fluency score went up and so did my comprehension.”

“My favorite thing about Triple E Reading is that we have time to just read. I like meeting with my partner but the worst part is writing in my journal. I got better at writing and it got easier but it still wasn’t very fun.”

“My favorite thing was being able to write about what I read and I got to read good books at school. I always read good books at home but now I got to read them in class too. Triple E Reading helped me to know what I’m reading. I got to practice my strategies.”

“My favorite thing about Triple E Reading is that we don’t have to sit in our seats. I like to read on the carpet. I like that I got to read a lot of books. I have never read so many books at school before. I learned that the more I read the better I get at it. My mom is happy that I got so much better.”
“I like that I got to read a lot of dinosaur books. Teachers like to tell you what to read but you let us pick. Triple E Reading could never get better because it is perfect.”

“I think Triple E Reading is really cool. The best part is that I get to talk to you. You always write back and give nice compliments. I learned that I like to visualize and summarize. I hope I get to keep writing to you!”

“My favorite part about Triple E Reading is that I always get to read exciting books. I learned that reading gets easier the more you do. I got lots of practice chunking words.”

“I learned a lot from Triple E Reading. I learned that visualizing is the best because you get a movie in your head. I like everything about Triple E Reading. It’s so much fun!”

“My favorite part about Triple E Reading is that you get to read and tell your partner about the book. I don’t like writing though.”

“Triple E Reading could be better if we get more time to do it. I think we could make time for it every day.”

“Triple E Reading taught me a lot about text-to-self and text-to-text connections. It also helped me become a better reader because I was looking for something in the book and practicing strategies. It helped me understand the story better. Triple E Reading could be better if we got more time to read.”

It is clear that students enjoy Triple E Reading and feel that it is a beneficial instructional strategy. They recognized that learning was taking place, and they felt as if
they were making progress. While some students expressed dislike for a certain part of
the program such as writing or discussing with a partner, everyone could identify positive
aspects. Because Triple E Reading incorporates a variety of tasks, it appears that all
students can find something that appeals to them.

Parental Opinions of Triple E Reading

I received various comments from parents expressing their confidence in the
program. Numerous parents informed me that their student was reading more at home
than he or she had in past grades. They reported that the Independent Reading Calendar
had a permanent place on the refrigerator. One parent shared that she copied the calendar
for everyone in her family so they could each keep track of their reading time. Parents
also told me that their children were asking to go to the public library more and begged
them to purchase new books.

Teacher’s Perspective of Triple E Reading

As my students engaged in Triple E Reading, I observed their behaviors and
listened carefully to their conversations. Some of the most rewarding moments of this
study were the instances when I overheard students discussing books outside of Triple E
Reading time, witnessed students bringing in books from home to lend to others, and saw
students keeping a list of books they wanted to read in the future. Students began asking
me to expand our classroom library. They suggested books for me to purchase and even
gave their “wish lists” to the school librarian. I also felt success with the program when
students starting requesting more Triple E Reading time. They wanted to read their
books every day and got upset if the schedule did not allow for Triple E Reading time.
Triple E Reading became a favorite “free time activity” in addition to the integral role it
played in the classroom instruction. After students finished their work, they read and asked for their Student Response Journals to write to me.
Chapter 5: Conclusions

Summary of the Study

My work in the classroom has supported the work of others reporting the numerous benefits of utilizing journals as a vehicle for student to response to literature (Hancock, 1992; Kelly, 1990; Wollman-Bonilla, 1989). Through the analysis of the student writing, the results reaffirmed the importance and effectiveness of utilizing written response as well as the necessity of adult guidance and support. This study aided in the understanding of various opportunities offered through written response to literature.

Limitations of the Study

Although this study was designed to be trustworthy in terms of the data collection and analysis, some limitations and difficulties surfaced as the study progressed. To begin, this study was conducted using only fifth grade students in small Midwestern town. All the subjects were typical; therefore, gifted and special education students were not represented. The study was conducted throughout a four-month time span. Lengthening the time allotted for data collection would increase the knowledge gained from the students’ writing.

A second limitation to the study is the fact that I did not read all of the books the students discussed in their journals. Because of the large variety of reading interests and the enormous number of texts available to students, I could not possibly be familiar with all the reading materials. Further complicating the issue is that I could not verify the
accuracy of what the students were writing. I addressed this limitation by asking clarifying questions to students in their Student Response Journals, conferring individually with students, listening to students read aloud, and monitoring students closely.

Finally, some students expressed a strong dislike for writing. Because the students’ writing served as the main avenue for expressing their comprehension, the reluctant writers’ journal entries may not reflect their true ability to comprehend. The reluctant writers may have neglected to write to their full potential in an effort to complete the task as quickly as possible. Writing in Student Response Journals was required and students knew they had to write something, however; I observed a lower level of effort compared to the students that enjoyed writing.

**Suggestions for Further Research**

Analyzing students’ writing presents an array of possibilities in terms of future research. If this study could be conducted over an entire school year, evidence of students’ progress in terms of comprehension and writing ability would be compelling evidence in the decision to implement Triple E Reading. Expanding the study to include various grade levels would also provide beneficial information regarding the effectiveness of the program.

As I analyzed the journal entries, I noticed differences related to gender, such as the selection of comprehension strategy usage, writing ability, and how they respond to text. Although investigating gender differences did not fall within the scope of this study, it would be valuable to study the similarities and differences in regard to how male and female students comprehend and write about literature.
During Triple E Reading, I observed that some students disliked writing in their Student Response Journals. It would be interesting to integrate technology into the Triple E Reading program to assess whether composing the journal entries on a computer would make writing more appealing to the students. It would be beneficial to investigate if technology could generate even more engagement in the Triple E Reading program.

Finally, Triple E Reading includes a social piece that was not investigated in this study. Each session, students were engaged in text-centered conversations with a partner and the whole class. Fielding and Pearson (1994) assert that conversation is an important aspect of independent reading programs as it provides students with the opportunity to practice and build comprehension skills collaboratively. Through the analysis of students’ conversations, researchers have the opportunity to gain a plethora of knowledge about comprehension, social interactions, and collaborative learning.

**Implications**

After conducting this study and observing the numerous benefits of Triple E Reading, I encourage all teachers to incorporate an independent reading block into their school day. Kelley and Clausen-Grace (2009) offered numerous suggestions to help teachers successfully utilize independent reading blocks in the classroom. As I underwent the process of transforming the traditional SSR independent reading block into Triple E Reading, I saw the need for a strong basis for the program. Because all teachers, classrooms, and students are different, it is crucial to develop (or utilize a previously designed program) that fits the needs of the students and the goals of the teacher. Some of the most important elements of independent reading blocks to address are to clearly articulate goals and expectations to students, support students in their reading by
conducting conferences, convey the idea that independent reading time is valuable, observe students to identify those who may be struggling, provide reading materials that they want to read, build in written and oral responses to establish accountability and responsibility, use the independent reading time to reinforce comprehension strategies taught during the mini-lesson, and have a predictable structure that students are familiar with.

This study demonstrates that Triple E Reading promotes learning, encourages the use of comprehension skills, and provides evidence that the students are able to comprehend the text. When given the opportunity to respond to text in an open-ended format such as a Student Response Journal, they are able to exhibit their comprehension in ways beyond what a teacher could elicit through a worksheet or a question and answer session. Triple E Reading gives students a voice in their learning and takes advantage of individual students’ preferences. The journals allow for the creation of bonds between the teacher and students, fostering a positive, supportive relationship. My goal for Triple E Reading was to develop independent, motivated readers that comprehend, choose to read, and experience success. Through independent reading programs such as Triple E Reading, I found that students can be successful, independent learners motivated to engage in future reading.
References


Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development. 2007. Literacy skills for the world of tomorrow. Http://www.oecd.org/document/49/0,3343,en_2649_33723_2997873_1_1_1_1,00.html.


Appendix
Table 1
Comparing SSR, R³, Reading Workshop, and Triple E Reading

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SSR</th>
<th>R³</th>
<th>Reading Workshop</th>
<th>Triple E Reading</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Read:</strong> Teacher and students read a book of their choice</td>
<td><strong>Read and Relax:</strong> Students have a set purpose to read a book of their choice anywhere in the classroom. Students practice strategy usage. Teacher does a “status of the class” and then confers with students on their strategy plans.</td>
<td><strong>Mini-Lesson:</strong> Teacher conducts a quick lesson based on the needs of the students.</td>
<td><strong>Mini-Lesson:</strong> Teacher conducts a quick mini-lesson based on the needs of the students. The mini-lesson is usually explicit instruction on strategy usage. The teacher may lecture, model, or lead a class discussion.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Record:</strong> Students record book titles in a reading record.</td>
<td><strong>Reflect and Respond:</strong> Students reflect and respond in their reading log, recording the book, title, and genre, as well as identifying the strategy they used and something interesting they read.</td>
<td><strong>Read:</strong> Students read a book of their choice. Teacher does a “status of the class,” circulates the room, and confers with students who have signed up for a conference.</td>
<td><strong>Read:</strong> Students read a book of their choice that is at their independent reading level (based on the five finger test). Teacher circulates the room and confers with all students (they do not sign up for a conference).</td>
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<td><strong>Sharing:</strong> Students may or may not share what they have read.</td>
<td><strong>Rap (Share/discuss): In pairs:</strong> Teacher continues to circulate. Students pair up and share something interesting they read and actively listen to their partner as he/she shares.</td>
<td><strong>Record/Respond:</strong> Students record their book titles in a reading log and respond to the book they are reading.</td>
<td><strong>Share:</strong> <strong>In pairs:</strong> Students meet with a previously assigned partner to retell what they read. <strong>Whole Class:</strong> Teacher facilitates a class discussion where all students have the opportunity to share what they read and make book suggestions to their peers.</td>
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<td><strong>Whole Class:</strong> Teacher facilitates sharing. Students report what their partner shared. Teacher asks the class to identify the strategy being used and the process is repeated.</td>
<td><strong>Sharing:</strong> Teacher facilitates a whole-class sharing session.</td>
<td><strong>Record/Respond:</strong> Students record the book title, genre, and date they began the book on their Reading Record. When they finish a book, they rate it on a scale of 1-10. Students also write about their books in their Student Response Journals. The teacher responds to their writing after each session.</td>
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<td></td>
<td><strong>Home Link:</strong> Students maintain a Reading Calendar recording the minutes they read at home. Students set individual reading goals and a parent signature is required to verify the accuracy.</td>
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<tr>
<td>C1: Retell</td>
<td>-recalls events in the story</td>
<td>“My book was about a princess that fell in love with a poor man from the village. She wanted to marry him but her father said no.”</td>
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<td>C2: Prediction</td>
<td>-makes hypotheses about what will happen in the book</td>
<td>“I think the Tigers will win the baseball game because they are better hitters and have a good coach that teaches them a lot.”</td>
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<td>C3: Personal Association</td>
<td>-text-to-self connections</td>
<td>“This book reminds me of my life because Leah’s parents are getting a divorce and my parents did when I was in 2nd grade. She is sad and so was I.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>C4: Literary Association</td>
<td>-text-to-text comparisons</td>
<td>“The Haunted Ohio Books are kind of like Goosebumps books because they both have monsters and ghosts. They are different because I think the Haunted Ohio Books are true but I know Goosebumps are not real.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>C5: Questioning</td>
<td>-asks questions related to the text</td>
<td>“I wonder why James wanted to fight Travis. They were friends. It is probably because Travis made the team and James didn’t.”</td>
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<td>C6: Literary Criticism</td>
<td>-shares likes/dislikes of the book -critiques author’s writing style</td>
<td>“I really like this book because it keeps my attention and I think the characters are like my friends.”</td>
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<td>C7: Visualizing</td>
<td>-discusses mental pictures</td>
<td>“I got a mental picture in my head. I saw all the fans clapping and cheering and I think I actually heard them yelling for Christopher!”</td>
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</table>
| C8: Response to teacher comments | -responds to a comment or question posed in the reading response journal | Teacher: *What do you think will happen next? Why?*  
Student: *I think that he will eat all the worms. He doesn’t want the boys to think he is a baby. That’s gross but he is trying to be cool.* |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Examples</th>
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<tr>
<td>C9: Difficulty</td>
<td>- describes the level of difficulty of text</td>
<td>“This book is really hard for me to understand. I think I should abandon it.”</td>
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<td>C10: Vocabulary</td>
<td>- discusses the meaning of words - states words that were easy or difficult to understand</td>
<td>“Mrs. Vance could you tell me what superstitious means? Context clues didn’t help.”</td>
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<td>C11: Aesthetic Response</td>
<td>- describes how the book makes them feel</td>
<td>“My book made me feel really mad today. Nicole is being made fun of and her friend started a rumor that she pees the bed.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>C12: Self-Monitoring</td>
<td>- evidence that student is aware of his or her own comprehension</td>
<td>“I was not focused today so I had to reread a lot.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>C13: Non-relevant</td>
<td>- journal entry discusses things other than the text</td>
<td>“Do you know what time the assembly is today? I want to see if we won the pizza party.”</td>
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Table 4  Comprehension Strategies Observed in Student Response Journals

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### Table 5
Comprehension Strategy Usage Totals

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Table 6  
Strategy Usage Totals By Student

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