A Look into Current Reading Instructional Practices: Close Reading Versus Guided Reading

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A Look into Current Reading Instructional Practices:
Close Reading Versus Guided Reading

By

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree
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Dr.  Joellen Maples

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Abstract

This study compared how students comprehended text with a close reading versus a guided reading approach. Research was conducted with three fifth grade students. Data was analyzed on performance while participating in a close reading lesson and in a small group guided reading lesson. I found it is easier to identify skills students need support in in guided reading lessons, struggling readers feel more comfortable with text at their instructional level and teachers are untrusting in whole group close reading lessons. My implications encourage teachers to attend professional development on implementation of close reading lessons, collaboration of creating critical thinking questions for all reading instruction, and to ensure more than one type of reading approach is implemented in a classroom to accommodate all learners.
A Closer Look at Close Reading: How Does It Compare to Guided Reading?

As an undergraduate of St. John Fisher College in the School of Education between the years of 2004 to 2006 our method courses focused on using the theoretical framework of Fountas and Pinnell’s Balanced Literacy Approach (2001) to reading, writing and word study. I was hired in a school district in Western New York which at the time, offered a mandatory three day training course for not just first year teachers but any teachers new to the district, called the Balanced Literacy Inservice Course otherwise known as BLIC. It was a three day course that covered Fountas and Pinnell’s theory to teaching reading, writing and word study. In three days it summarized what was already learned from a teacher who received an education from St. John Fisher College. The course was great refresher for those teachers and it also put all of the district’s teachers inline with teaching the same English Language program. In 2009, I attended this training course. In 2012 the district stopped this inservice program course. I questioned myself why a school district would stop a training course that is detrimental to the learning of their students but also kept autonomy of curriculum implementation among the educators. In 2012 New York State adopted a new set of learning standards for students called the Common Core State Standards (CCSS). It is a set of standards organized by Reading, Writing, Speaking and Listening and these standards were developed for students to be ready for college, workforce training, and life in a technological society (Common Core State Standards, 2011). The New York State Standards have shifted by becoming more rigorous per grade level. While using Fountas and Pinnell, text selection was evenly split between teaching fiction and nonfiction texts. Now, with Common Core, text selection is primarily nonfiction; informational pieces. Also
with the respect to writing, students are primarily writing expository pieces while narrative and creative writing does not hold value in the classroom during writing instruction.

Along with the adoption of the CCSS a reading strategy called Close Reading was making its way into classrooms. Close Reading is a reading strategy that is delivered to a whole class make up of diverse learners. The teacher uses a rigorous text and breaks it up into sections. Each section is looked at in depth over several days or weeks, dependent on the length of the text, and by rereading small parts several times, focusing on vocabulary that breaks meaning down and other important features. Students are instructed on how to use the given context to make meaning of difficult vocabulary and other literacy elements. Through much discussion of the text students are then expected to be able to perform a variety of tasks such as compare and contrast, answer text dependent questions, draw conclusions, make inferences and understand the main ideas and also be able to prove their understanding through their writing. The educators’ role is strong at the beginning of the lesson and then is reduced over time for students to be able to show an understanding through strategies that have been taught.

Guided Reading carries a different approach. Fountas and Pinnell (1996) created a guided reading program that focuses on a student’s level of reading capability at the present moment of the school year. Guided reading places the child in a more formal instructional reading situation. To begin a guided reading approach an oral reading assessment is administered to a student on a 1:1 basis. By the end of the assessment it is proven what skills and strategies a student has and then that gives the administrator a level of reading a student is proficient at, what level of instruction a teacher should begin with and the leveled text a student finds to be too difficult meaning the student does not possess the skills at that time to
comprehend the text fully. The instruction to students is then given in small groups of no more than 4 students who are all at the same reading level and generally possess the same type of reading skills. A guided reading lesson will generally last about 20 minutes per group. The lesson consists of the teacher giving an extensive background of a text, then students reading it orally. Instruction may differ on what a teacher does after dependent on what skill he or she is looking to teach. However, if the teacher is looking to teach comprehension he or she will most likely ask a battery of different type of questions; text dependent, inferential thinking and critical thinking about the author’s purpose. A small writing task and word work may also be incorporated into a guided reading lesson.

This topic is important to research for the purpose of comparing two dissimilar reading approaches. Presently, school districts throughout the country are buying in into scripted units of English Language curriculum in which the curriculum is based around using the close reading approach. Therefore there is a directive from administration to abandon Fountas and Pinnel’s guided reading and use these modules for English Language instruction. The close reading approach is delivered to a whole class despite the dynamic of reading abilities within a classroom. Close reading to a whole group contradicts the Fountas and Pinnell’s guided reading approach as the focus for guided reading is to find where a student is individually in their reading skills then create instruction based what the student needs to become a fluent reader in any type of leveled text.

This topic of study is current and relevant. This research will cover topics that are current and relevant inside the classrooms of today in grades Kindergarten through grade 12 as all classrooms will be making a shift into their current practice into teaching the modules.
Although the action research will take place with fifth graders all grade level educators may be able to walk away from reading this study as it is the students that will be affected if they aren’t able to receive the reading approach that is best for their learning style.

The research question I kept in mind when conducting my study was: how can close reading and guided reading be used to support literacy development from struggling readers? I implemented a close reading lesson and a guided reading lesson with my focus group. I then compared the results with how well they understood the text when taught in a small group guided reading lesson with a text at their instructional level. I collected and assessed a variety of data including student work samples from both types of lessons, student interviews and teacher interviews. My findings showed that struggling readers find more success when they are able to work with a text that is at their instructional level. They can achieve mastery of grade level standards with a text that is developmentally appropriate for them. Also, teachers are not finding success in their struggling readers when participating in whole group close reading lessons. My implications suggest that teachers expose students to rigorous text but allow more individualized instruction with text that is developmentally appropriate and instructional to each student. Using the same learning target for each student is acceptable if the text is differentiated for students so they are able to feel successful and show academic growth.

**Theoretical Framework**

A human is born with natural motivation to learn language. As they grow, the child discovers and invents literacy as they participate actively in a literate society (Goodman, 1984). For a child to develop literacy, literacy events within the family, community and other social groups need to occur. The parent or caretaker will begin to participate in planned discourses with the child to teach language. Together, the parent and child participate in a communicative
event and negotiate and create shared meanings (Kucer, 2005). The social discourses set up the child to be prepared for participation in another stage of literacy; reading and writing. Children develop both reading and writing as they participate in meaningful literacy events (Goodman, 1984). The child’s motivation to learn spelling is so grand they create shapes or pictures, or “scribbles” as a literate person may see it, but to them the scribbles is their expression through written discourse of a complete story they can retell or a list they can recite, and so on. At this point this is within the child’s zone of proximal development.

Vygotsky’s (1967) zone of proximal development is the range of a child’s ability characterized by the discrepancy between a child’s current level and the level of ability he or she reaches in solving problems with assistance. This theory directly connects with this study because the strategy of close reading with a focus on mastery of the Common Core State Standards lessons are based on the use of rigorous text that is above what is expected for the average learner to comprehend per grade level. Therefore, it is far beyond the comprehension of a student who already struggles with grade level text to be able to participate with the average and above average readers in the classroom. The text selected with close reading lessons based on the Common Core State Standards is not within the zone of all children’s proximal development. Vygotsky (1978) also defines the zone of proximal development as the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers. Guided reading strongly supports Vygotsky’s zone of proximal development. Guided reading begins with an assessment to gage where the student’s highest instructional level is in his or her reading development. Guided reading will then guide
the student into reading developmentally appropriate text and focusing on strategies that where determined by the assessments as areas of weakness. The student will be challenged enough but not overly challenged to where the student feels mastery is unattainable. In contrast, close reading implementation accommodates Vygotsky’s belief that interaction with peers is an effective way of developing skills and strategies. He suggests that teachers use cooperative learning exercises as a way for less competent students develop with help from more skillful peers (McLeod, 2007). A student cannot be brought into learning without the assistance of an adult or more skillful peer. However, a student cannot be brought into learning if the learning material is too difficult to comprehend where strategies cannot even be applied because the decoding of text is beyond the ability of the reader.

Guided reading focuses on small group and individual learning and development. This approach to teaching reading follows Piaget’s Theory of Cognitive Development. The theory of cognitive development is described by Piaget (1973) as a focus on mental processes such as perceiving, remembering, believing, and reasoning. Piaget believed that the child plays an active role in the growth of intelligence and learns by doing. He regarded the child as a philosopher who perceives the world only as he has experienced it. Piaget showed that children think in considerably different ways than adults do. Piaget’s work showed that children are born with a very basic genetically inherited mental structure that evolves and is the foundation for all subsequent learning and knowledge. He saw cognitive development as a progressive reorganization of mental processes resulting from maturation and experience. Therefore he developed three concepts of stages to describe the development of a person’s understanding; the schema, the four processes and the four stages of cognitive development. Piaget called the schema the basic building block of intelligent behavior – a way of organizing knowledge
Students enter a classroom all with different schema and life experiences. It should not be expected that all students can receive reading instruction in the same way. The four processes stage includes assimilation, accommodation, disequilibrium and equilibrium (Piaget, 1973). These processes allow transitions from one concept to another. Lastly, the four stages of cognitive development include sensory-motor (birth through age two), preoperational (age two through age seven), concrete operations (ages seven through eleven) and formal operations (ages eleven through sixteen). The sensory motor stage is the child learning his or her reflexes and understanding the world by objects the infant has directly experienced. The preoperational stage is curiosity stage where the child is taking interest in objects and people around him or her. The concrete operations stage is when the child is able to create mental operations and mathematical operations such as counting to ten, adding and subtracting. The formal operations stage is the beginning of abstract thinking. The child is able to think of possible ways to problem solve. The child’s reasoning is rationale and systematic. Waiting until children have reached the appropriate stage of development will allow the child success in his or her learning. Guided reading highly supports the notion of building schema and working through a text and strategies is developmentally appropriate for the individual child. Close reading chooses rigorous text that is above their cognitive development of reading skills and students carry a strong lack of schema of specific topics. Close reading approach emphasizes on the teacher not building schema of the topic for his or her students and just indulging into the text.

The theoretical framework that surrounds the topic of these two literacy approaches, close reading and guided reading, shows that both literacy approaches accommodate for struggling readers. It is proven Vygotsky’s zone of proximal development to learning is valid in the close reading lessons that use CCSS. We also have taken into consideration Piaget’s stages
of cognitive development. Students need to develop a schema and be in the correct stage of cognitive development in order to succeed and to be able to learn.

**Research Question**

As educators we see it as our personal responsibility to give every student in our classroom a right to learn. Teachers also understand that there are no two learners that are exactly alike and that one role of the educator is to create a literacy rich classroom where the diverse needs of the students in the classroom are met. With a push in our country adopting the Common Core State Standards which encourages all students to be college and career ready also a push from New York State and their educators to teach reading with a close reading approach. This brings me to my action research question, “how can close reading and guided reading be used to support literacy development among children who are struggling readers?

**Literature Review**

In order to conduct an action research it is critical to research what other scholars have already produced. I sought to find what research has already been collected about close reading and the result of student comprehension. Research studies were collected on the results of student comprehension when students have been taught reading through the guided reading approach. Three themes will be identified and discussed in depth within this literature review. The first theme will discuss how the role of questioning the text plays a vital role in student comprehension. This theme will discuss how a close reading approach uses questioning to aide in student comprehension. It will also disclose how a guided reading approach uses questioning of the text to aide in a critical understanding. After the questioning portion of a lesson is discussed this will naturally allure us to the topic of the importance of teacher preparedness of
his or her literacy lessons and how that fosters in student comprehension. A second theme that will be discussed is the approach to actual reading of the text and discussion based on the text. Close reading that is primarily implemented with a whole classroom make up of diverse learners and backgrounds will foster a different discussion as would a small guided reading group of homogeneous learners. This theme will discuss how the two approaches of literacy learning enhance comprehension of the student. More importantly this theme will also entail how the discourse of the classroom fosters for the critical reader in all learners. The third theme will discuss the struggling readers in the classroom. Within this theme, strategies that are used within a close reading model will be discussed and how it embraces the struggling reader and promotes comprehension. In contrast, guided reading will also be discussed and how small group learning promotes comprehension as well for the struggling reader.

**The Role of Questioning and Text Comprehension**

Teachers’ questioning has been debated throughout literature and research whereby issues of inadequacy for higher-level cognition have been suggested. Teachers’ questioning is pertinent during reading instruction whereby the teacher skillfully scaffolds children’s discussion and development of reading comprehension (Phillips, 2012). No matter the approach used to instruct on reading it is the purposeful questioning that will lead the student to be a critical thinker about text. Aukerman (2007) argues that scaffolding of reading comprehension should not begin, as the gradual release of responsibility framework does, with an expert model from the outside but rather with a social relationship between people, and social purposes. The students’ own evaluative take on the text, and on the talk, out to drive the conversation from the start. Past studies have proven that critical thinking which allows students to comprehend text deeply isn’t
achieved by all students. Phillips (2012) suggests that there are three levels of comprehension: firstly literal understandings derives information directly from a text, secondly the inferential level interprets meaning beyond what is written in the text and thirdly evaluative comprehension requires readers’ personal, emotional responses. Therefore during a guided reading or close reading approach it is explicitly the role of the teacher to form questions that will support the comprehension of students while reading. Despite levels of ability, all students are able to comprehend, but more so if they are prompted through teachers’ questions. There is not a specific difference in the way the question is asked, pertaining to being in either a whole group or small group lesson. However, the teacher instructing, whether it be using the close reading approach or guided reading approach, preplanned lessons and well thought out questioning is instrumental to successful reading instruction and the comprehension of his or her students.

As previously discussed, a close reading approach is described as a text involving an investigation of a short piece of text, with multiple readings done over multiple instructional lessons. Through text-based questions and discussion, students are guided to deeply analyze and appreciate various aspects of the text, such as vocabulary and how its meaning is shaped by context (Fisher & Frey, 2014). Teachers must be knowledgeable in the text before he or she is able to form questions that will bring his or her students to arrive at the deeper meaning of the text. This approach to reading instruction is unfamiliar to many practitioners in K-12 classrooms (Thomas, 2012). Therefore, professional development needs to be provided to give educators not only the expertise in the craft of close reading but the comfort level essential in teaching others the strategy of close reading. Professional development events across the country are focused on preparing elementary and secondary teachers to enact the principles outlined in the
CCSS-ELA, especially as it applies to close analytic reading, text dependent questions, and discussion (Fisher & Frey, 2013). Learning the correct protocol to effectively teach close reading is essential. It is critical for the teacher to carry the understanding that one of the purposes during a close read is for students to struggle with context as it is necessary for learning to occur. That struggle will derive from good questioning. Fisher and Frey set out to find student and teacher perceptions about the implementation of close reading in their classrooms.

The teacher participants in this study had extensive professional development on the elements of close reading: multiple readings of complex text using text-dependent questions that fostered discussion, knowledge building and reasoning. The research focused on how teachers implemented close reading, what the teacher perspectives were on the challenges of this instructional practice and what the students’ perspective was on this type of reading instruction. The findings from this study uncovered that teachers admit that it requires more effort to plan for a close read and requires discussion and planning with a grade level team to develop the right questions for the text. This admission also tells us that not all teachers spend a good amount of time carefully planning for their reading instruction which includes questioning to guide students to critical thinking. Several teachers post the study shared reflections on their instructional practice questioning if they are delivering a close read correctly because of the struggle they see with their students during a lesson. Williams et. al. (2013) question if it is important for teachers to spend a lot of time in professional development, questioning whether the intervention technique such as close reading or the strategies taught in guided reading are maintained and retained after its termination. Nevertheless, the students presented to be more engaged with the text and found the text selection to be more interesting. The students admitted to feeling
fatigued after a close read lesson because of all the effort that is exhorted to achieve mastery. However, they felt these lessons to be worthwhile and appreciated the responsibility and engagement during instruction (Fisher & Fray, 2013). This alone should tell us that students want to be challenged and feel exhilarated when they are able to accomplish a task with proficiency. Students will put forth effort if they trust the teacher is knowledgeable in the subject matter and the lesson plans are thoughtfully implemented with the specific make up of the individual students’ needs in mind.

In accordance with a guided reading approach questioning is also vital during reading lessons. The questioning is how teachers drive comprehension with their students. Fountas and Pinnell’s (1996) conceptualization of guided reading included the following elements: first, students were grouped according to developmental reading. Second, rather than simply introducing the story and setting purposes, the goal of the book introduction were to help students develop strategies to use in their independent reading. Third, students read the text as a whole rather than in segments, with the goal of reading successively more challenging texts. Finally, children are grouped and regrouped in a dynamic process that involves ongoing observation and assessment. In guided reading, the teacher instructs a small group of students on the introduction and reading of a story, and explicitly teaches comprehension/word solving strategies (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996). The guided reading process has seen success in the classroom for many years. Pearson (2013) argues that students have been overindulged with activating prior knowledge activities before beginning a book which takes away from the text itself. There needs to be a remedy to balance it out. Close reading allows for that balance as this approach does not allow for time to be spent on prereading activities but to just dive into the
text and allow the student to form his or her own questions, thoughts, opinions while being driven by teacher led questions when criticizing and element within the text. Phillips (2013) implemented a study to question the role of questioning during a guided reading lesson. His findings suggest that teachers seem to rephrase questions too quickly when students were noticeably struggling to find an answer to an open ended question. An open inferential question asked in a guided reading group, which required the children to infer was replaced with a closed question, the students responded to the teacher with that answer, the teacher repeated what the students’ said and then moved on. Guided reading seems to limit the engagement of students with a text and maintains a literal level of comprehension. Small groupings of homogeneous learners find difficulty deriving to a deeper conceptual meaning of a context within text due limited life experiences and literacies. Therefore, Phillips suggests that a range of questioning techniques is necessary to create a guided discussion for children’s comprehension to develop.

In summary of this study, effective questioning seemed to employ a conversational technique whereby prompting statements and interpretations developed pupils’ inferential comprehension. However, theory and practice contradicted each other during the study. Teachers suggested that prompting questions and having planned answers helped prepare their lesson and that encompassed effective questioning but during implementation of the lesson results showed there was insufficient wait time and in turn teachers changed their open inferential questions to closed literal asking questions. This study also showed how teachers allow their own input of ideas and thoughts instead of it being student led. Fisher (2008) implies that individual training rather than descriptive advisory publications could develop practice through and ongoing process. Without
consistent reflection by the teacher on constituting good practice of guided instruction teachers forget that the purpose is to bring students into critical thinkers and that it is not helping them to tell them what to think. In small group settings it is also more difficult to watch students struggle with text. It is in good nature to tell them what the answer is or rephrase the question to make it easier but it is hurting their comprehension development. Therefore through Phillips’ (2013) study we learn that planned questioning and answers are good, but we must stick to the lesson plan, do not give in because students show frustration. A better reader will develop from that struggle.

Instruction is designed to support children in developing a complex set of reading strategies that they learn to use independently in reading a variety of texts (Maloch et al., 2013). Regardless of the approach, that is the goal and set purpose the teacher has for his or her students. However, a guided reading approach is widely used among teachers in the elementary classroom. According to Rasinski and Hoffman (2003) it is nearly impossible today to find a primary classroom where some version of guided reading is not being used. The challenge today is that teachers are trying to accommodate a wide range of reading needs within a single class period (Morgan et al. 2013). Morgan et al. argue that a “one size” instruction that implies with a close reading structure cannot fit all because of what represents as challenge for one student may be easy for another. However theory and practice can be interpreted in a multiple of ways and how each teacher carries out their reading instruction block of time looks different in every classroom. Reis et al. (2013) conducted a study on the effects of differentiated instruction and enrichment on reading achievement. A program called the
schoolwide enrichment model-reading (SEM-R) is an enrichment-based reading program designed to stimulate interest in and enjoyment of reading, leading to higher reading achievement, by enabling students to self-select and read high-interest books of personal choice that are slightly to moderately above current reading instructional levels independently with differentiated instruction provided in weekly teacher conferences. This study investigated the effects of enrichment and differentiated approach to reading instruction. It investigated whether the use of engagement and differentiation strategies and the elimination of up to five hours of whole group instruction each week produced higher reading scores than those who did not. Therefore this study questioned which would be better to instruct in order for students to become better readers, who can think critically about a text, whole group or small group instruction. The SEM-R is similar to the close reading and guided reading instruction model, is whole group or small group instruction better to use to help students comprehend text? Research proved that differentiated instruction and enrichment teaching methods, including high interest, self selected books that are above students’ current independent reading levels, resulted in higher reading fluency and comprehension in some students. Teachers were able to replace whole group and small group instruction with differentiated instruction without detriment to achievement scores. Teachers met with individual students briefly in independent reading conferences. Because of this brief individual meeting, teachers had to be prepared with targeted instruction for each student, prepared questioning that would force the student to think on their own that derived critical thinking. Reis et al (2013) shared that the results showed that this approach works just as well as other instructional approaches.
In conclusion, there are inconsistencies as to what institutes as effective questioning as well as the most effective way to approach reading, whole group, small group or individualized instruction. Types of questioning used among educators are open or closed questions. There is evidence that open questions prompt children’s discussion of their inferences which develops their musing of uncertainties, compared to closed questions which require no discussion apart from short, literal recall (Sporer et al. 2009). The open type questioning is more difficult for the reader. However, Sporer et al share that there are other findings suggest that open questions can limit children’s comprehension to literal recall if a question is posed, answered, assessed and then the next question is asked without discussion. Guided reading is an instructional tool that gives teachers the ability to provide a small group of students with a similar need a text reading experience that is slightly beyond what they could do on their own, often exposing students to texts and structures they would not naturally choose to read (Morgan et al. 2013). A close reading approach and guided reading approach both promote using open and closed type questioning within a lesson. A close reading approach will include a whole class of diverse learners, advanced readers, average readers and the struggling readers. During a close reading lesson it would be normal to observe a teacher pose an open question to a class after reading a chunk of a text and then allow for students to locate text evidence to support their thinking along with talking about this question within small groups of heterogeneous learners. It would also be normal to witness the teacher circulate among the different groups to hear and the various stances students come away with through analyzing a text. Gathering back together as a whole class after discussing in small groups the whole class can be brought as a whole into a critical thinking process analyzing and synthesizing text by listening to the different interpretations
among the class and developing their thoughts with a final answer. A small guided group will look similar to a close reading lesson, reading a text, and the teacher posing purposeful literal and inferential questioning about the text. The difference is a small group lacks the discussion that includes a heterogeneous make up of reading abilities to discuss content with. When students in a small group display difficulties answering open questions this is when teachers may feel that the planned questioning may be too difficult for the students and then will rearrange the question so students can answer quickly and feel successful and the teacher can feel comfortable to move on with the lesson. Or the teacher may not feel the students will come to an open answer and ends up telling them the answer. Team planning and professional development proves to be detrimental to successful reading instruction whether it be whole group or small group instruction. Planning should be based around the data. Data drives all instruction. The data may come from the state, from previous and current content teachers, and from the current curriculum (Morgan et al., 2013).

The Discourse of a Critical Reader

Reading instruction carries its own discourse. Guided reading and close reading together share the same discourse. The discourse is the language that is used to discuss reading. The teacher plays a definitive role in the success of his or her students reading and discussing text critically. Swain (2010) defines the meaning of discourse:

A discourse is a socially accepted association among ways of using language, other symbolic expressions, and artifacts, of thinking, feeling, believing, valuing, and acting
that can be used to identify oneself as a member of a socially meaningful group or social network or to signal that one is playing a socially meaningful role (p.132).

A critical reader does several things such as: examines text, questions vocabulary, monitors comprehension, questions the author’s purpose of writing and also creates an opinion or a stance on the text. Swain created a study on the discourse of guided reading and how guided reading led to critical discussion and written responses. The study was given in two schools and one finding was that between both schools there was a different discourse among them. While one classroom did not naturally build upon each other’s comments and conversation was punctuated with other students eagerly requesting to talk. In contrast, the students studied in the other classroom used paired talk effectively and had a good understanding of their roles. The results displayed that the students from the second classroom developed a more critical response on the topic of discussion because of the more open established classroom discourse. Williams et. al. (2013) agrees that students who were taught classroom structure performed significantly better on a text that was studied in class and when given a text to comprehend independently. We can conclude that teachers need to have a strong established discourse for examining and discussing text with a critical eye. Whether it is during guided reading or close reading both approaches call for text discussion. The word ‘discussion’ can be defined as a person who shares a thought and actively listens to other thoughts in order to recreate a new deeper meaning on a specific topic. So if the teacher can promote a critical literate classroom where the discourse of critical reading and discussion is prevalent than guided reading and close reading prove to be a successful form for encouraging critical dialogue.
During reading instruction, the discourse of text discussion, whether in a close reading or guided reading lesson, will carry a more natural flow when the selected text is of high student interest. Fountas and Pinnell (1996) defend that graded leveled books must be carefully selected and used by the teacher based on the children’s instructional needs and interests. With a sparked interest level by the students, the learning strategies and skills being taught as obvious and the learning is fun. Avalos et al. (2007) states that it is important that texts chosen for the guided reading groups provide children with a reasonable but also present an opportunity for potential success. Active student involvement is important as the children carry discussions about the story, ask questions and build their expectations of the text. This discourse includes everyone in the group as students simultaneously read and receive support from the teacher and peers. This is comparative to close reading. With close reading and the connection to the CCSS text selection is primarily expository based text. In regards to the Common Core State Standards there has been a push for reading instruction to be combined with learning social studies and science content. Integrating comprehension training and content area learning provides an opportunity to introduce more expository text into the early elementary curriculum (Williams et al. 2013). After the teacher has chosen a text that is instructional for the group and interest level is high enough to promote a critical thinking discourse there are differences in the delivery of the guided reading group versus the close reading model. Fisher (2008) believes that the teacher’s role in developing comprehension is not to scaffold children towards uncovering the author’s intentions and meanings, but to empower them to bring their own understanding and experiences to the text. Empowering students in order to bring them to their own understanding and experiences is done through the discourse of discussion and written responses about the text.
For guided reading, building background knowledge of a topic before reading is an essential component when giving a text introduction. Morgan et al. (2013) explain that in the first meeting of guided reading, the teacher introduces the text to the students by sharing information that would be helpful for the readers to know, such as information about the organization of the piece, the time period in which the piece takes place, or something about the author. Activating prior knowledge is generally considered very important in helping the reader get ready for reading the text. The introduction to the text then sets up the reader for a successful reading experience by mediating access to the text (Avelos et al., 2007). When a child feels confident in the type of text he or she is about to read, it is thought that the reading experience may be successful. A purpose or focus for reading is also set during the introduction to direct students in their reading (Morgan et al., 2013). While reading the text the teacher usually has a set plan of strategies he or she plans on implementing which is dependent on the need of each child or small group. After the introduction the students will begin reading. Close reading and guided reading are quite comparable at this point in the instruction of reading. A purpose for reading can be a set of strategies or a learning target that is taken right from the CCSS.

The approach taken to the actual reading delivery of the text has found to be nonlinear as studies have been done and concluded that although the teacher claims to practice guided reading may not what be the teacher next door is doing even though he or she may also claim to be practicing guided reading. Not practicing the correct guided reading as Fountas and Pinnell (1996) intended it to be was concluded by Fisher’s (2008) study of investigating three elementary classrooms and the delivery of guided reading. The definition of ‘guided reading’
and what that looks like in a classroom has taken on several different meanings and forms. A preliminary investigation was conducted after a group of student teachers reflected that guided reading in a classroom was none other than students taking turns reading aloud around the room. The study concluded that teachers did not have the professional development to feel comfortable enough to carry a critical thinking discourse in the classroom. Teachers found it challenging to ask inferential questions and develop well-framed initial questions were ineffective when not followed up by further cognitively demanding probes. The teachers’ encouragement of critical reading appeared to be limited by a fear of relinquishing control of the discourse. However, they made no use of alternative strategies to develop textual analysis. It is a lesson to all teachers that unless a discourse with other teachers is established as far as discussing texts and forming inferential based questioning the teacher is as risk for failing the development of the critical reader. Swain (2010) concluded in her study of how teachers teach guided reading resulted with the understanding that developing critical readers within guided reading in not unproblematic, due to the discourses that influence who sessions are conducted. The involvement in the established practices of the individual school and the individual classroom inherit a teaching model within itself. It was found in this study that guided conversations around text did support the students in viewing text from a more critical and reflective stance. Swain argues that in order for students to adopt critical perspectives independently, they first need opportunities to explore this with an experienced reader, so they can understand the ideologies involved. If guided reading is implemented in this way, promoting the discourse of the critical reader then the delivery is similar to conducting a close reading within a small group.
According to Bass and Linkon (2014), close reading integrates four elements: inquiry, texts, theory, and argument. The phrase ‘close reading’ may seem to imply primary emphasis on the text itself, but the examination of text occurs within and gains significance only when it is embedded in inquiry, engages with theory, and generates an argument that is useful to other readers. Bass and Linkon suggests that literary inquiry develops from patterns or differences observed in texts or from concepts emerging from theory. These literacy inquiries of text do not happen naturally within a classroom. The discourse in the classroom needs to be set up so the critical reader feels comfortable to share his or her thoughts and opinions and the students also need to be encouraged to share a conflicting view or a new way of viewing a situation with their peers. Lapp (2013) agrees that while close reading, students are able to become the primary investigator of a text. A classroom where the discourse is comfortable and thoughts and conclusions are welcomed learning occurs. Bass and Linkon’s (2014), second element, the text, is the essential aspect of close reading. The text is what drives the lesson and the discussion. Theory is invoked in presenting the analysis of a text as well as in arguing for the significance of that analysis. With the development of a successful discourse within a classroom and discussion allows for students to argue points among text and in turn students are developing a critical thinking perspective. Students should have an understanding that the purpose of close reading lessons isn’t meant to be used in isolation. Lapp (2014) states that a goal would be that students adopt the lessons and uses them to selectively use cognitive functions of remembering, understanding, applying, analyzing, evaluating, and creating, the reader draws on prior and immediate knowledge to support integrating new text information within existing information. Theory is also developing and students in a close reading are asked to put their new developed
thoughts and opinions in written form. Writing is another way for the brain to synthesize information. After discussion, writing is important in developing theories based on the topic of the text. Lastly, argument frames the theory developing. Argument of a text gives a way for readers to discuss text with their peers and make connections with other texts (Bass & Linkon, 2014). Therefore students are synthesizing their thoughts through the discourse of a close reading lesson.

Whether it be guided reading or close reading the goal is to allow the critical reader in the classroom grow in his or her learning through the discourse of correct questioning and discussion with peers. The characteristic of critically literate children is quoted from Smith (2005) as follows: 

Children who can tune in to the voice of a text, who can take on the ideas of others in interpreting that text, and who can imagine for themselves what other people, with other experiences and other needs, might make of a text are well on the way to becoming critically literate. (p. 38)

Through identifying what studies have been done on close reading and guided reading we are able to have a clear understanding of what the critical reader in the classroom is able to do. However, it should be made clear that the questioning and discussion among peers is directed at reading proficiency and not exclusively on content. Poole (2008) states reading development derives from reading aloud to others, reading silently while others read, and engaging in talk related to the content of what has been said. Therefore the teacher and the critical reader should stay focused on the reading proficiency and not the content of the text.
The Struggling Reader Benefits from Close Reading and Guided Reading

The struggling reader is known as a student who makes slow progress in fluency and comprehension. This student might need strategies that link decoding and comprehension along with sufficient guided practice applying these strategies during reading so that deployment of strategies becomes habitual (Katz, 2009). These strategies can be implemented with both guided and close reading lessons. There are strategy instruction programs to teach students cognitive and metacognitive skills such as summarization, graphic organizers, and prediction to help them comprehend text. Strategy instruction is often combined with other methods, especially cooperative learning and peer tutoring (Slavin et al, 2009). Educators often assess why a student does not comprehend text easily. These indicators may inhibit why a student is considered a struggling reader. Individual difference variables that influence a student who is considered a struggling reader include rapid automatic naming (RAN), problem behavior, phonological awareness, alphabetic principle, memory, and IQ (Tran, 2011). We have learned there are benefits of learning in a whole group reading instruction and the benefits of learning in a small group learning setting has also been discussed. Mathes et al. (2003) argues that providing balanced reading instruction that incorporates the critical components of early reading instruction at necessary levels of intensity to enable struggling readers to excel while simultaneously meeting the needs of higher-performing students is a challenge. But when a student continuously is underperforming on assessments and observation there needs to be a Response to Intervention (RtI). RtI can take place for the student during a whole group or small group instruction. It is the differentiation for a struggling reader to receive additional support in the areas that show a lack in proficiency. There are analytic strategies the teacher can teach the
struggling readers in the classroom. Dependent on how many struggling readers there are in a classroom will determine the type of instruction the teacher would want to implement.

Previously, Van Keer and Verhaeghe (2005) reported that reading comprehension was considered to be a reading process of mastery: Once students could decode, comprehension was assumed to occur automatically. A struggling reader can read fluently but may not be cognitively thinking about what is being read in the text. Therefore the student needs to be able to read fluently and be a cognitive reader in order for comprehension to occur.

Morphological Analysis (MA) is an analytic strategy a teacher can use to teach morphemes. Morphemes are units of meaning, MA can provide a basis for both decoding unfamiliar words and acquiring an understanding of their meanings. The prevalence of morphologically complex words increases in texts as students’ progress through the elementary years (Katz, 2009). Not all word parts can be sounded out by their letter sounds. Some word parts need to be recognized by memorization of the word part. Baumann et al. (2002) agree that morphemic analysis involves unlocking a word’s meaning by examining its morphemes, or meaningful parts, such as base words, prefixes and suffixes, inflected endings, and Latin or Greek roots. Contextual analysis involves inferring word’s meaning by scrutinizing surrounding text, which includes syntactic and semantic linguistic cues provided by preceding and succeeding words, phrases, and sentences. Third grade is a transition year of learning to read to reading to learn. It is hoped that by the time a student reaches third grade he or she has acquired the necessary reading skills that can be applied to reading more complex words because he or she has the morphological knowledge. However, teachers know this is not necessarily the case with all students. Katz (2009) argued that MA alone might not be sufficient for the purpose of
deriving the meanings of words. In addition, they suggested that context cues might activate less familiar word meanings, which would improve readers’ chances for success. It is understood that a word that stands alone does not develop proficient vocabulary. The application of close reading truly emphasizes vocabulary development by using context cues that the text offers in order to derive a meaning from the unknown word. The delivery of close reading can be done on whole group or small group learning. Katz shares that upper elementary struggling readers show a lack of perseverance and other difficulties monitoring their reading of challenging texts, an effective intervention program should have the goal of helping them become analytic and engaged readers. When students struggle with something they have to be taught how to keep going and not give up. Self monitoring while reading is usually done with a scaffolded model of instruction so the student can feel safe when trying something new. Aukerman (2007) agrees that task completion is first undertaken entirely by the teacher, then there is joint responsibility for the task, and finally the student practices or applies the learning independently. The teacher will perform a gradual release of responsibility back to the student as he or she has shown capability of the task. According to Mathes et al. (2003):

Providing instruction to students in small groups has long been the core of most differentiated instruction. Small-group instruction led by a knowledgeable teacher has been shown to be more effective than whole-class undifferentiated instruction. And it is particularly true for low-performing students, who tend to have low levels of participation during whole-class instruction (p. 461). Small group instruction will give the student more of the 1:1 time with the teacher for him or her to receive the targeted instruction that is needed for the student to improve on their reading
comprehension. However, as previously stated, small group instruction will not give that student the rigorous critical thinking dialogue between peers. Small group instruction will also not allow for that student to participate in listening in on and possibly participating with the more skilled readers in the class when discussion of a text takes place. There has been a stigma against classrooms that only use small group instruction to instruct reading. Poole (2008) suggests that over time, membership of students in low-ability groups is said to have negative effects on self-esteem leading to a loss in motivation for learning. According to Poole, school districts across the United States have reported moving from homogeneous groupings to heterogeneous groupings because of the negative criticisms of ability-groups. Poole continues to say that “in heterogeneous groups poorer readers can develop their skills by observing and interacting with more effective readers” (p. 229). Cooperative learning is another type of heterogeneous grouping a classroom can adopt as a way of utilizing all types of diverse learners in a classroom and have all students grow in their critical literacy. Cooperative learning, according to Poole, involves students who are given specific roles to perform as they work together to complete a project or to reach a collective goal. It is a means of differentiation where heterogeneous reading groups create a literacy event which a low-performing reader is repeatedly offered up for display as the high-performing readers are given a role to help the low-performing reader as he or she is orally reading the given text. Slavin et al (2009) also agree that cooperative learning programs use methods in which students work in small groups to help one another master academic content. Close reading lessons will also include small group work where students work together to learn the same target goal or strategy. However, after analyzing the data of the study Poole (2008) conducted that included two heterogeneous groups proved to
be beneficial to the struggling reader. The struggling reader received the support from their peers who were considered higher-performing students. However, it was not reciprocated by the higher achieving students’ ability of creating a deeper level of critical reading and understanding from the struggling reader. So the study left the reader questioning if heterogeneous groupings are beneficial for all learners in the classroom. What should be learned from this study that there should be several RtIs built into literacy based classrooms that promote literacy for all learners. A lesson of close reading should be given as a whole group to all diverse learners then differentiated in guided groups to enrich a classroom of literacy events that challenge each individual learner.

Another RtI strategy that can offer a student support in his or her reading capabilities is peer-assisted instruction. Peer-assisted instruction is another alternative to both small-group and whole-class teacher led instruction when there are struggling readers in the classroom to support. According to Mathes et al (2003), peer-assisted instruction provides an advantage compared to both whole-class and small-group instruction because it provides a vehicle for increasing academic engagement of individual students without adding an additional teaching burden to the teacher. A problem every teacher runs into where there are students who struggle in academic areas is finding the time to give additional instruction to that student. The teacher is burdened with so many multi-tasking responsibilities within the working school day, working out a schedule to support those in need is always a current problem. Especially as students are reassessed and small groups are always evolving scheduling is always addressed throughout the whole school year. Poole (2008) argues that grouping students for reading instruction according
to ability or proficiency level is a longstanding debate that brings negative consequences such as leading to a wider achievement gap between students in higher and lower-level troup. Mathes et al. (2003) shares that Peer-Assisted Learning Strategies is a promising form of student engagement which builds on peer tutoring by carefully taught peer-tutoring routines. It has been shown to dramatically increase academic engagement of low performing students without adding instructional time. PALS is a way to incorporate the whole group in learning based instruction. Van Keer and Verhaeghe (2005) also agree with the applied strategy of peer-tutoring. Monitoring the reading process of another reader might facilitate the acquisition of self-monitoring skills and, hence, the adequate application of reading strategies. Adopting multiple strategies to use with not only struggling readers, but all readers, will benefit all learners. When Mathes et al. (2003) conducted a study on first grade classrooms that compared the instructional methods PALS and teacher-directed instruction (TDI) in small group settings to see how struggling readers would respond the results showed that there was an enhancement of reading performances on low achieving students who received PALS or TDI. Both groups, PALS and TDI outperformed the groups that did not receive this type of instruction in the area of segmentation, nonword efficiency, word attack and segments per minute measures. However, TDI groups outperformed PALS groups in the area of identification, word efficiency, passage comprehension, words read per minute. Closing statements made by the teachers recorded that both interventions had benefited them and their students. Van Keer and Verhaeghe (2005) agree that positive effects also have been found on tutors’ and tutees’ social and emotional functioning, especially with regard to self-efficacy perceptions, self-concepts, social relationships, and attitudes toward curriculum areas treated in the tutoring session. These strategies are considered
to be RtI strategies. A classroom that uses PALS as an RtI strategy along with the teacher using TDI it seems to prove that these classrooms are better supporting to the diverse needs of the classroom and all seem to benefit. What is learned from this study is that multiple strategies should be in place in a classroom with struggling or low performing readers. This study should not be looked at as one strategy taking presidency over the other but that both should be present in a literacy rich classroom of a classroom community working together to achieve critical literacy skills.

A workshop model of balanced literacy will promote literacy events where all students will be challenged at their appropriate level. According to Kontovourki (2012) reading should include read-alouds, shared reading, guided reading, and independent reading, during which students should read books at their reading level. Reading instruction should include units of study that expand over a period of four to six weeks. There should be a focus on reading with stamina and meaning and character study in reading. Word work as well as attention to fluency, vocabulary development, and comprehension instruction should also be included. Morgan et al. (2013) agree in the power of developing common understandings. Having a common understanding means, that in order to conduct true guided lessons, teachers need to carry the same idea of selecting texts, planning introductions, grouping students, and so forth. Close reading and guided reading can be incorporated into a balanced literacy workshop model. And with a balanced framework, the teacher can build a literacy rich classroom where all students of diverse reading abilities have experiences throughout the model to be able to engage in text with heterogeneous and homogeneous groupings in order to help close the achievement gap in the classroom and support not only the struggling readers but allow the high achieving readers to be
involved in literacy events with the struggling readers as well as it proves to be a strategy for those learners to also synthesize text.

As previously stated, in order to conduct an action research it is critical to research what other scholars have already produced. From these findings in the current research that was collected about close reading and the result of student comprehension have proven that there is not one way for a balanced literacy classroom to be conducted. We can also conclude that there is not just one way to teach reading that will offer success from the whole class of diverse learners. In the first theme, the role of questioning the text plays a vital role in student comprehension. What the research suggested was that teacher preparedness of his or her literacy lessons played an important role on how critical the student would be able to get in regards to questioning and understanding the text with reference to character development and inferences and how that fosters in student comprehension. Questioning the text is used in both a guided reading and close reading approach. The second theme discussed was the approach to actual reading of the text and discussion based on the text. The second theme looked deeper into the discourse of a classroom that enabled for critical thinking and the students being able to be critical readers. Close reading that is primarily implemented with a whole classroom make up of diverse learners and backgrounds does foster a different discussion as would a small guided reading group of homogeneous learners. This theme taught us that there should be several ways in a classroom where a student is challenged by the text. Also, we learned that the classroom should have established routines and a comfort level where all learners feel comfortable to take risks as far as sharing their understanding of a text with their peers in the classroom. This theme also taught us how the two approaches aligned together enhance text comprehension with the student. The third theme discussed the struggling readers in the classroom. Strategies were
discussed that are used within a close reading and guided reading model and how it embraces the struggling reader and promotes comprehension. From this theme we walk away with the knowledge of several strategies we can encompass a classroom with to promote the critical reader in all learners using the balanced literacy approach while still implementing close reading and guided reading approaches.

**Method**

**Context**

Research for this study took place at a suburban elementary school in Western New York. The New York State District Report Card for the 2011-2012 school year indicates a total of 11,478 students enrolled in the district. During this school year, 74% of students enrolled in this district were White, 13% were African-American, 9% were Hispanic or Latino, 3% were Asian or Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander, and 1% were Multiracial. Of the students attending any school within the school district in the 2011-2012 school year, 29% were eligible for free lunch and 11% could receive lunch at a reduced price. Additionally, 2% of students were English proficient at a limited level. The NYS Report Card of the elementary school in which this study took place comments that in the 2011-2012 school year, 703 students were enrolled at that school. Of these students, 69% were Caucasian, 17% were African-American, 10% were Hispanic or Latino, 3% were Asian or Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander, 2% were Multiracial. Of all of the students enrolled in this school, 45% were eligible for free lunch and 16% received lunch at a reduced price. The average class size during the 2011-2012 school year was 21 students. The classroom that was used for this study was a general education 5th grade classroom with 21 fifth grade students, and
one classroom teacher. Of the 20 students, 10 of the students were boys, 11 of the students were girls. Demographics of the classroom include 84% of the students were White or Caucasian, 15% African American, and 1% Asian.

Participants

Teachers

Ms. Moore (pseudonym), a white, 30 year old female, has eight years of teaching experience. Ms. Moore is certified to teach general education K-6 and has her Master’s degree in curriculum writing. Ms. Moore taught in Florida for the first three years of her career. She then moved to Western New York and has been teaching in the district for the last five years. Of the last five years in the district she has worked at Dolphin Elementary for the last two years. Of the eight years Ms. Moore has been teaching she always been at the third grade level. Ms. Moore has a passion for teaching and it shows through her creative planning ideas and implementation.

Mrs. Kane (pseudonym), a white, 35 year old female has been teaching in the district for 12 years. She is certified to teach general education K-6 and also has her Master’s degree in Literacy. Mrs. Kane has had a few different roles in the district in her 12 years of experience. Overall, she has taught fourth grade for eight years, and one year at fifth grade. Mrs. Kane was also a Math Intervention Teacher (MIT) for three years. Currently she is teaching fourth grade at Dolphin Elementary.

Mr. Map (pseudonym), a white, 48 year old male has been teaching in the district for 15 years. Mr. Map is certified general education K-6 and has his Master’s degree in school psychology. Mr. Map has taught fifth grade most of his career with the exception of five of those years where he was a MIT for the district. Mr. Map has been at Dolphin Elementary for the past three years and for the past two years he has been teaching fifth grade.
Students

Rachel (pseudonym), an African-American female is a 10 year old in the fifth grade at Dolphin Elementary (pseudonym). Rachel has struggled with reading and writing since she was in Kindergarten. She has received Academic Intervention Services in the areas of reading and math since first grade. Rachel is also a defiant and boisterous young lady who requires 1:1 attention throughout most of the school day to refocus her to the task at hand. She has seven other siblings who live in the home with her along with her mom and dad. Rachel enjoys playing basketball and coloring in her free time.

Doug (pseudonym), a white male, is a 10 year old in the fifth grade at Dolphin Elementary. Doug has struggled with reading and writing since he was in second grade. He receives Academic Intervention services in the areas of reading and math. Doug has a very short attention span and requires several breaks within a school day. He is extremely unorganized and has very poor study skills. He is rarely prepared for school with completed homework assignments or even a bookbag. His previous teachers along with myself, as his teacher this year, have conducted additional parent teacher conferences over the course of the school years because of academic concern and extreme inattentiveness. His parents are against having him tested for ADHD. He is the youngest in his family with an older brother and older sister. Mom and dad also live in the house. Doug is a polite boy who likes to share stories. He enjoys camping trips with his family and playing football with his friends.

Julie (pseudonym) is a white female, in the fifth grade at Dolphin Elementary. Julie receives Academic Intervention Services in the areas of reading and math. Julie is very polite and works hard. Julie puts in a great amount of effort into her work. But she struggles with comprehension of text and decoding. Julie is the oldest of four siblings, all girls. Mom and dad
also live in the house together along with a cousin that has taken residence there. She enjoys playing dress up and playing with hair and make up with her friends in her free time.

**Researcher Stance**

Currently, I am a graduate student at St. John Fisher College completing my coursework for a Master’s degree in Literacy Education, Birth through Grade six. As previously stated, I have a Bachelors degree in Childhood Education and Special Education Grades One through Six. In terms of this study, I acted as an active participant observer, in which I actively taught reading instruction while simultaneously observing the outcomes of the study (Mills, 2014). In doing so, I conducted observations and collected student work through my whole and small group instruction with each of these three students.

**Method**

For this study, I collected qualitative data. The three students described above participated with a whole group lesson reading about the rainforest through a book titled, *The Most Beautiful Roof in the World* by Meg Lowman. They also read a nonfiction text about tornadoes in a small group guided reading lesson with me. The students had one learning targets they were focused on mastering: I can write a gist statement for a chunk of text from a text. Behavioral observations were recorded through their participation in the whole group lesson and the small group lesson. Student work that was collected from both types of instruction included written responses of the main idea and detail of the gist statements. The quality of the work was analyzed by asking: does the student display an understanding of the task through his or her written responses? The whole group lesson required the students to be more independent learners and rely on peer discussion to promote a critical understanding of the text where as the guided reading group will be a more scaffold lesson where the students will receive a more guided approach and teachers will listen as they read text to themselves and will be able to
intervene as necessary. Students also participated in a focus group interview which was
recorded and transcribed on how they feel when learning how to read in the whole group versus
how they feel when they are in a guided small group reading a text at their instructional level.

Teacher interviews were collected from a 3rd, 4th and 5th grade teacher all in the same building to
gain an understanding of their point of view on the EL instruction of whole group close reading
lessons and when they are teaching small group lessons to their struggling readers.

To get started I read a few pages from the book aloud to the whole group. Then I
assigned a chunk of the text to each table group. The group reread their assigned chunk silently
and on an index card they wrote their initial gist statement on the card. After, the table group
shared their gist statements they had written they participate in a discussion of how to make their
gist statements stronger or better. They all formed revised gist statement by asking each other
“what was this chunk of text mostly about?” The students involved in the focus group
participated in a small guided lesson reading a non fiction text about tornadoes which is at their
instructional reading level “T” according to Fountas and Pinnel’s leveling of texts. However, the
learning targets are still the same as the whole group. I first did a book introduction explaining
what we were going to be reading about then we took a book walk identifying the non fiction
text features. I then pointed out vocabulary that is important to the text but will tell students they
will need to pay attention to the context to try and find out what it means or use other text
features to determine meaning. Students read 2 pages of the text by whisper reading it aloud to
themselves. I listened in to each student paying attention to their fluency of the students and if
they are using decoding strategies when they approach difficult vocabulary. After they read I
asked them what the main idea was of that chunk of text. After discussion students wrote their
main ideas and supporting details in a written paragraph along with any new information they
found interesting about the rainforest. After the instructional lessons were implemented the three students participated in an interview on their feelings of how they feel their learning development in reading is supported when they are in a whole group and small group lesson. Lastly, teacher interviews were conducted to a third, fourth and fifth grade teacher on their opinion of teaching EL modules as a whole group as the primary instruction for ELA.

**Informed Consent and Protecting the Rights of the Participants**

Prior to action research, letters of permission (Appendix A) were sent to parents of the students in the study. The letter explained the nature of the study as well as the methods of data collection that would be collected from the student. Anonymity of the students in the study was clearly stated in the letter as well as the right for parents to decline their child’s participation. I also received signed letters of assent from the three students in the study, which made the same points as the permission letter sent to the parents. Teachers also signed a consent letter that explained the nature of the study and for permission to use their interviews in this study. Additionally, in the assent and consent forms, I stated that pseudonyms would be used to ensure anonymity of students and teachers and names would be removed from any data used such as artifacts.

**Quality and Credibility of Research**

It is essential when conducting a study that trustworthiness is accepted among those that are participating in the study and the data collected is quantitative and qualitative and true. According to Mills (2014) there are four components to ensure quality research; credibility, transferability, dependability and conformability. These four components will hold true throughout the implementation of this study.
Mills explains that credibility can be defined as “the researcher’s ability to take into account the complexities that present themselves in a study and to deal with patterns that are not easily explained” (p. 115). In this study there will be many opportunities to record field notes from observations. To ensure credibility in my research, I practiced triangulation in order to compare various sources of data to each other. I also collected artifacts from the students as raw data items when I asked them to write their gist statements and main idea and details paragraphs. In order to obtain a good amount of data, I also participated in constant observation that recorded body language, expressions, and comments made by the students involved in the study.

Transferability is “the researchers beliefs that everything they study is context bound and that the goal of their work is to facilitate the developments of descriptive, context relative statements” (p. 116). To hold true to being transferable I will be explaining the depth of this study therefore if others reading this study feel as though the data would possibly be a way for another school to collect data for their school. I will collect descriptive data. The data will show transferability because it can be compared to other classrooms or schools. The detailed descriptions of the schools can be used in a way so others can compare them to their own school.

Dependability is the third characteristic and it refers to the “stability of the data” (p. 116). Dependability relies on numerous methods of data collected works in order to ensure the best representation of the participants of the study through the findings of the data. To hold true to the dependability of data, I collected field notes, observations, student work, and teacher interviews. These different forms of data were compared and analyzed.

The last characteristic is Confirmability. Confirmability can be defined as the “neutrality or objectivity of the data that has been collected” (p. 116). As previously mentioned I will practice triangulation in order to implement a variety of data sources and different methods to
crosscheck data. This study that has been developed has protected itself from any biases of any kind through reflexivity and it will be relied upon the data to show student development.

Data Collection

I used four dissimilar styles of data collection. For this study, the data collection included field notes, student work samples, focus group interviews, and I also questioned the teachers’ perspective in face to face interviews.

Field notes that were recorded were taken over the course of the 2013-2014 school year. As the classroom teacher, I am recording anecdotal notes on my students when I notice he or she is on task or off task, able or unable to achieve a learning target by answering a question or having a discussion with me or his or her peers. During the duration of this study, I focused primarily in on my three students in my focus group who are struggling readers. I recorded their behaviors, comments, level of participation and whether they were achieving their learning targets through discussion and written form.

I also collected student work samples. These consisted of writing samples that pertained to the day’s lesson in the whole group and in the small group. The writing sample would be indicative whether the student has understood the learning target which was being able to find the “gist” of a chunk of text in the whole group lesson. The small group lesson writing was having the students be able to read a chunk of text at their reading level and pull out what the main idea was with supporting details.

The three students were also interviewed (Appendix B) together as a group after the whole group and small group lesson. The students were recorded during this interview with my voice recorder app off of my cell phone. Following the interview I transcribed what was said and coded their responses thereafter as well. The questions were based on their feelings of
confidence in their reading ability and content understanding during the whole group close reading lesson and then also in their small group guided reading lesson.

Lastly, I interviewed a third, fourth and fifth grade teacher that had eight or more years of teaching experience. The interview questions (Appendix C) were based primarily on how the teacher is personally feeling with the change of English Language instruction in the classroom from guided reading to whole group close reading lessons at Dolphin Elementary. The teachers were also questioned whether their classroom data has shown growth with their readers who are not maintaining grade level expectation in regards to reading.

**Data Analysis**

As I collected my findings, several steps were taken to analyze the data throughout my research. First to analyze my interviews from the teachers I read over each one very carefully to familiarize myself with their answers. I then made a table to be able to see the question and their responses together in one row. I read through the answers again and looked for similarities between them. To code the teacher interview, I highlighted the question and answer portion where all three participants answered with the same response. I used a different color highlighter to highlight the question and responses that two of the three participants answered with the same response. After doing this, I was able to see which teachers have similar and dissimilar views on teaching the close reading modules.

The next piece of data I analyzed was the focus group interview. First, I transcribed the audio recording into text. Second, I reread through each question and each individual responses. Third, I began coding by highlighting the responses from students who had similar responses. I
used another highlighter color, if a student was just agreeing with someone else and did not offer any more personal connections from the lessons they participated in.

After those two pieces of data were analyzed I dug into the student samples of work. I had collected four written responses from each student. Two written responses were from the close reading lesson that is taught in a whole group. The second responses were written in their guided reading small group lesson. In the close reading lesson students wrote about what the “gist” was of a chunk of text they were asked to read independently about the rainforest. Similarly, in the guided reading lesson students were asked to write what the main idea and supporting details of a small section of instructional leveled text on tornadoes. To analyze their responses I read through each student’s close reading response on finding the “gist.” Using a four point checklist I scored the students on whether they were successful on writing about the “gist.” I repeated the process for their guided reading written responses. Students wrote four sentences that included finding the main idea and supporting details based on a portion of text that was read in our small group lesson. How to find the main idea and details were taught and discussed in small group.

**Findings and Discussion**

The data from the action research study was separated into the following main categories: teacher interviews, student work samples and student interviews. In looking through the data with a careful lens and cross referencing from the three mentioned categories, three themes emerged from the data. The first theme that emerged was that it is easier to focus on skills where students are struggling in guided reading lessons. When working closely with students in small groups it is easier for the teacher to identify growth and positive changes in the reading
development. The second theme that emerged was that struggling readers feel more comfortable with text at their instructional level. When taught in a whole group with an over challenging text they lack the necessary skills to attack the text and engage in intellectual discussion. When taught at their instructional level students understand that there is still a challenge to comprehend the text but the challenge is attainable with guidance from the teacher. Lastly, a third theme that arose was that teachers implementing close reading lessons don’t feel they are adequately teaching all students fairly.

**Focusing in On Where Readers Struggle Is Easier In Guided Reading Lessons**

Fountas and Pinnell (1996) believe that students grouped homogenously in groups who are instructionally at the same level have the ability to show growth in their learning and move into more challenging and complex texts as they improve in their reading skills and strategies. After I collected and coded all of my data my first theme that emerged was that it is easier to support readers where they are struggling during guided reading lessons.

The student participants in this study participate daily in close reading lessons that are taught with the whole classroom of students. The text that was being read closely during the time of this action research was *The Most Beautiful Roof in the World* by Kathryn Lasky. This text is a guided reading level "S." I collected data for this action research for two days. In day one’s lesson there were five standards being taught. One of the standards that was being taught with this text was ELA CCSS RI.5.2 - I can determine the main idea(s) of an informational text based on key details. (Common Core State Standards, 2011). To teach this standard with the class in a close reading lesson I directed students to read paragraphs one and two independently from page 13 (Appendix D) and to
write the “gist” or main idea onto an index card. Observing my student participants during this work time and taking field notes I noted Doug looking around to see what other classmates were doing during this time. He looked at the clock and stroked his hair not paying any attention to the text he was supposed to be reading (Field Notes, 2014). I then redirected him to begin reading. After redirecting Doug, Rachel decided to put her head down. I asked if she felt alright and I did not receive a response. I redirected her to the task at hand and this led to a series of events that did not allow for her to complete the task. When I noticed most of the class had completed his or her writing of the “gist” statements. I asked students to have a discussion with the peers at their tables and collaborate on what they wrote. Students at their tabled groups for ELA are strategically placed heterogeneously. Based on the discussions students were having with each other they then were to recreate a “gist” statement that is stronger from what they wrote the first time. I asked students to begin. Williams et. al. (2013) agree that having a classroom structure in place provides for success during reading instruction. The close reading lessons involve much discussion. During this time second portion of work time I noticed all three student participants were not talking in their discussion groups but were listening to the other students share. All three student participants waited to be the last person to share their “gist” statements in their group. Before Doug shared in his group he crossed something out and rewrote a new sentence (Field Notes, 2014).

Rachel’s gist statement read, “the gist is about how Meg thinks it’s important to understand the bigger picture, Meg can track a new swarm of ants and I think that she is trying to get a better look at the planet and where we live” (Field Notes, 2014). According to the checklist that included all the information a proficient answer would include Rachel
did not include any statements that led to the overall gist of paragraphs one and two. She received zero points. By not receiving any points from the checklist, Rachel did not thoroughly read the paragraphs or she did not understand the two paragraphs she was directed to read from page 13 in the book *The Most Beautiful Roof in the World* by Kathryn Lasky (Appendix D). Her sentences created were not complete thoughts that the author used to elaborate on the discussed topic in those two paragraphs she was asked to read on page 13.

Julie wrote, “the gist is about how Meg Lowman believes science is a machinery” (Field Notes, 2014). Again, I referenced the checklist to see if Julie had a good understanding of the gist of the paragraphs. I came to the conclusion that she did not based on the one point she earned out of four. From the one sentence she wrote it was mostly on target for the sentence in the last row of the checklist which says, Meg describes science as a machine and the way things work. But, based on the checklist her one sentence told me that Julie did not have a good understanding of the main idea of the paragraphs.

Students then rewrote their “gist” statements after having a discussion with their table groups. Rachel wrote “the gist is about Meg believes that science is the machinery that runs the Earth and Meg wants to have a closer look at the machinery” (Field Notes, 2014). On the second attempt to write the gist Rachel pulled out two points from the checklist that were important to include in the gist statements. This was an improvement from her score of “0” points from her first attempt. Rachel engaged in discussion in her table group. She listened to what her peers said the gist was (Field Notes, 2014). Her improved rewritten gist statement says that Rachel was listening intently to try and understand what the gist was. By hearing what her group had written and then together
looking back into the text, Rachel was able to construct a more meaningful gist statement from the two paragraphs on page 13.

Julie wrote “there is no machine but animals work together to survive if our environment is bad. Also, this is about how Meg compares the Earth to a machine” (Field Notes, 2014). As I compared Julie’s second response to writing the gist, she received zero points. Her statements she made were not complete thoughts and were not completely true based on what the text said. During the discussion time with her peers, it appeared as though she was listening but she did not pose any clarifying questions to her group (Field Notes, 2014). Julie did not benefit from her group discussion and her rewritten response reflects that she did not have a good understanding of the two paragraphs from page 13.

After students participated in creating “gist” statements the lesson continued and went on to teach other standards. Finding the “gist” of the two paragraphs on page 13 in *The Most Beautiful Roof in the World* by Kathryn Lasky was not the entire lesson focus for the whole group but only a tiny part of the lesson plan. By collecting the “gist” statements I was really able to see who did and did not understand the CCSS RI.5.2 standard of determining the main ideas of an informational text based on key details. Unfortunately, the lesson must continue and only in guided reading groups is an educator able to focus in on skills and strategies individual students need additional support in.

The student participants also met with me for a guided reading lesson which I collected data from for two days. On the first day I introduced the text to them titled *Storm Chasing Challenges* by Chris Downey. We spent six minutes previewing the book by looking at the different nonfiction text features the book included (Field Notes, 2014). Fountas and Pinnell (1996) would agree that building background knowledge and getting
an idea of what the text is about before reading is important for the reader. The students noticed and discussed shocking photographs and captions, the highlighted vocabulary words, glossary and subtitles. I shared with them the purpose for reading was to understand what the main idea was of each sections of text and then to determine the supporting details of the main idea. I scaffolded the lesson as Phillips (2012) would agree so they could have a strong understanding of what the task was. Students were directed to whisper read the assigned first two pages with their purpose question in their mind. Afterwards, I told the students to put into their mind what they think the main idea was. Without asking for a response, I told them the main idea. I discussed with them the general areas we can usually find the main idea in text. I told them that most of the time we find it in the first paragraph, sometimes it’s in the last paragraph. But the main idea does sometimes come from the middle paragraphs. I reminded them of their purpose for reading was to find the main idea and details. Together we read the subtitle and discussed the types of things we will read about in this subsection. Students then read and recorded their main idea and supporting details into a graphic organizer from a section of the text (Appendix E).

In the guided reading lesson, work samples were collected on what they wrote for the main idea and details of two pages in the book, Storm Challenges by Chris Downey. Rachel wrote in the main idea box, which is a direct quote from the text (Appendix E) “How first time chasers without experience could make things dangerous.” What Rachel wrote was not the main idea of the subsection. Her written statement was a detail in the text though. The text does say how new chasers are at first thrilled with the excitement of chasing a storm and can put other chasers in danger by not paying attention to other
chasers on the road. But this was not the main idea of the subsection. In the first supporting detail box Rachel wrote “When they are speeding up the road it gets dark and it gets very difficult to study.” Her supporting detail was not a sentence in the text and her sentence doesn’t make much sense. At this point, I reread back to her what she had written. I told her to go back into the reading and find details that support her main idea. She looked as though she was looking back into the reading but she did not change anything she wrote. (Field Notes, 2014). She is unable to determine the details of a text that supports her main idea. The second supporting detail box says “when it gets really windy they have to pray because they don’t want to replace the stuff” (Appendix E). Again, nothing is mentioned in the text about praying. By using the word “stuff” I assume she is speaking of the storm chaser’s equipment. Protecting equipment was mentioned. Rachel attempted to paraphrase what the sentence said. She changed the text and added details that aren’t included. Rachel does not understand how to correctly paraphrase a quotation. For the last supporting detail Rachel wrote “Outside of the spinning core, area of hail heavy rain an lightly rain travel around the supercell” (Appendix E). Her last supporting detail was a sentence from the text but this sentence did not support what the main idea was or even what she said the main idea to be. It was clear to me she did not understand what the main idea was of the reading. Even though the main idea was discussed prior to reading it is clear she did not comprehend the reading. Rachel did not ask any clarifying questions during this lesson and presented herself as if she understood the task by working diligently. Rachel did not feel comfortable asking for help and did not receive any points from the checklist.
Julie wrote in the main idea box “What to do in a dangerous storm” (Appendix E). Her main idea was not on target because the focus was on storm chasers only, not anyone, and what they are doing during a storm to stay safe. Her first supporting detail said “it is important for storm chasers to use common sense so they can keep safe” (Appendix E). Although this detail alludes us to know more about how storm chasers stay safe, this sentence was not actually written the way she has it in the text. The exact quote of what Julie interpreted says “Chasers who do not use common sense can make things more dangerous” (Appendix E). Julie paraphrased this quotation correctly. Julie is able to paraphrase simple sentences. The direction of the task is to pull out the direct quotations. Julie’s second supporting detail said “must be careful for a storm by making sure nothing gets broken/making equipment safe” (Appendix E). Again, Julie’s second supporting detail was not text evidence and this sentence doesn’t tell us how chasers stay safe. The sentence is fragmented and does not make sense. Julie was not rereading her work back to herself with a careful eye to notice that her sentence did not make sense and that it was not a quoted detail. The last supporting detail said “Stay away from dangerous storms like the core thunderstorm” (Appendix E). Once again, she took text evidence and turned it into a sentence that would be a statement for the perhaps the general public and not specifically the storm chasers. The text talked about how storm chasers take a risk by driving into the core of the thunderstorms to get a good picture but it is very dangerous to do that. Julie has the skills of paraphrasing a text and applying it to her writing. Julie will benefit from practicing reading a nonfiction text, and determining the main idea and supporting details. Overall, Julie did not receive any points and did not understand what the main idea was and therefore found difficulty when she had to support the main idea with supporting
details. Julie changed what the text said so it would follow what she wrote as the main idea. Julie is going to benefit from practicing finding the main idea and supporting details from a text. Julie will benefit from practicing pulling out the details and writing the direct quotations from the text and not changing what the text says.

On day two, we reviewed our first day’s work. I had them reread the pages from yesterday and we broke down what the main idea was together. I gave them a new graphic organizer. I led them to what the main idea was. We wrote it together. Fountas and Pinnell (1996) would also agree with this shared writing technique to support learners. When they established a good foundation of their main idea we worked together to find supporting details of the main idea. I supported and guided their discussion and when they were done the students had all the same things filled into their graphic organizer and it made sense meaning the supporting details supported the main idea.

The guided reading lessons I led on the main idea and details told me that these students have not yet reached mastery. Both Julie and Rachel did not receive any points during their guided reading lesson on being able to determine the main idea and details. This work will be continued with them throughout the course of their school year. The close reading lesson they participated did not support what they needed support in. The direction of them to read the two paragraphs on page 13 of the Most Beautiful Roof in the World by Kathryn Lasky and then just then directing them to write the “gist,” then to share with their group and rewrite doesn’t directly teach them how to write the “gist.” They listened to what their peers said and rewrote their “gist” statements. But they weren’t learning the skill of how to summarize a text to write the “gist.” The text for the student participants was too difficult for them to decode and comprehend. If they were not able to
read it independently then they were not able to find what the main idea was. The only way the student participants were able to learn what the gist was of the chunk of text was by using their listening skills to learn from what their peers were sharing aloud. Also, unless the gist cards were collected teachers would not know if students were actually understanding the text or not. From these outcomes from this study, it just proves how important it is to incorporate guided reading with small groups in addition to close reading lessons with the whole group.

**Struggling Readers Feel More Comfortable Learning from Instructional Leveled Text than in Whole Group Close Reading Lessons Using Rigorous Texts.**

After my student participants had completed both the close reading and guided reading lessons they joined in a focus group interview. It took a few probing questions for them to really feel comfortable talking to me about how they felt during the whole group lesson. So after the warming up period I was able to get some interesting information from them. I asked them what they felt when they had to read the chunk of text in the whole group lesson independently then write the gist on the index card. Julie finally admitted that “it was kind of hard to do it by ourselves” (Focus Group Interview, 2014). Julie didn’t understand fully what the assigned paragraphs said and could not determine the “gist.” Rachel and Doug agreed with her statement. I noticed Julie’s relief when her classmates sitting beside her agreed with what she had just said. Rachel and Julie didn’t understand what the text was saying either and it was difficult for them to determine the “gist” of the assigned paragraphs. She continued to talk. Julie stated “I read it twice or whatever, and I just couldn’t find the gist!” (Focus Group Interview, 2014). Again, her classmates, Doug and Rachel validated her statement with “yea, me too” (Focus Group Interview, 2014).
Interview, 2014). My next question to the group after Julie shared that it was hard for her to find the gist was about how they felt when they weren’t able to do it? Doug spoke first by saying “I was worried like I was doing it wrong” (Focus Group Interview, 2014). Doug experienced anxiety thinking he wasn’t going to do the assignment correctly. He feels insecure in his reading ability. Rachel and Julie agreed with Doug by both of them nodding their heads. These chains of questions were not the original questions I had planned out but I had not planned on the answers they gave me so my questions were casual probing questions trying to understand more about what happens with them during our whole group lessons. After they said they felt worried they were doing it wrong I wondered why they didn’t ask for help from me. Julie jumped in first “I didn’t want to ask for help” (Focus Group Interview, 2014). Doug and Rachel both agreed “yea me neither” (Focus Group Interview, 2014). These three students who are not performing at grade level expectation all did not feel comfortable asking for help when being taught amongst the whole group. Naturally, my next question was “why not?” Julie said

“Well, I felt like I was supposed to know the answer. Like, I was looking around and everyone was writing so it’s just like sometimes I feel like I’m the only one that doesn’t know so I don’t want to ask” (Focus Group Interview, 2014).

Julie feared to ask a question in front of her peers when it appears as though others seem to understand the task. Once again, the Doug and Rachel agreed with Julie by nodding their heads. What I can conclude from this portion of our interview together was that struggling readers find extreme difficulty asking for support in front of their peers. To them, it looked like they were the only ones who didn’t know what the “gist” was. By asking for help from the teacher they may give the impression of being “stupid” or “dumb” in the eyes of peers. Students who feel as though they always have a question to ask aren’t going to speak up for themselves in order to
protect themselves from possible ridicule or bullying behavior from other students. Struggling readers already feel inferior in regards to reading difficult text and feelings of being inferior follow with feelings of insecurity.

I began to ask my student participants questions about the small group lesson. I asked them their thoughts about working in small groups. Julie chimed right in, “Oh, I like working in small groups” (Focus Group Interview, 2014). Doug said “I like small groups and whole groups” (Focus Group Interview, 2014). Rachel nodded to Doug’s statement and responded “yes, me too” (Focus Group Interview, 2014). Focusing in on what Julie said I asked them what they liked specifically about working in small groups. Doug said “I like that when we need help we all work together.” Rachel responded right after Doug and said “Yea, like I ask a question to make sure I’m doing it right and you help me and answer it right away” (Focus Group Interview, 2014). This portion of the conversation led me to believe that my struggling readers feel comfortable asking questions when they are working in small groups. They do not feel pressured and do not feel that are being judged in a negative manner when asking a clarifying question or simply admitting they need additional support in accomplishing the task. Avalos et al. (2007) states that it is important that texts chosen for the guided reading groups provide children with a reasonable but also present an opportunity for potential success. My last question to them was how they saw themselves as readers. Rachel replied “In whole group lessons, I do bad in reading. But when I work back here with you, I do good” (Focus Group Interview, 2014). I replied to Rachel’s response, I reiterated that she feels she doesn’t read well when she read from the book we’re reading in class. She agreed and continued by saying “yea, those books are so hard! But the books we do together are like kind of hard but kind of easy” (Focus Group Interview, 2014). Again, just to make sure I understood Rachel’s response I reworded what she
said by saying “so you think the books we read in small group are challenging but with our lessons together and working together you feel comfortable with it, is that why you said it’s hard but kind of easy?” Rachel replied “yes” (Focus Group Interview, 2014). Doug sat quietly during this question was I asked him how he thought of himself as a reader. Again he just stared at me for a moment then admitted “I’ve never thought about myself as a reader, but I think I’m a good reader” (Focus Group Interview, 2014). Julie said “I think I’m a pretty good reader. Except for sometimes when you’ve asked me what I’ve read and I like can’t explain it” (Focus Group Interview, 2014). I told her why I ask her those questions and went on to say we have to be aware of what we are reading and if we understand what we read. Julie giggled “yea, sometimes I’m reading and I’m like what did I just read? I have no idea” (Focus Group Interview, 2014). With this last question, I was surprised by their responses. I assumed that my struggling readers were aware that they struggled with grade level text. Doug admitted that he has never been self-reflective about his reading skills. My students write monthly goals in ELA and math and write weekly reflections on how they’re achieving their goals which but his effort is minimal with each goal and each entry. Doug’s honesty reflects his progression with the development in his reading skills. Julie found comedy in not being able to comprehend grade level text by giggling when she said she reads then realizes she didn’t comprehend what she read. Her giggling tells me she doesn’t take her reading development very seriously. The cognitive reader realizes when he or she has lost their way in a book and will then apply a strategy such as going back to the spot where they last remember what happened and reread. Julie is not always being a cognitive reader. Lastly, in Rachel’s response, she has an understanding that the text read in the whole group is more difficult than the text she reads during small group instruction. That is why she responded by saying “in whole groups I do bad, but in small groups I do good” (Focus Group Interview, 2014).
Interview, 2014). However, she has a lack of confidence and has a self stigma that she is just going to “do bad” in whole group lessons. One of the purposes of using the close reading lessons is to allow all students to feel successful in difficult text because it is everyone working together through small portions of text at a time. Rachel is not sharing in that successful feeling in whole groups. The students have also come into this understanding that in whole group instruction they can’t or shouldn’t ask the questions on direction or task, but in small groups they know asking questions is acceptable. This mindset is set into place based on peer status and not anything that can be changed by teacher instruction. They feel comfortable asking the teacher questions, just not when all of their friends are around to hear.

**Teachers Implementing Close Reading Lessons Don’t Feel They Are Adequately Teaching All Students Fairly**

While I was reading over the data from my teacher interviews I noticed the teacher participants sharing the same ideas on implementing close reading and sharing similar student growth data. I asked if they felt that the close reading modules supported all learners in the classroom. Ms. Moore (pseudonym), the third grade teacher said “no, because the high flyers get it – the lows sit and wait for the answer by me or their peers during discussion” (Teacher Interview, 2014). I interpret Ms. Moore’s comment as struggling readers are not able to participate in the lesson because they haven’t understood the text they were asked to read before being directed into a peer discussion about the text. Morgan et al. (2013) argue that a “one size” instruction that implies with a close reading structure cannot fit all because of what represents as challenge for one student may be easy for another. Teachers are trying to accommodate a wide
range of reading needs within a single class period. Mrs. Kane (pseudonym), the fourth grade teacher said:

“Not always. They are not learning as many skills as the higher readers are. You can just tell they’re lost but unfortunately you can’t slow down the lesson for just those few. But that’s where it can get frustrating because you want everyone to “get it,” but there is so much to get done in a lesson, you just keep moving” (Teacher Interview, 2014).

Mrs. Kane has to pay attention to her pacing while teaching in the close reading lessons. She has to make decisions while teaching to move on to the next portion of the lesson even though she knows that not all students have grasped the last learning target that was focused on. This data compares to what Ms. Moore has stated about the more skilled readers are the only ones who are understanding the text and is able to participate in questioning and discussion where the struggling readers are unable to participate because they lack the necessary strategies in order to decode and comprehend higher text complexity. I asked the teachers if were seeing growth from their struggling readers in guided reading. Mrs. Moore stated “With some students, yes I have. But if students don’t put in effort and you don’t have parental support showing growth is difficult” (Teacher Interview, 2014). A home-school connection is important when supporting learners in the classroom. Mrs. Moore says she has seen growth from some students who struggle with reading. That is a positive. According to Katz (2009) Mrs. Moore is implementing the correct strategies and scaffolds to notice growth by her students. Mrs. Kane answered by saying “yes, there have been some reading behaviors I’ve been able to work with students to improve. I’ve seen growth in students using better reading strategies for decoding and comprehension” (Teacher Interview, 2014). I interpreted this statement as Mrs. Kane being able to become more personal with the students as readers and being able to make them
cognizant of their reading behaviors and delivering strategies to help the individual reader. Mr. Map’s response to this question wasn’t as positive as the other two. His response was “I’d like to say yes, but honestly not really. These students have been receiving Academic Intervention Services since the primary grades. And we haven’t seen any changes in them. We just keep doing the same thing. Something else needs to be done to help these same students become better readers” (Teacher Interview, 2014).

So again, Mr. Map’s perspective as the fifth grade teacher, he notices that his poor readers have always been behind in every grade level up to this point. It is a rare case where a student is on grade level then all of a sudden when they enter fifth grade they don’t have strong reading skills anymore. Mr. Map’s comment could as well as Ms. Moore’s comment sway us to a different topic of alternative Response to Intervention strategies for underperforming students, but we will accept his response of not seeing reading growth from his struggling readers in guided reading and close reading.

In conclusion to the responses of the teacher participants during this interview teachers know that their struggling readers cannot keep the pace of the lessons during close reading. Their lack of decoding skills and comprehension makes it difficult for them to think critically about the text. Therefore, it is difficult for struggling readers to participate in discussions and written work about the text. Listening to what the more skilled readers in the classroom say and the teachers’ interpretations in regards to the text is what they rely on during close reading lessons. Avalos et al. (2007) state that it is important that texts chosen for the guided reading groups provide children with a reasonable but also present an opportunity for potential success. Guided reading lessons allows for the teachers to focus on where students need the support and create lessons using text that is at their instructional level.
Implications

My first implication is that teachers partake in professional development on close reading lessons where they can learn more ways to differentiate close reading lessons. Professional development events across the country are focused on preparing elementary and secondary teachers to enact the principles outlined in the CCSS-ELA, especially as it applies to close analytic reading, text dependent questions, and discussion (Fisher & Frey, 2013). If the Common Core State Standards were written so that every child will be taught to be highly skilled readers, then the state needs to support every educator with the professional development where they are prepared and trained to teach every reader in the classroom using Common Core and close reading.

My second implication is that while planning a unit, grade level teachers discuss the text and collaborate on creating questions that will spark students to think critically about the text. Phillips (2012) agrees that no matter the approach used to instruct on reading it is the purposeful questioning that will lead the student to be a critical thinker about text. It is difficult to create an entire unit of questions by oneself, therefore through collaboration, the discussions between the teachers will be important when developing a strong bank of questions to ask students throughout the text. Fisher and Frey (2014) also agree with Phillips that through text-based questions and discussion, students are guided to deeply analyze and appreciate various aspects of the text, such as vocabulary and how its meaning is shaped by context. Strong, pre-determined questioning will allow for the success of whole group close reading lessons.

My final implication is that teachers make it a priority to support the struggling readers with an individualized guided reading lesson or another form of Response to Intervention if they
are implementing reading instruction with the whole group. Mathes et al. (2003) would agree to providing instruction to students in small groups in addition. It has long been the core of most differentiated instruction. Small-group instruction led by a knowledgeable teacher has been shown to be more effective than whole-class undifferentiated instruction. It is important for struggling readers to receive as much academic support as possible to help them become strong independent readers.

**Conclusion**

The research question I kept in mind when conducting my study was: how do close reading and guided reading compare to each other and how do they both support literacy development from struggling readers? I implemented a close reading lesson and a guided reading lesson with my focus group. I then compared the results with how well they understood the text when taught in a small group guided reading lesson with a whole group with a text at above their instructional level. I collected and assessed a variety of data including student work samples from both types of lessons, student interviews and teacher interviews. My findings showed that struggling readers find more success when they are able to work with a text that is at their instructional level. They can achieve mastery of grade level standards with a text that is developmentally appropriate for them. Also, teachers are not finding success in their struggling readers when participating in whole group close reading lessons. My implications suggest that teachers expose students to rigorous text but allow more individualized instruction with text that is developmentally appropriate and instructional to each student. Using the same learning target for each student is acceptable if the text is differentiated for students so they are able to feel successful and show academic growth.
If I were to conduct this study again I would invite other grade level teachers to implement the same close reading lesson to their classrooms as well and then we would compare data results with each other. I would also like each teacher implementing the close reading lessons to be videotaped as a type of data collection. If a classroom has understood the content of the lesson better than another, a videotape would allow us to understand why. Perhaps a teacher posed a question that wasn’t in the close reading lesson plan and that question helped students think or understand something better. Or, perhaps a scaffold was implemented that also wasn’t in the plan but it helped the students. Comparing with other teachers and being able to go back and see what each teacher did will gather good data results and improve the lesson for all learners the next time the lesson is taught.

One limitation of this study was time restriction. This study only included one close reading lesson and one guided reading lesson and then results were compared on how well struggling readers understood both lessons. This study could take place over the duration of many months or even an entire school year and growth of all students could be marked, not just the struggling readers.

Another limitation was the participation of my focus group students. Doug was absent during the time of data collection in my small group lesson. I collected data from Julie and Rachel but not from Doug. Also, during the whole group lesson Rachel was not participating in much of the lesson and disrupted my instruction several times with insubordinate behavior. She was able to turn her behavior around by the end but her distractions and disruptions to the whole class took away from the lesson as a whole.

As a whole, this study provided an immense amount of information for me as an educator on the importance of close reading and guided reading. Both types of instruction are
important and carry value in a classroom setting. One outcome that was proven to me was that one instruction cannot replace the other. They are both important in their respective ways. From my data collection, I found that struggling readers don’t feel comfortable sharing thoughts or ideas first while in group discussion most likely because they didn’t understand the text if read independently first. Teachers recognize that the struggling readers do not comprehend the text but they recognize they will be able to give them individualized instruction during guided reading. In guided reading teachers feel they are able to connect and support their struggling readers where they need support. As well as the students feel comfortable accepting and asking for help during small group instruction rather in large group instruction. With all or some of the discussed implications in place close reading implementation can be valuable to all types of learners as well as guided reading.

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Appendix A
Title of study: *The Comprehension of Close Reading and Guided Readers*

Name(s) of researcher(s): **Amanda Robinson**

Faculty Supervisor: Joellen Maples, PhD Assistant Professor St. John Fisher College/Marty Murray, Instructor

Phone for further information: **966-5772**

Purpose of study: *To compare how students comprehend text through a close reading approach and guided reading approach.*

This study has been approved by the John Fisher College Institutional Review Board.

Place of study: **Longridge Elementary** Length of participation: 2-3 days

Risks and benefits: This study presents no risks to your child. The benefits are the opportunity for improved teaching.

Your child’s name and the location of the research will be changed in order to protect your child’s anonymity. All data will be kept in a locked location and accessible only to the researcher. The findings from this study will be shared with other professionals at the St. John Fisher College Capstone Presentation conference.

Your rights: As the parent/guardian of a research participant, you have the right to:
1. Have the purpose of the study, and the expected risks and benefits fully explained to you before you choose to allow your minor child to participate.
2. Withdraw from participation at any time without penalty.
3. Refuse to answer a particular question without penalty.
4. Be informed of the results of the study.

I, the parent or guardian of __________________________________________, a minor ________ years of age, consent to his/her participation in the above-named study. I have received a copy of this form.

_____________________________ ____________________________ ____________
Print name (Participant) Signature Date

_____________________________ ____________________________ ____________
Print name (Investigator) Signature Date

If you have any further questions regarding this study, please contact the researcher listed above. If you experience emotional or physical discomfort due to participation in this study, please contact the Office of Academic Affairs at 385-8034 or the Wellness Center at 385-8280 for appropriate referrals.

**St. John Fisher College**
Title of study: *The Comprehension of Close Reading and Guided Readers*

Name(s) of researcher(s): *Amanda Robinson*

Purpose of study: *The purpose of this study is to compare how students comprehend a text through a close reading approach and a guided reading approach.*

This study has been approved by John Fisher College.

Place of study: *Longridge Elementary* Length of participation: *2-3 days*

Risks and benefits: This study presents no risks to you and it will help me become a better teacher.

Your name and the name of the school will be changed to keep your identity a secret. Only my professor and I will be able to see the data I collect. The findings from this study will be shared with other professionals at the St. John Fisher College Capstone Presentation conference.

**Your rights:** As a research participant, you have the right to:
1. You have the right to know what the study is, what the risks are and what the benefits are.
2. You can decide not to participate. It will not affect your grade or anything else in school.
3. You can decide not to answer any questions I ask.
4. You can ask to hear about what I learned.

I, ________________________________, agree to participate in this study. I have received a copy of this form.

_________________________  ___________________________  ___________
Print name (Participant)   Signature   Date

_________________________  ___________________________  ___________
Print name (Investigator)  Signature   Date

If you have any questions, please let me know. If anything about this study makes you uncomfortable, let your parents know so they can contact people who can help you.

St. John Fisher College
INFORMED CONSENT FORM (for use with adults)

Title of study: The Comprehension of Close Reading and Guided Readers

Name(s) of researcher(s): Amanda Robinson

Faculty Supervisor: Joellen Maples, PhD Assistant Professor St. John Fisher College/Marty Murray, Instructor

Phone for further information: 966-5772

Purpose of study: To compare how students comprehend text through a close reading approach and guided reading approach.

This study has been approved by the John Fisher College Institutional Review Board.

Place of study: Longridge Elementary Length of participation: 2-3 days

Risks and benefits: This study presents no risks to your child. The benefits are the opportunity for improved teaching.

Your child’s name and the location of the research will be changed in order to protect your child’s anonymity. All data will be kept in a locked location and accessible only to the researcher. The findings from this study will be shared with other professionals at the St. John Fisher College Capstone Presentation conference.

Your rights: As the parent/guardian of a research participant, you have the right to:
1. Have the purpose of the study, and the expected risks and benefits fully explained to you before you choose to allow your minor child to participate.
2. Withdraw from participation at any time without penalty.
3. Refuse to answer a particular question without penalty.
4. Be informed of the results of the study.

_________________________ ___________________________ __________
Print name (Participant) Signature Date

_________________________ ___________________________ __________
Print name (Investigator) Signature Date

If you have any further questions regarding this study, please contact the researcher listed above. If you experience emotional or physical discomfort due to participation in this study, please contact the Office of Academic Affairs at 385-8034 or the Wellness Center at 385-8280 for appropriate referrals.
Focus Group Interview Questions

1) How did you feel about today’s lesson with the whole group?

2) Did you find it hard to find the gist of your assigned chunk of text?

3) How did it make you feel when I told you to read the chunk of text then write the gist and not to discuss it with anyone first?

4) Did you feel worried you were doing it wrong or you had the wrong answer?

5) Did you feel comfortable asking for help?

6) Did you feel comfortable sharing your gist with your group? Why or why not?

7) How did you feel when I worked with you in a small group?

8) Why it may be important to work with a whole group too?

9) How do you see yourself as a reader?
Teacher Interview Questions

How long have you been teaching?

What are your certs?

What do you like about teaching the modules?

What don't you like about it?

Do you finding that the modules support all learners in your classroom? Why or why not

How are you accommodating the struggling readers?

Compared to past years of classroom reading instruction do you notice a change in performance on in class reading assignments this year as to previous years?

Are you seeing growth from your struggling readers?

Are you observing your students feeling excitement about reading this year? Is this different from past years?

Closing thoughts on close reading modules or the shifts in the CCSS that has pushed the students to this rigorous reading instruction?
APPENDIX D
Meg Lowman believes that science is the machinery that runs the earth. She explains, “I think that science is really the way things work, and that’s exciting. It is important to understand the bigger picture of our planet and where we live, how it functions, what we do with it, and how that will have impact.”

When Meg wants to have a close look at the machinery, she goes to the rainforest, and recently she has been coming to Blue Creek. Meg worries about the machinery. Although it seems invincible, although she can track a new swarm of ants rushing into a tree notch to fill a gap that was not there the previous day, she wonders how strong the machine really is. How many species can be removed before it will break?

Viewed from an airplane, the top of the rainforest at Blue Creek looks like a field of gigantic broccoli. The bright green florets are actually the emergent growth of the very tallest trees. They...
This storm chaser uses a video camera to record the tornado so he can later study its movement.

**Staying Safe**

Storm chasers drive many miles across the United States in search of storms. Driving in bad weather can be dangerous, even for an experienced storm chaser. Rain floods roads, often causing cars to get stuck or spin out of control. Rain, hail, fog, and pitch-black darkness can make it hard for the driver to see the road ahead. As chasing becomes more popular, the roads around storms become more crowded. First-time chasers without experience make things even more dangerous.

Some of the newer chasers have been branded as “renegades” by older chasers. The renegades start chasing for the excitement of being near a huge storm. Instead of studying the science of tornadoes, these chasers speed along roads in search of excitement and fun. Safety is very important when following a storm. Chasers who do not use common sense can make things more dangerous. They risk their lives and the lives of others just for thrills.
Chasers must be careful at all times. Not only is the weather dangerous, but many chasers carry expensive equipment to study the storms. This equipment isn’t easy to replace, so chasers are very careful that it doesn’t get damaged. They also pay close attention to their equipment. Those who do not can become victims to thieving people.

Some chasers take unnecessary risks in order to see a storm up close. Many seek out supercells. A supercell is a very powerful type of thunderstorm that can create tornadoes. Some chasers even go core punching. This is when a chaser drives through the center, or core, of a thunderstorm. The core of a storm has the most violent weather. Core punching is very dangerous. Many storm chasers refuse to do it, but it does give the closest view of any tornadoes that might form. Outside of the spinning core, areas of hail, heavy rain, and light rain travel around the supercell.