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Independently Implementing Best Practices In Flexible Guided Reading At The Elementary School Level

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INDEPENDENTLY IMPLEMENTING BEST PRACTICES IN FLEXIBLE GUIDED READING AT THE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL LEVEL

By

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

I have worked in many elementary classrooms in several different school districts across the country for the last five years. Some of these classrooms were my own, some classes I substitute taught, and in others I solely taught guided reading groups. Each classroom had its own marked personality for learning, yet in most cases classes were fairly similar in the way standards were approached and presented. Despite the common characteristics of each class, it amazed me how drastically different guided reading was implemented through individual districts, schools, and classrooms. I witnessed many teachers, including myself, struggle with balancing the components of a balanced reading block while in some schools it seemed to flow like second nature. I asked myself why this might be. I noticed schools that implemented guided reading in a systematic or flexible way had much higher levels of reading achievement than schools in which it is up to the teacher to decide how to juggle the balance of the reading block. So I had to ask myself, how can teachers easily and independently approach guided reading in a flexible way?

My years as an elementary educator have led me to this one burning question: *How can best practices in flexible guided reading be independently implemented at the elementary school level?* This chapter describes what guided reading is and its importance in a balanced reading program. This chapter also outlines how guided reading can be flexible in nature, and how this flexibility can help students show more growth in reading skills and comprehension. My teaching experiences in grades K-6 have led to

my curiosity about this topic. Therefore, the rationale for the research displays why I think elementary students would greatly benefit from flexible guided reading groups.

Guided Reading

I believe the best way to answer my research question is to begin by defining guided reading. What exactly is the overall purpose of guided reading? Guided reading is considered part of a balanced literacy program. Balanced literacy programs include shared reading, guided reading, read alouds, independent reading, interactive writing, shared writing, reading workshop, writing workshop, and word study. Fountas and Pinnell (1996) defined guided reading as "... a context in which a teacher supports each reader's development of effective strategies for processing novel texts at increasingly challenging levels of difficulty" (p. 2). Children should eventually be able to apply reading strategies to become successful independent readers. These small group interactions are a time when I can see my students making connections in reading. I can see their faces light up when they finally learn to decode new words or comprehend harder texts. Small guided reading groups are a perfect time for teachers to assess specific needs and strengths of students and reflect for further differentiated instruction. While guided reading is considered essential in a balanced reading curriculum, and provides crucial time for focusing on students specific needs, such as phonemic awareness and fluency, it can be hard for teachers to make time to meet with groups without proper support (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996). In my experience, groups tend to become stagnant as students never progress past their level of reading.

My own learning in elementary reading, 25 years ago, leads me to believe that small group reading instruction is not new and has been a part of school reading agendas for many years. I have strong memories of my elementary reading groups. I specifically remember my second grade group because it was when I realized that I would forever be a "middle level reader." There were three reading groups in Mrs. McCourt's classroom: green, yellow, and red. It did not take me long to figure out that these groups were arranged with a stoplight approach; green meant "go" for the higher level readers, yellow meant "slow down and work on things" for the middle level readers , and of course, red meant "stop and think" for the lowest level readers. I worked so hard to perfect my reading. I read every night at home and I eventually won a medal for reading the most books in the whole school in the school wide reading challenge that year. I watched my teacher carefully when she asked comprehension questions and taught word study, trying to mimic her every move and thought. I wanted to be in the green group more than anything. I never made it. My next fews years of elementary school were the same, I was stuck in the middle level forever, and I gave up about half way through 3rd grade. Not only did I never move to higher levels of text, the books we did read were quite dull, and I would lose interest quite often. If only these groups had been flexible, measuring precise reading skills and comprehension with text that was meaningful to me.

Flexible Guided Reading

Flexible guided reading ensures that guided reading instruction does not track students into the same reading level year after year despite growth in reading skills. For guided reading to be flexible, teachers should meet with students consistently, often

measuring student progress in reading skills, fluency, and comprehension. Groups are flexible because they are always changing in order to meet the specific needs of individual students. Students progress differently, some may reach higher levels of text much faster than others, some may need to work on certain letter blends, or some may need to work on comprehension. Teachers carefully measure how well students apply the use of skills, knowledge, and strategies as they read. Students may be placed in several reading groups in one year so that needs are met (Dorn, French, & Jones, 1998). Fountas and Pinnell (2012) pointed out, " Behavioral evidence is needed to inform grouping and regrouping so that the danger of static groups can be avoided" (p. 6).

Flexible grouping often focuses on texts that are meaningful. It is important to choose texts that are relevant to students in order to create an interest in reading. Too often educators place students in leveled groups in which they focus on reading skills using leveled books that students may have no interest in at all. Souto-Manning and Martell (2016) confirmed that lessons work better when children use books they are already reading and interested in for small group instruction rather than introducing a leveled book for the whole group. Additionally, a book may only be visited once a week as opposed to being a part of an ongoing weekly lesson. The students lose interest and show little growth. In turn, reading instruction has no set purpose and becomes stagnant in nature. Readers form bonds with the writer's meaning and purpose, aligned with the background knowledge they have or that the teacher has built, in order to find deeper meanings in texts. Flexible guided reading groups should consist of meaningful texts that are not chosen only by level but by student interests, this not only accelerates student

progress in reading, but also allows them to move forward to more advanced levels of text they find engaging. Fountas and Pinnell (2012) believed that "Teachers need to become experts in forming and reforming groups to allow for the differences in learning that is evident in students" (Fountas & Pinnell, 2012, p. 9). Flexible guided reading must focus on the needs of individual students and remain fluid because children learn skills at many different paces. Flexible grouping can begin with authentic on-going assessments and careful selection of text.

My Journey to the Question

My first experience with creating a balanced reading program was during my student teaching practicum. I was assigned to a 3rd grade classroom at a fairly large elementary school in central Illinois. The first week of school for teachers consisted of setting up leveled book baskets for guided reading groups. Groups had already been created by the school's reading specialist based on reading scores and achievements from the previous year. I was instructed to teach the everyday curriculum for reading which focused on a balance of shared reading, guided reading, independent reading, and word study. During the guided reading portion of the daily schedule the reading specialist pushed into the classroom and took a small leveled reading group while the teacher took another group. Each group met for 15 minutes each. Students who were not working in a group chose books from their leveled book baskets to read independently. The classroom teacher had created work folders that had various activities students could perform independently with these books. English language learners also went to another classroom to work on reading with an ELL teacher at this time. The guided reading

groups had a set curriculum that was followed consisting of various comprehension questions, writing, and word work. By the end of the semester I could see the benefits of the guided reading groups as students showed growth in reading skills and comprehension. The reading groups provided insight to student strengths and areas of need. However, the reading was performed chorally or silently without teacher input or prompting and the instruction was leveled but not individualized. Instruction was not assessment based and children rarely moved reading groups. Lastly, texts were part of a pre-selected and leveled curriculum. Students and teachers had no choice in what texts were read.

My first teaching experience in an elementary school, in a small town on the island of Maui, Hawaii, had a much different approach to reading, in essence there was no approach at all. I was given a teacher's manual and a "good luck, enjoy your class." My room was bare and no one came to set up leveled groups or book baskets, I was on my own. I looked at my classroom list of thirty-two 3rd graders and the anxiety set in. I knew from my past experience how important a balanced reading program was but had no idea how to accomplish it without support, especially with such a large class. I did my best to study student scores and files and to create leveled book baskets and work folders. I studied the teacher's manual from the curriculum provided and chose what was the best way to achieve all the components of a successful balanced reading program. However, with such a large class and no support, guided reading was not working. I had too many students left to work independently and for too long of a time. In short, that idea failed miserably. Since I was such a new teacher, I chose to go with direct instruction most of

the time. I then felt as if I could not address the literacy needs of most of my students. Over the next few years I taught smaller classes at the fourth grade level, and even with various tweaks, I could usually only meet with guided reading groups about once a week. This was not enough and I knew it. Many of my students reading scores flatlined and I was at a loss. I lobbied for more support and collaborated with equally frustrated teachers.

Eventually I left Hawaii to return to my home state of Illinois. I was happy to return to the district where I had student taught and had such valuable experiences with the literacy program. I very quickly got a long term substitute position as a part time Response to Intervention (RtI) teacher. I was trained to implement intervention reading using Jan Richardson's program The *Next Step in Guided Reading* (2009). I learned to use precise teaching to guide struggling readers in reaching goals in skills and comprehension. I also got to choose any book for the lessons. I enjoyed choosing books that would be interesting for my students rather than following lessons with set leveled books. Each quarter I progressed monitored students in reading skills including phonemic awareness, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension. I often saw growth and many times graduated them to the next reading level. For the first time I experienced guided reading that was flexible and truly differentiated for the reader. It was exciting to see students actually learn and meet literacy goals first hand. I collaborated with teachers and other literacy leaders in creating quality differentiated lessons that promote student growth. Student's achievements also followed them through each grade level so that they could continue to progress in the same manner each year.

My job as an RtI teacher using the Richardson program was brief and the following year I had to travel alongside my fiancé for his work. I substitute taught short and long term in many districts from Illinois to Hawaii. I found that most schools did not use flexible guided reading or emphasize guided reading as an essential part of the reading program at all. Some districts loosely used Jan Richardson's components and others used independent attempts at flexible reading groups.

Rationale for Research

After all my experiences with reading programs and curriculums, I feel I saw the most student growth within schools that implemented balanced reading programs that had strong flexible guided reading groups. Some schools are improving in this area, but have not had professional development and therefore lack knowledge in implementing flexible guided reading curriculums. I have most often seen the use of Jan Richardson's program. I have to wonder if Jan Richardson's program is the most successful? I feel as though there has to be more than one approach to flexible guided reading and if so what is out there? Are there strategies that teachers can put in place with little support? I hope the research will answer these questions and aid in my creation of a website for teachers to independently provide truly differentiated instruction in small guided reading groups that pushes students in achieving growth and love in literacy.

Conclusion

Guided reading is ready to graduate to a new level in order to push children forward. I too often observe lack of a balanced literacy program in classrooms. Many teachers feel they have trouble finding the time and support needed to fully develop

guided reading instruction, while other classrooms have ample support in ensuring all the elements of balanced reading curriculums. Despite essential balance being met, guided reading groups have become stagnant, placing students in leveled groups without providing them the opportunity for true growth and progression. Schools have now begun to push students out of this box by making guided reading more flexible in practice, measuring student skills and comprehension regularly, with text chosen based on student interest, so that they may progress to more complex levels of text.

In the next chapter I outline a literature review of guided reading practices that promotes flexibility for student growth and progression towards literacy. I hope to find best practices that I can consolidate into an easy access website for teachers. Teachers deserve the opportunity to provide reading instruction that promotes student growth. Therefore, as I review the literature in guided reading I will keep in mind my original question: *How can best practices in flexible guided reading be independently implemented at the elementary school level?*

CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

My goal in this literature review is to investigate the research question: *How can best practices in flexible guided reading be independently implemented at the elementary school level?* In my experience, students are often placed in reading groups that do not promote reading progression and some students never receive guided guided instruction. I wanted to know what schools or teachers have done to promote differentiation with guided reading. I began my research with the basic idea of guided reading presented by Marie Clay (1993) and then looked into how these ideas have been revised to meet the needs of all learners. I investigated why guided reading is important to literacy programs and how it has been implemented within classrooms based on the work of Fountas and Pinnell (1996). I then looked into the structure of flexible grouping strategies and studies that have used these flexible guided reading techniques. Flexibility in guided reading is based around the strengths and needs of students, therefore the research led me in the exploration of student-centered approaches to reading including: assessment to drive instruction, student interest and motivation in reading, creating reading groups that take into account the diversity of children, selecting relevant and meaningful text, and addressing social skills and behavior in guided reading. The last section of the review will explore research in how students engage with a text, allowing meaningful text discussion that values the reader's thought process. This section will explain ideas of how readers engage with text so that discussion about text is more natural and fluid.

Differentiation for all Students through Flexible Guided Reading

Guided reading is not new to balanced reading programs, but can become stagnant with groups remaining the same for several years. Instruction does not adapt to the pace of each child's progress in reading. Dorn, French, and Jones (1998) noted that to avoid static grouping, a considerable amount of attention is now put on grouping children based on individualized instructional needs. Now more than ever schools are being held accountable for reading performance, and are looking for an effective way to meet the needs of all learners using curriculum guidelines (Ford & Opitz, 2001). New strategies can be used by educators to assemble more flexible reading groups that are meaningful and independent to foster these needs. Studies have been done to enhance differentiation in guided reading and focus on how using flexible guided reading techniques link to reading achievement with the use of formal and informal evaluation.

According to Boyer (2014) teachers struggle to meet student needs as class sizes increases, resulting in a lack of time and resources needed. Educators find it difficult to meet with daily reading groups and cover required standards (Boyer, 2014; Gabl, Kaiser, Long, & Roemer, 2007). Local and federal mandates were put in place hoping to boost reading scores. The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) increased the demand of student success in reading with high stakes testing and implementation of scientifically based teaching strategies. This standard-based teaching targeted grade level proficiency in reading and math (Boyer, 2014). Dorn, French, and Jones (1998) emphasized the critical need of the classroom teacher in ensuring progression of struggling readers,

"...they need us, as their teachers, to be knowledgeable about the literacy process and to provide them with constructive reading and writing opportunities that guarantee their right to literacy" (p. 1).

Reading First was a component of NCLB that many schools were rewarded when they mandated programs that were deemed effective based on scientific reading research. *Reading First* programs implemented five components of reading instruction: phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension (*U.S. Department of Education,* 2008). As time went forward there was a shift to the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) in which all teachers would use the same standards to teach aligned reading programs (Boyer, 2014).

Literacy professionals then began adopting research on a more balanced literacy approach. This approach uses whole group, small group, and individual differentiated instruction within the general education classroom to meet the needs of all learners. Fountas and Pinnell (1996) and Dorn, French, and Jones (1998) placed instruction into three categories: guided reading, shared reading, and independent reading with emphasis on needs of support from the teacher. Instruction in a balanced reading program focus on phonological awareness, phonics, vocabulary, comprehension, and fluency. (Boyer, 2014; Dryden, Gaffner, Johnson, & Torres-Elias, 2014).

Why Guided Reading?

Fountas and Pinnell (1996) described guided reading as "the heart of a balanced literacy program" (p.1). They further outline the purpose of guided reading within a balanced literacy program. Fountas and Pinnell explained that guided reading provides

opportunity for students to develop as independent readers and engage with peers in the reading process. It provides a time for teachers to observe readers and directly provide needed support for these readers as they learn to use reading strategies with increasingly complex texts. Guided reading also gives readers the time to feel success in the reading process and enjoy the reading experience.

The act of reading is a complex process. There are several strategies that children must use in order to make meaning of the information presented in a variety of texts. Therefore, reading is an interactive process in which a reader uses information from several sources (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996; Souto-Manning & Martell, 2016). Clay (1993) presented a fundamental understanding that clusters these sources into three systems: meaning or semantic cues, structure or syntax cues, and visual information or graphophonic clues. Fountas and Pinnell (1996) outlined these cues. Meaning or semantic cues provide a sense of meaning from previous life experiences. This is how children make sense of written or spoken communication. Structure or syntactic cues are based on the rules of English, or knowing the rules that dictate how language flows together. Visual information is the knowledge and understanding of graphic symbols. This includes sounds and symbols of language, punctuation cues and spacing. While children subconsciously have these sources available, they may not always know how to use them while reading longer text. The teacher can carefully monitor this process in small guided reading groups. Souto-Manning and Martell (2016) emphasized that children are seldom taught how to orchestrate these cues. Teachers must make learning these cues accessible by directly and intentionally teaching an assortment of reading strategies.

Cognitive reading strategies. Clay (1991) laid out a series of cognitive strategies readers use to make meaning of text. Guided reading offers a time in which the teacher can help children understand and apply these strategies. Many of the strategies are related to the cueing systems of reading: meaning, language structure, and visual information. Strategies include, but are not limited to, prediction, the use of illustrations to make meaning, self-monitoring by reading again, analogies relating to unknown words, use of context clues, links to prior knowledge, decoding unknown words, and reading with fluency (Dorn, French & Jones, 1998; Fountas & Pinnell, 1996; Souto-Manning & Martell, 2016). French, Dorn, and Jones (1998) confirmed, "...it is critical that the teacher observe and take notice of which strategic operations the child is initiating and which ones he or she is neglecting" (p. 26).

Reading behaviors. Dorn, French, and Jones (1998) and Fountas and Pinnell (1996) noticed reading behaviors children display as they read increasingly complex levels of text. They stated that understanding how children approach a text is a valuable tool and there are certain behaviors that teachers should notice and support as children progress in text levels. For example, emergent readers must learn how to handle books and become acquainted with concepts about print (CAP), while transitional readers should be able to read longer stretches of text silently. There are many behaviors associated with reading increasingly complex text that are included in this research.

Essential elements of guided reading. Fountas and Pinnell (1996) suggested an outline for guiding reading based on the actions of the teacher and students before,

during, and after reading. Before reading, the teacher must decide on a text that is at the instructional level for the group or a text that focuses on a particular strategy the group may need to practice. The teacher will then prepare a way to introduce the text that is relevant to the level of student experience and knowledge. Introductions should also focus on the three cueing systems: meaning, language, and visual information presented in the text. Introductions allow readers to participate in discussion about the text through questioning and activation of prior knowledge. The teacher should leave some questions to be addressed as reading occurs. Jan Richardson (2009) emphasized the importance of selecting one to two reading strategies and a comprehension strategy to focus on throughout the lesson. Comprehension strategies include, but are not limited to, summarizing, predicting, and inferring. This can be an extension of the whole group comprehension focus or based the particular needs of the reading group. In the words of Dorn, French, and Jones (1998), "The book orientation provides a framework for children to use as they explore written text" (p. 43).

During reading the teacher steps back to listen and observe the behaviors and use of strategies children use as they read. Children read the text quietly to themselves as the teacher circles and observes. At this time the teacher can note problem-solving strategies and can help direct students through specific prompting when they are having difficulty. Fountas and Pinnell (1996) emphasized that guided reading is not done chorally or in a "round robin" fashion. Children should read at their pace with opportunity to use strategies to make meaning of text. Guided reading provides readers a supply of strategies that they can use for reading independently.

After reading, a discussion can take place about the whole text. The teacher may then use this time to re- teach reading strategies. Children can retell the story, check predictions, or add a personal connection which allows the teacher to assess comprehension. Students may then reread the story to a partner or themselves or the teacher may assign an extension activity such as writing (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996).

Student centered guided reading allows flexibility. The teacher's role in guided reading groups is to act as support guide as children learn to comprehend what they read. It is believed teachers should release ownership in learning to students over time by giving them a repertoire of literacy learning skills that will empower them as they make meaning of text (Whitehead, 1994). Ideally, every reader should have a copy of a text so that they feel in control of their learning. Greene (2017) used the work of Fountas and Pinnell (1996) and divided lessons into quick segments. Before reading, preview the book in no more than one minute. During reading, the teacher can circle and monitor and support individual student needs as a means of continuous scaffolding. After reading, check for comprehension by having the student retell and then ask specific questions to check for concepts the student may have missed. This basic outline gave a concise idea for a quick lesson. Greene (2015) stated that groups should not be static but flexible in nature. Students should be assessed often through informal and formal assessment and moved to new groups focusing on different areas of need because they will progress at different paces. Giving students ownership makes learning more meaningful to them (Greene, 2017; Whitehead, 1994).

Assessment to drive instruction. Boushey and Moser (2009), Fountas and Pinnell (1996), and Opitz and Ford (2001) revealed that assessment should be used to inform instruction and formation of small groups. Assessment informs teaching decisions, notes children's strengths and prior knowledge, gives insight into what they child can do with and without support, documents progress over time, and reports a child's learning to various stakeholders such as parents, the principal and others in the community.

Fountas and Pinnell (1996) introduced procedures in guided reading assessment through observations in letter identification, word tests, concepts about print (CAP), writing vocabulary, running records of text reading, comprehension, retelling, questioning following reading, and fluency and phrasing. Assessment is multi-dimensional and measures many aspects of the reading process. Opitz and Ford (2001) added that observations in a variety of settings and content areas provide "logical starting points for guided reading groups" (p. 16).

According to Fountas and Pinnell (1996), running records are the most time consuming to learn but are highly informative in measuring reading behaviors. They explained that they are … "not only for documenting children's reading behaviors for later analysis and reflection but sharpening the teacher's observational power and understanding of the reading process" (p. 89).

Flexible Grouping in Guided Reading

Opitz and Ford (2001) defined flexible guided reading groups as "...having students working in a variety of differently mixed groups that are drawn together for a specific purpose" (p. 22) Researchers argue that grouping students strictly by reading level can be debilitating to student reading progression. As more teachers implement readings groups, a few concerns have come to attention. First, placing readers in self-contained groups does not allow for progression in reading and can damage the self-esteem and self-confidence of struggling readers placed in low groups (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996). Second, the instructional format given to high and low readers is different and does not allow for cooperative learning. Struggling readers do not get a chance to work with classmates that can help them understand what it means to be a proficient reader. Opitz and Ford (2001) have offered a compelling argument for this view, "When we acknowledge and celebrate commonalities, we avoid viewing a developmental stage as a discrete variable and defining students solely in terms of reading stages" (p. 14). Opitz and Ford (2001) also reasoned that there is an over reliance on a reader's accuracy when grouping readers. They pointed out that instruction based on accuracy does not take into account a child's reading comprehension. A reader can make several errors and still comprehend text. Flexible guiding reading must take into account both accuracy and comprehension. Groups should also change based on the focus of the lesson and the needs of the individual student. Lastly, text selection is key in flexible grouping. Meaningful text selection is explained in detail further in the literature review.

Boushey and Moser (2009) take flexibility in grouping a step further with their CAFE (Comprehension, accuracy, fluency, and expanded vocabulary) model of teaching literacy in the classroom. In this model the teacher creates small-group instruction for groups of students with similar needs in one of these four categories. These groups are consistently reformed based on needs rather than text levels. Many times the teacher meets with students who are reading different books at different levels but are working toward a similar goal. These needs are found by individual reading conferences with the teacher.

Flexible grouping by grade level. Fountas and Pinnell (1996) laid out many ideas to dynamically group students. Many teachers have followed these methods to create their own attempts at flexible grouping. Boyer (2014) conducted a study to gain insight into teachers' perspective on the use of grade level wide flexible grouping for guided reading in relation to student reading achievement. Five first grade teachers implemented guided reading lessons that incorporated key elements to start each lesson such as discussing book features, picture walks, vocabulary skills, and setting a purpose for reading. Students then engaged in a first reading of the book, reading aloud or in pairs while the teacher circled to read with each individual student. During this conference the teacher took notes on skills that might need to be revisited. The lesson was ended with a review of the story and questioning with modeled comprehension skills. If needed, time could be designated for word work skills such as chunks, blends, or comprehension strategies like recalling story elements or retelling with details. The group was then released to reread the story for practice, work on an activity related to the reading or join

another literacy center. Teachers covering many of the same concepts during shared reading lessons confirmed that students were exposed to weekly standards in varying contexts (Boyer, 2014; Opitz & Ford, 2001).

In Boyer's study, flexible grouping created more homogenous classes as kids switched rooms to work with those that shared similar strengths and areas of need. Some teachers could then design shared and guided reading plans for struggling readers who needed additional support in all aspects of reading, while other teachers helped advanced readers comprehension of higher levels of text. Teachers believed that switching classrooms would give higher leveled readers the opportunity to move forward instead of waiting for others to catch up and lower leveled readers would feel more comfortable in learning among peers with similar skill levels. Boyer (2014) observed, "When asked to discuss the impact individual need had on making decisions about what to teach, the participants agreed the flexible grouping process allowed them to do that much more effectively" (p. 106).

Boyer (2014) argued that flexible grouping among these teachers made planning lessons differ substantially as they were adapted to the needs of students rather than designed uniformly. Teachers made more consistent notes during guided reading, and followed up on teaching points more regularly in following lessons. Flexible groups were based on teacher made assessments given for each child rather than the previous years recorded reading level. While there was little difference in materials, many teachers found it difficult to find higher levels of text for advanced readers and many times had to search in personal teacher libraries (Boyer, 2014).

At the end of the study, teachers reported that flexible guided reading across grade levels had its advantages and disadvantages. Sometimes switching classrooms did not allow them time to build rapport with reading groups. The short amount of time each teacher had with children made it difficult to learn about students. This would sometimes lead to disciplinary issues. Teachers also found it hard to communicate with parents since they were not necessarily the child's primary teacher. Conversely, an increase in time for each group allowed for more learning time and higher level students did not waste time in skill reviews. The formatted lessons made for student individual needs took pressure off the teacher as lessons were easier to plan. The results of the assessment data at the end of the study showed that all students had higher end of the year reading levels than in previous years (Boyer, 2014). The study did not clearly define how often groups were changed as readers needs changed. The use of the word flexible throughout the study was therefore unclear compared to the definition offered by Opitz and Ford (2001). The study does support the need for adapted instruction through guided reading and as Opitz and Ford pointed out " There is definitely more than one way to do guided reading" (p. 9).

Guided Reading to Increase Interest and Motivation

Gabl, Kaiser, Long, and Roemer (2007) observed elementary schools in the Midwest that had no set guided reading structure, and struggled with an overall lack of motivation in reading as the main reason of low achievement in comprehension and fluency skills. Since students did not feel that they could achieve success in reading, many of them would not try. School administrators felt this lack of confidence resulted in below grade level performance on tasks connected to comprehension and fluency.

Many students who started poorly without learning the necessary skills essential to comprehension and fluency, such as decoding strategies to recognize unfamiliar words, rarely achieved grade level reading proficiency .

Teachers and administrators in these districts chose to focus on guided reading as a means to increase reading motivation and in turn reading achievement. Prior to the study, educators felt as though guided reading required large amounts of leveled readers and as a result often turned towards the provided basal readers. Teachers knew they were not reaching the needs of all learners and therefore agreed guided reading needed to be made a priority for several reasons. A similar study on best practices in guided reading noticed that students even at the same reading level had very different needs (Dryden et al., 2014). It was understood guided reading could be flexible in nature and meet individual learner needs. They also felt guided reading would give them the opportunity to differentiate easily. Lastly, guided reading allows all students the opportunity to participate and engage in the reading process (Gabl et. al., 2007).

Gabl et al. (2007) noted that schools in this study looked at all the factors affecting how reading instruction was being delivered. Much like the previous study, they noticed large class sizes with wide ranges of ability levels created a lack of physical space, time, and resources needed for teachers to appropriately differentiate reading instruction. Additionally, the guided reading that was being implemented was done inconsistently. Many of the schools noted that teachers had not been trained in guided reading techniques nor did they know how to use assessment in order to make groups flexible and purposeful. Students also needed to learn skills that would allow them to

work independently and make connection with text. Lastly, schools became aware that there was often little parent or family support in student learning.

To create change in these areas, these schools looked into ways they could involve parents and educate them on reading strategies and techniques that were being used at school and could be implemented at home. Smaller, more meaningful, and flexible guided reading groups needed to be created that assessed students' needed skills. Teachers needed to create meaningful activities for students that were not engaged in a group. Gabl et al. (2007) reported teachers were in need of education in creating positive classroom environments that promote meaningful learning. Flexible guided reading goals were set into place with prioritized, consistent assessment on comprehension and fluency. Teachers considered how many groups were needed and looked at classroom dynamics to consider what students would work best together, considering that assessment would allow for movement among groups.

Teachers moved forward in creating an action plan for implementing reading objectives, intervention, targeted group behavior, teacher behavior, materials needed, and the frequency and duration of time for each reading group. Educators included parents in the planning by sending home a letter of how reading instruction would change. They started with lessons that modeled literacy centers for several weeks so that students would be comfortable with performing independent tasks when they were not in a reading group (Gabl et al., 2007).

Teachers in the study found it hard to give up the control of learning to students and worried that much of the mandated curriculum would not be covered. Therefore, it

was important to create engaging and meaningful lessons that blended many aspects of the curriculum for students that were working outside of the guided reading group (Gabl et al., 2007). The majority of students in this study showed positive gains in comprehension and literacy through the use of flexible guided reading. Student confidence in reading ability increased. Research done by Dryden et al. (2014) also showed a boost in teacher confidence when implementing flexible guided reading groups, as they felt they fully understood the components of a balanced literacy program. However, intervention in flexible groups was still difficult for students that needed additional aid in social skills required to work in a group setting. Educators' reflections explained that increased instruction on how to work in a group without conflict needed to be taught directly. It was felt that switching groups more often would provide opportunities to work on lessons that taught social skills (Gabl et al., 2007).

Choice in text. Gurley (2012) provided evidence that a lack of choice and personal interest in books teachers select may be a reason for lack of motivation to read and lower reading achievement. Several 2nd grade students with habits of off task behavior were observed in guided reading groups in which text was self-selected. Students engagement, oral and written discourse, and strategy use was the focus of observation (Gurley, 2012).

Instead of choosing the text, the teacher gave each student a microchoice or a choice of books appropriately challenging based on student instructional level. These choices had a range of text difficulty with a variety of topics and genres. Some books could be read in one sitting and some over several group meetings. The guided reading

lesson also differed slightly, instead of introducing the book to begin with, the teacher reviewed things to think about while choosing something to read such as what is already known about the topic, or if it is interesting. Next, students would walk through the text and make predictions. The teacher would review strategies and focus on a specific comprehension strategy. After guiding students as they read, discussion of the book was encouraged at the end. Students might retell the story or talk about personal connections. Students were also asked to look for common elements among their books (Gurley, 2012).

As students participated in guided reading, data was taken on the following: how well they ignored distraction, how long their eyes were on the text, and how persistent they were when difficulties arose. Data was also taken on gross motor activity, gestures, eye gaze, and body orientation during group meetings. Data showed that when students selected text they were slightly less prone to react to distraction and kept their eyes on the text more often. All students showed persistence with difficulties. They were more likely to check word choice with the teacher, self correct mistakes, and reread for clarity. Students used more strategies such as checking pictures to solve problems. All students in the study showed higher accuracy with self-selected text and read with more expression (Gurley, 2012).

Burke reading interviews and personal reading conferences. Souto-Manning and Martell (2016) suggested interviews as a means of assessment to understand a reader's interest and motivation. Interviews provide insight into a child's families, communities, and how they view themselves as readers. Interviews can be teacher made

or gathered from another source. A common interview is the *Burke Reading Interview* (BRI). The BRI uses a series of questions that exhibit the strategies a reader uses, where they have trouble, insight into previous instruction in reading, and if they think of themselves as proficient readers. Souto-Manning and Martell (2016) claimed that formal and informal interviews " ...can serve as a tool for positioning children as worthy, capable, and knowledgeable individuals with specific interest and motivations" (p. 105).

Boushey and Moser (2009) make time for individual reading conferences with students in order for each child to set independent reading goals. They argued that setting reading goals makes children feel in control of their reading. Children can monitor their own success in reading and in turn strive to read more complex levels of text.

Diversity in Grouping

Schlag (2009) studied whether there was a relationship in reading achievement and flexible guided reading at the elementary level. She described her study as one of social change that would provide educators insight into understanding of the diverse needs of students today. Her study implemented many of the same techniques as the previous with emphasis on consideration of the varying cultural, educational, and linguistic backgrounds of each student. Schlag asks teachers to take these differences into account for each individual student when they consider reading groups. Souto-Manning and Martell (2016) asserted that teachers must know their students identities and take note of their cultural and linguistic tendencies. "In doing so, we teachers can unveil the multiple ways in which children read words and worlds within and across contexts" (p. 81). Reading is not just passing on information, it is understanding that children are

human beings that are vital parts of their own social, historical, and cultural world. They need to be taught in ways that are culturally relevant, learning who they are in within their families, communities, and personal history.

Opitz and Ford (2001) viewed careful grouping as an essential part of differentiation in guided reading. They believe the simplest way to gather information about how students approach reading is through simple observation. Many teachers keep charts or grids with student information. Observation notes can be most beneficial if the teacher makes a list of questions pertaining to how a reader approaches reading to guide what should be noted. Souto-Manning and Martell (2016) gave detailed ideas on teaching diverse learners within a balanced reading program in their book *Reading Writing and Talk Inclusive Teaching Strategies for Diverse Learners, K-2.*

Selection of Meaningful Text

"The reader constructs unique meanings through integrating background knowledge, emotions, attitudes, and expectations with the meaning the writer expresses" (Fountas & Pinnell, 2012, p. 273). Teachers may have an abundance of books leveled and ready to use for guided reading, but they rarely ask themselves if these are books that students can connect to and enjoy. Readers in schools today come from a variety of unique cultures and various backgrounds, connecting to text in different ways. Flexible guided reading suggests a shift of control from the teacher to the learners by allowing them to choose what books they will read for guided reading instruction, this choice increases motivation to read and creates a deeper understanding of text (Fountas & Pinnell, 2012).

Opitz and Ford (2001) listed reasons for why students should read a variety of text. They felt that children need guidance in understanding that text comes in many forms and has various writing styles. Children must be introduced to new ideas and content-specific vocabulary. Many times children prefer to read non-fiction text and teachers should capitalize on these interests by using different texts. Teachers can also use different texts to scaffold previous learning. Lastly, text can expand a reader's background knowledge and lead to better comprehension. Opitz and Ford also broke down which texts can be used for guided reading and how.

Fountas and Pinnell emphasized the importance of meaningful text selection to enhance differentiated reading. For the past 20 years teachers have been collecting short texts that are leveled for readability. These short texts can be read in one 15 to 20 minute sitting. Most schools now use a gradient system marking readability levels from A to Z. Book rooms have been created to help teachers select books that are organized into book baskets or leveled bags.

Educators must use consideration when determining what books promote student growth at their level. During the first week of school, having a benchmark assessment conference with each individual child can measure how proficient a reader is. The teacher should not only measure how accurate word reading is, but how efficient the child would be if reading independently. Efficient readers can self monitor what they read and use abilities to search for and use multiple forms of information to gain meaning from the text. Teachers consider all the information before leveling the reader. As the year continues, teachers keep running records for reading levels and look for behaviors in

readers to determine the reading level and types of text that encourages productivity (Fountas & Pinnell, 2012).

Leveled texts place certain demands on readers that teachers should understand, such as complexity of the content, the amount of words on the page, or the size of the print. For example, a text may be written at a 5th grade level but have adult content that is inappropriate for young readers. An instructional level text permits the reader to broaden their reading capacities. To become fluent readers, students must encounter some level of success daily. Children should be able to read independently to create interest, perseverance, and fluency. They also need to challenge themselves with harder texts that yield moments of growth toward becoming a more proficient reader. According to Fountas and Pinnell (2012), "Successful Processing of the more challenging text is made possible by an expert teacher's careful text selection and strong teaching" (p. 276). Not all leveled books are the same. Many books have a level, yet it does not guarantee their quality. Leveled books can be formulated and leveled incorrectly. Educators must view text cautiously to affirm they are well written, illustrated, and check to see if the level has been accurately determined.

Students show more growth when a book is not too easy or too difficult. If a book is too easy, the students will not learn anything new. Yet, if the teacher feels as though she is doing all the reading, the book is too advanced and learners cannot learn and apply problem solving skills. Appropriately chosen books should have several opportunities for students to apply strategies and skills that the teacher has targeted as a need (Greene, 2015).

Fountas and Pinnell (2012) suggested 10 text characteristics that can help teachers determine the level of books and understand the demands each text places on the reader, and if these demands can be used for influential teaching. First, characteristics of genres and forms are more difficult than others. Second, text structure or the way a book is organized can influence a reading lesson as well. The content or subject of the text is also important to review. Many texts have complex themes and ideas that can provide new learning opportunities. Complex literary elements like involved plots, complex dialogue, or symbolic language may be too challenging. Sentence complexity, level of vocabulary, and length and complexity of words in text can also play a significant part in its appropriateness. Illustrations can play a major role in the mood and meaning of the text being read, and can help students understand difficult information presented. Lastly, book and print features such as the number of pages, size of font, and the table of contents can help in analyzing books for difficulty level.

Some schools found it difficult to create a leveled book collection and then organize and store books in ways easy to locate for instruction. Acquiring books is also costly so some schools use grant and district money to purchase books, and many teachers use companies such as Scholastic and Troll to collect books of varying levels. They then organize the books into categories of readability levels, student interests, and genres. Many of the books are put in labeled bags or baskets, easily accessed by teachers (Gabl et al., 2007).

Opitz and Ford (2001) warned teachers about safeguarding readers from the debilitating effects of labels. While text is available in levels, make sure children do not

associate themselves with the level marked on text. This reverts student mindset back to the static guided reading of the past. As students move in and out of groups based on need, levels and labels should not be what drives student motivation or instruction. Taberski explained that choosing the right book is based on the reader's needs and can be done a using an "if…then" guideline. For example a teacher may say, *If I want to practice proper phrasing, then I look for print chunked in phrases.* Using this guideline leads teachers to choose books based on student needs that will promote learning in reading groups (Taberski, 1998).

Classroom libraries. Classroom libraries rich in choice promote independent reading. A classroom with a wide inventory of books that build processing systems in children such as comprehension and fluency are essential. Libraries should include fiction and nonfiction texts arranged by topic and author that students can choose by interest and spend long amounts of time engaged in without teacher support (Fountas & Pinnell, 2012).

Lanning and LaMere (2000) expanded this idea by explaining that teachers must be familiar with a variety of books to ensure that they can properly implement flexible guided reading groups. As students move in and out of reading groups they bring new experiences and perspectives to text. Lanning and LaMere referred to the work of educational psychologist Wittrock in their article *An Important Aspect of Guided Reading: Books Galore! Classroom Connections, "* real learning results when students are led to make connections among ideas in text as well as between their existing experience and knowledge of what is presented in the text" (p. 3) Teachers must

therefore compile and become knowledgeable about “mountains” of books. Building a library over time will help keep down costs as it is spread over time. Considering student interest as books are purchased can help guide what books are purchased throughout the school year (Lanning & LaMere, 2000).

As we make groups flexible and differentiate through choosing good text for students needs, studies have also been done to emphasize the importance of behavior management and acknowledgement of social skills in creating reading groups. The next section focuses on studies done to help readers whose struggles in reading are linked to social and behavioral problems.

Social Skills and Classroom Management in Reading Instruction

To be truly flexible, reading groups must take into account social and behavioral skills that may be impacting student success in reading within a group. Without addressing these challenges many of these students become at risk for failure in the upper grades. This section provides an insight into strategies and behavior management techniques that can be used to help students self monitor behavior so that they can achieve higher levels of reading performance in a group setting.

Routines are necessary to establish at the beginning of the school year for guided reading groups to be successful. Richardson (2009), a reading specialist, explained that before small groups even meet, the students must comprehend the activities they are performing while the teacher leads groups. Children of all ages can establish independence if instruction is straightforward and there are consistent opportunities to practice. It is important to explain and model rules and routines that children may not

know, for example only in an emergency can a group be interrupted or how to pick books that are right for them, not too easy or difficult. Many teachers spend the first several weeks practicing and reinforcing routines and rules. Students must understand how to do activities independently if they are not part of a group. The work should be engaging and purposeful, steering away from worksheets. Listening centers are easily managed and helpful in developing language skills for English language learners. Partner reading is exciting for students but must be taught to eliminate distraction. Some teachers show a video of appropriate partner behavior to help students understand. Children should be able to stay engaged in activities for at least 15 to 20 minutes as the teacher conducts a group (Greene, 2015).

Students who have greater social competence more commonly experience academic success. Students need the skills to conduct oneself appropriately, make quality decisions, and communicate with teachers and peers in an effective manner. Regardless of social expectations in schools, students often experience shortfalls in social skills and academics, particularly in reading. Many times reducing problem behavior becomes the focus point for students that exhibit challenging behaviours. Too often academic achievement is not addressed (Miller, Fenty, Scott, & Park, 2011).

Today, interventions that look at academic skills also help reduce problem behaviors. Therefore when social skills are lacking, interventions are put in place to reinforce academic and behavioral skills. Schools have began using a Response to Intervention (RtI) approach to teaching and Positive Behavior Support (PBS) in intervening with behavioral challenges based on student needs. Both of these approaches

are also used in addition to the common elements of the tiered instruction model for academic and social behavior deficits based on student needs (universal [Tier 1], targeted group [Tier 2], and individual [Tier 3]) (Miller et al., 2011).

Despite new reading incentives and the inclusion movement, reading is still usually taught in general education classrooms to all students regardless of academic and behavioral deficiencies. The rigorous standards of NCLB and the reauthorization of the Individuals With Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) have changed schools perspective on approaches dealing with academic and social achievement. As a result, a study examining social skills instruction during small group reading instruction was conducted (Miller et al., 2011). The study took place in an elementary school in Florida consisting of 78% African Americans, 11.3% White, 5.4% Hispanic, and 5% Pacific Islander. Ninety-two percent of these students qualified for free or reduced fee lunch. The school had adopted the RtI model for student reading and a School-Wide Positive Behavior Support (SWPBS) system to address behavior problems recognized by administrators and teachers. The study took place during Tier 2 guided reading lessons and focused on social skills instruction in addition to reading. Three second grade students identified during SWPBS meetings as commonly showing skill deficits that put them at risk for academic and social failure were chosen for the study. They were chosen based on social skill problems during reading instruction, lack of response to school wide interventions, significant off task behavior during reading, and parental consent (Miller et al., 2011). During the intervention, social skills were taught during the last 10 minutes of guided reading. Each student was given a skills card with a short prompt sheet for a social skill

such as being on task or asking for help. There was also a point system on each card so the student could self-monitor his skill throughout the day. At the end of each class period the student evaluated how well they used their skill by filling in point boxes using a point scale system of 3=excellent, 2=satisfactory, and 1=fair. Point goals were created each day and the teacher encouraged these skills. If the students goal was met, they received a sticker that could be later be used for more tangible items. As skills were mastered, students moved on to the next skill ultimately reaching "engaging in work-related conversations" (p. 376). Prompts were also phased out to as students demonstrated proficiency (Miller et al., 2011).

Results showed an increase in on task behavior for all three students in guided and independent reading. Recommendations for teachers included planning ahead and creating an environment in which social skills are part of guided and independent work. Teachers should plan direct instruction of expected behaviors and model and provide a rationale for the skill with many opportunities for practice that include immediate feedback. Lastly, they should continually assess progress while still phasing out prompts so that students take more responsibility for their behaviors over time (Miller et al., 2011).

Today's schools have a significant amount of Tier 2 intervention readers. If guided reading groups are to be truly flexible, behavior must also be a strong skill focus since issues with social skills can decrease academic engagement and cause students to miss much needed literacy skills. As academic and behavioral challenges continue, teachers must be aware of quick behavior management strategies to foster guided

reading. These strategies can be implemented before, during, and after guided reading lessons (Marchand-Martella, Martella, & Lambert, 2015).

Before reading begins, targeted expectations should be set that are characteristic for small group instruction. A suggested technique is using STAR (S=sit in a learning position, T=track with your finger, A=answer on signal, and R=respect others) (Marchand-Martella et al., 2015). Expectations should be reviewed and posted, eventually phasing out as students become proficient. Whatever the expectations may be they should be taught directly to students perhaps using the "I do, we do, you do" approach. This is when the teacher models a social expectation, then the group practices together, and eventually the students practice independently. Before reading a leveled book, sticky notes should be placed on the table to keep tallies to record how well students practice expectations. If a student does not model expectations they will not receive a tally until they do (Marchand-Martella et al., 2015).

During reading students should continue to be praised for staying on track. The "teacher kid" point game keeps students engaged as they read. The teacher gives points for students meeting expectations and his or herself points when students are off task. If reading aloud, there should be no round robin reading, but a random time, and order to who is reading so that all students stay on track. If a student makes a word error, the teacher says the word, the group repeats it, and the reader says it once more before continuing to read. While keeping students engaged, the teacher can record incorrect words to review later (Marchand-Martella et al., 2015).

After reading the teacher can review any incorrect words and check for comprehension. Lastly, points gained for expectations can be reviewed and praise can be given for outstanding behavior. Following set procedures for guided reading promotes academic engagement linked to higher levels of achievement (Marchand-Martella et al., 2015).

Boushey and Moser (2014) designed an approach called the Daily 5 to embed students in literacy activities that are meaningful and engaging. The Daily 5 includes read to self, work on writing, read to someone, listen to reading, and word work. These activities are taught with in depth focus on expectations for each activity focused on choice, building trust and accountability, community, and independence in literacy. This model helps teachers spend less time on class management and more time for working with students one-on-one or in guided reading groups.

Technology to monitor behavior in guided reading. Technology can be a useful tool to keep students not participating in a group on task. Class Dojo is a free online class management system that can consistently monitor positive and negative student behavior. The website can be found at https://www.classdojo.com/. At the click of the button on a phone or ipad a teacher can award or take away points based on behavior when instructing a reading group. Chiarelli explained, "The company reported that teachers using Class Dojo reported a 45%-90% increases in positive behavior and a 50%-85% decrease in incidents of negative behavior" (Chiarelli, Szabo, & Williams, 2015).

The teacher assigns each student a profile with an avatar such as a silly face or animal. Students can change their avatar as they choose. The class then works together to

compile a list of rules and procedures emphasized during guided reading. The teacher explains that she can press a button and give points for behavior. She can also give points to the whole class or individual groups of students. When the points are rewarded the children hear a bell for positive behavior and a horn for negative behavior. This keeps children motivated to earn more points and lose less. Points are gained to earn certificates and avatar stickers that can eventually be traded for more tangible items or rewards. Teachers can keep a poster in their room to show how many stickers each child has earned. Parents are also in the loop. The teacher can send home an invitation with a parent code so that they can see how their child is behaving at any time (Chiarelli et al., 2015).

A study was conducted in first grade classroom in northeast Texas with a wide variety of student abilities to see how effective ClassDojo was at reducing behavior problems during guided reading instruction. The program was implemented for two months. Researchers noticed that immediate sound feedback on behavior made students more aware of their behaviors and caused them to self-monitor more often. In this class, the teacher displayed Class Dojo during guided reading time and during transitions. The students could see what behavior was being awarded or what needed to be redirected as it happened (Chiarelli et al., 2015).

The teacher could see the overall class or individual student behavior for the day to see daily improvement. Scores were collected for eight weeks looking at only the class score as a whole. Results showed that students displayed less negative behaviors at the end of the study. Positive behaviors tripled from the first month of the study to the

second. Negative behaviors went from 135 in the first 4 weeks to 51 in the last week. Classroom disruptions were reduced during guided reading and instructional time increased (Chiarelli et al,. 2015).

Acknowledging social skills and how they affect a reader's reading achievement is part of creating reading groups that are flexibly meeting individual student needs. Behavior management can lead to better implemented guided reading and foster independence in self-monitoring of behavior during reading groups. The next section will focus on how readers view a text to gain understanding, and the importance of conversation to evoke reading proficiency through guided reading.

Understanding How Readers Make Meaning and Engage with Text

It is important to understand how students engage and comprehend a text. Without comprehension reading is truly meaningless. This last section will explain how to get a more accurate idea of how readers engage with text so that discussion about text is more natural and fluid. These sources give examples of how to ask questions that spark readers connection with a text, and in turn causes them to think deeper about what they read. Some researchers focus on analytically reading text, changing their perspectives about accuracy and how they view themselves as readers, while another argues for a grounding in philosophical understanding to enhance comprehension. All studies emphasize the importance of conversation about reading to gain proficiency and understanding.

Fountas and Pinnell (2012) encouraged the use of precise language that facilitates talk about text. Direct teacher prompts, addressing learners needs, and using precise

language, gives students the ability to talk about reading strategies. This help them reach independence. Specific language can support analytic thinking about text. An example from Fountas and Pinnell's research gives a clearer picture of facilitative talk in reading groups :

Searching for and using visual information
Teach
It has to make sense and look right too.
Let me show you how to check
Prompt
Does that make sense and look right?
Reinforce
That makes sense and looks right
(Fountas & Pinnell, 2012, p. 279, figure 7).

Teachers should consider that they are not teaching the text for but are indeed teaching the reader how to read. Teachers must consider how students handle errors and discuss how to use strategies to problem solve. Teacher language should facilitate reader independence (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996).

Goodman, Flurkey, and Martens (2016) suggested an approach that takes away from a focus on accuracy while reading. A current study used Retrospective Miscue Analysis (RMA) as an instructional strategy to help a struggling nine year old change his perspective about himself as a reader. Its goal is to lead students to, as Goodman et al. (2016) referenced in an earlier study, "revalue the reading as a process of constructing meaning and revalue themselves as capable readers who have knowledge about the world, their use of language, and about how text works" (p. 215). Goodman et al. (2016) explained that RMA is flexible and can be valuable for teachers. RMA discussions can be integrated into whole group and guided reading lessons (Goodman et al., 2016).

Discussion using RMA implies to readers that miscues are not mistakes but an important part of reading. RMA avoids labeling with words like error or mistake because all readers are challenged by certain levels of text. Miscues give insight on a reader's background knowledge and how they make meaning out of text. Beneficial miscues show the reader is comprehending, while some miscues disrupt making meaning of text. Analysis of miscues during RMA can help teachers change the perspective a child has on reading. Readers make sense as they go through words and use strategies such as making an inference or prediction to make meaning and correct miscues. Reading can not happen without comprehension; therefore, readers need many chances to read for real purposes with meaningful text. RMA promotes development in reading and encourages readers to be inquisitive about what they read. Opitz and Ford (2001) agreed that there is too much focus on accuracy scores in providing instruction for readers. Many times teachers misinterpret scores and students receive reading instruction that does not foster their needs.

A Goodman et al. (2016) study focused on Zachary (pseudonym) who did not consider himself a good reader, nor did his mother who had little time to work with Zachary. He could not sound out words, and he had trouble with spelling which also made it challenging to write. Following directions was also a challenge and made homework difficult. He fought to read with accuracy and use phonics or apply phonics to sound out words. Each session of the RMA was recorded. To begin RMA there is an interview that focuses on learning the reader and their perception about reading using a BRI. Zachary explained that he used the sound- it- out method to figure out words, which

led researchers to believe that he perceived reading as, what Goodman et al. (2016) called *reading-is-word-recognition*. Zachary's answers focused on words, phonics,spelling, and sounding out. He did not think he was a good reader because he thought of every mistake as being negative and did not focus on his strengths. Zachary did however like to read at home and explained he had many books that he thought were fun to read and he knew the names of many different authors.

After the initial introduction, Zachary was asked to read a book and retell the story. Zachary then listened to himself read on the recording device. Certain parts of the story were listened to again in order to discuss miscues, such as why Zachary said *splashed* instead of *spilled* and *basket* instead of *bucket*. Zachary was able to identify the miscue and explain why he might do so. The teacher focused on his strengths as he made meaning of his miscues. After 14 sessions, Zachary showed more flexible use of strategies and was more comfortable discussing miscues. His retellings had more conceptual depth and detail, and he was more confident. He had 50% fewer miscues per hundred words. He also went from scoring a 2 out of 5 in retelling to a score of 3. Initially he could only tell the basic information of story elements with little detail or interpretation. After several sessions he could describe the plot in sequence with names and detail. Due to lack of knowledge and experience, he could still not interrupt some aspects of the plot.

Goodman et al. (2016) believed Zachary's vision of himself as a reader also changed. As he read more, experiencing a variety of texts, and developing a vocabulary to describe reading strategies he used, he began to read more proficiently. The BRI was

given again to measure Zachary's views. At first he perceived reading as reading words accurately. He was worried about sounding things out and spelling. He did not think he was a good reader because he made mistakes. After 14 RMA sessions he felt that he was good reader because he "can enjoy books." He now uses his miscues to help him, and says he can now correct the ones he still makes. He does not give up as easily and can understand most of what he reads (Goodman et al., 2016). Goodman encourages teachers to use RMA with students, "They will deepen their understanding of the reading process, and students will revalue reading and themselves as readers as they expand their knowledge of literacy and the world" (Goodman et al., 2016, p. 224).

Teaching for deeper comprehension. Pennell (2014) argued against the emphasis placed on analytically reading text. From third grade forward students are taught *close reading,* in which text is analyzed through a close look at main ideas, the structure of text, and writing craft. Through this perspective, meaning is derived through close analysis of what is stated in the text, and therefore not through personal connection or interaction. Pennell (2014) believed that a broader lens is needed to comprehend text. By looking at reading through the discipline of philosophy, a more human-centered approach to learning is essential in critical thinking, skills in argument, and aesthetic insight to reading.

An intervention was developed for third graders who had little issues with effectively using reading strategies, but were unable to reach higher levels of comprehension. The intervention was based on practices rooted in the philosophical inquiries sparked by the Vygotskian (1986) principle that cognitive functions are

arbitrated by semiotic tools in language. Students in the study met for four months relying on dialogic discourses, fluidity of text, and experiential knowledge to understand text (Pennell, 2014).

The first two weeks of intervention focused on "ground rules for talk,"or techniques to learn dialogic discussion. These ground rules were displayed on chart paper and included the following: 1.) Talk into it and include everyone. 2.) Ask for opinions and reasons (why do you think that?). 3.) Listen respectfully. 4.) Give your opinions and reasons (Pennell, 2014, p. 254, figure 1). Students practiced discussion techniques through story mapping, read-alouds, vocabulary practice, and teacher led philosophical questioning. Other anchor charts exhibiting sentence starters such as "In my opinion..." or "I disagree because…" were displayed to lead scaffolding in discussion. The teacher worked as a facilitator to pose questions that would lead to more elaborate discussion. Pennell also displayed an anchor chart to lead students to generate hypothesis about text: To come up with a hypothesis we ask ourselves: 1.) What are some possible answers to the questions.? 2.) What is your opinion? 3.) Try to imagine what someone who thinks differently might say. 4.) Can we try to see the issue from another point of view (Pennell, 2014, p. 255, figure 3)? A precise day to day intervention was practiced to facilitate these philosophical discussions.

The intervention next focused on the positioning or fluidity of the text. The text was therefore viewed as not fixed but fluid because of the various lenses readers used to socially negotiate with it. Here students used philosophical inquiry to engage socially in

order to construct deeper meaning of text. This differs from CCSS, where context and position of text is fixed and used to directly gain knowledge.

Students used philosophical reasoning to look further into the meaning of a text. The answer is not found in the text but is open to interpretation on a character's actions, traits, and sense of self. Knowledge is found not only in the text but outside through an understanding of differing viewpoints. Students relate and connect with ideas through "a staircase of dialogue" (Pennell, 2014, p. 257). Viewing the text as fluid gave students who had trouble with high level comprehension alternative ways to understand a text and its relevance.

Lastly, the intervention paid notice to the experiential knowledge of readers. Discussion was prompted to elicit memories and outside knowledge students had in relation to a text. Students were allowed to use personal experience as evidence to express opinion. While sometimes it seemed off topic, in many cases students were drawn to the experiences and views of others and changed their perceptions of characters and ideas in a story. While the text was the initial mediator for understanding, it did hold full control of discussion toward understanding.

The students in this study showed gains in comprehension. Their reading levels in regards to narrative passages increased from a 2 to 3 and a 3 to 4 for Michael. On a post assessment, students showed some increase in comprehension but there is still a need for remediation. Pennell (2014) believed that students engaged in more exploratory conversations and used language such as "but, I think…" to show reasoning and define their cognitive thinking. Students often took a more philosophical approach to text by

asking their own questions to construct knowledge from reading rather than just merely receiving it.

Using discussion-based reading practice can be fostered in guided reading groups. ELLS can use philosophical talk to gain understanding of text through discussion of their culture and social perspectives. Philosophical inquiry can also be used as a strong skill set to advance argumentative writing that is required by CCSS in which students must share viewpoints and give evidence (Pennell, 2014). Dorn and Soffos (2005) offered a variety of ways to teach deeper comprehension in their book *Teaching for Deep Comprehension A reading Workshop Approach.* This text expands and illustrates the ideas Pennell focuses on in his study.

Conclusion

After reviewing the literature, I refer back to my original research question: *How can best practices in flexible guided reading be independently implemented at the elementary school level?* Educators are aware that guided reading is an integral part of a balanced reading program. Guided reading of the past did not take into account the way readers process text to make meaning. Student skills are ever changing and growing as new learning takes place. Literature shows that flexible guided reading can be successful in helping students in accuracy and comprehension. It is important to note that some literature review focused on accuracy skills and others on comprehension. Opitz and Ford (2001) noted that "reading for meaning is the primary goal of guided reading (p. 3)." The research review only provides a narrow look into the many facets of reading text and

educators must keep in mind that we read to make meaning of text and comprehension should be on the forefront of guided reading instruction.

There are several different approaches using evidence-based research that can be used by teachers to differentiate guided reading successfully. It seems that most practices in guided reading do not require a large amount of support from administration and staff. While more support would be helpful in intervention and school wide implementation, many teachers do not have this luxury. I believe through guidance of the research done around flexible guided reading, teachers can successfully and independently implement small group reading instruction.

Teachers need a clear and easy accessible tool to the evidence-based approaches to flexible guided reading. Providing teachers with tools to observe readers and carefully measure their skills through a wide lense using various forms of assessment is the first step in making reading flexible. I believe that one of the most important aspects of flexible guided reading is how carefully groups are formed and reformed to reach the needs of all learners. How we group and regroup students should be based on continuous observation and understanding of how the reader makes meaning of text. Educators must think of each learner as unique and capable of success using their strengths to build confidence and motivation to read. Many teachers are often unaware of the research available, or teach in schools that do not provide much support in creating a balanced reading program. These teachers need a comprehensive tool that allows them to independently implement and build on successful approaches in guided reading that focus

on readers processing skills and techniques to provoke real thinking and discussion about text that empowers readers well beyond their classrooms.

Summary

Strategies are being used by educators to ensure that reading is differentiated for all learners. Schools are held accountable for how well students perform in reading. There is an extensive body of research on instructional approaches to increase the use of differentiation through reading programs, specifically in guided reading. Using flexible techniques that value the differences in learners during guided reading has shown to enhance reading achievement.

Educators should choose text that is meaningful to students. Leading students with books that spark their interest will boost student motivation in reading. Students come to a classroom with various cultures and background knowledge that leads them to understand text differently as they learn to read. Teachers should choose books that promote student growth and address individual needs. Children need to experience success daily as they acquire literacy. Books that are frustratingly difficult or too easy result in little to no learning. Classroom libraries rich in text are important for promoting independent reading. Teachers must continue to be careful when labeling books so that children do not associate themselves with a particular level.

Paying attention to classroom management when guided reading is occurring is essential to the flow of a successful reading program. Students must be engaged in meaningful activities that continue to foster reading development when they are not participating in a reading group. Social and behavioral skills must also be taken into

account as a possible hindrance to academic reading achievement. Self-monitoring techniques can be used to promote literacy in children by connecting social skills to reading performance through guided reading.

Reading is more than reading words but how readers make meaning of text. Using techniques that value how a reader processes a text will help readers take more risks in their own learning. Techniques using thought provoking questions and discussion that help readers to make sense of what they read is essential in fully comprehending a text. Readers must have the chance to think about a text with multiple lenses derived through their own experiences and backgrounds to read proficiently.

Chapter three will focus on how the research that has been done to make guided reading flexible and successful can be streamlined into one easily accessible resource for teachers to implement high-quality guided reading instruction independently. I will use the research and resources that have established the best practices in flexible guided reading to compile a website for teachers that guides them in implementing practices in guided reading using flexible, differentiated instruction, acquiring and selecting meaningful text, classroom management within guided reading, and valuing and empowering readers through the guided reading process.

CHAPTER THREE

Project Description

The literature review led me to the understanding that extensive research has been conducted on how schools use guided reading in flexible ways in order to differentiate for the needs of all students. Literature suggests that differentiation can be laid out in a variety of ways with thoughtful selection of meaningful text, implementing embedded instruction in social skills, and valuing the way students learn to read. Therefore, I look back to my research question: *How can best practices in flexible guided reading be independently implemented at the elementary school level?* After reviewing the research I believe that teachers can independently implement many of these techniques into their classroom to achieve successful, differentiated guided reading.

My teaching experience in schools across states and districts has already given me insight that reading programs can be drastically different. Some districts have set reading programs with consistent training in new reading strategies, while other educators must fend for themselves in managing reading groups. My goal is to provide all teachers access to research based approaches to flexible guided reading that can be implemented into their reading program. My website project helps teachers create differentiated reading groups that work in their classrooms, despite the experience they may have in implementing a balanced reading program and regardless of whether sufficient support systems are in place.

The following chapter lays out my project approaching the research question: *How can best practices in flexible guided reading be independently implemented at the*

elementary school level? I begin by explaining what my project may entail and why I have chosen this path. I explain how I constructed my project and the final format of the project. I have included the setting and participants of the project as well as the timeline for the study. I end by summarizing the chapter and how chapter four may proceed.

Final Project Overview

After much thought and research, I decided that a website streamlining best practices in guided reading would be the best resource for teachers without knowledge or access to resources or support. I pondered ways that I have sought out professional development in the past and realized most of the time I turned to online resources such as websites, blogs, or podcasts that offered information either in direct professional development or where to find it. Teachers already use a variety of websites to gain knowledge in techniques that will better their instruction. On a website titled *Educational Technology and Mobile Learning,* Kharbach, (2017) listed many of these popular professional development sites. In the age of technology teachers search information on the web everyday. I hope teachers searching for professional development in guided reading will find my site useful.

The website works as a bank for easy access to strategies, tools, and links to help teachers anywhere implement guided reading that is not only differentiated but also promotes flexibility in grouping based on changing student needs. I organized ideas into links relating to creating and following through on flexible grouping: informal and formal assessments, ways to successfully choose the right text for individual student needs, educator's successful classroom management strategies for guided reading, social skill

instruction during guided reading, and tips to understanding the thought processes of readers in the elementary grades. In my experience and the experience of many of my colleagues, implementing guided reading with meaningful instruction takes a vast knowledge of literacy and requires professional development. Therefore, I hope that my final project can provide a research based, simple tool that can help teachers become successful in implementing worthwhile reading instruction for all learners through flexible guided reading.

Final Project Format

I have created a website in which teachers can approach flexible guided reading independently within their classrooms. As an educator, I regularly had access to a computer and often sought out websites that provide free information that was useful in my classroom. As a new teacher, I had little time and money to buy and study resources that may or may not be have been valid in my current educational setting. The website, *Guided Reading for All* which can be found at www.guidedreadingforall.com, compiles research based practices in guided reading and outlines them in an easy to use, step by step approach for differentiated guided reading.

The website has many links that lead teachers through setting up flexible guided reading based on research from the literature review. The introductory link ,titled *Implement Guided Reading that is Flexible for Your Classroom,* gives a brief summary of what can be expected as teachers look further into this site. This is also the about link on the top menu bar (see Figure 1).

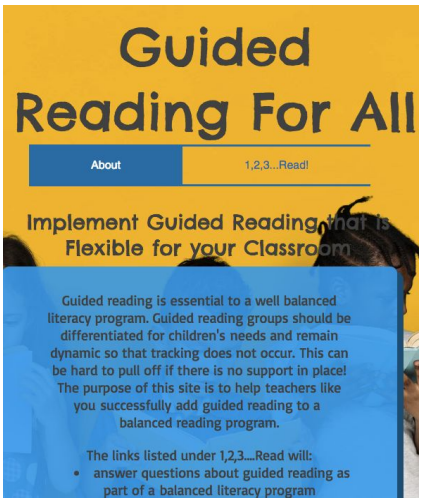

Figure 1. Landing page for website.

The 1,2,3...Read link on the menu bar provides a drop down menu and central page of steps toward meaningful guided reading instruction (see Figure 2).

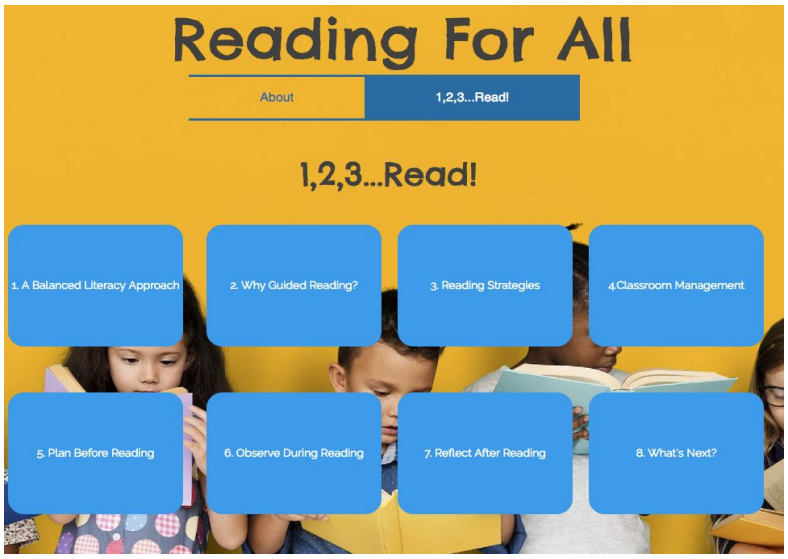

Figure 2. Website menu.

Link one, *A balanced Literacy Approach* takes the viewer to a page that defines the components of balanced literacy programs and what part guided reading plays in this approach. The information from this page is based on the research of Fountas and Pinnell (1996) and Dorn, French, and Jones (1998).

The next link under 1,2,3...Read is *Why Guided Reading?* This page lists reasons why guided reading is important based on the research of Fountas and Pinnell (1996) and Opitz and Ford (2001). I have also added my own personal feelings on guided reading after reviewing the literature.

Link 3, *Reading Strategies*, explains strategies students use when they read. These are important as they are addressed consistently in following links. These strategies are taken from the literature of Marie Clay (1991) and Jan Richardson (2009).

In my experience, it was difficult to manage the other children in the room while I was meeting with small groups. Further reading in the literature of Opitz and Ford (2001), Dorn, French and Jones (1998), Fountas and Pinnell, and reflection of my own experiences in a variety of classrooms helped in creating the fourth link on the website. The *Classroom Management* page provides links to several classroom management techniques to ensure students are engaged in meaningful literacy activities with minimal disruption. I also included the ClassDojo website link from the research of Chiarelli, Szabo, & Williams, (2015) .

Step five under 1,2,3...Read is titled *Plan Before you Read.* This page provides links to several pages that provide steps to take before implementing guided reading for all students. These links dig deeper into understanding the text in your classroom and how it can be used to meet the needs of students, getting to know your students as readers, understanding how to support struggling readers, assessment to drive instruction, creating and recreating flexible groups, and lastly creating lessons for small groups. The resources provided within these links are based on the research of Boushey and Moser

(2009; 2014), Dorn, French , and Jones (1998) Fountas and Pinnell (1996; 2012), Richardson (2009), Lanning and LaMere (2000), Opitz and Ford (2001), and Souto-Manning and Martell (2016).

Observe During Reading is the sixth step under 1,2,3...Read on the menu bar. This page describes the language prompts that can be used to foster reading comprehension from the early stages of reading forward. Many of these prompts were originally introduced by Marie Clay (1991) and continually modified and built upon in more recent research such as Fountas and Pinnell (1996) and Richardson (2009). Opitz and Ford (2001) and Boushey and Moser (2009) suggest using language that is specified to the purpose of the reading lesson. This page also links to observation taken during guided reading and how these observations can further influence instruction. One link on this page discusses reading behaviors to teach and observe based on more recent research by Fountas and Pinnell (2012) along with individual conferences that promote independent reading goals presented by Boushey and Moser (2009). The last link on the *Observe During Reading* page contains further links to videos of guided reading lessons in action using various models of research.

Reflect After Reading reminds teachers to reflect on observations from reading groups and continuously regroup students based on needs that will better improve reading comprehension and build them up as readers. There is a link on progress monitoring that can be done individually or that may be required by schools under the RtI process. This is based on my research findings of the intervention process Marchand-Martella, Martella, & Lambert (2015) and informs teachers of what this process may look like in a school.

The last, but important link *What's Next?*, provides teachers with the sources I have researched for continued professional development. The website is simply a starting point for implementing guided reading as part of a larger balanced reading program. Teachers will need continued development in maintaining flexible guided reading through guided reflections and questions. The resources provided will lead teachers in the direction of research that has been done to better answer questions related to guided reading and best practices in a well-rounded literacy program for their readers.

Final Project Design

The most important aspect of the project will be the design of the website. There are websites available that offer ideas for teachers in guided reading practices, such as, but not limited to, scholastic.com, readingrecovery.org, and readwritethink.com. Yet many of these websites have only excerpts on guided reading as part of a balanced literacy model, are not user friendly, or do not lay out the research work is based on. These websites give small glimpses into flexible guided reading but do not lay out the whole picture in a comprehensive way. I would like my final project to lead teachers in a step by step guide in implementing guided reading. The resources provided on the website are based on research from the literature review and have been compiled for teachers to better understand the reading process in order to more sufficiently serve the needs of their readers in guided reading groups. Teachers can draw from the materials available to create their own view on reading and design a balanced reading program that suits the needs of their learners.

The main page of the home screen is inviting and easy to read with minimal words and direct links to information. Pages within links are clear, direct, and if possible printer friendly. Examples are given regularly for teachers to draw from. This website is not an easy fix to all the challenges flexible guided reading may bring, but a simple and manageable way to get the process started with little support in place. As teachers practice their skills, it will be suggested they keep learning and building on skills through continued personal professional development.

The design of the website is based on the design process and evaluation, optimization of user experience, and other methodology of website creation laid out by the Department of Health and Human Services (2006) *Research-based web design & usability guidelines.* I chose Wix Website Editor at wix.com to create my website. Wix is rated highest in online reviews of website creation tools including websitebuilderexpert.com. I also consulted ideas from a socialmediatoday.com article entitled *Web Design: 11 Characteristics of a User-Friendly Website* when designing my project.

Setting and Participants

The website is specifically designed for new teachers or veteran teachers that have little to no support in implementing flexible reading groups in a classroom. Many teachers are required to create a balanced reading program within their classrooms or grade level. This website will make the startup process for guided reading more accessible. Teachers in schools that have limited budgets or interest in support staff will also greatly benefit from the website. Rural schools that have small student populations

and varied approaches to balanced reading will be able to use this website as well. I think of myself in that bare Maui classroom with little help in creating a reading program. My hope is that this website will give that lost teacher a jumping off point in integrating guided reading independently.

Timeline

I will complete the website as a part of my capstone project class. I plan to have a solid draft of the website by November of 2017. I will work with content reviewers that have knowledge in the field of reading, specifically guided reading. These reviewers will analyze the research and approach to the research question in order to justify its significance for elementary classroom teachers. After analyzing the research, I compiled links to websites that provide tools using research based practices in guided reading to form a clearly designed website. I took time to draw out web pages that are easy to use and clear in context. I would like a teacher to pilot the website within a classroom setting. I can then tweak items that may be unclear and need adjustment. A reflection on the project is presented in writing in chapter 4. When completed, the website will be published in December of 2017.

Summary

Chapter three outlined an overview of my final project, the format the project will take, and the final design of the project. The chapter included a discussion of the setting and participants for whom the project will be most beneficial. Lastly, a timeline of the project construction has also been included. Chapter four serves as a reflection of the project. Reflections may include the literature that was most helpful in creating the

website, challenges that arose in design and implementation, limitations of the project, and further research that may need to be done in the area of flexible guided reading. Chapter four reflects on how I can best communicate the website to others and why selected information may prove helpful for elementary teachers in successfully implementing flexible guided reading in their own classrooms.

CHAPTER FOUR

Introduction

My past experience in teaching led me to the research question *how can best practices in flexible guided reading be independently implemented at the elementary school level?* The purpose of the capstone project was to provide teachers with access to a comprehensive tool in implementing best practices in guided reading instruction. The project takes the form of a website, entitled *Guided Reading for All,* that presents research based practices in guided reading as part of a balanced literacy program that teachers may have no prior knowledge of or are unsure where to begin without necessary support. The project serves as a professional development tool in independently implementing flexible guided reading in the elementary school classroom.

The following chapter describes the major learning throughout the capstone process and revisits the literature that was helpful in creating the website. The chapter will also address possible implications in policy as well as limitations that may have arose during project completion. I discuss future research available in the area of flexible guided reading and lastly, how I will communicate the website to benefit teachers instruction in guided reading.

Major Learnings

The capstone process has provided many learning opportunities and has helped in my development as a researcher, writer, and a learner. I have discovered that there is an abundance of research in the area of guided reading. At first the task of researching all of the material seemed like an impossible feat, but I quickly began to find themes within the

research and was able to organize the literature into categories. I noticed that much of the work around guided reading was based on the theoretical framework of Marie Clay and the team of Fountas and Pinnell. I had to then pick and choose what was most beneficial for the project. The most quality research I found was through discussion with literacy leaders in my district. I am fortunate to now work in a school that has a full library of informational text on literacy. After reviewing and discussing much of the research in the area of flexible guided reading, I discovered that I agreed with certain research more than others and that essentially I created my own theoretical approach to guided reading. I hope to continue remain open to ideas and approaches in differentiated guided reading in the future.

After meeting with my content reviewer I was surprised to learn that I often was addressing learners in a deficit manner. While my theoretical approach to reading is to build readers up with the necessary tools need for deeper understanding of text, I was using language that did not promote this idea. I was often referring to what children can not do. I have learned to change my language when I talk about my students and I now make sure to pay attention to a child's strengths and how they can better inform my instruction to meet students where they are.

The capstone process has also has helped in developing my writing style and process. I found it very challenging to write the literature review without added bias or opinion. I found this style of writing to be somewhat tedious and even frustrating at times. Writing in first person narrative simply comes more naturally. However, informational writing did help in my retaining and understanding large amounts of

information. The informational writing had to be edited much more than my personal writing so that it flowed and connected with the rest of the text. This process helped in viewing myself as more of a writer than I ever have. The process of writing and editing a longer piece of work with various perspectives leaves a feeling of accomplishment and yet increased curiosity in the subject. I can see how informational writing can be beneficial for teaching deeper comprehension to younger students, also preparing them for college and careers.

Creating a website was a fun yet challenging part of this process. I found relaying the most important aspects of guided reading in a website format required some of its own research and personal creativity. I was surprised to learn how time-consuming and tedious creating a website can be. I had to change my original approach to the project a few times in order to make the information easy to follow and cohesive. I believe I still have much to learn about effective website creation, yet I think this will be an engaging and valuable skill to teach to students in the technology age.

Lastly, I actually felt somewhat cheated that some of the earlier research had not been shared with many of the districts for which I worked. While I knew guided reading was important to reading growth before, I am now tuned into how crucial it can be in the development of young readers. As more research in flexible guided reading becomes available I believe that educators should be informed of past research in order to build a strong base of literacy knowledge.

Revisiting the Literature

While there is a large amount of information about implementing flexible guided reading, I immediately noticed that much of the research was based on the work of Marie Clay (1991). Fountas and Pinnell (1996) built upon Clay's research and have since published a large amount of work centered around guided reading and classroom literacy. Fountas and Pinnell's book *Guided Reading: Good first teaching for all* was an excellent guide in framing my website. I used their before, during, and after reading approach to small group instruction as a means to also implement guided reading. Their research also led me to the Fountas and Pinnell website that has some free material for teachers that I have included as part of the project.

Dorn et al. (1998) provided many examples of organizing classrooms for effective implementing flexible guided reading groups. The research outlines many ideas for organization and scheduling that I often referred to when creating the website. Dorn and Soffos (2005) and Opitz and Ford (2001) focused on models for reading with deeper comprehension within shared and guided reading. This research laid out ways to engage readers in a deeper thought process by grouping students for various purposes building lifelong readers and learners. It was these combined works that helped in creating my own theoretical framework for learning to read that I relate to throughout the website. I believe that reading strategies and skills must be directly taught and built upon as a means to reach deeper comprehension because the ultimate goal of reading is comprehension. Students are at various levels of the development of these skills and

strategies to reach deeper comprehension. Reader's needs change and guided reading groups and instruction must change often to meet these needs.

Richardson (2009, 2014) took the work of Fountas and Pinnell and Dorn, French, and Jones a step further with carefully created lesson plans for quick and efficient instruction. This approach to guided reading is highly structured and the literature breaks down daily plans for guided reading groups. Lesson plan templates and other resources are available on Jan Richardson's website (www.janrichardsonguidedreading.com). I was able to link some of these resources that were applicable to my project. I was also able to find many videos of lessons following Richardson's approach to guided reading.

Boushey and Moser's Cafe model and Daily 5 (2009, 2014) approaches to literacy instruction were literacy models that were brought to my attention by my content reviewer and proved extremely beneficial to parts of my project in classroom management and possible ways to implement lessons. Some of this research is also available for free online in the form of videos and mini professional development lessons. I was also pleased to find some of these techniques being used in some of the classrooms at my school.

Overall, I referred to almost all of the literature to create my project. The above literature proved to be the most influential in the website creation, but review of the information such as the RtI process presented by Miller et al. (2011), the Burke reading inventory to understand students, and considering diversity of learners presented by Souto-Manning and Martell, (2016) led to further exploration and added links in understanding readers and the process of literacy development in schools. The literature

used to create this project has sparked my curiosity of further research in flexible guided reading and I will continue to add to this research over time.

Policy Implications

Research in the area of balanced literacy and flexible guided reading shows that direct small group instruction is crucial in the development of young readers. Differentiated guided reading is essential in providing equitable literacy education. These implications reveal reason to provide at least some educator professional development in guided reading as part of a balanced literacy program. Approaches in guided reading should be part of university policy for coursework required of elementary education majors. In my experience, there is little instruction in how to teach reading for undergraduate teachers.

Much of the research focused on teacher knowledge of a large amount of text and student's exposure and accessibility to a large variety of text. I have noticed the amount of text available in classrooms does not meet this research. Children should have equal access to literature despite geographic location or school demographics. Building classroom libraries that have a variety of books is expensive and takes time. Policy in budget should account for the amount of books needed to build sufficient classroom and school libraries.Furthermore, teachers should have more than comprehensive websites for resources in literacy instruction. Policy should ensure that schools work to provide literacy coaches and supports to aid educators in implementing best practices in literacy instruction that includes flexible guided reading.This website can serve as a professional

development tool for literacy coaches to guide teachers in the process of setting up successful balanced literacy programs.

Limitations of the Project

There were a few major limitations I had to keep in mind or that presented themselves as I was creating this project. First, teaching literacy in small groups requires continued experience and knowledge of the literacy process. There is no right answer in teaching guided reading. Educators must use the website as a jumping off point and continue to research and learn what is best for their students. Secondly, there is not enough time within the capstone process to allow teachers sufficient time in implementing and applying the instructional content presented on the website. It takes at least 6 weeks to teach and model the structure of a reader's workshop that creates an environment conducive to guided reading and literacy as a whole. Teachers must lead children in how to choose books that are right for them, reading behaviors of good readers, and class expectations for independent or center work during guided reading. I will continue to work with teachers that have agreed to use the tools provided on the website to ensure the content is truly useful. Lastly, there are a variety of available sources for teachers in guided reading and balanced literacy but many are costly. While I have included the research for further reading it may be difficult for teachers to afford what is available. I am however hopeful that the website leads teachers toward sources that will be the most beneficial to them as they implement guided reading in their classrooms.

Future Research and Projects in Flexible Guided Reading

Implementing flexible guided reading takes a vast amount of knowledge about literacy and how children cognitively process text. The website project I have created can be further developed to address more aspects of a reading workshop, cognitive processing of text, teaching for deeper comprehension, and organizing classrooms to meet student needs. Additional research can be provided further with the input of teachers using the website.

Further research must be done in how schools can better ensure that teachers are provided support in executing literacy rich programs. In my experience, some districts have the gift of literacy leaders that are well versed in research based practices and approaches to literacy, while many schools do not have the money or access to staff to fill these positions. Further research on how intervention is approached within schools would be a starting point in understanding how the needs of struggling readers are being met.

I often see gaps in the level and variety of vocabulary that children know. I believe this can greatly affect their comprehension of text. I would like to further explore how this gap can be closed through guided reading instruction. I was disappointed at how little vocabulary instruction was addressed in the literature of guided reading. I am curious to see what literature is available in scaffolding vocabulary and how it can be integrated more meaningfully in guided reading.

I would like to seek more research in choosing diverse texts to meet diverse learners. As our students become diverse they will continue to bring background knowledge that may not be present in American literature. Souto-Manning and Martell

(2016) offer teaching strategies to meet diverse learners in grades K-2, yet I would like to see continued research in how to connect these students to literature that is relevant and meaningful to their cultural identity. While much of the research provides lists of texts for various purposes, many of them still do not provide titles representing cultures and identities present in today's schools.

Communicating Results

Communicating my website is important in relaying this professional development tool to teachers. Wix provides a starting point in making website easily accessible in a Google search through chosen specific keywords. I chose words such as guided reading, implement guided reading, reading workshop, guided reading ideas, balanced literacy, and many other topic words that appear throughout the website. When publishing, Wix also offers emailing that the website is available. I have communicated the results of my research to fellow teachers and colleagues including administration in the districts I have worked. I have asked many colleagues to look over the website and discuss possible ideas for using it as a professional development tool.

Social media is a strong force in communicating new ideas. Teachers are also used to using these types of tools. Sharing the website through sites like Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter will reach a wide audience. Creating educator groups on Twitter and Facebook is an easy and effective way to gain interest and engagement from teachers regardless of geographical location.

Benefits to the Profession

My website project *Guided Reading for All*, provides equitable access to professional development in research based practices for small group instruction at the elementary level. The site breaks down important concepts researched in the area of guided reading as part of a balanced literacy approach. In my experience, only larger districts with adequate funding provide professional development in this area. Having access to this type of information makes reading instruction more equitable for all children. Guided reading is designed to allow for differentiation and meets students where they are in reading development. Successful execution of guided reading allows children more direct instruction in their specific needs regardless of school funding and support. Recent research in guided reading steers away from debilitating text levels that have tracked students in the past. The website offers suggestions in creating guided reading groups that are flexible for individual student progression. It is my hope that this project makes teachers more knowledgeable of how young readers process text and holds them more responsible in providing instruction that grants all children the literacy skills they need to become lifelong readers.

Summary

Chapter four provided a concluding reflection of the capstone process including my major learnings as a researcher, writer, and learner. This chapter served to revisit the literature that was beneficial in creating the project and any possible policy implications that may have arose. I discussed some limitations of the project and future projects or research that can be done in the area of flexible guided reading. The chapter explained

how the project will be communicated to other educators and lastly how the project will benefit the teaching profession.

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