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## Building Comprehension In Fifth Grade Students Using Guided Reading

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BUILDING COMPREHENSION IN FIFTH GRADE STUDENTS USING GUIDED  
READING

by

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A capstone submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master  
of Arts in Education.

Hamline University

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## CHAPTER ONE

### Introduction

#### Overview

As an elementary teacher since 2016, one of the main objectives I hold for my students is for them to learn how to read. As they move through elementary school, students are expected to become fluent readers that can comprehend text. There are many teaching strategies that exist that claim to help students be the best readers. Guided reading (Fountas & Pinnell, 2010) is a literacy strategy that is meant to build competent readers. At my school, by fifth grade, most students are working to increase their comprehension at higher level texts. In order to help students reach higher levels of thinking, a teacher must be knowledgeable about guided reading, which Fisher (2008) noted “is an ambitious enterprise that requires a degree of confidence, understanding and knowledge” (p. 20). As a fifth grade teacher that uses guided reading, I would like to know *what is the impact of comprehension strategies when they are incorporated into a guided reading lesson plan in fifth grade?*

In this chapter, I will narrate my experiences with reading going back to my elementary school days. These experiences have brought me to my research question. My love of reading started in elementary school. That passion for reading is part of what led me to becoming a teacher. My professional journey has led me to the teaching strategy of guided reading. It is a fairly new concept in my district and I want to know how to best utilize it with my fifth graders. My plan is to create a curriculum for guided reading that aligns with one of the district’s established fiction units. Before diving into the research

in Chapter Two, I will first define guided reading and explain the general format of a lesson in the area of guided reading. As I begin to research this question, it is also important to reflect on my own experiences.

### **Personal Experience**

I grew up with a passion for reading, so a lot of my time was spent on reading and my parents modeled this behavior as well. For me, reading came naturally and it led to success in school. I remember having book clubs from third to fifth grade as a part of our school day. Each group would have a picture book or chapter book to read and we would meet to discuss it. It seemed like the comprehension questions in discussion flowed naturally because a chapter book easily led to using comprehension strategies like making predictions, summarizing, and inferring. Meeting with my reading group was one of my favorite things about school and it led to my love of reading a variety of genres.

Becoming a teacher was important for me because I wanted to instill in my students a passion for reading so they could feel the excitement like I did myself as a child. The thought of sharing this passion excited me. While studying at Iowa State University for my undergraduate degree, I received my reading endorsement. The endorsement allowed me to take extra classes on digital storytelling, individualized reading instruction and language development. We were taught that reading instruction was vital in the younger grades and I wanted to be prepared to teach reading effectively. My education at Iowa State University prepared me to begin my career as a teacher.

## **Professional Journey as a Teacher**

In 2015, I began my teaching career as a substitute teacher. I worked in several districts, including my current district. It was a great learning experience to see all the different strategies that were being used to teach reading. Guided reading (Fountas & Pinnell, 2010) was a new topic being introduced to my current district and it was interesting to see how every school varied in how they were implementing guided reading. At the same time, my district was being introduced to the Literacy Collaborative (2018) and guided reading was not necessarily at the forefront of professional development. The Literacy Collaborative (2018a) was started in 1996 by Fountas and Pinnell. The major components of the workshop model (The Literacy Collaborative, 2018b) are word study, reader's workshop and writer's workshop. Within each subject, there are many components that make up the workshop model. My future district was just getting to know how to implement the Literacy Collaborative when I accepted my first job.

After substitute teaching for one year, in 2016 I began teaching fifth grade. My first year in my own classroom required me to teach guided reading, but it was very unclear what that should look like. There was very little training on the topic my first year. There are no guides or scripts that go along with the books in my district. I created a format that worked for me and did the best I could as a first year teacher. Relying on what had been learned in college to form flexible groups and to plan effective lessons for my students got me through my first year. Guided reading my first year felt awkward and

unnatural. In my personal assessment, I was not an effective teacher nor did my teaching build a passion for reading with my students.

In 2018, I completed my second year of teaching fifth grade at the same school. This past year, all of the teachers in my building participated in five days of professional development on guided reading. The teachers in my building had training from our literacy coach on the format of guided reading lessons, how to select books for groups, how to analyze the texts and how to incorporate word study into their lessons. One of my learnings was to adapt my lesson format to align with the district's expectations. My second takeaway was to adjust my guided reading schedule by meeting with a group on subsequent days so there could be a more natural discussion about a book.

When choosing books for my groups, I also became more aware of how the book could meet my teaching points rather than the book deciding the teaching points. This led me to learning how to analyze a guided reading book for language, structure and meaning. Rather than finding a book and thinking it would be good to use to teach predicting, I began looking for books that met the instructional needs of my students based on my formative assessment data. It was also a big realization that books at the same level differ in language, structure and meaning, so it was vital that each book was analyzed before bringing it to a guided reading group. Because of this, the books in my lessons were becoming more meaningful, and my teaching became more intentional.

Before long, my more experienced team members were coming to me for guided reading advice. They were used to teaching with book clubs and guided reading was a whole new teaching strategy to them. I became the team leader in organizing the books

for each unit by creating a spreadsheet with titles and teaching points that were purposeful for each book based on data. My guided reading structure has come a long way, but I still have questions about the content of the lessons. According to Fountas and Pinnell, a guided reading lesson structure is only the beginning, “powerful teaching within the lesson requires much more” (2012, p. 281). The lesson format makes sense to me, but my struggle is finding ways to build comprehension with my fifth grade students following the format. Therefore, I have decided to create a project that focuses on creating curriculum for guided reading with a focus on comprehension.

### **Purpose of My Capstone Project**

The purpose of my research and project is to create a curriculum for guided reading to go along with a unit of study as defined by my district that will build fifth grader’s comprehension. The school is in a second ring suburb of a major metropolitan area in the upper midwest with a diverse student population. Guided reading is an expectation in my district, but there has not been a clear way to align it with the units of study.

I have chosen to align guided reading with a fiction unit of study on the author, Eve Bunting. Eve Bunting is an established children’s author that often writes about complex social or historical issues in the world. I chose this unit because it is the only fiction unit during the year in which guided reading is occurring throughout. Our other fiction units are at the very beginning of the year and the very end of the year and guided reading does not occur throughout those units because classroom routines are still being established or end of year testing is occurring. Comprehension skills need to be taught for

both fiction and non-fiction text so it is important to capitalize on this fiction unit in the middle of the year. The fifth grade author study provides great opportunities to build comprehension through interactive read alouds and those skills can then be built upon during small group instruction in guided reading. After completion of this project, my fifth grade colleagues will have access to this curriculum in their classrooms as well.

The other reason I want to develop a structured guided reading curriculum for this unit is that it occurs right before the standardized test for reading in the state where I work. The district's reading scores have slowly been decreasing closer to the state average. In the 2016-2017 academic year, fifth graders only passed with 72.2% from my district and the state average for 2017 was 67.5% (District Students Exceed Averages on State Tests, 2017). There has been a big push in our district to increase standardized test reading scores. My grade level team has found that we need to increase the rigor of our comprehension questions to better align with the standardized test reading standards. The data from our Benchmark Assessment System (BAS) has not aligned with the results from the school's standardized reading test required by the state. Our BAS testing happens four times a year and it is a test designed to find the instructional reading level of a student along with other reading teaching points. My goal is that a better designed curriculum to use with guided reading will help build comprehension in students and will lead to success on the standardized reading test required by the state.

In addition to my district, my project could be beneficial for other literacy teachers. The lesson plan format will be based off of the research of Fountas and Pinnell (2010), who are leaders in literacy education. My project will allow other teachers the

chance to learn how to build comprehension through the small group instructional strategy called guided reading. To move forward with my research question, guided reading must be defined first.

**Defining guided reading.** Guided reading is defined differently between researchers but has many similar qualities. As defined by Ford and Opitz (2011), guided reading is “reading instruction in which the teacher provides the structure and purpose for reading and for responding to the material read” (p. 226) and is used with small groups to explicitly teach reading skills to students. A definition from Fountas and Pinnell (2010) simply stated that guiding reading is “small-group reading instruction designed to provide differentiated teaching that supports students in developing reading proficiency” (p. 2). My school district uses Fountas and Pinnell (2010) for their definition and structure of guided reading. Essentially, guided reading is small group reading instruction.

### **Conclusion**

I knew when I became a teacher, a big focus of my job would be helping students to learn how to become skillful readers. My professional career has led me to the use of guided reading as a way to do that. While my school has started the professional development on guided reading, I am taking it upon myself to complete additional professional learning on teaching guided reading. My goal is to build upon the structure of the guiding reading lesson plan we have discussed in this chapter and to use this instructional strategy as a way to build comprehension. Comprehension is a key reading component and guided reading allows students to build a deeper understanding of the texts they read with proper teacher support. My experiences and current understanding of

guided reading have led me to my research question, *what is the impact of comprehension strategies when they are incorporated into a guided reading lesson plan in fifth grade?*

In Chapter Two I will review the literature that currently surrounds guided reading and comprehension. I will focus on research regarding guided reading, comprehension, metacognition and assessment. In Chapter Three, I will explain the curriculum that I am developing to teach comprehension using guided reading. The curriculum follows a researched model and aligns with a major learning theory. Finally, in Chapter Four I will reflect upon my curriculum and what it brings to the field of education.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Literature Review

#### Introduction

Since the 1990's, guided reading (Fountas & Pinnell, 2010) has emerged as the popular form of small group reading instruction. Fisher (2008) stated that educators believe this is the strategy that will help readers become proficient in comprehending text, however, the author also notes there has been less “guiding” and more teacher control of the lesson. Rather than the teacher “guiding” students to the intended learning goal, they continue to tell them what to learn. To make guided reading as effective as possible, guided reading (Fountas & Pinnell, 2010) must be understood first. Teachers, like myself, need to avoid the pitfalls of ability grouping, groups based solely on level of text, and learn how to implement the strategy of guided reading (Fountas & Pinnell, 2010) into their classroom effectively. In this capstone project, I will extend my school's professional development by researching the question, *what is the impact of comprehension strategies when they are incorporated into a guided reading lesson plan in fifth grade?*

In this chapter, I will explore four themes that relate to my topic of guided reading and comprehension. The first theme that will be explored is guided reading. In this section, I will explain the purpose of guided reading, the components of guided reading and the teacher's role in using this strategy. Next, I will dive into the research behind

comprehension. This section will start with a definition of comprehension and then move into strategies that need to be explicitly taught to students. Each strategy will be defined and explained how it can be used with guided reading. Then, I will explore the idea of metacognition. Metacognition will be defined and classroom implications will be described. Finally, I will describe assessments that relate to guided reading and comprehension. I will state the purpose of using assessments and discuss different types of reading assessments that teachers can use.

### **Guided Reading**

Ford and Opitz (2011) described how guided reading dates back to the 1940's when Emmett Betts introduced research on the directed reading activity. The authors also noted how guided reading has floated in and out of popularity, but has made a comeback since the late 1990's. Fountas and Pinnell (2010) are credited for the renewed popularity by revising guided reading small groups, so that each group is meeting the needs of the students. Fisher (2008) noted how within these groups, the teacher provides support so that students can comprehend at a higher level and use reading strategies independently. Fountas and Pinnell (2012) concurred that the support provided by teachers in guided reading has allowed this small group strategy to transform reading instruction to focus on the deeper meaning of texts while building proficient readers.

One of the main purposes of guided reading is to develop competent readers. Ford and Opitz, (2011) described the end goal of guided reading as students being able to read a text independently. One of the ways Fisher (2008) recommended reaching this end goal is to have support from a teacher so that students can work with higher, more

challenging texts, so that they can eventually become independent at that level of text. Fountas and Pinnell (2012) believed that the goal is to challenge students in guided reading with complex texts so that they learn strategic actions that they can then apply to their independent reading without teacher support. Fountas and Pinnell (2012) went on to say that the objective of a guided reading lesson plan is not just to read a particular book or understand a single text but rather to build “a network of strategic actions for processing texts” (p. 272). Because of this, teachers need to have larger objectives in mind when planning guided reading lessons and creating subsequent plans.

Since students in a classroom are diverse, Fountas and Pinnell (2012) created guided reading so that differentiated instruction can occur. These authors define differentiated instruction simply as adjusting the curriculum based on students’ needs. One of the goals of guided reading was to move away from ability based grouping or grouping based on level. Guided reading groups are not just based upon the level students are reading at, but rather what they need at the moment (Fountas & Pinnell, 2012). This point is reiterated by Ford and Opitz (2011) when they explain that the focus of guided reading is no longer on covering material, but rather it is about teaching learners at the level they are at and focusing on a skill that they are in need of. Therefore, groups are flexible and constantly changing based on the skills, standards or essential learnings that are being focused on.

For guided reading to achieve its main purpose, it should be used as just one part of an effective literacy curriculum (Ford & Opitz, 2011). For these authors, an effective literacy curriculum also needs to include read alouds, shared reading, and independent

reading, along with an effective writing program that enhances the reading program.

Supporting the ideas of Ford and Opitz (2011) are Fountas and Pinnell (2012) who agreed that guided reading is only one component. They recommend the use of literature circles, interactive read-alouds, independent reading, and reading mini-lessons to supplement the instruction that occurs in guided reading.

Lastly, Ford and Opitz (2011) pointed out another purpose of guided reading is to build positive experiences with reading. For them, a positive experience means that students should succeed with teacher support so that they can see that reading can be enjoyable and have positive experiences with different genres. Fountas and Pinnell (2010) also encouraged teachers to use a range of literary texts that will expose students to a variety of genres and what reading has to offer in order to build enjoyment. Building enjoyment in students can be done while the teacher incorporates the components of guided reading.

**Components of guided reading lesson and role of the teacher.** The purpose of guided reading is best accomplished when all of the components are carried out by the teacher. While guided reading may look different from classroom to classroom, it follows a general structure. According to Fountas and Pinnell (2010), it is important for teachers to begin by carefully selecting texts for each group because guided reading is based on the notion that students are being taught at their instructional level. This means that the text is not too easy and not too hard. However, there is more than just the level of a book that goes into the text selection process.

Fountas and Pinnell (2012) have identified ten characteristics related to text difficulty that need to be understood before a teacher decides to use a particular book with a guided reading group. These ten characteristics are as follows

- Genre/form - The type of text that it is and whether it is fiction or nonfiction. Within those larger definitions of genre, there are smaller categories such as fantasy or historical fiction that have similar characteristics
- Text structure - How the book is organized. Most fiction stories follow a narrative structure and there are several common nonfiction text structures such as description, chronological or problem/solution.
- Content - This relates to the subject or matter of the text.
- Themes and ideas - The big ideas of the text and from the big ideas, a reader may get out an author's message.
- Language and literary features - This focuses on the difference between spoken language and written language. Written language often includes dialogue, figurative language and more description.
- Sentence complexity - Refers to how simple or complex sentences in the text are.
- Vocabulary - The meaning of words used in a text are defined by vocabulary.
- Words - These differ by looking at the amount and length of the words.
- Illustrations - The drawings, paintings or photographs that are in a text.

- Book and print features - Refers to the physical aspects of the texts such as length, size and layout along with other nonfiction text features.

It is important to analyze these features because not all books are leveled equally and not all books offer the same teaching points.

Once a text is selected, Fountas and Pinnell (2012) described the remaining components of a guided reading lesson. Each guided reading lesson should begin with an introduction of the text that provides support, yet still leaves problem solving to do by the student. During the introduction, students should be given a purpose for reading the text and the teacher should help students make a connection between the text and their past experiences. Then, each student independently reads the entire book to themselves. Fisher (2008) added to the importance of having students read independently by stating that this helps students develop comprehension on their own, rather than only participating in round robin reading where each student reads part of the text. Fountas and Pinnell (2012) suggested that during independent reading, a teacher should listen one-on-one as students read the text out loud. While listening to the student, a teacher can conduct a formative assessment to gather data on student strengths and needs. After everyone has completed the reading, the teacher guides students through a discussion about the text and provides specific teaching points. An option after discussing the text, recommended by Fountas and Pinnell (2012), is to have an extension activity. This could involve further reading, a writing assignment, or the students creating something to share out with the class. The literacy coach at my school has explained the format of a guided reading lesson plan required by my district that has been adapted from the Fountas and Pinnell (2012)

structure. Teachers at my school have discussed this structure in depth and it is my professional opinion that the next step is to learn about the teaching points and discussions after reading to build student comprehension of the text. Along with the content of the lesson, teachers also need to understand their role in guided reading.

The role of the teacher changes when guided reading is used. However, Fisher (2008) conducted a study that showed that teachers do not understand the new format. Fisher (2008) conducted a small scale case study on three primary classrooms in three different schools. The study found that teachers were maintaining control of the lesson and that they were asking students questions that only had one right answer. These are not the discussions that Fountas and Pinnell (2012) want to have happen during guided reading. They want to see teachers using facilitative language to encourage discussion among students that builds comprehension. There are several things teachers need to do in order to make guided reading successful.

The term “guided” is key when thinking about a teacher’s role in this process. Guided reading should be less about the teacher telling students what they should know and rather the teacher should be “coaching students during reading” (Ford & Opitz, 2011, p. 231). Fisher (2008) supported this idea by explaining that the teacher needs to build a connection between what the students know and what is new to them by sharing responsibility for problem solving and then gradually giving the responsibility to the student. In this model, Fisher (2008) sees the learner sharing in the responsibility of learning as the teacher provides a scaffold for the student to be successful. Both Ford and Opitz (2011) and Fountas and Pinnell (2012) insisted on the use of responsive teaching

when it comes to guided reading. This means that teaching points are responsive based on observations made when students were independently reading the text and the discussion that follows.

The research documents that guided reading can be an effective reading development strategy. Creating the lesson and understanding the teacher's role is the first step. The next step is to carry out the lesson and teach students something about the process of reading. The lessons I create in my curriculum will follow the guided reading lesson plan that I just described. In the next section, I will define comprehension and discuss comprehension strategies that need to be taught in order to produce proficient readers.

### **Comprehension and Strategies for Teaching It**

Comprehension is a necessary skill for becoming a competent reader. There are many definitions of comprehension, however there is a general consensus from researchers that comprehension needs to be explicitly taught to students (Ness, 2011). There is also agreement from researchers that multiple strategies need to be taught at once to students (Texas Education Agency, 2016). In this section, I will define comprehension and go in depth about the different levels of comprehension. Later in the section, I will discuss comprehension strategies. Each strategy will be explained, and classroom applications will be discussed.

The definition of comprehension is different depending on what research is used. Since the 1970's, comprehension has become an active task and there has been more emphasis on constructing meaning rather than just reading words (Yang, 2006). Goudvis

and Harvey (as cited in Lloyd, 2004) defined comprehension as a “complex process encompassing knowledge, experiences, and active thinking” (p. 123). Pardo (2004) defined comprehension as a process where “readers construct meaning by interacting with text through the combination of prior knowledge and previous experience, information in the text, and the stance the reader takes in relationship to the text” (p. 272). Ness (2011) used the definition of “the process of simultaneously extracting and constructing meaning through interaction and involvement with written language” (p. 98). All of these definitions involve the reader actively thinking about the text and how it relates to their prior knowledge.

The process of recalling prior knowledge is complex. Pardo (2004) explained schema theory as a way for readers to activate long-term memory. According to Pardo (2004), the idea of schema is that many ideas are stored in long-term memory and when a word or concept appears to the reader, that information is pulled out and placed in short-term memory temporarily. Short term memory is limited so the information is only available for a short time before being placed back in long-term memory. Comprehension looks different depending on the reader because of the heavy reliance on background knowledge based on experiences, “language ability, decoding skills and higher-level thinking skills” (Pardo, 2004, p. 273). Understanding of comprehension can also be impacted based on the complexity of a comprehension question.

There are also different levels of comprehension. Fountas and Pinnell (2012) separated comprehension into three levels: within, beyond and about. Thinking within the text involves the processes of solving words, monitoring and correcting, searching for

and using information, summarizing information, adjusting reading for different purposes and sustaining fluency. Thinking beyond the text is where the reader infers, synthesizes, makes connections and predicts. This level is unique based on the reader because of background knowledge. The last level stated by Fountas and Pinnell (2012) is thinking about the text. At this level the reader analyzes and critiques the text. These levels closely align with the levels stated by Hurry and Parker (as cited by Fisher, 2008). They explained their three levels as literal or surface understanding, an interpretive level where inferences are made and an evaluative level which evokes a personal response from the reader. Activating background knowledge is a key part in comprehension.

A teacher should activate prior knowledge before reading the text. One way to do this is to pre-teach vocabulary (Christen & Murphy, 2018). For this strategy to be effective, Christen and Murphy (2018) suggested that there should only be a few key words taught each lesson. Pardo (2004) reiterated this by stating that teachers need to pick out the words that will help students build understanding of the text. In other words following Pardo's (2004) advice means that not every unknown word needs to be taught. Another strategy is to enrich a reader's background knowledge.

One way to enrich background knowledge described by Christen and Murphy (2018) is to preview a story. These authors explain that previewing a story can help provide the necessary background knowledge for the reader. In addition to previewing a story, another way to build background knowledge recommended by Pardo (2004) is for teachers to use informational books with students to provide world knowledge so that

they can read about experiences that they have not had themselves. Activating background knowledge is a key first step to teaching comprehension to students.

### **Teaching Comprehension Needs to be Explicit and Incorporate Several Strategies**

The research is in agreement that comprehension strategies need to be explicitly taught to students. Ness (2011) found that students who received explicit or direct instruction of reading comprehension strategies outperformed their peers who did not receive explicit or direct instruction. Ness (2011) stated that the best way to build students' understandings of text is through explicit instruction of reading comprehension strategies. The instruction should include when to use the strategy and how to solve problems in regards to comprehension. The key is that the teacher uses a gradual release of responsibility. Gradual release of responsibility refers to the teacher turning over more responsibility to students as a topic is discussed. The teacher starts with full control and eventually turns over all of the responsibility to the students. Duke and Pearson (2002) also have a model for teaching comprehension.

In the Duke and Pearson (2002) instructional model, there are five components of teaching comprehension. The first step is the teacher explicitly describes the strategy and explains when and how to use the strategy. The next step involves the teacher modeling the strategy. Then the teacher uses the strategy collaboratively with students. This step includes a discussion about what students are thinking. The fourth step uses guided practice to use the strategy with teacher support. The last step is independent use of the strategy. Eilers and Pinky (2006) also noted how teaching comprehension requires the use of more than one text.

In their view, Eilers and Pinky (2006) recommended a short text to introduce comprehension strategies, but students need to learn how to apply strategies to any text. These authors feel that teacher-generated questions often only measure students comprehension of a single text rather than their ability to use it for any text. They found that small group instruction was most productive when the conversation was natural and unscripted.

Finally, it is important to remember that strategies should not dominate the discussion, building understanding of the whole text is the ultimate goal (McKeown, Beck & Blake, 2009). Too much focus on strategies will prohibit students from making meaning of the text. Ultimately, strategies need to be explicitly taught in order to build comprehension and there are several ways teachers can do this.

**Think-alouds.** One strategy to explicitly teach reading comprehension strategies is through using think-alouds. A think-aloud is when someone says what they are thinking as they perform a task (Duke & Pearson, 2002). The authors have found that think-alouds have been shown to improve students' comprehension when students themselves use it and when teachers think aloud to their students. Essentially, when teachers use it, think-alouds are a form of modeling. Teachers should use this strategy when they are reading out loud to students. According to Bereiter and Bird (as cited by Duke & Pearson, 2002), students that are taught to think-aloud as they read have better comprehension than students who are not taught to think-aloud. Another way to teach this strategy from McKeown et al. (2009) is to have teachers use this strategy in discussion by labeling strategies as students discuss them. For example, if a student unknowingly

makes a prediction about the text, the teacher would comment that they have made a good prediction. Think-alouds are just one strategy that can build students' comprehension. Another strategy that teachers can use to improve comprehension is to implement the use of graphic organizers in the classroom.

**Graphic organizers.** A graphic organizer or visual representation of text allows students to present information again (Duke & Pearson, 2002). In addition, visual representations are active and in the transformative process of creating one, “knowledge, comprehension, and memory form a synergistic relationship” (p. 219). This process of creating graphic organizers or visual representations help students take abstract ideas from the text and create concrete ideas. This strategy is a visual way of making meaning of the text. Teaching text structure is also a way to build comprehension in students.

**Text structure.** The research shows that students who understand text structure, remember more information than students who have not been taught text structure (Duke & Pearson, 2002). However, fiction structure was more inconclusive in the research, but there are strong correlations between teaching nonfiction text structures and comprehension. The Texas Education Agency (2016) agreed that text organization knowledge is important. They state that it is because text organizations become schemas that readers can pull to their short-term memory when they are reading. A schema of text organization helps a student know what to expect from the text and what will likely come next as they read.

While it is clear that explicit teaching of comprehension strategies is necessary, a teacher must work to teach multiple strategies at once. According to Pardo (2004),

“teaching multiple strategies simultaneously may be particularly powerful” (p. 277). This is because good readers use more than one strategy when they are reading. It is unlikely a good reader only uses one strategy as they read a text. So when one strategy is being focused on, Duke and Pearson (2002) suggest that other strategies should be referenced, modeled and encouraged. Strategy instruction is not a “linear skill” and spending too much time on just one strategy can inhibit the reader from becoming thoughtful (Lloyd, 2004, p. 124). Strategies that should be explicitly taught by teachers are predicting, inferring, summarizing, questioning, making connections and visualizing (Texas Education Agency, 2016).

**Predicting.** Making a prediction is common in the elementary classroom. Essentially, a prediction is when a reader connects “existing knowledge to new information” in order to create meaning in the text (Texas Education Agency, 2016, p. 2). Good readers are constantly analyzing their predictions as they read and changing their predictions if they are not correct. A study by Fielding, Anderson and Pearson (as cited by Duke & Pearson, 2002) found that confirming a prediction in the text was just as important as making the prediction. There are several ways this strategy could be implemented into a guided reading lesson. Students can make predictions about the text based on the title, the author or what a character will do based off of their own experiences (Texas Education Agency, 2016). Another way to have students make predictions is by the teacher giving a preview of the story. Duke and Pearson (2002) discussed a strategy where the teacher provided the students with keywords from the text

and the students used the key words to come up with a prediction. Through discussion, predicting is an easy strategy to implement into a guided reading lesson.

**Inferencing.** Making an inference is one of the most important things that successful readers have to do (Texas Education Agency, 2016). Pardo (2004) agreed that it is one of the most important processes for comprehension and that it is most likely done automatically. An inference is when the reader “evaluate[s] or draw[s] conclusions from information in a text” (Texas Education Agency, 2016, p. 2). Authors do not always explicitly tell the reader every detail, readers must use clues in the text and their background knowledge to form meaning. There are several strategies that have been researched as ways to teach inferences. One suggestion from Marzano (2010) is to ask four questions.

The first question involves figuring out what the student’s inference is. This relates back to a think-aloud and identifying a student’s inference out loud. The next question is about what information was used to make the inference. The third question is “how good was my thinking?” and the last one is whether a student needs to change their inference or not.

Another strategy to teach inferences is from Kylee Beers (Reading Rockets, 2018). It is known as the “It says, I say, and so” strategy. The student takes what the text says, thinks about the background knowledge they have and then comes up with an inference based on the text and prior knowledge. As a 5th grade teacher, I think the second strategy would work best and could easily be used with graphic organizers. The graphic organizer starts with a section where the students write down what the text says.

Then they put down what they know about the topic and then finally, they combine the two ideas to form an inference based on context clues and prior knowledge.

**Summarizing.** By definition, a summary is when a reader synthesizes information and explains it in their own words what it is about (Texas Education Agency, 2016). Summarizing allows students to recall text quickly, makes them aware of text organization and helps them identify what is important. According to Duke and Pearson (2002), practice in summarizing also increases overall comprehension of text content. There are two main approaches to teaching the strategy of summarizing. One of these approaches is more rule governed than the other, based on the study completed by McNeil and Donant (as cited by Duke & Pearson, 2002). McNeil and Donant have six rules for readers to follow in order to create a brief summary of the text.

The rules include getting rid of unimportant information, choosing words to represent sentences or ideas and then coming up with a topic sentence. The other strategy is known as GIST from the research Cunningham (as cited by Duke & Pearson, 2002). This strategy teaches students to create a summary using fifteen or fewer words. Students start with small passages and slowly work up to longer passages, still only summarizing with fifteen or fewer words. Both strategies were equally effective and outperformed summary instruction only using writing and main ideas of the text. One of these strategies could easily be used at the end of a guided reading lesson.

**Questioning.** Another strategy to use is questioning. When students generate their own questions, their comprehension improves (Duke & Pearson, 2002). Effective readers ask themselves before, during and after reading a text. Asking question can help readers

integrate information, identify main ideas, summarize information, and focus on problems with comprehension (Texas Education Agency, 2016). A way to start teaching this strategy is to use a think-aloud (Questions Before, During, and After Reading, 2016). A teacher should write their questions on a post-it note and place it in the text every time they ask a question in their head as they are reading. A teacher can select some points in the text before the read as stopping points. Then, teachers gradually pass over the responsibility to the students and record their questions on chart paper for the whole class to see. The key is to model a variety of questions and show questions that allow for deeper meaning and discussion rather than detail-oriented ones (Questions Before, During, and After Reading, 2016).

**Making connections.** Comprehension is an active process and making connections allows readers to stay engaged in their reading (Allen-Simon, 2016). Making connections allows students to connect the text with their prior knowledge and experiences. The three types of connections are text-to-self, text-to-text or text-to-world. To start teaching this strategy, teachers should use the think-aloud model and make connections with their own life (Pardo, 2004). The teacher should explicitly point out when the text reminds them of something in their life and say that they are activating their schema. A graphic organizer can also be used to separate the three types of connections (Allen-Simon, 2016). It is also important to emphasize connections that enhance meaning rather than obvious connections that are surface-level.

**Visualizing.** This strategy involves the ability of the reader to create mental images of the text. Research shows that readers who are able to visualize are better able

to recall information (Texas Education Agency, 2016). When starting out with this strategy, it is important to select texts that have a lot of descriptive language (Mahoney, 2010). One way to have students practice this strategy on their own is to read a book out loud and have students draw what they are visualizing. The teacher should show the pictures after students are done with their drawings. A teacher can also use the think-aloud strategy to describe what they are visualizing as they read a descriptive part of the text. All of these strategies are equally important in order to teach comprehension.

Comprehension is one of the most important goals in reading. It is a complex process that relies on background knowledge and can be divided into several levels of difficulty. A teacher needs to explicitly teach comprehension strategies while remembering to have a balance in their instruction. Strategies to teach comprehension include think-alouds, graphic organizers and text structure. When using these instructional techniques, comprehension strategies of predicting, inferring, summarizing, questioning, making connections and visualizing can be taught. Readers also need to be taught when and how to use these strategies to solve problems. These strategies should be incorporated into guided reading lessons. I plan to take this information and apply it to my teaching in order to answer my question of, *what is the impact of comprehension strategies when they are incorporated into a guided reading lesson plan in fifth grade?* In the next section, I will define metacognition and how it relates to building comprehension.

### **Metacognition**

Metacognition is a key part in reading comprehension. A definition of metacognition from Gemm Learning (2018) is simply thinking about one's thinking. Good readers are always monitoring their reading comprehension using metacognitive strategies. The beginning of this section will define metacognition in terms of reading comprehension and explain the importance of this strategy. The second part of this section will explain how it is used in the classroom.

Metacognition became related to reading comprehension in the 1970's according to Paris, Cross, and Lipson (1984) when researchers looked into cognitive and developmental psychology to learn about how students read. These authors defined metacognition as a "broad spectrum of cognitive abilities . . . and knowledge about person, task, and strategy variables" (p. 1240). Boulware-Gooden, Carreker, Thornhill, and Joshi (2007) added that metacognition includes knowing when to use comprehension strategies to process information. Yang (2006) agreed that effective readers not only need to know about comprehension strategies, but they need to know when to use them to help comprehend the text. The author went on to explain that using different strategies at different times is known as metacognition. Essentially, in terms of reading, metacognition is the ability to think about what is being read and figuring out how to use strategies at different times to better understand the text.

It is vital that students learn how to use metacognition when they are reading. Eilers and Pinkley (2006) stated that "students who use metacognitive strategies while they read become better readers and more clearly comprehend what they read" (p. 14). Yang (2006) added that these strategies also help students become critical readers. If

students are not taught metacognitive strategies, Paris et al. (1984) explained that students will not realize they need to stop to check their comprehension and they will just be reading words rather than for meaning. As stated previously, comprehension is a key part to reading and students need to be thinking about what they read. Ford and Optiz (2011) found that the most proficient teachers promoted the use of metacognition.

For students to learn how to use metacognition, they must be taught by their teachers. One of the best ways to teach metacognition is through the use of modeling during a think-aloud (Benchmark Education, 2018). During a think-aloud, Gemm Learning (2018) suggested teaching students to do three things when reading: plan, use active reading strategies, and use fix-up strategies. Gemm Learning (2018) recommended that during the planning stage, students are assessing what they already know before reading, having a plan when there are gaps in the reading process and selecting the right text to read. In the active reading stage, students need to be utilizing comprehension strategies as they read. Gemm Learning (2018) also noted that in this stage, students need to be asking themselves if they are understanding what they are reading. The last stage of using metacognition is using fix-up strategies. When a student realizes that they are not understanding what they are reading, they need to use a fix-up strategy to solve the comprehension problem.

Self-monitoring or fix-up strategies are essential if students are to build comprehension effectively. When reading becomes difficult, good readers know how to solve the problem by using fix-up strategies (NSW Centre for Effective Reading, 2018). The NSW Centre for Effective Reading (2018) described three things students do when

they self-monitor: they are aware when meaning breaks down, they identify what it is that they do not understand, and they use a fix-up strategy to solve the problem. A few fix-up strategies that the NSW Centre for Effective Reading (2018) provided are rereading, read ahead, read more slowly, read aloud, make connections, look at visuals in the book, find out what unknown words mean, or create a picture in their mind. Through teacher modeling, students will have these strategies to choose from when they get stuck reading a text.

Metacognition plays a key role in reading comprehension. In order to assess the impact of comprehension strategies in guided reading, I must include the importance of metacognition so that students monitor their usage of strategies. Once students have been taught reading comprehension strategies and/or metacognitive strategies, teachers must decide what the students need to improve their reading skills. Teachers need to use assessments to figure out their next teaching point. In the following section, I will explain different assessments and how they can be used in guided reading.

### **Assessment**

To have successful guided reading groups, there needs to be formative assessments given throughout a unit. Groups are flexible and always changing in guided reading based on assessments. There are several assessments teachers can use on a regular basis to determine students' comprehension levels and use of metacognitive strategies. In this section, I will explain the purpose of assessments and provide details about running records, the Benchmark Assessment System and metacognitive assessments.

As with any effective instruction, guided reading requires the use of assessment (Duke & Pearson, 2002). The authors Duke and Pearson (2002) explained that the purpose of a formative assessment is to inform future teaching from the teacher. Fountas and Pinnell (2012) added that ongoing assessment is necessary to avoid “fixed-ability groups” as guided reading relies on flexible grouping (p. 275). According to the authors, ongoing assessments provide the opportunity for the teacher to make adjustments to their small groups. Fountas and Pinnell (2012) explained that students do not progress at the same rate, so it makes sense for groups to change frequently based on students needs. In order for this to happen, assessments need to be occurring more than just a few times a year.

Running records are a way to assess students frequently. A running record allows teachers to record accuracy and reading behaviors by using a coding system (Alphakids, 2002). This assessment was developed by Marie Clay and is highly recommended by Fountas and Pinnell (2017). A running record can help determine an appropriately leveled book and teaching points for future lessons.

To begin taking a running record, Fountas and Pinnell (2017) recommended sitting right next to the student while they read the text. The authors say that a running record does not require the use of pre-typed text, it can be used with any book that a student is reading. Teachers can code how a student behaves when they come to an unknown word, if they substitute a word, if they self-correct, any repetitions they make along with other reading behaviors. Each behavior has a certain code that teachers are recommended they use so that anyone can decipher the running record. When the student

is done reading, Alphakids (2002) explained how to score the accuracy and self-correction to determine an appropriate text level. These reading behaviors and others can become future teaching points.

After a running record is complete, the teacher can analyze the errors that the student made. Alphakids (2002) stated that there are three types of errors a student can make: meaning, structural, or visual. Fountas and Pinnell (2017) defined a meaning error as one that a student's error makes sense in the context. The error makes sense in the context of the book, but it may not have a letter-sound correlation. The authors defined structural errors as errors related to language structure and grammar. The reader will be thinking about whether the sentence sounds right or not by relying on their knowledge of grammar and structure of the English language. The last error Fountas and Pinnell (2017) defined is visual. Students use visual features of words or letters to say a similar word. For example, if the text says pool, the reader might say poor. An error in a student's reading might fall into more than one of these categories according to Alphakids (2002). It is up to the teacher to determine their teaching points based off the data. Running records are a quick way for a teacher to assess students' reading abilities.

Several times a year, teachers need to have a more comprehensive formal reading assessment. Fountas and Pinnell (2017) have developed a Benchmark Assessment System for teachers to use in their classroom. The authors explained that this assessment allows teachers to determine an independent reading level and an instructional reading level. When it is given to form future guided reading groups and teaching points, it is a formative assessment. When it is used at the end of the year, it is considered a summative

assessment that shows student progress for the whole year. The Benchmark Assessment System consists of oral reading by the student while the teacher conducts a reading record with a script, a comprehension discussion about the text and a writing about reading is also completed by the student.

The reading record is just like a running record except for the fact that the teacher selects the book and has the words of the book in front of them to code. The comprehension discussion includes questions that assess a student's ability to answer within, beyond, and about comprehension questions. Fountas and Pinnell (2017) recommended using this assessment at the beginning of the school year to determine an initial level and then mid-year and the end of the year to monitor progress. The authors cautioned against only relying on this assessment because two to three times a year is not enough to provide effective reading instruction.

Since metacognition occurs in a student's mind, as a teacher, I find it harder to assess. One way it can be assessed is through a self-reporting inventory. Several self-reporting inventories have been developed over the years, but one of the more recent ones is called the Metacognitive Awareness of Reading Strategies Inventory (MARSI) (Mokhtari & Reichard, 2002). It was created by Mokhtari and Reichard (2002) so that students could assess themselves on their use of processes during reading. This assessment allows students to become aware of their own reading strategies and provides teachers with future teaching points. One suggestion from Mokhtari and Reichard (2002) is to give the inventory as a pretest and posttest to monitor students' progress. The authors cautioned that it is a self-report measure so it should be interpreted as such. For

example, just because a student marks that they are using a metacognitive strategy, it does not mean they for sure are as they read. This assessment was developed for 6th-12th graders so it will have to be adapted for the use my in fifth grade students. For example, my fifth graders will need the questions explained to them and the assessment may need to be made shorter to adapt to a younger grade level. Another potential way to assess metacognition is using the NSW Centre for Effective Reading (2018).

The NSW Centre for Effective Reading (2018) provides a simpler questionnaire that helps students to monitor their own reading with the use of post-it notes. There are eight total questions that students mark yes or no to. They would have the checklist with them as they read and then use a post-it note to mark spots that they do not understand. Then, there are follow up questions to help guide students towards using a fix-up strategy to provide understanding of the text. As a fifth grade teacher, I think I would start with the simpler inventory so that students can build an understanding of the questions and then work them up towards the more complex inventory. Either inventory would provide the teacher with an insight into their students' use of metacognition and self-monitoring.

## **Conclusion**

A lot of research in this chapter involved the work of Fountas and Pinnell (2012) who have revitalized the use of guided reading in classrooms today. For guided reading to be effectively used as an instructional strategy, it needs to be used as a flexible small-group teaching strategy. Within these groups, it is possible to build strong comprehension. In this section, I have defined comprehension and how to teach specific strategies. It is necessary for teachers to explicitly teach these strategies to students. I also

touched on the importance of metacognition in reading instruction. Good readers are always monitoring their reading comprehension as they read. Finally, I explained several types of assessments that need to be used in a classroom so that teachers can provide effective literacy instruction.

In Chapter Three, I will use this research to guide the development of a guided reading curriculum with an existing unit of literacy study. The goal of the revised unit will be to build comprehension in students through explicit instruction of strategies. Metacognition will also play a role in the curriculum. As with any effective curriculum, assessment will be embedded throughout the process. In Chapter Three, I will use this information to help answer my question; *what is the impact of comprehension strategies when they are incorporated into a guided reading lesson plan in fifth grade?*

## CHAPTER THREE

### Project Description

#### Introduction

My experience as a fifth grade teacher has led me to recognize the importance of guided reading. I have a strong belief that small group reading instruction has the power to build strong readers. With the introduction of guided reading to my school district, I decided to take it upon myself to learn more about the process. This led me to my research question; *what is the impact of comprehension strategies when they are incorporated into a guided reading lesson plan in fifth grade?* My literature review provided me with answers to this question which prepared me to create my curriculum project that will provide guided reading lesson plans for fifth grade teachers.

In this chapter, I will begin with a description of my project and which area of the curriculum is being developed. Next, the curriculum model of Understanding by Design (Tomlinson & McTighe, 2006) will be defined and it will be explained how it was used to plan the lessons. Then, the learning theories of constructivism and the social learning theory will be explained. After that, I will explain the setting and the intended participants of the project. Finally, a timeline for my project will be provided.

#### Project Description

My project consists of guided reading lesson plans to go along with an existing unit of study. The lessons will add to an author unit of study on Eve Bunting. This author

writes about social issues in many of her books. The current unit has specifications for whole group, but not for small groups. Since it is a fiction unit of study, all of the guided reading books will be fiction. In this section, the lesson plan format will be described. I then explain the assessments that should be used with this unit of study. Lastly, the standards and essential questions of the unit will be covered.

The lesson plan format is based off of the district's expectations, which has been adopted from Fountas and Pinnell (2012). There are two parts to the lesson plan: analyzing the text and planning for instruction. Analyzing the text involves looking for the big meaning in the text, identifying the text structure, making note of unfamiliar sentence structure or word choice and then thinking about the word study the text could offer. In my experience, this is important to do because texts vary greatly, even if they are the same level. Analyzing the text first allows the teacher to be familiar with the text and it makes it easier to plan for instruction.

The second part of the lesson plan format is planning for instruction. To begin, the teacher decides on the teaching focus. Next, the teacher decides the word study focus of the lesson. This part involves about five minutes of the students engaged with words. Then, the teacher must plan how they are going to introduce the text to the students. During this introduction, the teacher should activate prior knowledge that the students have regarding the topic of the book. Before students read independently, the teacher should state the purpose for reading the book. The purpose should relate back to the teaching focus of the guided reading lesson plan. Then, the students read independently.

During the independent reading, it is a good idea for teachers to have some type of recording system to record anecdotal notes as they listen to students read. In fifth grade, students can be sent back to their desk to finish reading independently. The following day, the guided reading group should reconvene to have a discussion surrounding the text. The teacher needs to plan discussion questions that will lend to conversations about within, beyond and about the text comprehension. Lastly, the teacher should plan for any optional extensions or assessments surrounding the text. In my district, it is encouraged that small groups share out their learning to the whole class, so they could create something as an extension for sharing. This lesson planning process will be used for each group.

Since guided reading should be planned based on the students' current skill sets and needs, I will create a variety of lessons with different leveled books. Based on my professional experience, by January, most fifth graders are reading between the levels S-V with a few students reading lower or higher. I am planning for a unit that begins in January, so most of my lessons will fall between that text level. Guided reading will occur for about four weeks in this unit, so I plan to create 15 guided reading lessons. While all of the lesson planning aspects are essential, my focus will be on building comprehension by careful planning of the teaching points, purpose for reading and the comprehension discussion that follows. The guided reading books chosen will help students to answer the essential questions of the unit. The big ideas of the guided reading lesson plans will be planned using a backward design model called Understanding by Design (as cited in Tomlinson & McTighe, 2006).

### **Using a Backwards Design Approach to Design the Lesson**

Understanding by Design (UbD) is a curriculum model designed by McTighe and Wiggins (as cited in Tomlinson & McTighe, 2006). I chose this curriculum model because it shares commonalities with my district's expectations of guided reading and teaching. One common aspect of UbD is that learning outcomes are thought of first. In my guided reading lesson plan from the district, teaching points are the first thing a teacher needs to plan. Teaching points should be based on standards. Everything else should be setting students up to meet those learning targets. UbD also stressed the importance of having essential questions so that overarching unit goals are kept in mind throughout the unit (Tomlinson & McTighe, 2006). Lastly, UbD places high importance on assessments (Tomlinson & McTighe, 2006). Assessment is embedded in the guided reading lesson. This curriculum model will be used in the lesson plan format to create curriculum for fifth graders.

**Standards.** The academic standards in my district come from the Department of Education in the state where my school is located. The fiction unit of study on Eve Bunting, specifically guided reading, covers a variety of standards within the literature and vocabulary acquisition and use strands. These standards will be referenced when considering potential teaching points for each book. My district also provides equity and diversity standards for fifth graders to know.

Since Eve Bunting writes about social issues, these standards fit well into the unit. There are two diversity standards that will be addressed through guided reading. The first is respecting people based on similarities and differences and the second is how groups of

people have been treated in the past. One social justice standard that will be address in this unit is identifying figures, groups or events that have worked to bring fairness and justice to the world. These standards will be addressed as students explore the essential questions of the unit.

**Essential questions.** The essential questions for this unit have been set by the district. These essential questions align with UbD expectations in that they encourage students to strive for more knowledge because there is not one correct answer. The questions demand inquiry in order to be understood (Tomlinson & McTighe, 2006). Fifth grade teachers in the district are given a unit map that contain the essential questions. While the essential questions will mainly relate directly to the books written by Eve Bunting, smaller guided reading texts can help students to understand the concept. The essential questions that can be answered in guided reading for this unit relate to decisions authors and illustrators must make when they plan, write and illustrate texts, determining theme and genre of texts, history and social awareness and lastly, how language and craft can engage readers. Discussions regarding these essential questions in small group will guide students towards understanding the questions when they are directly related to Eve Bunting books. These standards and essential questions will be assessed using several types of assessments.

**Assessments.** The two types of assessments are formative and summative. In my literature review, I described running records, the Benchmark Assessment System and metacognitive self-surveys. Running records will be used throughout the guided reading lessons as a formative assessment. The teacher can conduct a running record while

listening to a student independently read during the lesson or they can pull students for individual reading conferences after groups are done. In my experience, listening to a student read a page provides enough information to plan for future teaching points.

Another assessment that will be used in the lessons is The Benchmark Assessment System that is scheduled to be administered in February/March. My district conducts this assessment every three months, so it will not occur right after this unit but will be summative for the trimester.

My third and final assessment piece is using a metacognitive self-survey as a pre-test and post-test for formative feedback. I will give the students the survey at the beginning of the unit and then after the four weeks of guided reading to check in on progress of metacognitive strategies. The inventory from Mokhtari and Reichard (2002) will be adapted to fit my fifth grade classroom. Rather than having a rating scale of 1-5, it will just be 1-3 with a rating of never, sometimes, always. The questions will be read out loud to students and explained as necessary. This survey was chosen because the questions will allow the teacher to decide on future teaching points based on how students rate themselves.

Throughout the unit, students will have a metacognitive checklist. This checklist from the NSW Centre for Effective Reading (2018) consists of eight questions that the students answer yes or no to. It encourages students to use a post-it note to mark areas that they do not understand and it provides strategies that they can use to find meaning. This checklist will be introduced during guided reading and then students can transition

to using it independently. The components of my project are grounded in learning theories and curriculum design models.

### **Learning Theories that Inform My Capstone Project**

One of the learning theories that supports the process of guided reading is constructivism. This theory is based on the belief that learners construct knowledge for themselves (Hein, 1991). This is a grounding theory of learning in my district. To achieve the use of constructivism, Hein (1991) suggested that teachers should start by figuring out what students already know so that they can build off of those experiences. The introduction of a guided reading lesson is a good time for teachers to learn about students' prior knowledge. Another key part to constructivism is reflection (Hein, 1991). The discussion after a guided reading text is a good time for students to reflect on what they read and to see how their interpretation of the text relates to other people. Several theories are based off of the idea of constructivism.

Lev Vygotsky (as cited in McLeod, 2014) developed the social learning theory. This theory from Vygotsky (as cited in McLeod, 2014) places emphasis on culture and social factors on cognitive development. McLeod (2014) went on to explain that Vygotsky believed that cognitive development stems from social interactions that occur during guided learning within the zone of proximal development. The zone of proximal development is the zone where skills are too difficult for a student independently, but they can be successful with teacher support. This zone is surrounded by what students already know and what students do not know at all. The zone of proximal development is where most instruction should be happening (McLeod, 2014). Guided reading is based

upon the fact that students are being challenged in their zone of proximal development and they will only be successful with the text with the support of the teacher. Guided reading also provides a social time for students to interact with the text and others in the group. My project is supported by these theories and the curriculum was constructed with a specific model in mind.

### **Setting**

The lesson plans are being developed for a small, suburban elementary school that is one of 19 elementary schools in the district. The district is in a second ring suburb of a major metropolitan area in the upper midwest. It is part of one of the largest districts in the state. This elementary school draws from a small area in a single community.

According to the school website, in October of 2017-2018, the enrollment was 498. The school consists of 16% of students who receive free and reduced lunch, indicating students who fell below the poverty line. Out of the total population of students, 12% are English Language Learners. The school is made up of 69% White, 13% Black, 13% Asian, 4% Hispanic and 1% Native American. Of all of these students, there are 17% labeled as special education.

The results from this school on the required state standardized test have been decreasing on the reading assessment. Five years ago, in 2012-2013, 76.9% of students from my school passed the reading assessment. This past year, only 69.8% of students passed the reading assessment. Our school goal for next year is to increase the passing rate from 69.8% to 72.7%. The lesson plans will be created for a single fifth grade classroom pulling from the school's total population with this goal in mind.

## **Participants**

This project will be created for a 5th grade classroom. There are 27 students in the class. Four students are labeled as special education with two of those students receiving significant pull-out services. Three of the students are labeled as gifted and talented. Out of the 27 students, 24 of them identify themselves as being caucasian. From the August Benchmark Assessment, the reading level of these students range from a level L to a level Z with the level S/T being grade level.

This project will also be available for three 5th grade teachers, including myself, to use. One of the teachers is early in her career with gaining familiarity with guided reading and learning about the district's expectations. The other teacher is an experienced fifth grade teacher. The other 19 classroom teachers at my school would benefit from looking at my lesson plan format as well. My guided reading curriculum will benefit them as they strive to learn more about the guided reading process.

## **Conclusion**

In this section, my curriculum project was described. My curriculum will add to an existing unit of study about an author. The curriculum will be created for small group reading instruction. I also described the reading assessments to use with this curriculum. The constructivist learning theory is at the forefront of this project. The Understanding by Design framework was used to create individual lessons along with overarching unit goals. This project is intended for a 5th grade class in a suburban classroom.

In Chapter Four, I will reflect on my curriculum project and discuss its future applications. The final chapter will also highlight important ideas from Chapter Two that were involved in the creation of the project. Lastly, it will discuss potential further research and the benefits that it brings to the education community.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Conclusions

#### Overview

This project was developed from a combination of personal and professional experience. Guided reading is a new strategy in my district and I took it upon myself to learn more about the strategy and how it can be used to promote comprehension in fifth grade students. In the previous chapter, the rationale for my project was discussed and the process of creating the curriculum was explained. Chapter Four is a reflection of my thoughts and learnings while seeking to answer the question, *what is the impact of comprehension strategies when they are incorporated into a guided reading lesson plan in fifth grade?*

The chapter begins with my reflections on my learnings while working on the project. Then, I will summarize some key learnings from the literature review in chapter two. I will also discuss the implications and limitations my project has. Finally, I will describe how the project benefits the teaching community.

#### Reflection on the Process

My project aimed to provide more structure for an existing unit of study by providing curriculum for small group instruction. With an increase of focus on guided reading in my district, but little direction on how to do it effectively, I knew I wanted to focus on guided reading. Specifically, I wanted to focus on comprehension while using

guided reading. The amount of research on guided reading and comprehension was overwhelming. I developed a color coding strategy for organizing my research articles and it made writing Chapter Two more manageable. Each theme in Chapter Two had its own color so it was quicker to look through the large amount of articles to find what would be relevant.

As a researcher, it was important to learn to balance the information from different sources. The research articles said one thing, my district and literacy coach added another layer and then my own teaching experience added another layer of learning. Research in a perfect world is one thing but I had to adapt my project to follow what research says is best practice while also thinking of my 27 unique fifth graders and what their needs are. At times, it was hard to know the “right way” to do things. Meeting with my content expert helped because while she is a literacy coach for the district, she is also a classroom teacher and knows the reality of teaching. Together, she helped me to create a project that follows research, the district’s guidelines and will help my students become better readers. I also made sure to include some key findings in my literature review in my project. The summary of literature review also includes my major learnings while completing this project.

### **Summary of Literature Review**

Reading instruction is always a hot topic in education. Fountas and Pinnell (2012) were at the forefront of my literature review. I was familiar with them because my school district uses their research and follows their reading instruction format. Their research on how a guided reading lesson plan should happen is how my lesson plan is formatted.

Before the lesson is even planned, I made sure to analyze a text to determine how I could use the book with students and what the text had to offer. The first thing in my lesson plan is word study. Then you can see the intentional teaching points, followed by the introduction. In each lesson plan, I put a time where the teacher would listen to students read independently. Then there is the discussion and extension activity. This format is recommended by Fountas and Pinnell (2012) and my district.

One piece in the research that I found surprising is that teaching strategies need to be taught explicitly. This is my biggest takeaway from my project. Ness (2011) found that it was most effective if students are explicitly taught the strategies rather than hoping students learn to “absorb” the strategy. My content expert and I discussed how there are some mixed messages in the district about teaching explicitly versus letting the students arrive at their own learning at some point. She agreed that there needs to be explicit teaching of comprehension strategies. My lesson plans reflect this and the strategies in each lesson plan are taught to students in the introduction or the discussion after. The main comprehension strategies that are reflected in my project are predicting, inferencing, summarizing, questioning, making connections and visualizing.

Another key piece of learning from my literature review is the idea of metacognition. Gemm Learning (2018) defined metacognition as thinking about one’s thinking. Good readers innately think about what they are reading without knowing it. Young readers need to be taught how to do this (Eilers & Pinkley, 2006). As in comprehension, metacognition can be modeled through a teacher think-aloud (Benchmark Education, 2018). There are several fix-up strategies that students can use

while reading. In my project, I decided to include a metacognitive self-survey that students will fill out from Mokhtari and Reichard (2002). My research showed me how important metacognitive strategies are for reading comprehension. This was a major learning for me and it is an area I want to improve on in my own classroom.

### **Implications**

This project was created for a fifth grade classroom that studies the author Eve Bunting. As learned in the literature review, guided reading groups should be planned based on student need and groups should remain flexible (Fountas & Pinnell, 2012). My 15 guided reading lesson plans are meant to be a menu of options for fifth grade teachers. The levels of the book reflect the range of readers seen in a classroom. Each book also has several teaching points that can be emphasized based on what the group of students need. The lesson plans are not meant to be perfectly planned for each group already, the classroom teacher must decide how to use the lesson plans for their own students. This means that classroom teachers should be responsible for making decisions about their own classroom and each teacher needs to be comfortable with the guided reading lesson plan format.

### **Limitations**

This project was created to add to an existing unit of study. These lessons are intended for small group use and should not be used whole group. There are books provided by the district that can be used for whole group. The lesson plan format could be adapted for whole group as long as the part of students reading independently is taken out. For whole group, the teacher should do the reading and modeling of effective

comprehension strategies. Some follow up questions could be asked by the teacher at the end though.

Another limitation is that this unit is four weeks long but only 15 guided reading lesson plans were planned. This may not be enough depending on the students. There may not be enough books to cover a specific skill for the entire four weeks. The thought is that this is a starting point and the classroom teacher can make decisions and plans for the remainder of the unit. Further research could assist classroom teachers in creating more lesson plans.

### **Suggestions for Ongoing Research**

Grouping in guided reading needs to occur intentionally. There are different theories into how students should be grouped in order to focus on academic ability while also trying to build students up mentally. My research did not discuss best practice for how to group guided reading groups. Further research could be done in this area in order to provide more effective instruction for small groups. The idea that students will stay in one group for the year based on their reading level is not supported by research.

Another area that needs ongoing research is the connection between fluency and comprehension and how fluency can be taught during guided reading. There is an immense amount of research on the connection between fluency and comprehension. However, there could be more in the area of connecting it to guided reading. Fluency is a key part to making growth in comprehension, so it would be important to plan for when working with guided reading groups.

### **Sharing**

I plan to share my project with my colleagues. My fifth grade team is excited to have these lesson plans for the upcoming Eve Bunting unit. Over the past couple of years, we have been creating Google Docs with guided reading books and potential teaching points. I plan to put my lesson plans and assessments in that folder so that they can have easy access. I also plan to talk through the project with them during a Professional Learning Community (PLC). This will ensure that they know how to effectively implement the lessons. It will also help them to carry over my new learnings to other units of study. This project will also benefit the teaching community as a whole.

### **Benefits**

This project benefits the education community by providing the lesson plan structure and assessments for small group reading instruction. It provides educators with the knowledge that explicitly teaching reading comprehension strategies is necessary. This can occur whole group as well as in guided reading. Students learn to read by being explicitly taught reading strategies and having the teacher model how they should be thinking. Having this model of unit with guided reading, will help teachers implement this strategy in other units. This small group instruction will help teachers to push students in their reading and this should correlate with standardized reading test scores.

### **Conclusion**

While reflecting on this project, I feel like I have grown as a reading educator. The amount of research on the topic is overwhelming and the task of teaching students to read can be daunting. I was able to combine the research, district expectations as well as the needs of my fifth graders into a comprehensive guided reading plan. While there is

always more to learn, I feel ready to share my findings with my colleagues. Together, we can continue to build our learning around the strategy of guided reading and how to implement it into other units in our school year.

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