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Fifth Graders' Reading Choices

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To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a dissertation written by Janelle Dugger Bouknight entitled "Fifth Graders' Reading Choices." I have examined the final electronic copy of this dissertation for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, with a major in Education.

Richard L. Allington, Major Professor

We have read this dissertation and recommend its acceptance:

Anne McGill-Franzen, Stergios G. Botzakis, Schuyler W. Huck

Accepted for the Council:

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Vice Provost and Dean of the Graduate School

(Original signatures are on file with official student records.)

Fifth Graders' Reading Choices

A Dissertation Presented for the

Doctor of Philosophy

Degree

The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Janelle Dugger Bouknight

May 2016

ABSTRACT

This study sought to determine whether students were capable of selecting appropriately leveled text for independent reading and whether students read those books once they were selected. A sample size of 155 students from a metropolitan area of the southeastern United States was studied. During the first interview, the researcher collected data concerning how the student selected the book. The student was then allowed to take the book home. A follow-up interview consisted of having the student read a pre-selected portion of the text and was followed by three comprehension questions. Researcher compared the readability level as determined by Lexile measures with those of the researcher's comprehension questions. The researcher found that students were more likely to choose a book that was below the reading level where they were deemed proficient, yet students were not likely to correctly answer comprehension questions based on those selections. Overwhelmingly, students did not read the books they chose over the two week period the students were given.

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Chapter 1: INTRODUCTION AND GENERAL

INFORMATION

Statement of Problem

As an avid reader, one of my favorite places to take my nephew was the bookstore. From the time he could walk, we would visit Barnes and Noble, spend time in the kids' section, and buy three or four books for his personal library. When he was younger, I introduced him to the likes of *The Hungry Little Caterpillar*, Jane Yolen's *How Do Dinosaurs* series, and, of course, the *Magic Treehouse* books. As Andrew got older, he would go to the bookstore with ideas of what he wanted. One interest he had was in American history. With his move into non-fiction books, I noticed that he often selected books that were far too difficult for him. I would have him read pages to me, and the reading was clearly at his frustration level. Thus, a question began to form in my mind. If Andrew, who was a proficient reader based upon the state reading test, couldn't select a book he was capable of reading, how many other kids couldn't pick books they could read independently?

As an educator, I believe children should read. They should have access to volumes of books that they want to read (P. Cunningham & Allington, 2003). National studies show a decline in the amount of time children are spending reading on a voluntary basis (Iyengar, 2007). This decline is cause for alarm because additional studies show the more children read, the better they become at reading (Krashen, 2004). Additionally, children who read well become adults who can contribute to future economies by being fully employed (Iyengar, 2007).

Need for Global Competitiveness

By tracking students' reading achievement scores as well as their reading habits, a trend emerges. The analysis of the data shows that as students age, they read less. Comparatively, as students age, they score lower on reading achievement tests (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2013). Reading well is one indicator of future success. Thus, the decline of reading achievement could be a harbinger of things to come for the nation.

Technological advances, especially in the last 20 years, have created an environment of instant access resulting in a shift from a local to a global workforce. As the employee pool for U.S. and international corporations are vastly expanded, U.S. students must be able to compete with their international counterparts. However, if they are to be judged simply by their comparative tests scores, U.S. high school graduates would likely not get a foot in the proverbial door.

According to the Program for International Students Assessment (PISA), only 8 percent of 15-year-old U.S. students tested on the proficient level, while 50 percent of students from the other countries tested were ranked as proficient. Overall, 18 countries scored higher than the U.S. in all three testing categories of reading literacy, mathematics literacy, and science (Kelly, 2014).

Even with the increased attention in the last decade from legislators and educators to prepare students for a global workplace, including the passage of No Child Left Behind, the necessary and fundamental reading skills of students have improved only slightly since 1971. The National Assessment for Educational Progress (NAEP) has not seen any significant progress in national reading scores from its first test administration in 1971 to its last published results in 2013. With the first NAEP testing, fourth grade readers scored 208, while scores in 2012 were 220; scores from 13-year-olds only increased from 225 in 1971 to 263 in 2012. The most shocking

statistics were found with the 17-year-old readers, who scores only increased to 287 in 2012 from 285 in 1971 (National Center for Education Statistics, 2013). Thus, there is more involvement from the national government than ever before, and the reading achievement scores are practically stagnant.

U.S. Reading Proficiency Declines in Upper Grades as Students Read to Learn

With the NAEP showing little improvement in reading achievement over the past 41 years, it is important to look at areas of decline when comparing U.S. students to their worldwide counterparts. While the scores from fourth grade U.S. students have increased very little, the most recent data show fourth grade students in the U.S. scoring among the highest in the world. However, when 8th grade students are tested, their scores rank towards the middle of the pack (Kelly, 2007). Chall and Jacobs theorized that this vast drop in scores reflects the time in the U.S. education system when students transition from learning to read to reading to learn (Chall & Jacobs, 2003).. Comprehension problems are evident in dealing with the texts that are more complex, the vocabulary less common, and the reading demands higher than what those students were exposed to in the primary grades. Because the majority of students' reading experience is with more complex informational text, students do not read as much or as often as they did in the primary grades, and with less practice, their reading skills stagnate and eventually begin to diminish (Chall & Jacobs, 2003).

Free Reading and Improved Test Scores

One strategy that could be used to ameliorate the effects of the fourth grade slump would be to have students engage in more free voluntary reading (FVR). Stephen Krashen (2004), one of the most outspoken supporters of free voluntary reading, found that when silent sustained

reading (SSR) is implemented for longer than seven months during the school year, students are more likely to show positive results. For example, McNeil's study, conducted on reform school boys aged 12-17, showed that one group was encouraged to choose their own reading material, and the materials were the basis for class discussions. The other group used traditional classroom instruction. After one year, the group that utilized FVR plus discussion showed gains averaging 12.8 points on the Scholastic Achievement Test, while the group that was instructed using traditional methods gained 4.6 points. (as cited in Krashen, 2004, p.4) Krashen goes on to analyze the studies that have been conducted on silent sustained reading. His analysis shows that when SSR is implemented for fewer than seven months, eight studies show that SSR had a positive impact, fourteen showed no difference, while three studies found negative impacts. When the time devoted to SSR was extended beyond seven months and up to one year, nine studies had positive results, ten showed no difference, and no studies showed negative results. Finally, when examining studies that lasted longer than one year, eight showed positive results, two showed no difference, and none had negative results (Krashen, 2004).

However, the researcher cautions that SSR alone will not improve reading skills. Krashen's (2004) analysis includes three notable premises: in order to improve their reading abilities, students must select books that meet their interests and are suited for their reading levels. In addition, students should be able to read these books in a short duration. He suggests that as students become more adept at selecting books they **can** read and **want** to read, more reading takes place, leading to greater gains in reading achievement (Krashen, 2004).

The Problem with Independent Reading

While Krashen's study (2004) shows that students will improve reading skills with free reading of appropriately leveled and engaging books, the underlying assumption of free reading and choice may result in book selections that are neither of interest to the students or at the appropriate levels. This is mostly because, when it comes to book recommendations, the power of peers overwhelms all other book experts. Wendelin and Zinck's (1980) study showed that 69% of the surveyed students were likely to read a peer recommended selection, leaving only 31% to put their faith in a teacher recommendation. However, it is Greaney's (1995) research that points out that people actually have little influence on book selections of students. His found that, first and foremost, students choose books by topic. This was followed by genre, familiar author, and book cover. While peers did have some influence, a recommendation by a friend, teacher, parent, or other adult rounded out the bottom of the 10 possible reasons a student would choose a book (Greaney, 1995).

Ollmann's research found that when examining text only, the book's topic does appear to be at the top of a student's priority list but is superseded by other text features. A survey of 7th graders showed that topic, title, introduction, and pictures were the most likely text features to influence a student's book selection (Ollmann, 1993).

Therefore, the information for the preceding studies suggests that even though a student individually chooses a book for SSR, Krashen's three premises -- level, interest, and length -- are not necessarily considerations for the actual person choosing the book. However, if students were taught the skills to choose books that they would more likely finish, independent reading --

when it includes self-efficacy, motivation, and engagement -- could be an important part of increasing reading scores nationwide.

Purpose of the Study

This study will examine the free reading choices of fifth graders to determine whether these students can independently choose material appropriate for their reading level and interests. When students select books within their zone of proximal development, they are reading text that is easy enough for them to comprehend, but difficult enough for them to grow as readers (Fielding & Roller, 1992.) Studies noted earlier in this dissertation suggest that students choose books for a variety of reasons; my study will build on that base on knowledge and consider the question as it pertains the student's ability to choose books appropriate for himself or herself as a reader, including motivation to read and engagement with the text.

Theoretical Framework

This study on student reading choice is undergirded with the foundation of three learning theories. Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory asserts that self-efficacy plays an important role in student achievement (1977); Gambrell (2010) links motivation to literacy development, and Csikszentmihalyi (1990) states that learning could not take place without engagement. These theories help deconstruct Krashen's (2004) independent reading achievement findings: students will read more when they believe they can read a text (self-efficacy), want to read the text (motivation), and are interested in the text (engagement).

Self-efficacy

Self-efficacy is the belief that one can actually accomplish a goal or can expect a specific outcome. Generally, when people are given a task within the realm of their competencies, like reading a designated text, they have enough belief in their abilities to accomplish the task successfully. Bandura (1977) sums this up best stating that self-efficacy is “the conviction that one can successfully execute the behavior required to produce the outcomes” (p. 193). Furthermore, Bandura (1977) asserts that self-efficacy also includes dealing with adversity and “whether they will even try to cope with given situations” (p.193). The term also encompasses the amount of effort a person is willing to spend on a given task and how persistent he or she will be when faced with obstacles (Bandura, 1977, p.194)

Within the confines of the classroom, educators see evidence of how self-efficacy plays a daily role in learning (McTigue & Liew, 2011). If students have had limited success with reading, they are not inclined to continue trying to read. When they must read a text that is beyond their reading level, teachers watch their students become frustrated and eventually shut down. However, Bandura stresses, educators have the ability to promote self-efficacy in their students. He suggests that teacher instill a set of scaffolds to ensure success and then gradually remove those scaffolds as a way to build self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977). Without a strong sense of self, especially for students who struggle academically, there will likely be a minimal effort to attempt a challenging text because their history of frustration when reading will sap them of their desire to try. The alternate application of this theory is that students who have positive self-concepts as readers will put forth more effort and read more because they experience positive consequences from reading (Gambrell, 2011).

Motivation

In addition to self-efficacy, students also need to be motivated. According to Gambrell, motivation, the desire for someone to do something, plays a key role in literacy development (2010). Without intrinsic motivation, students are not as likely to reach their full potential as readers. Eccles's (2000) expectancy–value theory surmises that motivation to attempt a task is built on one's own self-efficacy and the value the person places on a particular task. Thus, if one believes he/she can accomplish a task and sees value in accomplishing that task, he/she will be motivated to attempt the completion of the task. Without self-efficacy and task value, the expectancy-value theory predicts a person will most likely not attempt the task, much less complete it (Wigfield & Eccles, 2000). Guthrie and Wigfield (1999) examined motivation as it applies to reading and determined that motivation is just as important as cognitive ability in the comprehension of a text. Students must be motivated to read if reading is going to occur.

Engagement

Along with self-efficacy and motivation, students must also be engaged. According to Csikszentmihalyi (1990), learning cannot take place unless a person is willing to devote attention or is engaged in the process. Hidi (1991) and Schiefele (1991) also assert that engagement plays a crucial role in education. Their study shows that when students are interested in giving attention to the material, learning, motivation, and effort have been shown to improve (Hidi, 1991; Schiefele, 1991).

Studies illustrate that student engagement emerges from different factors. Some students are engaged when choice is available (Guthrie & Davis, 2003). Sometimes engagement results from a developed interest in a particular topic (Schussler, 2009). Thirdly, keeping students en-

gaged in their learning comes from giving them authentic tasks (Purcell-Gates, Duke, & Martineau, 2007). Regardless of the manner in which students become engaged in reading, engagement is as important to the reading process as self-efficacy and motivation.

Definition of Terms

Sustained Silent Reading (SSR): An announced, uninterrupted time of reading that takes place in a classroom where students read to themselves

Free Voluntary Reading (FVR): Reading of any texts that students have chosen for themselves and is not subject to any type of follow-up assignment, such as a written summary or comprehension questions

Lexile: A unit of measurement used to determine the difficulty of text and the reading level of readers

Accelerated Reader (AR): A Renaissance Learning program that tests students to determine their reading level then assigns texts that correlate to each student's zone of proximal development. After reading a text, a student then takes a test specific to what was read. Depending on the level of difficulty of the texts, tests are worth a pre-determined number of points. Usually, students are given AR goals, meaning each student must read and pass a specified number of texts and tests to reach the goal.

Reading Counts: A Scholastic program that uses Lexile ranges to match texts to students. After reading an appropriately matched text, a student takes a test specific to what was read to determine whether he/she successfully comprehended the text.

Delimitations of Study

The subjects of this research were limited to one school with five fifth grade classrooms in one large southeastern school district. This delimitation was necessary to reduce researcher travel; however, it does make the sample less representative of what might be expected to be found on a national scale. In addition, the number of students who participated was also limited to those who returned permission slips for participation, further narrowing the pool of students.

Significance of the Study

This study is designed to add to the growing research base (Alverman, 2002; Fisher, 2004) in the adolescent literacy arena, specifically examining the use of books for free reading (Kasten & Wilfong, 2005). Because numerous studies support positive effects of free reading in reading classrooms and reading outside of school, my hope is to add to the research by examining the types books, in particular their reading level, selected by students when given no parameters such as Accelerated Reader, Lexile ranges, or other leveling.

Chapter 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

Everyone expects children to learn how to read while they are in school. It has been stated that “the most fundamental responsibility of schools is teaching students to read” (American Federation of Teachers, 1999). As a nation, the concern about the skills children learn in public schools is growing. Reading progress is measured using national tests, such as the National Assessment for Educational Progress, to determine which states are doing a good job teaching children and which states are not doing so well. Every state conducts its own state-level tests to determine whether children are learning and teachers are teaching, with some states using those assessments to reward teachers whose students show better than expected gains. The importance of reading is well-known and documented (Murnane, Sawhill, & Snow, 2012). Students who are better readers are more likely to do well in school, graduate from high school, pursue a college degree, and attain living-wage jobs (Iyengar, 2007).

With reading as the cornerstone for learning, especially in elementary schools, programs tailored to the teaching of reading compete for center stage as well as dollars. Today, some schools engage students in readers/writers workshops (Towle, 2000), while others prefer using commercial basal readers (DeWitz & Jones, 2013).

Why free voluntary reading is good for students

Research studies have found that free voluntary reading has many advantages (Allington, 2005; Wu & Samuels, 2004; Shin, 2003). First and foremost, if students choose their own reading material, their own interest will spur their reading. Motivation research indicates that feelings and beliefs about interest and value lead to greater engagement and learning

(Alvermann, 2002). Providing students with opportunity for self-directed learning can increase their sense of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1996). Teachers are most likely to see success when they incorporate student enjoyment, choice, and independence into the classroom. Independent reading can also increase the amount of engaged reading students will do (Fisher, 2004). Part of Fisher's (2004) study centered on a retroactive study conducted at an urban high school. Four classrooms with teachers who actively implemented self-selected reading (S-SR) were compared with four classrooms where S-SR was not implemented with any fidelity or regularity. Using the Gates-MacGinitie scores from September, researchers found no statistical differences between the group of 9th graders in the four classrooms that had strong implementation of S-SR and the four classrooms that did not. When the researchers examined the data obtained in May, they found that those students in the classrooms with successful S-SR implementation showed significant additional gains of 0.6 years in reading achievement over that of students in non-S-SR classes. In this study, reading for twenty minutes per day gave the students a boost of over one half year of gains in reading achievement.

Secondly, multiple studies show that students who read more have greater reading achievement. One study on fifth grade students showed that time devoted to book reading had a positive correlation with reading achievement (Greaney, 1980). Greaney's study was conducted in Ireland in 1976 on 920 fifth graders in thirty-one different schools. Of the students who chose to read in their leisure time, 62% of those students chose to read books.

Another study indicated that time spent reading in school predicted reading comprehension (Taylor, Frye, and Maruyama, 1990). This study was conducted using 195 fifth grade and sixth grade students in a suburban school district. Three classes were above average readers, six classes were average readers, and two were below average readers. Students read

silently an average of 15.8 minutes per day during their fifty-minute reading class. Using two different reading tests, researchers were able to conclude that time spent reading silently during class led to an increase in reading comprehension skills. This study also highlighted that teachers were the ones responsible for determining how much class time was devoted to silent reading (Taylor et al., 1990).

The 1998 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) reports that for fourth grade students, there is a positive correlation between reading achievement and the amount of time spent in school on self-selected reading (S-SR). For this finding, 6300 fourth grade students were tested. Similarly, the 2011 data of the NAEP show the same trend. It is crucial that children spend more time reading because the time spent reading is linked to gains in reading achievement (Krashen, 2004).

More time spent reading had a significant effect on achievement for on grade level readers and high ability readers when compared to a control condition where less time was allocated for recreational reading (Wu & Samuels, 2004). In this study, which was conducted in direct response to the National Reading Panel's (2001) assertion that there were no experimental studies indicating that silent sustained reading benefited reading achievement, research shows that some aspects of reading are positively influenced by the amount of time students are engaged in independent reading. Participants in this study were thirty-five third grade students and thirty-seven fifth grade students. There were two classes of each grade level. The comprehension test used in this study was the Metropolitan Achievement Test 7 reading achievement test. One interesting finding of this study was that all students did not benefit equally from the same amount of time spent engaged in independent reading. While the average students and above average students showed better comprehension gains when given forty

minutes to read independently, there were no significant differences in comprehension scores of the below grade level readers in the fifteen minute group when compared to the forty minute group (Wu and Samuels, 2004).

Lastly, vocabulary development is yet another benefit of voluntary reading. Students who read more have greater vocabulary gains, regardless of previous vocabulary knowledge (McQuillan, 2001). The children who had larger vocabularies were those who were exposed to a greater number of words through leisure reading (Kamil, 2003). Hart and Risley's (2003) study also showed the connection between the number of words children are exposed to and their vocabulary. This study additionally showed that there is a connection between word exposure and socio-economic status (SES). If researchers estimate that good readers read close to one million words per year, students must be learning some of those words from the context of the reading as it would be virtually impossible to teach so many words through direct instruction (Hart & Risley, 2003). Understandably, all of the one million words would not be unique, but the vast number of words read implies that many of the words would be new words to the reader (Kamil, 2003).

Scores on the author recognition test created by Keith Stanovich showed positive correlations with vocabulary (West & Stanovich, 1991), reading comprehension (Stanovich & West, 1990), and spelling (A. Cunningham & Stanovich, 1990). By merely having people indicate whether they recognize the authors' names, Stanovich was also able to conclude that those who claim to do more reading performed better on the author recognition test (Stanovich & West, 1989). In addition, people who were observed reading for ten continuous minutes in an airport scored higher on the author recognition test than those who were not observed reading for the requisite amount of time (West, Stanovich, & Mitchell, 1993).

Silent sustained reading and self-selected reading during school

In direct response to the National Reading Panel's (National Reading Panel, 2000) report that silent sustained reading (SSR) could not be determined to have an impact on achievement, S. Jay Samuels (2003) conducted a quasi-experimental study on the impact of silent sustained reading. He and Wu found that for students in low reading ability groups, fifteen minute sessions of silent reading appear to be as beneficial as forty minute ones for improving skills such as reading speed and comprehension (Wu & Samuels, 2004). This study, conducted over a six month time frame on seventy-two third and fifth grade students in a Minnesota elementary school, led the researchers to conclude that different amounts of time should be considered for different ability leveled students (Wu & Samuels 2004). Given that struggling readers need to devote more time to reading text than those who are reading on or above grade level, it is logical that classrooms and schools that want to improve the reading skills of struggling readers should stagger silent sustained reading time over the course of the day instead of having one big block of time for SSR.

Studies conducted on free voluntary reading (FVR) during the school day include a variety of groups used as research subjects. One study examined the results of FVR and traditional instruction with sixty reform school boys. Boys in the FVR group were encouraged to read books, magazines, and newspapers as the basis for classroom discussion. The boys in the FVR group showed gains of an average of 12.8 raw points on the Scholastic Achievement Test, while those in the traditional instruction group showed gains of 4.6 raw points on the same test (Krashen, 2004). Although the amount of text being read by the FVR group contributed to their gains, group discussion and its ability to motivate students may have played a part in the increases as well.

Fisher (2004) examined data retroactively to discover that students who were in classrooms where S-SR was implemented in a consistent manner showed reading gains of an additional .6 years when compared to those students who did not have the benefit of being in classroom with a proper implementation of FVR.

The amount of time spent reading in school was positively correlated with an increase in reading comprehension skills in a study conducted by Taylor et al. (1990). This study showed that the students showed gains in reading comprehension when an average of 15.8 minutes of the 50 minute reading class was devoted to silent reading (Taylor et al., 1990).

Outside of school reading

While studies show that the FVR is typically as effective as other instructional methods when it comes to reading achievement, another facet of student reading centers around the reading they complete outside of the schoolhouse. An examination of data collected from the National Education Longitudinal Study of 1988 (NELS: 88) revealed that African American students who reported that they read for pleasure outside of school were more likely to have a higher reading proficiency level. This test defined four reading levels: below 1, 1, 2, and 3. Level 1 was defined as understanding of simple comprehension, such as story details and main idea. Level 2 students were capable of making simple inferences and evaluating abstract concepts. At Level 3, students showed mastery of making complex inferences, evaluating judgments, and utilizing multiple sources to reach an answer. Of the African American seniors who indicated that they read outside of school for pleasure, 44% of them scored at Level 2 or Level 3 on the NELS:88 Reading Comprehension assessment. For the students who indicated that they did not read for pleasure outside of school, only 32% of those students attained Level 2

or Level 3 on the NELS: 88 Reading Comprehension assessment (Flowers, 2003). This study reiterates J. Kim's finding that African American students benefited from voluntary reading outside of school time (J. Kim, 2006).

Studies continue to highlight the differences in the amount of reading completed by students from low-income families and those from middle class families. Neuman and Celano (2001) noted in their research that "for every one line of print read by low-income children, middle-income children read three" (p. 24). In McKool's (2007) study on fifth grade students, low-income students reported a lack of access of reading material that they were interested in reading. In this same study, students who were defined as avid readers were more likely to report that Sustained Silent Reading was practiced in their classrooms. Avid readers also suggested that teachers should spend more time recommending books to students and more time allowing students to read their own selections during class time. The reluctant readers also advocated for time to read self-selected text during class, but they revealed that they were often not allowed to read material of their choosing, such as magazines and comic books. Thus, for the reluctant readers, there really was not the opportunity to self-select materials, which could very well impact the motivation to read (McKool, 2007).

A study conducted with first graders by A. Cunningham and Stanovich (1993) also supports the idea that reading outside of school benefits students' reading achievement. A. Cunningham and Stanovich created a title recognition test to use with first graders. The test had seventeen true titles and eight foils. Researchers were careful to omit titles that children were exposed to during regular classroom instruction. The study revealed that students who scored higher on the title recognition test also scored higher on the Stanford word recognition subtest as well as the Stanford spelling subtest. Thus, the researchers drew the conclusion that students

who had more exposure to print materials at home scored higher on the word recognition test and spelling test. The correlation between the title recognition test and the word recognition subtest was 0.64, while the correlation between the title cognition test and the spelling subtest was 0.69 (A. Cunningham & Stanovich, 1993).

All studies do not show positive correlations between reading outside of school and reading achievement scores. The Taylor et al. (1990) study showed that 5th and 6th grade students benefited from silent sustained reading during the school day; however, time spent reading at home did not make a statistically significant difference. While reading at home approached statistical significance, reading in school showed much greater gains. Authors suggested that accounting for time spent reading was more reliable in the school setting since teachers reported the time. Because students were responsible for logging the time spent reading at home, it is possible that they misrepresented the time actually spent engaged in reading (Taylor et al., 1990).

Similarly, research conducted with 4th, 5th, and 6th graders who lived in a low socio-economic neighborhood found that there was no statistical difference in the reading achievement of 5th and 6th graders' scores between students who defined themselves as recreational readers and those who did not (Arthur, 1995). Using reading scores from the Iowa Test of Basic Skills, the researcher compared the scores of students who defined themselves as recreational readers and those who did not classify themselves as recreational readers. In the data on 4th grade students, t scores of $3.25 > 2.306$ are statistically significant at the .05 confidence level. This finding showed that the 4th grade students who defined themselves as recreational readers had reading scores that were statistically significantly higher than those who didn't define themselves as recreational readers. However, for 5th and 6th grade students, the t scores at grade five, $1.14 <$

2.306 and grade six, $1.71 < 2.306$, are statistically insignificant at the .05 level of confidence.

Recreational reading appeared to have no significant impact on reading achievement of these students (Arthur, 1995). While this study was a smaller scale study, it does cause some confusion as to the success of many summer programs in boosting reading achievement scores.

FVR in the summer

While reading throughout the school year is certainly a hope for those students who struggle with reading, FVR has been shown to have a positive impact on low-ability readers when utilized in a summer program (Shin, 2003). During the six-week period of Shin's study, students in the experimental group spent approximately two hours of the four hour sessions engaged in S-SR. Approximately 45 minutes each day was devoted to reading and discussing novels selected by program administrators. The control group followed the standard language arts direct instruction approach. On the Altos, a standardized achievement test, students in the S-SR model gained five months of reading comprehension and vocabulary. According to the post-assessment, the control group actually regressed in reading comprehension and vocabulary (Shin, 2003)

J. Kim (2006) also discovered that summer reading had a small, but significant, impact on the reading achievement of low-income students, minority students, struggling readers, and children who reported owning fewer than 50 children's books. Students who participated in this study were encouraged to read independently as well as read with family members. While students in the treatment group did not indicate that they completed more independent reading at home, they did report spending more time reading with a family member.

One longitudinal, experimental study showed that when students were given access to books that they self-selected, their reading achievement gains were greater than those of a control group (Allington et al., 2010). Most students involved in this study were demographically considered minorities and from homes of lower socio-economic status. For the three consecutive years of the study, students were given 12 books on the last day of school that they had previously selected at a book fair. After the three years, researchers examined the Florida Comprehensive Achievement Test (FCAT) scores of both the experimental group and the control group. A t-test found statistically significant differences ($t = 2.434$, $df = 1.328$, $p = .05$) between the performance of the treatment students and control students on the FCAT administered after the third year. The effect size was also statistically significant ($ES = .14$) (Allington et.al., 2010).

Perhaps it is the longitudinal factor that should be examined more closely. Other studies that provided student selected books over one summer did not show the gains found in the Allington et al. (2010) study. J. Kim and Guryan's (2010) examination of the efficacy of a voluntary summer book reading intervention with low-income Latino children did not show measurable gains in reading comprehension or vocabulary. Students in the treatment group reported reading more books, yet there was no statistically significant difference in the posttest scores of the treatment and control groups. Interestingly, J. Kim suggests that students may have chosen books that were not appropriate for their reading level, thus limiting the impact those books would have on their comprehension and vocabulary posttest scores. Yet, book selection did not appear to impact the success of the three-year intervention conducted by Allington et. al. (2010).

Previous work by J. Kim (2006) showed gains in specific subgroups in a summer intervention program centered on 4th grade students. Students were pre-tested and post-tested using the Iowa Test of Basic Skills. When examining the data, the treatment showed statistically significant difference in scores of African American students ($B = .22$, $SE = 0.09$, $t = 2.59$, $p = 0.011$) and marginally significant increase in scores of Latino students ($B = 0.14$, $SE = 0.08$, $t = 1.76$, $p = 0.22$). Further examination of J. Kim's data from this study revealed that the positive effects were largely concentrated among underperforming students whether defined by minority status or availability of books in the home. Thus, providing the opportunity to read books during the summer did benefit specific subsets of students. Worth noting, this Kim study did not include self-selection of books by students.

Librarians can substantiate the impact of summer reading programs on reading abilities. Fiore and Roman's (2010) study chose to study rising 4th graders because of the tendency for students' test scores to show regression between 3rd grade and 4th grade. Eleven schools in eight states partnered with a local public library for a six week time frame. The Scholastic Reading Inventory (SRI) Enterprise Edition was the test utilized in this study. Like J. Kim and Guryan (2010) and Allington, et al (2010), Fiore and Roman were particularly interested in the impact of the summer reading program on students from low-income families. Each school in the study had at least 50% of its population on free or reduced lunch. The SRI showed that students who participated in the study gained 4 Lexile points. Although this was not an incredible increase, it was evidence that reading over the summer does prevent learning loss.

Studies with foreign language students

Numerous studies show that free voluntary reading has a positive impact on students who are learning English as a foreign language. These studies show gains in the same areas as students who primarily speak English. One such study set in South Africa demonstrated that the students who were encouraged to read for pleasure scored higher on reading comprehension tests than those who were taught in traditional classroom settings (Elley, 1998). Additionally, a study with Japanese students who were retaking an English as a foreign language class showed that students who participated in FVR showed gains of more than twice as much on a cloze test used to measure reading comprehension as those who did not participate in FVR (Krashen, 2004).

Stanovich's author recognition test also proved to demonstrate a positive correlation between author recognition and vocabulary and writing in other first languages. The author recognition test correlated positively to vocabulary in studies conducted with Spanish speaking people (Rodrigo, McQuillan, & Krashen, 1996), while the test correlated positively to writing in studies conducted with Korean speaking people (H. Kim & Krashen, 1998) and Chinese speaking people (Lee & Krashen, 1996).

The drawbacks of FVR

While free voluntary reading has research to support its inclusion in schools, it is not without disadvantages. Foreseeable disadvantages include the potential need for permission to deviate from scripted or required texts, possible lack of teacher buy-in, potential differences in teacher implementation, and differing teacher views of student accountability.

Given that free voluntary reading is such a simple approach, one would expect that support from the top down would be a given. However, in the age of high stakes testing, schools

are more likely to implement test prep practice than S-SR. Miller (2009) reports that by sixth grade, most of her students have “spent at least three years in classes in which test preparation and the drilling of test taking strategies were the most common type of reading instruction they received” (p. 32). In a high school, one principal “put an end to reading” and wanted his teachers’ focus on instruction instead of having students sitting around reading during the school day (Ivey & Fisher, 2005).

Other hindrances to implementing FVR can be attributed to teachers themselves. Teachers who were against the use of FVR often defended their stance by stating that students were spending too much time off task. Some studies support this assertion. One study showed that 60% of high school students in twenty different classrooms reported reading during the time designated for SSR (Meyer, 1998). It is not surprising that only 53% of students wished to continue having time for FVR. Fisher (2004) found that less than 40% of students at Hoover High were reading during their SSR time. A teacher-researcher found that her students were on-task an average of 72% of the time during SSR (Trudel, 2007). During SSR, students’ on-task time ranged from a low of 59.24% to a high of 93.83%. The mean score was around 84%. With the exception of one student, everyone was on task for at least 72% of the silent reading time during SSR. Three students were on task over 90% of the time. While Dully’s research (1989) showed that the self-concept of students who were in the experimental group participating in FVR improved, it also revealed that in a five minute time period, there were six instances of off-task behavior.

An additional study did not give statistical data regarding the number of students who were off-task during SSR, but the authors did acknowledge that there were a number of issues with FVR in the classroom (Kelly & Clausen-Grace, 2006). Students also exhibited the

following behaviors: read inappropriate reading material (too hard or too easy), “fake reading”, choosing a new chapter book every day, chronically reading books well below their independent levels, getting stuck in the same genre or series, and general avoidance behaviors.

Another issue teachers have with FVR is the lack of student accountability. Since there is no written component for students to complete, there is less certainty that students are reading and comprehending the text. Without accountability, teachers felt that they had no way to monitor or check student progress (Fisher, 2004). In a world where teachers are accountable for everything, this can be a real stumbling block. When using the true FVR format, teachers do not have the opportunity to assess students’ skills and provide appropriate instruction (Kelly & Clausen-Grace, 2006).

Contradictions in the research

While there is sufficient evidence to support FVR in school, there are two areas where studies revealed contradictory results. The first of these is whether reading outside of school is beneficial for students. While studies by R. Anderson, Wilson, and Fielding (1988), Flowers (2007), J. Kim (2006), and McKool (2007) showed positive correlations between reading outside of school and reading achievement, The Taylor et al. (1990) work does not show a statistically significant difference between the students who read at home and those who did not read at home. Arthur’s (1995) work also does not show a significant difference in scores between students who labeled themselves as recreational readers and those who did not. Thus, reading outside of school shows mixed results, while reading during school shows either positive results or results that were equal to those of other forms of instruction in fifty-one out of fifty-four studies.

Researchers also found differing results with regards to the types of materials that produced positive results. Light reading showed to have positive correlations with reading achievement in the Allington et.al. (2010) summer reading study. According to the study, most of the students chose books that were based on popular culture icons and series books, both of which would be termed “light reading”. Yet, this study showed positive gains for students. A similar study by Shin (2001) revealed that students who read mostly *Goosebumps* series books for their summer SSR time also showed gains over the six week summer program (Shin, 2001). Rucker’s (1986) research on magazine reading revealed that students who were given magazine subscriptions based upon their interests scored higher on reading comprehension tests than those who were not given the magazine subscriptions. Thus, magazine reading presumably contributed to greater gains and possibly led the readers to read more material. However, other studies show that light reading does not have as positive results for students. Greaney’s (1980) work found that the students who preferred reading comic books were not as proficient in reading as those who read only traditional books. Thorndike’s (1973) study showed that by the end of secondary school, the more proficient readers preferred to read history and biographies, technical science, and philosophy and religion while there was a negative correlation between the reading comprehension scores and the selection of books on sports, love stories, and school stories (Krashen, 2004). Although Thorndike’s study was a correlational one, it is worth noting the types of reading being completed by students of different ability levels. The students who were more proficient readers tended to focus on more complex subjects where the reader learned additional information from the reading, while the less proficient readers read more fiction stories.

Choosing books for self-selected reading

Along with the ample research showing the positive gains made from utilizing FVR, there are numerous studies showing the types of books children select. For example, Williams's study (2008) with low socio-economic status (SES), African American children showed that media and mass marketing impacted the choices of children. In her study, Williams found that the top book choices for participants in her study were fiction, media and mass marketing, and series books. Williams had 37 of the 293 students wear microphones in order to gain insight into the conversations students had with friends while examining the books. In these conversations, the researcher discovered that all of the girls and more than half of the boys selected biographies about famous music singers or televisions stars. Thus, the researcher showed the impact of media in student book selections (Williams, 2008).

Hopper's study (2005) also showed the media influence on children's book choices, though in a different vein than William's study. Hopper's study, conducted with 743 children aged 11-15, showed that children had a profound interest in Harry Potter books and the Lord of the Rings books. At the time of the study, both book series were in the midst of being made into films, hence the media connection for the books. Books most often chosen in this sample were also fiction books, series books, and books with media influence. This study examined the reading material that students were currently reading, only analyzing their choices retroactively. Many students also reported reading magazines and web pages, either in addition to or instead of books (Hopper, 2005).

Conversely, Allison's study (1994) showed that students did not select books with movie influences. Students in this study were more likely to choose nonfiction books than books from

other genres. While Allison's original purpose had been to compare the Children's Choice Award winning books with the selections made by the students in the study, none of the Children's Choice Award books were selected by students in the study. This study was conducted with 62 students in grades three through six.

While these studies focused on the types of books children chose and concluded that fiction and media selections were at the top, Moss's study limited book choices to only non-fiction titles in order to ascertain the reasons children would choose a specific non-fiction title (2008). Her study showed that most students chose a non-fiction title based upon their own desire to learn more about a topic. While almost half of the students cited the pictures in the nonfiction books as a reason to read their selected book, the pictures were often cited as interest piquing and sources of wonderment, as opposed to the superficial reasons for picking a book with pictures (Moss, 2002).

Swartz and Hendricks's (2000) study focuses on the strategies used by special education students to select books for pleasure reading. Of the 31 middle school level students in their pool, 19 students had a specific learning disability, ten were developmentally delayed, while one was multi-handicapped, and one had a behavior disorder. When examining the strategies the students used to select books, the researchers found that 24 of the 31 students mentioned choosing the book because of the topic or subject. The second most often cited book characteristic was its length. Twenty-one of the students mentioned the book's length as a factor, with most of the students preferring shorter books. One male student gave more insight into his reasoning for choosing shorter books, stating that books with more than 80 pages had words that were too big and the books get too hard. Eighteen of the students selected a book using the summaries on the back of the book as a factor; 15 students chose a book using the

cover art or illustrations within the books. With regards to media influence, 11 of the students considered the fact that there was a television show or movie related to their books. Nine of the 31 students acknowledged that they favored the author of their chosen book, with R.L. Stine and Stephen King being the authors of interest (Swartz & Hendricks, 2000).

As in Swartz and Hendrick's study, many authors have examined the strategies students use when selecting books for their own reading. In research spanning over 50 years, the prevalent top reason for choosing a book seems to be the subject of the book. While much research has been conducted on the types of books students read and how they select those books, there is little research emphasizing whether what students are choosing can be read by those students and whether the students who are adept at choosing appropriate books are deemed proficient readers by their test scores.

Achievement and authentic reading

In today's world of high stakes testing, it seems any strategy or concept must prove itself by increasing student achievement. The use of authentic reading has been shown to do just that. Free, voluntary reading might be the truest form of authentic reading found in schools today, given that students read texts of their own choosing and read for their own purposes. Several studies of FVR, which in the school context can be self-selected reading (S-SR) or silent sustained reading (SSR), indicate that FVR has a positive impact on achievement. For example, the use of free, voluntary reading (FVR) in the classroom has been shown to be just as effective, if not more so, than traditional instruction. In thirty-eight out of forty-one studies, students in classrooms where FVR was in place scored as high or higher on comprehension tests administered to both FVR classes and traditional instruction classes (Gallagher, 2009). Another

study found that more time spent reading had a significant effect on achievement when compared with a control group where less time was allocated for self-selected reading (S-SR). This same study revealed that students do not benefit equally from the same amounts of time spent on self-selected reading. Readers with lower reading abilities showed higher gains in vocabulary when just fifteen minutes of SSR per day occurred. Higher ability readers benefited the most in reading comprehension when they spent forty minutes per day engaged in SSR (Wu & Samuels, 2004). Therefore, students in this study read books of their own choosing for pleasure and showed academic gains in vocabulary and reading comprehension. In a similar fashion, children who had larger vocabularies were those who were exposed to greater amounts of words through leisure reading (Kamil, 2003). Thus, students who read books for pleasure had larger vocabularies.

One study examined the results of FVR and traditional instruction with sixty reform school boys. The boys in the FVR group showed gains of an average of 12.8 raw points on the Scholastic Achievement Test, while those in the traditional instruction group showed gains of 4.6 raw points on the same test (McNeil cited in Krashen, 2004). Again, the use of self-selected text as opposed to a school based text led to gains in achievement.

Even extending reading authentic texts for pleasure over the summer has shown to be beneficial to achievement. One longitudinal, experimental study showed that when students were given access to books that they self-selected, their reading achievement gains were greater than those of a control group. For this study, students were given 12 books they selected on the last day of school for three consecutive years. After three years, researchers examined the Florida Comprehensive Achievement Test (FCAT) scores of both the experimental group and the control group. A t-test found statistically significant differences ($t = 2.434$, $df = 1.328$, $p = .015$)

in the performance of the treatment and control students on the FCAT administered after three consecutive summer book distributions. The effect size was also statistically significant ($ES = .14$) (Allington et al, 2010).

The importance of text selection

Knowing that students who read more score higher on achievement tests, have larger vocabularies, and are more successful in school should encourage schools to create blocks of time for independent reading. Coupled with the impact of free, voluntary reading is the motivating factor of students' choosing texts for their own purposes. However, in order for free voluntary reading to be successful, students must be able to choose books that they can read independently. Given that many libraries incorporate the use of Accelerated Reader or Reading Counts, students in those schools do not have to examine the book to determine whether it is a "just right" book. According to Fountas and Pinnell, students reading between levels L-Z should know 98% to 100% of the words in the text for the selection to be classified as at that student's independent level (Fountas & Pinnell, 2010).

How do students choose what they want to read?

A study completed by Wendelin and Zinck (1983) reveals several recreational reading patterns amongst students in grades five through eight. Students were more likely to choose a book based upon a friend's recommendation (69%), read a book with a movie or television show tie-in (77%), often bought books with their own money (58%), and read books by authors whose works they had previously read (85%). Of the 688 students surveyed, the most important consideration when choosing a book to read was what the information contained on the book jacket or back cover (53%). Other book selection techniques that were used by the students

included the thickness of the book (15%), what it says on the first page of the book (12%), the picture on the cover (8%), the size of the print (7%), and whether the book has pictures (5%). Given that the majority of the students chose a book based upon what the book jacket or back cover revealed, this indicates that students were making their selection based upon the topic of the book. Students who utilized the book's thickness and those who read the first page are exhibiting behaviors that indicate they are more aware of how to assess a book's level of difficulty. Those who concern themselves with a book's thickness may lack reading stamina to tackle longer works, while those who read the first page are likely looking to be hooked into reading the book as well as examining the book for its readability.

Ollmann's (1993) research also revealed that the topic was usually the dominating factor in a student's choice of reading material. Of the 104 seventh graders she surveyed, 79 of them chose a book based upon its subject. The strategies that were the least likely to be used by these students were the number of difficult words (five students) and sentence length (two students). While these two components basically define readability for teachers, these were the least likely strategies used by the students. However, it is interesting to note that the researcher surveyed these students about text selection using seven stories from the literature anthology. Thus, the level of difficulty of the stories should have been reasonably restricted for inclusion in the grade level text. While Ollmann's ultimate goal was to transfer the selection strategies to books of students' own choosing, there is no published research to show whether that goal was ever reached.

Do students choose books that they can independently read?

Research regarding the readability of the texts students choose is mixed. Studies on struggling readers reveal that they often choose books that are too difficult for them to read independently. This trend is seen in studies by G. Anderson, Higgins, and Wurster (1985), and Kibby (1995). In G. Anderson et al., the genres of books selected by the high-achieving, average, and low readers were incredibly similar. The lengths of books chosen by the high achieving readers and the low achieving readers were not significantly different. The differences emerged when examining the level of the books they selected. Struggling readers were less likely to select a book they could read on their own. However, Hiebert, Mervar, and Person's (1990) study showed that struggling readers chose easier books than the more competent readers. Each of these studies compared the text difficulty of books chosen during free reading with the books students were using during instructional time.

Other studies show that students vacillate between books of various levels of difficulty. Students do not seek books that grow in level of difficulty. Rather they bounce back and forth between difficult and easy books. This pattern is found in studies by Fresch (1995), Smith & Joyner (1990), and Timion (1992).

Kragler and Nolley's (1996) study finds that the most competent readers chose books that were too easy for them, while those who were average and struggling readers chose books that were too difficult for them to read independently. Thus, the books that the most competent readers chose were books at the independent level, which is what teachers would hope to find if the goal is to have students reading independently. However, Kragler and Nolley's study only included nine students all of whom were male.

Conclusion

Previous research shows that FVR is as good or better than traditional instruction methods when it is implemented for longer periods of time. Since, at its heart, FVR is about students choosing texts, the emphasis is on students selecting texts that they want to read. Thus, when we examine students and texts, the concept of choice is a key component. When students are given choices, the assumption is that they are choosing books they are capable of reading. In order for students to make substantial gains, they must be able to comprehend the text they are reading. Therefore, an examination of the level of the texts students choose is a worthwhile study.

Chapter 3: METHODS

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to determine whether students are able to select books for free voluntary reading that they are capable of reading. More broadly, this study was designed to determine how likely students of differing gender, ethnicity, socio-economic status, and reading abilities are to demonstrate proficiency in book selection and what strategies they use to make their selections. If students are unable to choose a book that is at an appropriate level for them, students are not operating in the zone of proximal development (Berk & Winsler, 1995) and are not reaping the full benefits seen in free voluntary reading. If students cannot choose a book that is appropriate for them, it is necessary for teachers and/or librarians to explicitly teach this skill within the confines of the classroom or library.

Using both Lexile scores and individual comprehension quizzes, the researcher determined whether the student was successful in choosing a book at the student's appropriate level. Data were collected from 155 students. It was necessary to assess the comprehension skills based on (a) the research questions that guided this study, and (b) the theoretical framework discussed in chapters one and two. It was hypothesized that there would be no difference in students of varying reading ability to choose texts on their own reading level.

Research Questions

1. Do students choose books at the appropriate reading level when the artificial labeling system information is removed? Does this ability to choose appropriate books vary by gender, ethnic group, socio-economic status, or standardized test classification?

2. What strategies do 5th grade students employ when selecting texts to read independently for free reading? Are those strategies more or less likely to be utilized by students based upon their gender, ethnic group, socio-economic status, or standardized test classification?

3. Do students read the books they choose for free reading? Are there differences in the reporting of those who finish by gender, ethnic group, socio-economic status, and standardized test classification?

This chapter describes the research design, sample selection, instrumentation and materials, variables in the study, procedures, and data analysis.

Research Design

The research questions in this study establish the study as a descriptive one. In order to collect data, the researcher interviewed the student participants on two separate occasions. The primary goals of the study were to determine whether students could select books at their independent reading level, the strategies students used to select said books, and whether students read the books they selected. The researcher also wanted to examine data to determine whether differences between groups emerged with regards to their ability to choose appropriate texts, strategies used, and reading the selected books.

Sample Selection

The school district that participated in this study was located in the southeastern United States and enrolled roughly 70,000 students in grades K-12. There were 51 elementary schools comprised of grades K-5. The district was chosen due to its size and proximity to the researcher.

Following university approval of the Internal Review Board (IRB), the researcher contacted the Office of Research for the school district to gain permission for the study at the district level. Once approved at the district level, the researcher contacted the principal for permission to conduct the study in the selected school. The school that was chosen by the researcher was selected because of its diverse population. While the surrounding schools in the district had some diversity, this school was one of the most diverse schools in the district. The school's enrollment was 810 students. Approximately 20% of the students were African-American and approximately 30% were of Latino heritage. The remaining 50% of the student population was White (non-Latino.) Approximately 7% of the school was classified as ELL. Once permission was obtained from the principal, the researcher sent a Letter of Consent describing the research to the parent or guardian of each 5th grade student. Once Letters of Consent from parents and guardians were returned, the researcher sent assent to participate forms home with the 5th grade students. Students who returned both the Letter of Consent as well as the assent to participate form participated in the book selection.

Instrumentation and Materials

Palmetto Assessment of State Standards (PASS):

The Palmetto Assessment of State Standards (PASS) is one of the tests used in calculating Absolute Ratings, Growth Ratings, and Federal Accountability status. The only subtest used

in connection with this research was the English/Language Arts test. The test consists of 36 multiple choice questions. All questions are passage based, meaning the student has to read a passage in order to answer the questions. The test is untimed. The raw score is converted into a scale score for the schools and parents to see. The researcher was also given scale scores for students. The scale score range is 300 to 900, with a score of 600 categorizing a student as having met the standards tested. The English/Language Arts tests measure achievement in four domains: reading: literary texts; reading: informational texts; reading: vocabulary building; and researching. The test is administered in May of each year to all 5th graders (South Carolina Department of Education, 2011). Of the students in this research study, all students took the standard form of the English/Language Arts PASS test. No students qualified to take the alternate version of the test for students with special needs.

Measures of Academic Progress (MAP):

Created by Northwest Educational Association, the Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) are promoted as useful benchmarking assessments. With the ability to test students three times per year, MAP can show areas teachers should target for each child to maximize academic growth. MAP scores are reported using a scale score so that students may be compared across schools and districts. As a computer adaptive test, the students are not limited to test items solely at their grade level. Tests are administered on a computer and are untimed (Northwest Educational Association, 2013). For the purposes of this study, the September 2013 MAP administration was used. This test provided the most recent recommended Lexile range for each student available for this study.

Lexile:

Developed by Metametrics, the Lexile measure is formulated using the length of words, sentence structure, font style, clarity, and amount of white space on the pages of texts. The elements are analyzed to provide a number for a person's Lexile measure. Appropriate reading material is deemed to be 100 points below that number and 50 points above that number. Thus if a person's Lexile number was 800, he or she should strive to read books in the 700 and 850 Lexile range. Books can range from 200L to 1600L. Numerous tests report recommended Lexile measures, including PASS and MAP.

Book Selection Strategy Conversation

Once students selected their books, students were asked why they chose the book. Answers students gave were recorded in their files in Pages. If a student did not mention a specific strategy, the researcher asked them whether they used it. In some cases, researcher's observations were enough to answer the question. Thus, if the student did not open the book, there was no need to ask whether they read any of the text inside the book when making their selection.

Comprehension Instrumentation:

Students were asked three questions per book. Two questions were literal in nature, while one question was inferential. Literal questions referred to questions that could be answered directly from the text. Students could either recall the information from reading or look back and locate the answer. Either way, the answer was explicitly stated in the text. On the other hand, inferential questions required the students to draw a conclusion to reach an answer or infer an answer based on background information. These questions required higher order thinking by the students.

For example, one of the books Zachary chose was *You Wouldn't Want to Be a Roman Gladiator* by John Malam. When meeting with me the second time, Zachary was asked to read pages 18 and 19 of the book. Zachary's literal questions were 1) "Tell me one way you became a gladiator.," and 2) "What happened if you lost your fight?". The answers to both of these questions were directly in the text. The inferential question for this text was "Why were gladiators categorized with different names?" The pages of the text reference five different types of gladiators, each with a picture and a caption. Upon reading the captions, the reader can discern that the gladiators had different names depending upon the type of weapon they used. Thus, the reader had to draw a conclusion that the fighters were named for the weaponry they used.

Variables

There were variables the researcher was interested in dissecting in this research. The first variable was the students' abilities to choose books at an appropriate level for independent reading. The second variable was the strategies used by students to select books. These variables were examined through the lenses of other variables: student's gender, ethnicity, socio-economic status, and PASS classification.

Procedures

Permission to conduct the study was first received from the school system. Next, the researcher contacted the principal of the school to gain access to students for the study. Once permission had been secured from both the county and the school, Letters of Consent were sent home with 5th grade students, totaling 247 students. Of those 247 students, 155 students returned Letters of Consent. For the students returning Letters of Consent, they were given Assent Forms. Only students returning Letters of Consent and Assent Forms participated in the research. All 155 students who returned Letters of Consent agreed to participate in the study.

Research for this study began on December 9, 2013. Once permission to conduct the study was granted by both the school system and the school, the researcher began moving a library of books into the assigned space. The researcher's library contained roughly 300 books, composed of selections from the researcher's personal library and books from the institution where the researcher was employed. Due to space constraints, books were categorized into fiction, science nonfiction, social studies nonfiction, biographies, and other sections. Fiction books were alphabetized. These same space constraints prohibited books from being displayed in an engaging manner. Thus, all books were shelved with the spines facing outward as in a standard library shelving format.

For the first set of interviews, students were pulled during their library time. The first meeting with the student allowed the researcher to meet the student and for the student to select his or her book. After the book was selected, the researcher asked the student why the student selected that book. Students answers were typed into a file in Pages for future reference. If student gave a reason, such as "I liked the picture on the cover", researcher categorized the answer as using the strategy where student used the cover. If student gave an answer, such as "The book sounded funny", the researcher probed the student to determine what made the student think the book was funny. The student's response was then categorized in the appropriate strategy for selection when the answer fit one of the researcher's pre-selected strategies. The time spent with each student for this interview was approximately 10 minutes.

After the students chose their books, they were sent back to class. Then, the researcher examined the text, looking for a section of text that would provide good material for an inferen-

tial question. After creating an inferential question, the researcher also wrote two literal questions from the same section of text. These questions were typed into the same file previously created for the student. Books were then checked out to the students for two weeks.

Questions were reviewed by the researcher's colleague to confirm that questions were properly written and classified as literal or inferential.

Once the allotted time had passed, students were re-interviewed. Again, students were pulled during their library time. This time, each student was first asked whether he/she read the book. Student response was recorded in the previously established Pages document. Each student was then referred to specified pages to read silently and was told that there would be three questions about the passage when he/she was finished. Once the student finished reading, the researcher asked three questions. Answers were recorded in the Pages document. Researcher gave scores of 0/2, 1/2, or 2/2 for the literal questions and 0/1 or 1/1 for the inferential question. Scores were also recorded in the Pages document.

Collection of data at the school ended on March 27, 2014.

Next, the researcher collected data regarding students' PASS test scores and classification and MAP test Lexile ranges. The PASS test provided data on reading achievement and also a correlating Lexile range. The MAP test provides information on reading achievement, level of difficulty, as well as correlating Lexile range.

Finally, several of the books in the library provided to students did not have Lexile scores available from Metametrics. The researcher contacted Metametrics in search of a solution to this problem. Metametrics gave the researcher access to the professional analyzer to provide a more accurate Lexile number for the study. Several steps were involved in the process. First, the text

had to be scanned into a PDF. Once the PDF was opened, the text had to be converted into simple text. Then the text had to be converted again into rich text. Next, the researcher had to proof all of the text that had been converted since many letters get converted into symbols during this process. Once all conversion errors had been corrected, the text was ready to insert into the professional analyzer. A Lexile number was then assigned to the book. In an effort to attain the most accurate Lexile number, 20% of the book had to be scanned. This procedure took between an hour and a half to three hours per book. Approximately 25 books used in the study did not have Lexile numbers and required this process.

Data Analysis

The research questions in this study established the need to use descriptive statistics to analyze the differences among groups. The data collected in this study could be analyzed using the chi-square test for independence. In all cases, data collected were categorical in nature, the subjects fit into only one cell, and the levels of each category were mutually exclusive. This test determines whether the counts are what one would expect to see when compared to the observed count. While good for looking for association between two variables, this statistical analysis does not lend itself to determining the strength of association between two variables.

Conclusion

This chapter outlined the research design, sample selection, instrumentation and materials, variables, procedures, and data analysis for this study. This study examined the collected data to determine whether there were differences between groups of students regarding the strategies used to select books, their ability to select a book within their assigned Lexile range, their proficiency in answering comprehension questions regarding their selections, and their self-reporting on whether students read the selected books.

Chapter 4: RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Introduction

This study examined the differences between various groups of adolescents and their abilities to select reading material at an appropriate reading level, strategies they used for selecting a book, and the successful completion in reading the chosen book. Data were collected during the 2013-2014 academic year. Each student (n=155) selected a book, participated in an interview about selection strategies, and completed a comprehension check of three questions asked by the researcher.

Research Question 1

Do students choose books at the appropriate reading level when the artificial labeling system information is removed? Does this ability to choose appropriate books vary by gender, ethnic group, socio-economic status, or standardized test classification?

Table B1 indicates the students' abilities to choose books within their Lexile ranges. To prepare the data to perform an analysis, the researcher attempted to locate an assigned Lexile number for each book that was selected by a student in the study. If a Lexile was not available, the researcher utilized the professional analyzer through Metametrics to determine a Lexile measure for the book. Then, the researcher utilized the Lexile ranges from MAP testing as the ideal ranges for the students since these were the most recent data collected regarding their Lexile ranges. Each student was then categorized as having selected a book within his/her range or not selecting a book within that range. These data were then analyzed by gender, ethnicity, SES,

and PASS classification. The analysis showed that the researcher failed to reject the null hypothesis for each category.

Frequency

In examining the frequency with which the sample group choose books within their Lexile range, the data showed that 26.4% of students were able to choose books within their Lexile range, leaving 73.6% who did not choose a book within their Lexile range, with many students choosing books that would be classified as “easy reads” for them. While there is a large difference in the number of students who selected a book within the Lexile range and those who did not select a book within the Lexile range, there were no significant differences between groups when examining this ability through the lenses of gender, ethnicity, PASS classification, and SES. Further examination revealed that 59 students selected books below their recommended Lexile range, 37 within the Lexile range, and 43 above the recommended Lexile range.

Researcher Generated Questions

Students were asked comprehension questions to determine whether they were capable of understanding the books they read. This was done to provide a qualitative analysis of the students’ ability to comprehend the book they selected.

A chi-square test of independence was performed to examine the relation between the students’ ability to answer comprehension questions based upon the book and their gender, ethnicity, SES, and PASS classification. In the case of ethnicity, there were four cells in the 3 X 4 table with frequencies below five. Thus the researcher combined the “answered 0 questions correctly” and the “answered one question correctly” so that only one cell would have a count of five or fewer. The chi square analysis was performed using this adjusted categorization. In the case of PASS classification, there were six cells in the 3 x 4 table with fewer than five counts in

the cells. Thus, categories were recombined in an effort to receive a valid computation. The same combination of “answered zero questions correctly” and “answered one question correctly” was used.

In this case, the null hypothesis was not rejected when the analysis was completed with regards to gender. The null hypothesis being that there would be no difference between the gender divided groups. Since the analysis revealed a Pearson’s chi-square value within the range of expected values, the researcher did not find that there was a difference between the two groups. Hence the outcome is that the researcher failed to reject the null hypothesis.

On the other hand, the Pearson’s chi square value for ethnicity, SES, and PASS classification was different. In these cases, the Pearson chi square value was higher than the expected range, given the degrees of freedom. Thus, the analysis indicates that there were differences between the groups, hence the null hypothesis (no difference between the groups) is rejected.

The first category where differences between subgroups emerged was ethnicity. Chi square analysis revealed that the difference between ethnic groups answering explicit questions correctly approached significance, but nevertheless, did not meet the threshold required to reject the null hypothesis. However, a significant difference existed between the ethnic groups and their performance on the implicit question. See Table 1 for frequency counts.

Since the researcher rejected the null hypothesis when examining the implicit questions asked by the researcher, it was necessary to look at the frequency with which the implicit questions were answered correctly and incorrectly by each subgroup. This examination revealed that both Black and Latino students answered far fewer implicit questions correctly when compared with their White peers. See Table B2 for frequency counts.

Since the researcher also rejected the null hypothesis with regards to the comprehension questions asked by the researcher regarding SES, it was determined that further analysis was necessary.

A frequency table shows that students who qualified for free or reduced lunch were much less likely to answer the explicit questions or implicit question correctly than their peers who did not qualify for free/reduced lunch. See Tables B3 and B4 for breakdown.

The last area of where the null hypothesis was rejected with regards to the researcher's questions was PASS classification. Thus, an examination of the question types is warranted to determine where the differences lay.

While the breakdown by question type shows that the p-value is approaching a point where the null hypothesis could be rejected for answering explicit questions correctly, it is still within the limits given the probability of .05. In this data set, the researcher rejected the null hypothesis with regards to the answering of implicit questions correctly. An examination of the frequency counts showed that 40% of students rated "not met" on the PASS examination answered the implicit question correctly. Of the students rated as "met", 45% answered the implicit question correctly, while 70% of those rated "exemplary" answered the implicit question correctly. Thus, children's ability to answer the implicit question correctly was more likely if those children were rated as "exemplary". See Table B5 for a breakdown of the ability to answer the implicit question correctly by PASS classification.

After analyzing all variables singularly, the researcher determined that additional information could be collected by examining two variables through the lenses of gender, ethnicity, PASS classification, and SES. In particular, the researcher wanted to examine the demographic

information of groups who selected books above their Lexile range and could answer the researcher generated questions correctly, as well as students who selected a book within their Lexile range but failed to answer the questions correctly.

There were 14 students who chose books that were above their recommended Lexile range and answered all 3 researcher generated questions correctly. Ten of these students were female, while four were male. Eleven of the students were White, one was Black, and two were Latino. Two of the students qualified for free and reduced lunch out of the total number 14. Seven of the students met the standard for passing the PASS English/Language Arts test, while seven of them were rated as exemplary. It is interesting to note that seven of the students were in the “met” category, indicating that these students were not the strongest readers in the sample, yet they were able to answer both explicit and implicit questions on the text. Thus, the students may have had background knowledge that facilitated their comprehension of a more difficult text. Or, perhaps this analysis points out a fallacy in the Lexile values assigned to these students.

For the next analysis, the researcher examined the data to find students who read a book that was below or within their Lexile range, but failed to answer the researcher generated questions correctly. In this case, there were 54 students who met this criteria. An examination of the frequencies showed that 30 of this subset were male, while 24 were female. Twenty-eight of the students were White, 12 were Black, and 14 were Latino. Twenty-four qualified for free/reduced lunch, while 30 did not. With regards to PASS classification, two were classified as “not met”, 17 were rated as “met”, while 35 were rated as “exemplary”. Again, the greatest difference was the one between SES groups.

An analysis determined that when examining data to find students who selected a book at or below their recommended Lexile range who did not answer all three researcher generated

questions correctly, there were 54 students in this subset. The analysis of this subset showed that there were no significant differences in the students in this subset and students in the entire data set with regards to gender, ethnicity, or PASS classification. There was a significant difference when examining this subset through the lens of SES. Given that 31.6% of the sample included students who qualified for free/reduced lunch, one would expect this subset to contain roughly the same percentage of students. In this subset, 44% of the students qualified for free/reduced lunch. This information serves to emphasize the reading difficulties often found in students who come from disadvantaged homes. In this study, they were over-represented in a subset of students who chose books that were either within or below the recommended Lexile range, yet these students could not answer three researcher generated questions correctly.

Research Question 2

What strategies do 5th grade students employ when selecting texts to read independently for free reading? Are those strategies more or less likely to be utilized by students based upon their gender, ethnic group, socio-economic status, or standardized test classification?

To answer the first part of the research question, a frequency table is used to show the popularity in the usage of a variety of strategies. Since students often used more than one strategy, total number is greater than the number of participants. See Table B6 for frequency counts.

To answer the second part of the question, a chi square analysis was performed on each strategy by each subgroup. Groups tended to use similar selection strategies across the board.

Since the only area where differences were revealed was the utilization of book length as a strategy, that strategy will be further examined. See Table B7 for chi-square values.

There was a significant difference in the use of book length as a selection strategy when examining the use of the strategy by ethnicity and SES. A frequency table showed that Black and Latino students were much more likely to utilize the book length as a selection strategy, meaning that those students were more likely to choose a shorter book. See Table B8 for frequency counts.

Chi square analysis also revealed differences between students of differing SES groups with regards to the book length selection strategy. In the cases where book length was used as a strategy, the students chose the book because it had fewer pages than other potential choices. See Table B9 for frequency counts.

Research Question 3

Do students read the books they choose for free reading? Are there differences in the reporting of those who finish by gender, ethnic group, socio-economic status, and standardized test classification?

A frequency count shows that 53 students reported reading their book, while 99 students reported that they did not finish reading their book. Students were counted as book completers if they read 75% of the book or more. Books were issued to students for two weeks.

Breaking the information down by subgroups reveals that there is a difference in the students' self-reporting of completing the reading of their books based upon ethnic group. See Table B10 for the results of the chi square analysis.

Further examination reveals that Black and Latino students were more likely to report reading their books than their White peers. See Table B11 for a frequency table with results.

Conclusion

A number of chi square tests were performed to determine whether there were any differences in the ability to choose books within the appropriate Lexile range. Tests for differences between gender, ethnic groups, socio-economic status, and PASS classification were conducted. In addition to examining the differences for choosing books within Lexile range, the researcher also tested for differences between students' capabilities in answering comprehension questions based upon the book the student selected. Examination of subgroups who either read above their Lexile range and answered all three researcher generated questions correctly or choose books at or below their Lexile ranges and did not answer all of the researcher generated questions was conducted.

Chi square tests were also used to search for differences between the use of the following book selection strategies: reading a passage of the book, reading the book summary, examining the cover, using the title, considering the book length, and considering the font size. Chi square analysis was completed for each strategy and gender, ethnic group, socio-economic status, and PASS classification.

Finally, the categories of gender, ethnic group, socio-economic status, and PASS classification were examined for differences between the subgroups with regards to reading the book that was selected. Areas where differences were found in the data with regards to subgroups will be presented in Chapter 5.

Chapter 5: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

“Primary and elementary school ages are critical periods in the development of reading skill and the formation of lifelong reading habits” (Cullinan, 2000), and allowing students to select their own books for reading is an important part of enhancing the motivation to read. However, students must also be able to select books that are at an appropriate level for them. If the book is too difficult, it will lead to frustration; too little of a challenge will lead to boredom (Routman, 2003). In order to encourage reading growth, it is necessary to match the reader with a book that is within a range of readability for the student. As students age, the skill of independent book selection becomes even more important. Once students leave elementary school, they will not encounter as many teachers who have knowledge in reading instruction (Tennessee Department of Education, 2015). Middle school introduces students to the world of content area teachers. Learning how to choose a book that is at an appropriate level of difficulty is important for 5th graders (Calkins, 2001.)

This study sought to determine the ability of upper elementary level students to select appropriately difficult trade books, the strategies used to select said trade books, and the reported completion of those trade books by students. Each of these criteria was examined by gender, ethnicity, family socio-economic status, and PASS classification. Students’ reading levels were determined by using the fall administration of the Measures of Academic Progress. This computer based test provided a score as well as a corresponding recommended Lexile range. A recom-

mended Lexile range can facilitate the student reading books at a level where he/she will encounter an appropriate level of difficulty for his/her reading skills. Reading at an appropriate level of difficulty is the best way to grow as a reader—with text that's not too hard but not too easy (Calkins, 2001). Findings will be discussed in this chapter.

Findings

Research Question 1 : Do students choose books at the appropriate reading level when the artificial labeling system information is removed? Does this ability to choose appropriate books vary by gender, ethnic group, socio-economic status, or standardized test classification?

The findings of research question 1 revealed that most of these students (73.6 %) failed to make appropriate book choices when leveling systems were not used. This finding was in direct contrast to the study conducted by Kragler and Nolley (1995) where those researchers found that students chose a book at their independent reading level 62% of the time. Students in the Kragler and Nolley study were 4th grade students with reported reading levels between 2nd and 6th grade. However, the class in Kragler and Nolley's study utilized reading workshop within the confines of the classroom. In reading workshop, students are taught to choose books that are just right for them to read during independent reading time. The reading class in the present study utilized basal readers. Students in current study did not regularly practice selecting books for themselves. Thus, the difference in the classroom curricular plans seems to provide one possible explanation for the difference in the success of the students selecting an appropriate book. If educators expect students to read on their own, choosing a book is a skill that needs to be ex-

plicitly taught, regardless of the format used in classroom reading lessons. Systems, such as Accelerated Reader or the current core basal reader programs, circumvent the learning opportunity that can be gained by teaching students how to select a book at an appropriate reading level. When students are in classrooms where basals or classroom novel sets are predominantly used, their opportunity to practice good book selection strategies are limited even further. There was no variation across subgroups with regards to this skill. Students across the various levels of reading proficiency were unable to choose books that were within the recommended Lexile range. Frequency counts show that Latino students were just as likely to choose a book that was above the recommended Lexile range as one that was below or within their Lexile range. This is a strong indicator that these students have not been instructed in how to choose a book suited for them. While some White students and some Black students chose books above their Lexile range, both of these two groups were more likely to choose books below their recommended Lexile level. In selecting books below the Lexile level, these students must have some understanding of text difficulty. If students can choose a book at an appropriate reading level, the likelihood of comprehending that book increases. If a student chooses books that are too difficult for him/her, the likelihood of comprehending that book decreases.

While most students struggled with choosing an appropriately difficult text, students from disadvantaged homes also demonstrated great difficulty with answering questions requiring inferencing skills. When it came to the depth of their comprehension, the abilities of students differed between those from disadvantaged households and those who were not from disadvantaged households. The students varied in their abilities to answer implicit questions. This finding goes hand in hand with Gordon's 1978 study. While Gordon's research showed that students, in gen-

eral, had greater difficulty with implicit questions, those with extensive prior knowledge performed better on the implicit questions than those without such prior knowledge. Prior knowledge grows out of a complex network of social, cultural, and educational experiences. Children from disadvantaged households sometimes lack the benefit of parental interaction and engagement, which was a finding of Hart and Risley (1995). While children from lower income households in the Hart and Risley study experienced fewer positive interactions with their caregivers and were exposed to 30 million fewer spoken words than their middle class peers, these same disadvantaged students continue to be deprived of optimal learning situations in the home. This could compound the effects of the lack of background knowledge. While Gordon's study points out the lack of background knowledge for these students, other researchers question whether students transfer their background knowledge to the text (G. Anderson et al., 1985). Either way, this study supported the difficulty experienced by students from low-income families when answering implicit questions. Lesser amounts of background knowledge are associated with lower reading achievement and with the reduced volume of reading struggling readers engage in (R. Anderson et. al., 1988; A. Cunningham & Stanovich, 1991, 1993)

Given that reading is a transaction between the reader and the text, the reader's prior knowledge directly impacts the learning that comes from the text. Thus, readers who have limited world knowledge to bring to the text are at a disadvantage when it comes to making inferences about the text. This study also showed that the same difference in answering implicit questions was found between ethnic groups. Previous research indicates that low-achieving students from language-minority backgrounds often pursue finishing the task as their primary objective and believe that reading is synonymous with decoding and pronouncing isolated words, regardless of whether they process text in an oral or silent modality (Jimenez et al., 1995, 1996).

While none of the participating students qualified for ELL services within their district, that does not eliminate the possibility that these students spoke Spanish as a first language or speak Spanish in their home. In this study, 27 students had Latino surnames, while 33 students were classified as Latino by the school district. The potential inclusion of students being bilingual is a possible explanation for this finding.

In addition to examining the ability to choose appropriately leveled texts by ethnicity and household socio-economic status, the data were also examined by gender and PASS classification. There was no difference in children's abilities to select appropriate reading material based upon these elements. Thus, girls were just as likely to make poor choices as boys, and students who scored "exemplary" on the state test were just as likely to make poor choices as students who scored "not met". This finding implies that the selection of appropriate reading material is not a matter of comprehension skill but rather a separate skill that should be explicitly taught. Students who are better readers are no more likely to intuitively select an appropriately leveled book than those who are struggling readers. In this case, it appears that children were not taught how to select an appropriate text. Thus, if we want students to read for pleasure, they need to be able to choose books that are appropriate. Neglecting to teach this skill and over-reliance on teacher selected texts fail to help students make appropriate choices for themselves.

Research Question 2: What strategies do 5th grade students employ when selecting texts to read independently for free reading? Are those strategies more or less likely to be utilized by students based upon their gender, ethnic group, socio-economic status, or standardized test classification?

This research verified previous research that students are more likely to use the cover of a book as a selection strategy than any other strategy (Jones, 2007). Use of the cover and the title proved to be the most popular selection strategies in this study. The second tier of strategies, based upon usage popularity, included reading the summary and the book length. Rounding out the bottom of strategies used by students were the font size, reading paragraphs inside the book, and reading chapter headings or subtitles. Since the bottom three strategies required purveying the inside of the book, many students made their selections without opening the book. Thus, in an effort to promote the selection of books based upon selecting a book appropriate for the reader, students should be encouraged to make book selections based upon the inside of the book as well as the outside.

Given students' reliance on external book features, it is no surprise that the only difference in book selection strategies came from using book length as a reason for choosing a book. This was the only strategy where there was a significant difference in usage within subgroups. Struggling readers were more likely to choose a book that was short in length. This strategy was utilized significantly more often by minority students and low SES students. In this study, the minority students and students from low-income families tended to be less capable readers. Swartz and Hendricks's study (2000) focused on students with special needs, and those students also chose books based upon the length of the book. The current research extends this finding. While some students might select a shorter book because they don't like to read, using the book length is not a strategy that should be dismissed as superficial. Readers may view shorter books as those that fit their capabilities or reading stamina. Since Black and Latino students were more likely to report using a book's length as a selection strategy, perhaps the selection of the shorter books translated into the ability to finish selected books.

Students' strategies for choosing a book (book cover, book title, font size, book length, book summaries, reading paragraphs, and chapter titles or headings) were examined through the lenses of gender, ethnicity, socio-economic status, and PASS classification. While there was a difference in the usage of book length as a selection strategy by ethnicity, there were no significant differences between groups regarding use of the other strategies. Students were all just as likely to use other strategies as their peers. This finding continues to highlight the likelihood that these students had not yet acquired book selection strategies. Learning how to choose a book of appropriate difficulty is a key component to promoting choice as a motivator. If teachers want students to choose to read, they must give them the skills to choose an appropriate book.

Research Question 3: Do students read the books they choose for free reading? Are there differences in the reporting of those who finish by gender, ethnic group, socio-economic status, and standardized test classification?

With regards to reading their selected books, Black and Latino students reported finishing their books significantly more often than their White peers. An explanation for this finding is the books selected by Black and Latino students. These students were more likely to choose shorter books, thus allowing them to finish their books within the allotted time.

Another potential reason for the reporting of reading books could be how students define reading. If students skimmed the book without putting forth the effort to actually read the book, that would impact how much they understood about the text as well as the student believing he or she finished reading the book. Furthermore, if students only skimmed the book, that could be an alternate explanation for missing the implicit questions asked by the researcher. If students

aren't making inferences and drawing conclusions while they read, this could impair their ability to comprehend the text on a deeper level.

Applications for Practice

This study clearly showed that these upper elementary students did not typically use selection strategies that led them to make appropriately challenging selections when artificial leveling systems are not used. While students did not show skill in selecting books that appropriately challenging, most students choose books that were at their independent level, as opposed to their frustration level. Teachers, especially those who utilize basal readers or literature anthologies in their classrooms, should explicitly teach students how to select books for their independent reading, especially if the goal is for students to choose books that will push students as readers. Teachers should also promote strategies beyond the cover art and title of the book. While a cover may provide some visual clues about the book, they are generally used as mini-marketing posters to encourage buyers to purchase the book (Kies, 1995). While the cover may capture the reader's attention, it is necessary to delve into the book in order for a student to determine whether it is a good fit for his/her reading level.

Questions for Further Research

Further research could be conducted on several arenas explored in this study. First and foremost, does explicit instruction in book selection lead to appropriate book choices for students? A further line of study could explore whether acquiring book selection strategies leads to further book completion and perhaps even greater academic achievement. More directly, can

students learn book selection strategies to use when choosing their own books for independent reading? Does teaching book strategy selection increase the amount of independent reading? The findings of the current study are important for all teachers, but especially for those who are utilizing basal readers in their classrooms. Since many students used strategies that did not involve opening the book, the first step may well be to focus on encouraging the students to open the book to make the most informed choice. Choice is one of the most motivating factors for students in school (Gambrell, 1996; Fisher & Frey, 2012), but students must be taught to make thoughtful choices regarding book selection.

Secondly, additional research is needed on how to ensure that all students understand the complexity of implicit questions and how those questions are answered. Given that the results of this study showed that minority students and economically disadvantaged students were much less likely to answer implicit questions correctly, it is critical that teachers model and provide practice in answering implicit questions. The critical thinking required in answering implicit questions is crucial to the development of strong readers. When students read only for surface level knowledge, they are missing key components in the material. Only by teaching students how to think more deeply about the text can teachers ensure student comprehension of the text.

Finally, the issue of background knowledge among children from low socioeconomic homes was seen as a possible impairment for the students' poor performance in answering implicit questions. Since reading comprehension relies on the reader making inferences while reading (R. Anderson et al., 1984), which often requires background knowledge, additional research is necessary to determine ways to increase the amount of background knowledge students have and whether students utilize that background knowledge when answering implicit questions. Given that so few students reported reading the texts they chose for this study, it is possible that

their level of prior knowledge was low because of a general low reading volume. In a review of the literature, Lewis and Samuels (2005) found that 45 of 49 studies suggested that increased volume of reading caused improvement in reading. If these students, or any students, are not reading enough, it is only natural that their level of prior knowledge would be lower overall. Other studies indicate that wide reading is an antidote to insufficient amounts of background knowledge. A. Stanovich and A. Cunningham's work (1993) found that the differences in the exposure to information accounts for significant differences in knowledge held by those individuals. This is the crux of the argument for wide reading. If students read widely, they will gain more knowledge about a variety of topics. In turn, students can use this information to support the learning of additional information.

Another potential target for research revolves around data that were not explicitly collected during the study, but a trend that was noticed. Many times the students reported not reading their selected book from the study because they were reading an Accelerated Reader book. Students reported this finding with tones of exasperation and disappointment. Further research could examine the impact of Accelerated Reader on the motivation to read. After all, if teachers are sacrificing the desire to read at the altar of accountability for reading, they are not encouraging lifelong reading. Furthermore, Accelerated Reader puts limits on the choices students can make because the library must have a test for the book in order for the book to even be in the realm of choice for the student. Thus, students are limited by the librarian's selection of tests and how many tests the library can afford to purchase. Choice should be a motivating factor for students; however, a trip to the library in many schools does not equate to choosing a book that students want to read. In schools using AR, the barriers to choice include book selection based upon the availability of a test and the assigned reading level given to the student. Students may

see a library full of books, but being able to choose from any of them is too often an illusion. Students have limited choices when Accelerated Reader or other leveling programs are used.

Another potential research question that arose from this study concerned Accelerated Reader tests and genre. Given the predominant use of AR in elementary schools, it would be interesting to know how many of the tests in various schools correspond with non-fiction texts, especially considering the importance of non-fiction reading and wide reading in the development of background knowledge. For some students, books checked out from the school and classroom libraries are the only texts they can access. If the school doesn't have an array of non-fiction tests in their Accelerated Reading library, then those students do not have the opportunity to check out many non-fiction texts, especially when many librarians and teachers have rules about what a student is allowed to check out with regards to Accelerated Reader books. In some schools, students are only allowed to check out books that fall within the Lexile range to which they are assigned. Thus, if a student wants to read a new book in a series, but that series is deemed "too easy" for them based upon his or her Lexile range, the student is not allowed to check out the book. Additionally, if a student has a strong interest in rocks and minerals, but the book they want to check out on that topic is deemed too difficult for him or her based upon the Lexile range assigned to the child, then the student is denied the opportunity to check out that book as well. Similarly, if the school does not have an Accelerated Reader test on the Civil War book that the student wants to check out, the student cannot check that book out either.

Limitations of the Study

While this study allowed the researcher to answer several questions regarding the reading habits of upper elementary level students, it is not without limitations. First of all, the population

was not as diverse as the researcher had hoped. While hoping to have large enough groups to compare, the number of students who participated who lived in homes that were socioeconomically disadvantaged was smaller than anticipated. Secondly, even though the researcher attempted to compile a library of titles that were not series books in an effort to prevent students from choosing a book because it was familiar (and thus did not require the students to utilize book selection strategies), the prevalence of series books prevented that from happening. Thus, some students selected their book because of the familiarity.

Another limitation can be attributed to the researcher's decision to use Lexiles as the guideline for appropriate book selection. Conversations with employees at Metametrics revealed that the Lexile ranking for the child is deemed acceptable if the child can answer 75% of the comprehension questions about a text. Based on the guidelines for most informal reading inventories and Fountas and Pinnell's leveled reading system, the 75% benchmark is too low. In general, mastery is considered 80%. A recent announcement by Metametrics revealed that they are shifting the numeric range assigned to students upward, meaning students will be expected to read more difficult texts (Metametrics, 2014). This shift will likely result in students dropping even further away from the recommended 80% mastery. Given the pseudo-success students generally have on Reading Counts tests, the researcher is unconvinced that this will lead to greater reading comprehension students demonstrate on the tests, thus negatively impacting reading achievement.

Additionally, while the researcher enlisted another professional to vet the implicit questions she constructed from each book, she relied on her own professional judgment when constructing explicit questions.

Summary

In this study, students generally did not select texts of an appropriate level of difficulty when it came to their free reading selections. The researcher conducted this study with 5th graders in a large metropolitan school district in the southeastern United States. Data were collected from 155 students in a single school. The researcher analyzed the data using chi square to compare how groups varied or did not vary with regards to appropriate book selection, strategy utilization, and the reading of the books. Students from economically disadvantaged homes and minority students were less likely to answer implicit questions about the selected text correctly. Students from economically disadvantaged homes were also less likely to answer explicit questions correctly. Studies by G. Anderson et al (1985), Bristow (1985), and Kibby (1995) showed that less able readers chose books of greater difficulty. The Latino students in the current study also exhibited this. Explanations for this finding could include speaking Spanish as a first language, wanting to appear as a stronger reader, or any other obstacles encountered due to ethnicity. The Hiebert et al. (1990) study, however, indicated that the reverse was true. In their study, less able readers chose easier books. In this study, the White and Black students were more likely to choose easier books. They were also more likely to choose appropriate books.

No particular selection strategy proved to be the harbinger for choosing a book within the appropriate parameters. Only one strategy had any difference amongst the subgroups. Students from ethnic minorities and those from low SES households were more likely to choose a book based upon its length. Books that were chosen by those from low SES households and ethnic minorities were shorter, as defined by the student. With regards to reading the books, students who were Black or Latino reported reading their books with significantly greater frequency than

their White peers. However, the majority (99 out of 152) of the total students asked reported not reading their books.

As teachers, the most important habit we can instill in students is the act of reading. As students age through the school system, it is crucial that they learn how to choose a book that is appropriate for them. Teachers in primary grades often talk to students about the “Goldilocks” rule as a guide to selecting appropriate books to read. However, as students get older, less attention is paid to choosing an appropriately leveled text. By the time students reach middle school, they will not likely encounter a teacher who has a background in reading instruction. It will be up to the student to know which books are appropriate choices for him/her. It will be up to the student to know which strategies will aid him or her in choosing an appropriate book. By choosing an appropriate book, the student has the best chance of both being able to read the text and be challenged enough to prevent boredom. This is a key component to increasing reading volume, and thereby, reading achievement.

The need for accuracy in choosing books of an appropriate level of difficulty is an important part of reading development. If students have that skill set, it will enhance their ability as readers, which in turn, could impact their reading achievement. If teachers wish to grow students as readers, it is essential to empower students with the skills for selecting an appropriate text.

Without the skills to select an appropriate text, especially if that text is too difficult, student’s motivation may be hampered. Given that choice is a motivating factor for students, consistently choosing books that are too difficult for them to read will not increase motivation. Simply teaching them a strategy, such as the five finger rule, could have a large impact on consistently directing students to books they are capable of reading, thus increasing their motivation

to read. In addition to affecting motivation, this same skill would add to a student's sense of self-efficacy. Having the mental tools and opportunities to select an appropriate text would lead to greater self-efficacy as readers. Thus, as students select books they can read, they are more likely to read those books which, in turn, facilitates more reading. If the books they choose are too difficult, it is likely that students will become disenfranchised with reading. By teaching students to select appropriate texts, the goal is to get a text that the student can read and wants to read into his or her hands. This is important for the sake of engagement. Students who consistently chose texts that are too difficult for them to read cannot be engaged in the texts since they cannot read them. Thus the trifecta of motivation, self-efficacy, and engagement intertwine to create the necessary components of text selection. Students need to have choice in reading material for motivation. They need to have self-efficacy in choosing an appropriate text. Readers also need to be engaged in the text they have selected. These three factors cannot be completely handled by readers if they are not capable of choosing texts they can read.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

Samples of Questions

If You Lived Here: Houses of the World by Giles Laroche
p. 17-18

1. How are the walls build to withstand earthquakes? (explicit)
2. Where were these houses found? (explicit)
3. Why would you not build this kind of house in the United States? (implicit)

Last Laughs: Animal Epitaphs by J. Patrick Lewis and Jane Yolen
p. 23-24, 29-30

1. What is funny about the inclusion of the words butterfly, breast, and back in the porpoise's epitaph? (explicit)
2. How did the iguana die? (explicit)
3. Why is the title "Hasta Mañana" appropriate for the iguana? (implicit)

Extreme Machines by Christopher Maynard
p. 28-31

1. Why is hydroplaning dangerous? (explicit)
2. Why is the spray called a rooster tail? (implicit)
3. What type of engine powers the hydroplane? (explicit)

The Yearling by Patricia Reilly Giff and Marjorie Kennan Rawlings
p. 181-182

1. Why were there no rags in the Baxter household? (implicit)
2. Why are they going to the bee-tree? (explicit)
3. Where does he leave Penny the fawn? (explicit)

Ice Island by Sherry Shahan
p.74-78

1. Why is the snow outside of town clean and white? (implicit)
2. What does Tatum's father give her to drink? (explicit)
3. Who surprises Tatum? (explicit)

Wayside School Gets a Little Stranger by Louis Sachar and Adam McCauley
p. 82-87

1. What did Miss Drazill do to Louis? (explicit)
2. How old is Louis now? (explicit)
3. Why are Louis's nails dirty? (implicit)

Appendix B

Tables

Table B1: Frequency of Students by Ethnic Group Who Answered Questions

Ethnicity	Total Number of Students	Answered 0 Questions Correctly	Answered 1 Question Correctly	Answered 2 Questions Correctly	Answered 3 Questions Correctly
White(non-Latino)	86	2 (2.33%)	3 (3.49%)	34 (39.53%)	47 (54.65%)
Black	25	2 (8.00%)	6 (24.00%)	12 (48.00%)	5 (20.00%)
Latino	31	4 (12.90%)	10 (32.26%)	10 (32.26%)	7 (22.58%)

Table B2: Frequency of Answers to Implicit Question by Ethnic Group

Ethnicity	Number of Students	Answered Implicit Question Correctly	Answered Implicit Question Incorrectly
White	90	67 (74.44%)	23 (25.56%)
Black	25	12 (48.00%)	13 (52.00%)
Latino	31	10 (32.26%)	21 (67.74%)

Table B3: Frequency of Students Answering Explicit Question Correctly/Incorrectly by SES

SES Status	Number of Students	Answered 0 questions correctly	Answered 1 question correctly	Answered 2 questions correctly
Received free/reduced lunch	43	7 (16.28%)	12 (27.91%)	24 (55.81%)
Did not receive free/reduced lunch	95	3 (3.16%)	26 (27.37%)	66 (69.47%)

Table B4: Frequency of Students Answering Implicit Question Correctly/Incorrectly by SES

SES Status	Number of Students	Answered Implicit Question Correctly	Answered Implicit Question Incorrectly
Qualified for Free/Reduced Lunch	44	8 (18.18%)	36 (81.82%)
Did Not Qualify for Free/Reduced Lunch	98	77 (78.57%)	21 (21.43%)

Table B5: Implicit Questions Answered by PASS Classification

PASS Classification	Answered Implicit Question Correctly	Answered Implicit Question Incorrectly
Did not meet standard	4 (40%)	6 (60%)
Met standard	23 (45%)	26 (55%)
Exemplary	58 (70%)	25 (30%)

Table B6: Frequency of Strategies Used by Students

Strategy	Reported Number of Times Used
Cover	130
Title	123
Read summary	41
Length of book	38
Font size	27
Read chapter headings or subtitles	17
Read paragraphs inside the book	17

Table B7: Strategy Use by Subgroup

	Pearson's Chi Square Value	Df	Outcome
Cover/gender	0.522	1	failed to reject
Cover/ethnicity	3.195	2	failed to reject
Cover/SES	3.121	1	failed to reject
Cover/PASS	1.553	2	failed to reject
Title/gender	0.378	1	failed to reject
Title/ethnicity	6.767	2	failed to reject
Title/SES	0.538	1	failed to reject
Title/PASS	0.616	2	failed to reject
Summary/gender	5.488	1	failed to reject
Summary/ethnicity	2.724	2	failed to reject
Summary/SES	5.230	1	failed to reject
Summary/PASS	0.592	2	failed to reject
Book length/gender	0.563	1	failed to reject
Book length/ethnicity	19.962	2	Reject
Book length/SES	13.764	1	Reject
Book length/PASS	0.903	2	failed to reject
Font size/gender	0.679	1	failed to reject
Font size/ethnicity	6.207	2	failed to reject
Font size/SES	0.712	1	failed to reject
Font size/PASS	10.636	2	failed to reject
Read chapter titles or subtitles/gender	2.045	1	failed to reject
Read chapter titles or subtitles/ethnicity	4.773	2	failed to reject

Table B7 Continued

	Pearson's Chi Square Value	Df	Outcome
Read chapter titles or subtitles/SES	1.405	1	failed to reject
Read chapter titles or subtitles/PASS	5.279	2	failed to reject
Read paragraphs/ gender	2.571	1	failed to reject
Read paragraphs/ ethnicity	0.739	2	failed to reject
Read paragraphs/ SES	2.835	1	failed to reject
Read paragraphs/ PASS	2.931	2	failed to reject

Table B8: Frequency of Book Length Use as Strategy by Ethnic Group

Ethnicity	Number of students	Used book length as a selection strategy	Did not use book length as a selection strategy
White	94	12 (12.77%)	82 (87.23%)
Black	27	13 (48.15%)	14 (51.85%)
Latino	31	13 (41.94%)	18 (58.06%)

Table B9: Frequency of Book Length Used as a Strategy by SES

SES status	Number of students	Used book length as a selection strategy	Did not use book length as a selection strategy
Qualified for free/reduced lunch	45	20 (44.44%)	25 (55.56%)
Did not qualify for free/reduced lunch	101	17 (16.83%)	84 (83.17%)

Table B10: Chi Square Analysis of Book Completer Status

	Pearson's chi square value	Df	Outcome
Gender	0.005	1	failed to reject
Ethnicity	6.119	2	Reject
SES	2.854	1	failed to reject
Pass classification	0.791	2	failed to reject

Table B11: Frequency of Book Completers by Ethnic Group

Ethnicity	Number of students	Reported they read the book	Reported they did not read the book
White	93	27 (29.03%)	66 (70.97%)
Black	27	9 (33.33%)	18 (66.67%)
Latino	32	17 (53.13%)	15 (46.87%)

VITA

Janelle Dugger Bouknight was born in Tennessee. After graduating from high school in Reserve, Louisiana, she attend the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. She graduated from the University of Tennessee, Knoxville with a Bachelor of Arts degree in history with a minor in secondary education in 1993. In the summer of 1995, she attended Carson Newman College to pursue the coursework necessary to gain certification in elementary education. In 1998, she was awarded a Master of Science degree in education from the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. She spent 15 years working as a middle school and high school teacher for a local school system. In 2008, she entered the Graduate School at the University of Tennessee again; this time, to pursue her doctorate of philosophy degree in education. Currently, she is employed by the University of Houston, Victoria.