

2017

The Impact of a Close Reading Approach on the Comprehension Level of English I Students at Wavers High School

Tina Marie Janus
University of South Carolina

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The Impact of a Close Reading Approach on the Comprehension Level of English I
Students at Wavers High School

by

Tina Marie Janus

Bachelor of Arts
Winthrop University, 2005

Master of Education
University of South Carolina, 2014

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of Doctor of Education in

Curriculum and Instruction

College of Education

University of South Carolina

2017

Accepted by:

James Kirylo, Major Professor

Rhonda Jeffries, Committee Member

Yasha Becton, Committee Member

Doyle Stevick, Committee Member

Cheryl L. Addy, Vice Provost and Dean of the Graduate School

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Dedication

I would like to dedicate this dissertation to my family for their support in my completion of this important milestone in my life. Thank you to my husband who completely understood this process, and who lived in chaos with me for several years. I would also like to thank my children for inspiring me by the miracle of their births to seek a better life for them, and in the process, my life was blessed. Special thanks to my granddaughters, Mae, Maya, Sienna, and Naomi who constantly remind me that fairy tales are real, superheroes exist, and play is essential to a person's soul. My children and grandchildren (including those yet to come) inspire me to leave a legacy illustrating that hard work and determination crushes all barriers. Lastly, I want to share one of my favorite quotes that encouraged me to persevere my whole life...

“Ah, but a man's reach should exceed his grasp, or what's a heaven for?”

-Robert Browning

Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge Dr. James Kirylo for his wise advice and supportive demeanor as I pursued the highest degree in the field of education. With his guidance, I not only finished the last trek of my journey, but will continue to walk as a renewed teacher-practitioner honing my craft. Thank you to the committee members, Dr. Rhonda Jeffries, Dr. Yasha Becton, and Dr. Doyle Stevick for their thoughtful consideration of my work. I would also like to recognize posthumously two former teachers who helped me to overcome the challenging obstacles in my young life by meeting my needs both emotionally and intellectually. To my first-grade teacher, Mrs. Gaither, your much-needed hug each day reminds me to be compassionate towards my students and still be empathetic in my daily interactions with them. To my eighth-grade history teacher, Ms. Sargis, your unrelenting high standards taught me to never accept anything less than my best effort. Your example reminds me to respect my students by seeing their potential rather than their circumstance. You walk with me each day as I step into my classroom.

Abstract

The purpose of this study was to examine the impact a close reading approach had on the reading comprehension levels of twelve English I students. Studies in literacy theory have suggested that students' reading comprehension levels improve with the use of reading strategies. As part of a larger body of research concerning reading instruction for secondary students, there is a need for older readers to learn comprehension strategies specific to reading content subject matter (Shanahan & Shanahan, 2015; Duke & Martin, 2015; Ness, 2007). Using a mixed-methods approach, the data collection consisted of pretest/posttest instruments, field observations, existing records, surveys, and exit interviews. The results of the study show that the participants' comprehension levels were positively influenced when the participants received instruction in the use of a close reading approach, thus confirming the researcher's hypothesis that the close reading approach would improve the participants' comprehension. Additional findings revealed that students who have a negative perception of reading and who read less are more likely to struggle with comprehension. However, it appears that the close reading approach improved the participants' metacognitive awareness, which may account for their overall improved reading achievement from pretest to posttest results. This study confirmed that content area teachers can influence reading outcomes when explicit instruction in a close reading approach is implemented in content area classrooms.

Keywords: close reading approach, comprehension, content teachers, content literacy, reading, metacognitive awareness, Gradual Release of Responsibility.

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List of Abbreviations

EBRI	Evidence-Based Reading Instruction
ELL	English Language Learner
GRRF	Gradual Release of Responsibility Framework
MAP	Measures of Academic Progress
NRP	National Reading Panel
NWEA.....	Northwest Evaluation Association
PLC	Professional Learning Community
SSR	Silent Sustained Reading
WIDA.....	World-class Instructional Design and Assessment

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

In most high school content area classrooms across the United States, the teachers' main learning objective for their students is for them to acquire knowledge of a particular content (e.g., American history). It is uncommon that secondary teachers also plan targeted reading instruction in addition to subject area goals. Reading instructional support in the content classroom usually consists of students being shown how to use graphic organizers and reading guides (Ness, 2007). Unfortunately, content teachers often assume that students enter their classroom prepared with the foundational reading skills to work and study in the content areas. However, this is usually not the rule, but the exception. Many students are unable to read productively, and such reading is critical to developing knowledge in the content areas.

Despite the complexity of reading acquisition in general, literacy experts believe that complexity of the texts involved in each content area contributes to the students' inability to understand subject matter materials. Secondary students have difficulty reading content subject matter due to the specialized texts that are used in content curricula (Shanahan & Shanahan, 2015). These texts are mainly informational textbooks and/or documents relating to specific subject matter, which includes domain-specific vocabulary (Short, Lynch-Brown, & Tomlinson, 2014). Students with little experience reading for information are at a disadvantage when they encounter a content text and cannot understand it. They need specific reading strategies that support more productive

reading of content-specific texts (Shanahan & Shanahan, 2015). Reading for information, specifically acquisition of content knowledge, requires the student to know how to implement correct comprehension strategies for each required reading.

Consequently, content reading is not an easy task for students if they do not know how to self-monitor by applying comprehension strategies while reading. Progress is hindered due to a lack of reading competence caused by limited comprehension. Harvey and Daniels (2009) emphasized that reading comprehension should be viewed as a readers' ability to advance their thinking processes while reading. Older readers who struggle while reading often have difficulty monitoring their thinking process and must be taught strategies that foster deeper comprehension of a text. For this reason, they need instruction not only on multiple reading strategies, but also how to employ them independently while engaging with a text. A key aspect of self-monitoring as one reads is the awareness to stop reading when comprehension has broken-down (Beers, 2003). A student must be able to identify when they no longer understand what they are reading and respond to this problem with a reading strategy that repairs their comprehension. This is especially important when students are reading in the content areas and have less experience with content area of texts. Almasi and Hart (2015) stated that it is critical that older students self-monitor while reading so they can make meaning of instruction in content subjects. Without the ability to read with understanding, secondary students do not academically progress. This creates a difficult instructional environment for the teacher and a less productive academic experience for the students.

Problem of Practice

The overarching concern of this study is the researcher's English I students' inability to comprehend content area readings sufficiently resulting in less productive gains in content knowledge. More specifically, this study examines the effect that a close reading approach will have on the comprehension level of 12 English I students. The researcher was concerned when students showed poor performance on both written and verbal assessments. For example, students could not answer reader response questions with accuracy when assigned a reading with comprehension questions. They had difficulty recalling what they read and performing critical analyses when assigned written work. Their performance on both informal and formal assessments illustrated they did not have a deep understanding of the text. Likewise, when the students were verbally questioned during informal assessments, they could not recall key information based on their readings. This pattern of comprehension difficulties was present for both fiction and non-fiction texts. Although, the researcher is aware that there are many reasons for poor performance in an academic setting, this study is framed in reading theory due to the teacher researchers' premise that the students' inability to learn content knowledge was caused by poor comprehension of content reading materials. Therefore, a variety of research-based practices were initially implemented to combat this problem.

For example, the researcher created an expansive classroom library for students to have easy access to pleasurable reading of both fiction and non-fiction texts and provided daily independent reading time. Research shows that children who regularly read become more proficient readers. According to a 2002 study performed by the Organization for Economic Co-Operation and Development, which spanned thirty-four countries and

included a sample size of 250,000 fifteen-year-olds, those students who spent the most time reading, excelled in reading. Their findings also surpassed income barriers for all children (Trelease, 2014). Additionally, the researcher provided read aloud experiences for the students. The main objective was to choose interesting stories that would motivate students to read for pleasure and to choose informational texts that would build background knowledge for future reading in the content areas (Allen, 2000). Lastly, the students received direct instruction on how readers make meaning and repair their comprehension while reading (Amasi & Hart, 2015). Unfortunately, while these initial approaches to reading instruction sparked a greater interest in reading for pleasure in some students, they did not measurably improve the students' comprehension skills. Their continued lack of progress on verbal and written reader response questions showed that students need reading instruction that offers a strategic approach to deeper reading.

Research Question

What impact will a close reading approach have on the comprehension level of 12 English I students.

For purposes of this study, the close reading approach was a hybrid set of steps developed by several theorists in the field of literacy. In step one, students engaged in multiple readings of a short text. In step two, students identified and defined unknown vocabulary words in the text. During step three, the students continued self-monitoring their comprehension by chunking the text into smaller increments of specific foci regardless of the pre-established paragraphs or stanzas. In step four, the students made meaning of what they read by summarizing each chunk of information (Shanahan, 2017; Blachowicz & Fisher, 2015; Saccomanno & College, 2014; Brown & Knappes, 2012;

Beers, 2003). Additionally, instructional delivery of a close reading approach was implemented using Fischer and Frey's (2014) Gradual Release of Responsibility Framework (GRRF) (see definition of terms). Instruction took place in four cycles: direct instruction and modeling, whole group instruction, small group instruction, and independent work.

Hypothesis

The close reading approach will have a positive impact on the comprehension level of 12 English I students' reading comprehension.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to examine the impact of a close reading approach on the comprehension level of twelve English I students.

Brief Overview of the Methodology

Action research as a means of improving classroom instruction and assessment fits perfectly with a teacher's desire to understand and modify one's own practices (Mertler, 2014). This involves choosing a specific problem of practice and providing a thorough examination of it (Butin, 2010). Upon completion of an action research study, the teacher researcher makes data-driven decisions to improve his or her instructional practices (Dana & Yendel-Yoppy, 2014). Therefore, using action research to examine the impact of a close reading approach on the comprehension level of twelve English I students is called for. This action research study will be executed using a mixed-methods design. The combination of quantitative and qualitative data in this study allows the teacher researcher to use the students' assessment scores to measure student achievement, while qualitative data measures the students' perceptions and beliefs concerning the

validity of a close reading approach as a reading strategy. The quantitative data collection consisted of a pretest/posttest using a grade level text and reader response questions. All qualitative data was collected in the following forms: field observations, existing records, surveys, and exit interview (Mertler, 2014).

The setting of this study is a high school in the central Piedmont region of South Carolina with a population of approximately 2000 students with an average class size of 30 ninth grade students per English I classroom. The specific setting of this study is an English I classroom with a population of diverse learners between the ages of thirteen and sixteen years old. The students in this study range from lower middle school to beyond high school reading levels as ascertained by their Measures of Progress (MAP) reading assessment. There are seven females and five males. Two of the students are English Language Learners (ELLs) who score on the proficiency reading level as determined by their World-class Instructional Design and Assessment (WIDA) scores. The study took place over an eight-week period.

The action research began with the teacher researcher giving the students a reading interest inventory to establish the students' views on reading and what strategies they employ while reading. Then the students were given a pretest to complete. The pretest was composed of eight reader response questions based on the text, *The Gettysburg Address*. The researcher began the instruction of the close reading approach using the GRRF (see term definitions) to teach the twelve English I students how to implement the four steps of a self-monitoring comprehension strategy called a close reading approach. After experiencing the close reading approach through teacher modeling and subsequent whole, small, and independent groupings, the students

completed surveys. The researcher conducted observations and recorded field notes concerning the students' perceptions and actions while learning and practicing a close reading approach. The study concluded with a posttest and a culminating exit interview.

Significance of the Study

This study will contribute to the growing body of literature concerning secondary reading instruction in the content area classroom. This study is significant because it examines whether this is a correlation between content teachers providing reading instruction and student achievement in content knowledge acquisition. According to the United States Department of Education Report (2012), evidence-based reading instruction (EBRI) in the content areas should focus on teaching students the reading strategies they need to make meaning of content area texts rather than focusing solely on teaching content mastery. Therefore, it is crucial to study the impact of reading instruction being executed in a content area classroom because many content teachers view themselves as teachers of content only (Ness, 2007). The researcher concurs that students need to be proficient in reading content subject matter to gain content knowledge. From anecdotal experience, this researcher has concluded that students who are unable to fully understand English I readings are also unable to master content knowledge. A critical problem of practice for content teachers is meeting the needs of struggling readers, while also teaching content knowledge.

When students' are unable to read proficiently, it impedes the teacher's use of complex texts, which research has shown enables students to reach higher learning goals. Fisher and Frey (2015) contend that students who are only given texts that match their reading level are unable to build a knowledge base necessary for advancement in the

subject areas: “Secondary students need complex texts, and they need to be adequately supported to understand them” (p. 153). Rather than lowering the reading level of the texts, which will negatively affect their academic performance in English I and hinder their advancement into higher content area classrooms, secondary students need a comprehension aid that guides deeper comprehension and allows critical thinking skills to flourish. This study will give pertinent information about how instructing students in a self-monitoring reading strategy called a close reading approach will change their ability to comprehend required grade-level texts.

Summary of the Findings

The findings of this study show that the close reading approach positively affected the comprehension levels of the twelve English I students in this study. There was an overall increase in the students’ comprehension levels, which was represented in a 32% overall gain between the pretest/posttest instruments. Likewise, each leveled reading group showed an average increase between 14% - 50% from pretest/posttest results, indicating that the close reading approach is a reading strategy that improved the study participants’ comprehension levels regardless of initial reading levels. The findings show that secondary students benefit from targeted reading instruction in the content area classroom. Furthermore, the findings also showed a relationship between reading instruction and metacognitive development. The students’ metacognitive awareness was enhanced when taught a close reading approach that promoted self-monitoring while reading strategies. Therefore, content area teachers can use a close reading approach to aid their students’ comprehension level of subject materials if better comprehension is

needed. These findings point to the close reading approach as having a positive impact on the comprehension levels of twelve English I students.

Limitations of this Study

As with any study of classroom practices that involves students, there will be variables that cannot be controlled such as full student participation and/or absences that affect learning. The choice of participants was limited to students who returned permission slips on time and those who have demonstrated a stronger work ethic. Within this subgroup of possible candidates, the researcher chose students who were diverse in reading level, ethnicity, and gender. Once the study began, one student failed to complete assignments and attendance was sporadic; therefore, another student was chosen to take his place to keep continuity between the numbers in the leveled reading groups. The researcher kept a locus of control over the data collection and analysis due to the smaller sample size choice (*N=12*). More studies are needed to generalize these results over a larger population.

Dissertation Overview

This dissertation is formatted with Chapter One having an introduction that contextualizes the study and highlights its research question, purpose, and significance. Chapter Two is a review of the related literature concerning literacy theory because it is the framework upon which the close reading approach will be discussed. It is necessary to view this study in relation to past and current reading research since its focus is concerned with reading instruction. The methodology of the study is presented in Chapter Three. It gives specific information on how the study was implemented such as data collection and analysis. In Chapter Five, the findings of the study are revealed and

interpreted. Chapter Five concerns the implications for future examination of a close reading approach and an action plan for further study. There is also a plan for sharing the findings with interested stakeholders.

Definition of Terms

Gradual Release of Responsibility Framework. This is an instructional framework developed by Douglas Fischer and Nancy Frey. The instructor teaches curriculum using four phases of instruction: *I do it* is the teacher modeling using direct instruction, *We do it* is the students and teacher working together in a large group setting, *You do it together* is the students working in collaborative groups, and *You do it alone* is when the students work individually (Fischer & Frey, 2014a).

Emergent literacy. This is the time between birth and approximately third grade when a child can read and write using the conventions of language (Tracey & Morrow, 2015).

Metacognitive awareness. Part of metacognition, it is one's understanding that optimal learning occurs when one uses self-regulating controls to influence optimal results in learning (Minguela, Sole, & Pieschl, 2015).

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Learning Theories and Reading

In his analysis of the reading brain, Wolf (2007) stated that the human brain was not designed to read. Unlike speaking and vision, reading is not built into human DNA. The innate qualities of language and vision do not extend to reading (Olson & Gayan, 2002). Though children can speak words, they have very little meaning without association (Jensen, 1998). In fact, when humans began reading symbols, a product of the earliest forms of writing, the brain was restructured to accommodate this new behavior (Wolf, 2007). If the early human brain successfully adapted and reorganized itself to the process of reading, then improving reading ability is also conditioned into the miraculous workings of the human brain. The brain is capable of reading, but questions of how children learn to read and the best conditions for learning to read is fuel for research.

For decades, theoretical understanding concerning how children learn best have provided frameworks for learning. These learning theories have influenced educational practices in all discipline areas. One theory that acknowledges a child's importance in the learning process, aptly named a child-centered approach, gained momentum from around the 1700s and continues to influence current instructional practices. Tracey and Morrow (2017) stated the key part of a child-centered model in an educational setting is the view that learning is motivated by a child's sense of wonder. They further explain that it was learning theorists like Rousseau, Pestalozzi, and Frobel that conceptualized play and

natural curiosity as the source of learning opportunities for children. Dewey, another educational reformer, focused his attention on how learning proceeds with instruction to achieve mastery.

However, Dewey (1916) promoted a problem-based approach to learning. He claimed that for learning to take place, a child needs to confront a problem within the context of the child's real-world experiences, ones that can be solved through trial and error, much like those of a scientist's work. He believed that contextual settings provide the best curriculum for true learning. He elaborated, "They [problems] give the pupils something to do, not something to learn: and the doing is of such a nature as to demand thinking, or the intentional noting of connections; natural learning naturally happens" (p. 148). His concern encompassed how to approach subject matter instruction in any curriculum design.

Parting from Dewey's view that children learn through testing barriers without restraint, Montessori (2010) argued against children learning through problem-solving. Instead, children need direct language that is devoid of complicated words that direct them to the discovery of correct conclusions. From her perspective, Montessori contended that learning happens when students are given explicit modeling by the teacher illustrating the exact answers, which gives the child opportunity to learn without confusion. Furthermore, if the student does not understand it, it is a futile effort to continue in his or her confusion. The teacher and child move on to another lesson; otherwise its continuance would impede natural learning. Dewey's (1916) opposition to the Montessori method was that children were being taught from the intellectualism of adults rather than from their own experiences with materials.

More in line with Dewey's idea of approximation, working through a process of trial and error when learning new information, Piaget was interested in the difference between the thinking processes of adults and children (McLeod, 2009). Piaget (1952) asserted that children learn through association between a new object and its placement in their current schemata, which occurs during four stages of maturation. Jarrett (2011) added that Piaget stressed that a child's reality is composed of their generalizations of the world that form their schemata, which develop into more complex thinking as the child grows. Thus, Piaget's thinking aligns more with Dewey's trial and error rather than Montessori's argument for a formal presentation of information designed to avoid learner confusion. Piaget's view that mental processes occur in learning is the main foundational thought for *cognitivism*, a learning theory that began in the 1960s. Theorists believed that the learner is capable of logical thoughts. The brain is usually compared to a computer that processes information, only with humans it is their use of higher-order thinking skills connected to memory and schemata ("Cognitivism" 2015). The concept of metacognitive awareness specifies that learners are aware of their thinking processes while learning (Flavell, 1976).

Moving away from how individuals learn through cognitive processes, Vygotsky's (1978) socio-cultural theory promotes collaboration between learners. Children need to interact with their peers who are at different stages in cognitive abilities. His *zone of proximal development theory* concludes that children learn best when they are challenged just above their cognitive ability level, so teachers and fellow students can scaffold their understanding, which then provides a more effective route to mastery (Roskos & Newman, 2002). Constructivists and cognitivists, Vygotsky and Piaget

respectively, shared the same belief that children are active learners who construct knowledge by using prior understandings to build new knowledge (“Constructivism,” 2015).

In theoretical contrast, the learning theory of *behaviorism*, despite its conjoining with the constructivist concept of experience influencing learning, is positioned differently regarding how knowledge is acquired. Behaviorists believe children learn through positive and negative reinforcement as a conditioning agent in the learning process (“Behaviorism,” 2015). Tracey and Morrow (2017) identified behaviorism as the foundational learning theory that informs the reading pedagogy dominantly used in most classrooms. Reading is conceptualized as an entity that is the sum of all its parts. Thus, reading instruction is fractioned into mini-lessons: “The complex task of reading is broken down into its many component elements, and the emphasis of reading instruction becomes mastery of these components” (p. 49). A key feature of how behaviorism influences reading instruction is found in the operant conditioning work of B.F Skinner. During instruction, readers are given positive reinforcement for accurate answers. If they are incorrect, they are asked to continue working until they arrive at the correct one. It is also worth noting that direct instruction is used for teaching reading skills. For example, in the pedagogical approach called reading readiness, the teacher uses direct instruction of pre-reading skills believed to be the precursors to reading acquisition. An effect of using a skills-based approach to reading is that instruction of subskills becomes layered with subskills to learn subskills. Then reading theorists began determining which skills were more necessary for learning (Hiebert & Raphael, 1996, as cited in Tracey &

Morrow (2017), and teachers choose what specific skills best support children while learning to read and expertly assess their progress (Tracey & Morrow, 2015).

General Issues in Reading Acquisition

The argument that emergent readers need skills-based instruction versus a meaning-making approach has been debated for years (Frey, Lee, Tollefson, Pass, & Massengil, 2005) as the call for federal involvement to improve reading instruction became more urgent in the late 1990s. In 2001, President George Bush signed No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation into law. This mandate included the framework for reading instruction designed by The National Reading Panel (NRP). Their research recommendation for a successful reading program included the following components: phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary instruction, and comprehension (National Reading Panel, 2000). Though research support for skills-based reading instruction became more prevalent, many were concerned with extraneous factors that influence the overall process of transforming a non-reader into a reader.

Before the creation of the NRP, Yetta Goodman (1975) published an article stating that everyone is a reader. She felt reading is easily learned, excluding physical or mental impairment, when readers feel it has a purpose in their lives. Nonetheless, she explains while working with students and teachers through the years, she often heard them self-identify as poor readers. For supporting evidence, they cited lack of interest in the text, reading past unknown vocabulary, reading aloud without fluency, or needing to reread as examples of their inability to read well. Though Goodman believed these to be common reading behaviors depending on contextual situations, she proposed that the students' and teachers' perceptions of what good readers do was inaccurate because they

focused on specific aspects of early reading instruction like decoding or reading every word rather than concentrating on making meaning while reading. The argument becomes an issue of whether reading is a natural behavior best performed by readers in natural settings (Goodman, 1975; Smith, 2006) as opposed to reading instruction being a set of skills that can be systematically taught and learned.

Smith (1994) contended that learning to read involves making sense of what is read rather than a focus on decoding words, which he argued does not sound like authentic language to an emergent reader when he or she is deciphering language. He insisted that reading ability is not derived from readers learning specialized skills, but is arrived at when people read to acquire information or read to explore their interests. Consequently, if the right conditions for learning are not present when children begin reading instruction, their acquisition of language and literacy is hindered. He contended that children learn to read with less confusion when they make a connection between books and the shared experience of reading with help from a caregiver. Basically, Smith believes that the combined components most critical for reading development are readers' past experiences guiding their progress, and the readers' self-motivation regulating their growth in reading development.

In a similar fashion, Johnson (2006) defined the struggling reader as someone who was not ready to learn when she illustrates probable explanations for reading problems such as less than optimal early reading instruction or living in difficult environments that impeded early learning. She also connected fewer educational opportunities to learn before kindergarten as a factor in lower reading achievement. Wolf (2007) pointed out that a 32-million-word deficit exists between middle-class children

who were read to by caregivers and disadvantaged children who were not. Early preparation for formal reading instruction is diminished when children do not have literacy support in the home. Consequently, this reading discrepancy causes an achievement gap before instruction ever begins between students that formed before they were exposed to formal instruction of reading skills. Furthermore, many of these issues affecting reading achievement fall outside of the school and teachers' control (Rasinski, 2017). Even without factoring in early literacy experiences, Jensen (1998) emphasized that children do not have a common time schedule for reading acquisition; hence, it is not unusual for students in early elementary classes to have a three-year variance in reading achievement. This fact complicates reading instructional choices for emergent readers.

Considering the current educational trend to align instruction and assessment, it is difficult for educators to follow Smith's lead in allowing students' reading to develop holistically outside a structured teaching plan. By contrast, there is a strong consensus in educational theory that thorough assessment of student learning drives good instructional practices (Green & Johnson, 2010). Pearson and Cervetti (2016) noted that once testing became standardized, reading became a set of tasks, like learning how to locate central ideas, finding critical details, or understanding how text structure impacts meaning. This led to a concrete way to assess instructional practices and reading gains, which began a circular movement of one influencing the other. In opposition, Goodman (1975) argues that standardized testing is not an accurate method for assessing reading. She believes that media reports of students having less reading ability than their predecessors was the catalyst for a perceived reading problem in the United States despite students reading more in a print saturated society. Decades ago, she concluded that being literate had

become more necessary than in previous years and that students who had extra exposure to purposeful reading achieved better reading ability rather than the opposite.

In retrospect, her inference was mistaken considering current statistics. The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) findings showed that grade 12 students in the United States continue to fall in reading proficiency since the first reported findings in 1992. In fact, grade 12 students performing below basic reading levels has increased by 3% since 2013. Overall, only 37% of grade 12 students are performing at or above the proficiency reading level indicating that more than half of the nation's students are reading below proficiency levels as they near graduation (The Nation's Report Card, 2015). Thus, these statistics seem to support a need for continued use of assessments that measure reading losses or gains.

Political influences like reading initiatives and mandates have become the norm in determining student levels of reading achievement through benchmark assessments. Allington (2001) explained the push to improve reading opened the door for The Reading Excellence Act (REA), which became law in 1998 and which is responsible for the Reading First initiative and the creation of the NRP. The basis for this mandate was to ensure that all federal funds for reading improvement were distributed solely to reading programs that used research-based methodologies such as use of empirical methods, clear connections between data analysis and conclusions, validity across multiple investigators, and peer-reviewed results. Still, Allington admitted unbiased, scientific reading research is a difficult process in a school setting with school districts, parents, students, and teachers clamoring for attention and involvement. For example, the assignment for participants receiving treatment or not is only one hurdle that must be overcome.

Regardless, the findings of these studies such as the NPR's components of reading give a concrete framework for schools to follow for reading instruction (Rasinski, 2017).

Regardless of research challenges, the move for research-based practices has become a permanent condition for improving educational practices. The Reading First initiative within the NCLB legislation mandated that reading instruction follow this directive: "Comprehensive reading programs with material based on scientific reading research are an integral part of the Reading First classroom" (Barone, Hardman, & Taylor, 2006. p. 4). Yet, some would argue that there were unintended consequences to NCLB's focus on research-based methodologies targeted for reading improvement. In a 1998-2010 longitudinal study concerning learning expectations for kindergartners in the United States, Bassok, Latham, and Rorem (2016), found teachers generally believed their students would leave kindergarten being able to read. There was also an academic emphasis on math and literacy, while a reduction in art, music, and science occurred more frequently. They posited that pressure from NCLB legislation caused the pedagogical focus to change to a less child-centered curriculum (dramatic play and art areas) where children were tested in the first two months of school. Additionally, the curriculum consisted of work usually considered beyond kindergartners' abilities. High expectations for each child's reading acquisition continue to guide student learning objectives along this trajectory making it necessary to teach reading skills even earlier than in the past, which rippled across all grade levels.

With concern for students' reading below grade level, the view of reading as a skill prompts discussion on how to define skills. Snow and Matthews (2016) broke down reading into two skill-based areas. They defined literacy skills as being constrained or

unconstrained. Constrained skills are those that can be readily taught, such as the alphabet and spelling rules, while unconstrained skills are derived from “large domains of knowledge acquired gradually through experience” (p. 57) and are more difficult skills to teach readers. They suggested that when reading levels fall in older students, this could possibly be fueled by an instructional emphasis on constrained skills, which are easier to teach and test, while unconstrained skills involve students building a knowledge base and critical language skills such as discourse and grammar. This happens over time and can be interrupted depending on factors both within the classroom walls and outside of the educational environment.

Snow and Matthews (2002) pointed out that even when students adequately learn how to read through skills-based instruction during the early elementary years, there are many who struggle with reading in later years. Any instructional attempt to remediate reading difficulties in older students by teaching basic reading skills may initially help, but it impedes the students from deeply interpreting the text (Willingham, 2009, as cited in Risko and Walker-Dalhouse, 2015). However, Vacca (2002) observed that reading for meaning requires more than knowing the mechanics of reading. Children should be able to read using strategies that aid their full comprehension, but Vacca acknowledged that many older students are usually not given enough literacy support by way of instruction once they are in middle school and beyond. The result is a decline in reading at the time when adolescents should be building their vocabulary and fluency through copious amounts of reading experiences. When they cannot read well, they avoid reading (Wharton-McDonald & Erickson, 2017).

Adolescent Reading Concerns

Usually, reading instruction takes place in the early elementary school years. Usually, a switch occurs around fourth grade from reading instruction and literacy support to the demands of content area reading. This change in focus can begin the process of students developing reading problems. Many students are identified as below-grade-level readers upon entrance into secondary content area classrooms. Yet, how to best support struggling adolescent readers to achieve deeper comprehension and improve reading achievement remains a challenge for administrators and teachers. One issue is that reading instruction is mainly seen as a responsibility of teachers in the English content area (Goldman, 2012). This misconception concerning reading is common in secondary schools. Harmon et al. (2016) investigated remedial reading programs in two secondary schools. They found that there was inconsistency between how reading teachers and students perceived reader identity, reading habits, reader strategies, content area reading, and the reading program. Besides these differences, which the authors believed requires dialogue to fix, a major finding of the study was that there is a lack of research into high school reading programs.

Goldman (2012) cited a lack of concrete information within reading instructional research that could be put to immediate use to solve incongruities in reading programs. She stated that mainly smaller samples have been used to examine approaches to reading to learn, and while results have been replicated across other small-scale studies, which helps with validity concerns, the studies have failed in giving experimental evidence of effectiveness. She explained the challenge inherent in reading instruction:

One reason for the paucity of evidence is that effective reading-to-learn instruction has many moving parts: teaching different instructional strategies; teaching how to use those strategies effectively depending on the task, text, and learning goals; ensuring engagement; and introducing opportunities for interaction with peers and teachers about the text (p. 94).

Still, the search for research-based reading methodologies that work is still critically needed. The comprehension of a text requires a reader to use cognitive skills. Readers without strategies for comprehending a text struggle while reading, and those readers with the ability to apply reading strategies read more proficiently (Conley, 2016). Although this stands as common sense, it simplifies the complexity of reading. There are many reasons for lower reading achievement. Beers (2003) addressed her former understanding of a struggling reader as a *kid who cannot read* by replacing this general description with a specific focus on what reading behaviors the child exhibits that are contributing to his or her reading problems. She referred to struggling readers as dependent readers that have specific challenges. For example, they may have difficulty making inferences, recalling information, or stopping when reading becomes too challenging. Dependent readers are those children who have specific needs that call for an exact instructional plan that solves their specific reading needs. On the other hand, children who can successfully read using self-monitoring strategies are non-dependent readers. They employ reading strategies that are purposeful like activating their prior knowledge, monitoring their understanding of the text, and knowing that reading has a purpose. If the result of applying strategies is deeper comprehension, the need to find the right combination that has the most potential for improving adolescent reading

achievement needs to be found amid all the factors that cause children to become struggling readers.

Rasinski (2017) concluded that despite the various reasons why some children struggle while reading, there are two competencies—word identification and/or fluency skills—usually found lacking in below grade level readers. Children who cannot decode vocabulary words within a text have poor comprehension because of their inability to identify words. Additionally, the second competency required in reading is fluency, which is really composed of two subskills—word recognition automaticity and prosody. Usually referred to as reading rate, the slower a reader performs word recognition as they read across a page, the more likely it is that confusion will set in. Prosody, the second subskill of fluency, is the ability to read orally with expression. Rasinski maintains that proficient readers transfer this skill while reading aloud to their silent reading. Therefore, the opposite is also true. Readers with a monotone oral reading sound illustrate a lack of comprehension that is also present when they are reading silently.

Beers (2003) advocated that struggling readers need more practice reading to increase their fluency. When repeated readings are performed, it is like any other endeavor that someone repeats to become better; multiple readings give the novice the chance to feel like an expert as he or she becomes more familiar with what they are reading (Blum & Koskinen, 1999). Tracey and Morrow (2015) suggested that gains in fluency are the result of repeated readings. This can be carried out through many class activities where reading such as Reader's Theatre, paired readings, and teacher readings. The instructional method of repeated readings is gaining attention for all reading remediation and is no longer seen as only useful in younger grades.

In a research action study conducted by DiSalle and Rasinski (2017), six low-performing fourth grade readers made large gains in fluency and comprehension through the teacher's use of an instructional framework called Fluency Development Lesson (FDL). Over a period of 12 weeks, students had a different text to read each day. The essential components of a FDL is teacher modeling of fluent reading, assisted reading, repeated readings, and word work rather than just focusing on simply on reading rate as is usually done in many fluency interventions. Although a small sample has limited generalizability, the authors believed that small scale studies in authentic classrooms provide a forward movement for future use of this protocol due to the success of their investigation. Originally used for early elementary reading intervention, Fluency-Oriented Reading Instruction (FORI) and Wide Fluency-Oriented Reading Instruction (WIDE FORI), which are similar in methodology with FDL, have teacher modeling, vocabulary identification, repeated readings, and discussion of the text as key components. Though usually a part of a larger classroom implementation in literacy curriculum, these instructional models could also be adapted to smaller groups or tutoring (Kuhn & Rasinski, 2015). Warton-McDonald and Erickson (2017) emphasized that skilled readers are excellent decoders because they can identify vocabulary efficiently, which positively affects their reading rate.

With the aim being to improve fluency by increasing decoding accuracy, Edwards (2008) chose a phonics intervention to help improve 16 struggling secondary students to read with deeper comprehension. Her research focused on sound-symbol relationships to improve reading and spelling. The phonics lesson took place in the first fifteen minutes of class for seven weeks. The findings showed that *all* students made a significant gain in

reading in both the Raw Score and the Reading Grade Level. Included were the observations of the students' teachers who saw a marked improvement in their students reading ability. Edwards concluded that secondary students can benefit from certain types of short intense phonics instruction.

However, Wolf (2007) warned that parents and teachers may mistake fluent reading and successfully decoding words for a deeper comprehension of the text. They are not the same, she pointed out. She asserted that readers need to possess "an increased capacity to apply an understanding of the varied uses of words—irony, voice, metaphor, and point of view—to go below the surface of the text" (p.137). For a working comprehension to take root, the reader must be able to move beyond decoding the words and develop new understandings from the text. Almasi and Hart (2015) concurred that comprehension goes beyond the act of locating the meaning of the text, which usually means there is one teacher-led interpretation that the reader must locate. Instead, they argued that students are more than receivers of knowledge, and meaning is constructed using strategies that best fits their goals. In general, readers' strategies may include the important skills of "predicting, imagining, questioning, summarizing, clarifying, inferring, and connecting to prior knowledge" (Warton-McDonald & Erickson, 2017, p. 354). Likewise, Thomas Barrett's second and third levels of comprehension are designated as inferential and critical. Teachers need to teach beyond literal interpretation and instruct readers to engage with a text beyond merely recall. Instead, their instruction should focus on their students reading critically at the higher level of constructing meaning beyond the text (Rasinski & Padak, 2008; Allen, 2000). If reading requires a

skill set and comprehension strategies must be employed, then teachers need to be strategic in their approach to remediate adolescent reading problems.

Many experts tout the practice of activating a student's prior knowledge before reading to support their ability to construct meaning from a text. Hollingworth and Ybarra (2009) defined the instructional method labeled *activating a student's prior knowledge* as the means in which a teacher extracts old knowledge in a student's long-term memory, so they can connect the old information to new content. They explain that activating prior knowledge is not assessing whether the students know what is about to be taught, but is it activating what they know about the new material about to be presented to them. Roschelle (1995) pointed out that many studies have concluded learning originates mainly from prior knowledge and secondly from presented curriculum. If the teacher does not consider the cognitive influence of a student's prior knowledge when connecting to new content, this omission could confuse learners and work against their meeting learning goals. McCullough (2013) argued that it is critical that students connect to a text to fully comprehend what they are reading. Their interest in the topic may propel them to read, but it is their schema about this topic that is the foundation for them making accurate meaning of what they read.

Rosenblatt (1994) agreed that context matters when learning to read. She proposed that reading involves an interaction between the reader and the text because readers use their experiences, memories, and personality to interact with a text. The notion that a text has meaning outside of the reader is incorrect. However, Rosenblatt emphasized that this does not mean the reader can make unfettered meaning of the text. Their understandings must be linked to textual evidence. Serifini (2013) added that the

readers' interpretation of the text's meaning is derived when they use their language and life experiences, consider how the text is situated in time, and analyze the text for what it reveals. In a study regarding prior knowledge, Kostons & Werf (2015) investigated how the activation of prior knowledge affected comprehension for 88 primary school-aged children. Although they admit that more study is needed for long-term teacher practices for activating prior knowledge, the results confirmed that children comprehend more effectively when their prior knowledge is activated. Furthermore, they found that whether students have cognitive, metacognitive, or motivational knowledge, all three types require activation to become available to learners in their educational situations.

While teachers may be cognizant of the benefits of assessing a student's background knowledge for improved comprehension, there is an opposing concern that too much emphasis on frontloading a text brings in too much ancillary information during instruction. This instructional practice interferes with comprehension of the text. Gallagher (2009) warned teachers to avoid over-teaching a text. A teacher may be overly concerned when designing reading instructional experiences, and the text becomes buried in pre-, during-, and post reading activities. Roschelle (1995) explained there is a paradoxical relationship in the use of prior knowledge because, as a strategy, it can create a dissonance between the instructor's teaching of material and the learner's acceptance of that instruction. In his discussion of instructional methods used in a science class, he stated that students may rely too much on their previous knowledge rather than new knowledge introduced by the teacher. The concern is that prior knowledge activation disrupts the processing of new information. Likewise, Boyles (2012) contended that students' reading comprehension was negatively affected when too much emphasis was

made for students to connect personally to a text. The text itself became secondary, and it was soon forgotten in the pursuit of prior knowledge activation. It was especially problematic when personal connections were included in standardized testing situations. Therefore, how much attention should be given to activating personal connections remains part of a broader literacy discussion.

One area of comprehension that does not get as much attention is the power that listening has on reading skill acquisition. Jalongo (2008) elaborated, “Listening is the process of taking in information through the sense of hearing and making meaning from what was heard” (p.13). The ability to listen effectively influences reading progress when a child’s listening skills are proficient. Trelease (2013) goes further in stating, “[Younger readers have a] huge reservoir called the Listening Vocabulary...which flows into Speaking Vocabulary...which flows into a Reading Vocabulary (p. 14). He stressed that the strongest indicator of beginning reader’s literacy success is the amount of words the child knows upon entering kindergarten. Therefore, students who are exposed to a rich verbal environment will more than likely also comprehend language more readily.

Issues in Content Area Reading

The fourth-grade slump, as defined by Chall (1983), describes the time when students are expected to switch from reading instruction to content reading. O’ Donnell and Wood (1992) in their identification of five stages of literacy, theorized that older students should have the ability to think critically at higher levels. In the last stage called refinement, which children enter in sixth or seventh grade, it is expected that “students should be able to deal with specialized subjects and technical information...students who do not enter this stage are unlikely to realize their full potential as readers and writers” (p.

6). The cognitive shift in reading focus from fiction to non-fiction texts is challenging to many students especially in middle school where the teacher's role and perception of his or her goals is content delivery. In addition, the student must adjust to a pursuit of content knowledge acquisition, which is cognitively distinct from the learning expectation in elementary school that consisted of accessing information from print (Swanson et al., 2017). Fischer and Frey (2014b) added that texts are highly specialized to each discipline, but there are examples of cross-curricular texts. They cite the use of poetry in history classes or historical documents in English classes. Moreover, Yopp and Yopp (2006) investigated the use of basal readers in elementary school and found that 80% of such texts were fiction, which created a lack of reading experiences with informational texts. This fact places adolescents at a comprehension disadvantage when they experience the dramatic switch in genres and are expected to read and comprehend. According to Allen (2000), content reading is more difficult than fiction reading for several reasons: text structure, appeal (stories versus facts), single-themed versus multiple concepts, and vocabulary. For example, content vocabulary can fluctuate between several reading levels within the same book. When a student struggles with reading a textbook, he or she begins to equate failure to comprehend with his or her own inadequacy (Jackson & Cooper, 2007). They regard reading content subject matter as a negative experience.

On the other hand, fiction reading is usually more favorable to students. Though challenging in its own way, the students' familiarity with fiction and the fact that fiction reading is usually character, theme, or plot driven, may be easier for adolescents to read when compared to content reading. There is also an element of choice in fiction reading. If elementary school teachers use more fiction texts in the classroom, then older students

may be more amenable to reading fiction. Additionally, theorists recommend that secondary learning objectives involve many pleasurable reading opportunities in the secondary classroom to improve reading ability (Allen, 2000; Beers, 2003; Trelease, 2009). This sets up a predesigned barrier to a major shift in disciplinary literacy. Content area reading is different from pleasurable reading because the goal of reading in a subject area is for students to meet learning goals, which equates with reading to learn for knowledge acquisition (Goldman, 2012). Duke and Martin (2015) identified three main aspects of content reading as “genre-specific to a significant degree; that multiple factors, including text, reader, and contextual factors can influence students’ comprehension; and that comprehension develops over time” (p. 251). Accordingly, the adolescent’s lack of informational reading experiences combined with varying comprehension levels contribute to less success in the content subject areas. Content teachers without a deeper understanding of reading theory and the literacy needs of adolescents are mystified when students exhibit poor achievement despite their best practices. Allington (2001) finds that content teachers readily identify their students as having general reading and writing deficits, but he believed that specific reading problems in the content areas stem from the students arriving to the content classroom without a knowledge base sufficient for new learning presented to them.

On the other hand, merely building a students’ knowledge base does not solve the problem of poor reading comprehension in the content areas. There is the challenge that content teachers are basically content-driven and lack the necessary reading theory knowledge to support their students’ reading. In a Fordham University study of content area teachers, the findings showed that middle and secondary teachers felt that teaching

literacy skills to students took time from their class instruction, and they felt that it was not in their skillset or teaching objectives (Ness, 2016). While working with content area teachers, Tovani (2000) experienced a similar dislike of literacy instruction being embedded into content curriculum. However, many studies correlate content area teachers' reading instruction with improved comprehension, which leads to gains in content learning objectives (Duke & Martin, 2015). In a study involving 381 teachers and content literacy instruction, Howe, Mundy, Kupczynski, and Cummins (2012) found a significant relationship between teachers who had years of experience using literacy strategies and teachers who had graduate hours and familiarity with the strategies. Both groups viewed using the strategies as useful. The researchers recommended that school districts use experienced teachers to mentor teachers in the use of literacy strategies, and for them to provide funds for literacy graduate classes. The study showed that teachers-participants would teach reading strategies to their students if they themselves were taught strategies and became familiarized in their use. Therefore, it follows that low proficiency readers will make significant gains if the content teachers support their students' reading comprehension through reading strategy instruction during class. Allen (2000) maintained that the content teacher is in a pivotal position to teach reading strategies specific to their content subject matter.

Yet, not all content teachers agree that they should be responsible for incorporating reading instructional strategies into their teaching schedules. The view of combining reading instruction and content knowledge acquisition involves educators buying into this pedagogical solution. Gillis (2014) emphasized her frustration when she was told as a content teacher *that every teacher is a reading teacher*. She is also wary of

the assumption that reading and English teachers have the prerequisite content knowledge to teach content literacy. Content experts and reading specialists are rarely combined in a single person; hence, it is essential that these two groups collaborate. They must be consistent in their instructional goals (Draper & Sieberg, 2010). Gillis (2014) recommended that content teachers should not focus on being reading teachers. She recommended that adolescent literacy specialists work with content experts with the aim of improving content area reading.

Possibly, the confusion about what reading support function like in a content area classroom has been the problem. The search for immediate solutions for building reading comprehension resulted in a less than adequate response as the result of professional development that included doable fixes labeled as reading intervention, while these fixes also touted less intrusion on instructional time. Many educators added the use of graphic organizers, reading guides, and maps believing them to be comprehension strategies. However, these reading aids do not improve a reader's comprehension level because unskilled readers cannot effectively use them. Instead, better progress is made when content area teachers use "direct instruction, explanation, and modeling" of comprehension strategies for reading remediation (Alvermann & Moore, 1991, as cited in Conley, 2017) so that students learn to how to read more effectively. Furthermore, Allington (2001) pointed to numerous research investigations that found when teachers taught their students how to use comprehension strategies when reading, it was not the important skill of critical thinking, but was more related to students' memorization of facts and reciting the text. The dissonance between content area teachers' understanding

of reading support and comprehension instruction may be understandable considering their general inexperience with reading theory.

Modla, McGeehan, and Lewinski (2014) conducted a study of 78 elementary education/special education teacher candidates to find out if their comprehension skills and strategies would influence their future reading instruction of their students. Citing that effective reading teachers are knowledgeable on how their own comprehension works, the researchers used the Critical Reading Inventory and Meta Comprehension Strategy Index assessments to understand the teacher candidates' level of comprehension and perception of their comprehension as indicators of future instructional behavior. The findings indicated that many of the pre-service teachers initially lacked the skills necessary for deep comprehension and were unaware of their own cognitive processes when reading; whereby, confirming the researchers' hypothesis that instruction in comprehension strategies is impeded if the educator has difficulty understanding textual information and cannot conceptualize their own reading process. However, after a semester of instruction in comprehension skills, their scores on the CRI improved as did their metacognitive understanding. Yet, the researchers were left with the concern whether these findings were generally indicative of most teachers. This is a concern that secondary students need literacy instruction to aid them in progressively difficult content reading situations. Goldman (2012) maintained that reading demands in the content areas increases with grade level due to learning goals and assessment linked to higher level reading demands. Teachers need to adopt the perspective that, when they teach content subject matter, instructing students to act as historians, scientists, or mathematicians when reading and writing in the content areas will improve their academic achievement.

Practices, Approaches, and Strategies for Adolescent Readers

If a child's reading process is systematically developed over time, it is a practical expectation that all educators have working knowledge of reading theory. As discussed earlier, the instruction of reading strategies and adoption of research-based approaches may be both a timely and a workable solution. Still, implementing a curricular and attitudinal change that will produce positive results requires all teachers to share the goal of improving reading achievement. It also involves students participating in the learning process. Trelease (2013) argues that one must read to improve one's reading. Unfortunately, this simple concept highlights a simple fact—many students' reading failure is directly linked to years of negative reading experiences. Tovani (2000) observed, "In ninth grade, many students have been defeated by test scores, letter grades, and special groupings. Struggling readers are embarrassed by their labels and often perceive reading as drudgery" (p. 9). Hall and Comperatore (2014) referred to this concept of self as reader identity. They claimed that when readers see themselves as poor readers, they will avoid reading and even go as far as not implementing reading strategies even to their own detriment. As well, many educators possess a dearth of understanding on how to meet the literacy needs of a classroom full of students with multiple variations of reading challenges. Just as the students feel inadequate with a lack of success, educators can likewise feel insecure from a lack of instructional knowledge. Therefore, research-based teacher training in different instructional approaches to reading may be a key to unlocking the reading potential in every student.

For example, reading experts recommend the implementation of a dedicated reading time called silent sustained reading (SSR) (Allen, 2000; Beers, 2003; Sanden,

2014; Trelease, 2013). When the practice of SSR began in the 1970s, it was primarily used as a time set aside for oral reading time; however, SSR has gone through many iterations since its inception as a classroom pedagogy. The goal of this approach is to provide independent reading time for children to practice reading and increase their reading experiences (Lenski & Lanier, 2014; Sanden, 2014). Mason-Singh and Guthrie (2012) held the view that voluntary reading time influences student engagement because students who self-choose texts are more likely to learn. Although there still exist minor variations, Pilgreen (2000) defined the current conception of SSR. She emphasized that teachers should not attach grades to pleasurable reading. They should provide a supportive and nurturing reading environment that has specific time set aside for daily reading. Post-reading activities and self-selection of texts are also key features of a well-established SSR program. Lee (2011) found in her own implementation of an SSR time that it takes time and effort to establish an effective program and teacher inexperience is a distractor. Also, it is critical to motivate students to read by working on motivational factors.

Still, Trelease (2013) contended that the heart of SSR should be to instill an independent reading habit, despite the presence of misunderstandings concerning SSR. For example, he cited a principals' admonishment to a teacher who implemented SSR as involving too much reading that should happen outside of the classroom, which statistically is not happening with adolescents. This belief may have been influenced by the National Reading Report's 2000 report that, in 14 short-term studies, SSR was not found to aid readers. They also looked at SSR as isolated reading instruction. Trelease pointed out that SSR is not meant to replace reading instruction and Krashen's

examination involving 55 studies (both short and long-term) have refuted the NRP's findings that SSR is not a valid part of a complete reading instructional plan. Krashen's examination indicated that SSR is a program that positively influences student reading achievement.

Whereas SSR is more independently-based and less instructive, *read alouds* are a combination of instruction and pleasurable reading when implemented correctly. The practice of reading aloud to children has been passed down across many generations. Considered the leading expert on read alouds, Trelease (2013) admitted his initial use of read alouds was inspired by his own father who read to him nightly. On the instructional side, read alouds have been used to teach fluency and vocabulary, while also providing means for building schemata. Normally a common practice in elementary school classrooms, read alouds gained momentum for use in secondary classrooms (Allen, 2000). In a study conducted on read alouds in a science classroom, Hurst and Griffity (2015) investigated the impact read alouds have on the comprehension levels of seventh and eighth grade students. All students were given equal treatment of the text with one unit of study with silent reading and one unit of study with the teacher reading aloud. The findings showed that there was no significant difference between treatments, but it did show that treatments significantly affected student learning. Another aspect of the study was that the reading ability increased, students received more benefits from the read aloud. Additionally, 78% of the students had a positive attitude towards read alouds, while all below average readers preferred their text orally read to them. Therefore, read alouds affect both the intellectual and affective sides of reading instruction.

Experts agree that the practice of using text-based discussions that generate questions with the aim of enhanced comprehension could result in reading gains. To deepen the reader's comprehension, the old manner of teachers assigning a set of comprehension questions completed by students in isolation is replaced by strategic questions created by both teachers and students with the intention of stimulating deep conversations (Fischer & Frey, 2014b). In a study of forty-three fourth and fifth graders, Nolte and Singer (1985) studied the effect of self-questioning on comprehension achievement. Using the concept of active comprehension, defined as readers questioning the text to support their understanding, they tested how self-questioning impacted comprehension. A teacher used direct instruction on how to question a text during critical points in a text, while omitting this aspect in the control group. Then as the teacher phased herself out, the students began using their own questions individually or within a group. After each text, the students were tested. Initially, there was a significant difference in the gains for the treatment group. However, both groups were eventually within a point difference depending on the readability of the passages. Overall, students in the active comprehension group averaged 12.8 correct answers as opposed to the control group average of 9.9. Though further studies is needed, students who learn how to question a text at important intervals may exhibit deeper comprehension of a text. These findings are supported in previous studies (e.g., Andre & Anderson, 1979; Beck, Omanson, & McKeown, 1982; Frase & Schwartz, 1975) on readers using questions to guide and generate their understanding of a text.

Theorists also look at reading motivation as a precursor to effective comprehension (Louick, Leider, Daley, Proctor, & Gardner, 2016). Motivation to read

has not been studied extensively in terms of low proficiency readers. O'Brien and Dillion (2014) and Leider et al. (2015) studied the effects of self-efficacy on motivation and its effect on the reading comprehension of 112 low performing middle school students in semi-urban and urban settings. Included in the mixed methods study were surveys, standardized reading tests, and a random sampling of student motivational interviews. Quantitative results showed that self-efficacy beliefs significantly correlates with reading comprehension. More studies on contextual situations are warranted for a greater understanding of this effect. Interestingly, the semi-urban site displayed higher comprehension scores, while the urban site showed higher motivation scores. This may mean confidence in one's ability to read does not always equate with motivational influences.

Besides concerns about self-efficacy and motivation, some theorists point out that all readers are at risk in schools of being demotivated by poor instructional practices. Allen (2000) asserted that students value reading if their experiences with books are rewarding. According to Gallagher (2009), the execution of *readicide* (the act of killing reading for students) is prevalent in classrooms when teachers assign difficult books without any interaction until the final test or continually interrupt the reading of a book with too many companion activities. He argued that underteaching or overteaching a text leaves students bored and without motivation to learn. The text becomes less important, and when readers focus less on the text, it is common sense that their comprehension of the text is hindered.

In a comprehensive study involving 32 countries conducted by Warwick Elley (1990-1991) for the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational

Achievement, students in the age ranges 9 -14 were assessed for reading proficiency. Nine year olds from the United States were the second-ranked readers after Finland. Yet, the U.S. students dropped to eighth place by the age of fourteen. This abrupt change is attributed to the fact that American students read less as they mature (Trelease, 2013). If time spent reading is linked to reading achievement, then educators must consider the effect of their instructional practices. In the field of literacy theory, understandings concerning the act of reading and methodologies used for instruction and remediation continue to evolve. Consequently, researchers promote and support a myriad of approaches for improving a reader's literacy and language acquisition. These differences in opinion concerning how to best prepare students to become literate adults are usually reflective of the constant changes in pedagogy that are necessary to address these adaptations (Beers, 2007). Serifini (2004) warned educators to reconsider teaching with myopic view that one researched-based instructional practice is best. Rather, consider reading theory and its practical application more organic in nature. Educators must be flexible when they operationalize theory into practice and investigate a myriad of approaches to reading instruction.

The Act of Close Reading

One current trend that has gained momentum in the search for an instructional method that teaches students how to effectively examine and comprehend a text is called the close reading approach. The concept of close reading is not a new phenomenon in literary criticism. Richards (1929) was concerned that his students could not comprehend a text as deeply as necessary for analytical study. He developed a means of prodding the meaning of a text from its ambiguous state by instructing scholars to analyze the author's

choice of literary devices. Richards push for literary criticism to be derived from a close examination of the text is one that “a professional psychologist might have been expected somewhere along the line to render” (Ransom, 1941, p. 45). Thus, the concept of going beneath the surface meaning of a text when reading has its roots in early literary criticism. This type of text analysis, where the goal is for all readers to come to an agreement on the meaning of a text, began to be criticized for treating the reader as an outsider (Serafini, 2013). Post-structural and reader response theorists believed that the reader’s sociocultural experience influenced the meaning of the text and rejected the concept of the teacher leading the students through the text for unified answers.

Still, Hinchman and Moore (2013) suggested the popularity of a mainly unused literacy strategy was given new life when the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) made it a focus of their literacy instruction within its framework. As in many new curricula design start-ups, the maelstrom of dissention by teachers and school districts over the repudiation of research-based reading instructional use of contextual background and prior knowledge caused a revision in the original definition and criteria of the close reading method as proposed by the CCSS. In his article titled, *Common Core ate my baby and other urban legends*, Shanahan (2012b) argued that the confusion originated when David Coleman and Susan Pimental (2012), lead authors of the English Language Arts and Literacy Standards, presented an example of close reading that included Coleman’s admonishment to teachers for using external explanations instead of having students just read the texts. Confusion concerning pre-reading strategies began to flourish. Sandler and Hammond (2013) posited that many educators understood this to mean that all pre-reading scaffolding activities were to be omitted entirely from a close reading. They

understood the CCSS definition of close reading as a cold reading activity, meaning there is no preparation of the text in any manner before students engage in reading.

However, the CCSS authors clarified by saying, “Rather than preloading background information or quickly supplying it when students become confused by the text, teachers can provide cues, clues, and prompts to help navigate the text at key points” (Sandler & Hammond, 2013, p. 60). Standards now included the use of relevant prior knowledge (Coleman & Pimentel, 2012). Shanahan (2012b) observed that due to no explanation of the reversal, the misunderstanding concerning the characteristics of close reading continues. As a literacy expert, he advocates that pre-reading be used judiciously with an intended purpose and knowing when a text is better instructed without scaffolding. Additionally, instructional time should be utilized more for rereading the texts and post-reading follow-up than frontloaded with pre-reading text activities.

Despite the clarification, educators and theorists who believed that context, schemata, and prior knowledge are cognitively important aspects of comprehension are dubious about these parameters of close reading. It is literally a distraction to comprehension when unknown nuances embedded in the text confuse the reader (Newman, Kaefer, & Pinkham, 2014). Furthermore, Wood and Taylor (2006) advocated that students have personal experiences and knowledge that are key to their understanding of new information. Fischer and Frye (2012) stated that the primary purpose of a close reading is for students to build new schemata by using their prior knowledge to gain information from a text. They warn against teachers allowing prior knowledge activation to become a priority in the close reading process. The secondary

purpose of close reading instruction is to teach students to persist in reading even when they engage with challenging texts.

Yet, others argue there is justification for confusion when it comes to any scaffolding in reading instruction. Shanahan (2012a) asserted that the text chosen for a close reading should be read by the students (at least the first time) on their own with the stipulation that if students need critical information or key vocabulary words, they can be added to the reading instruction design. Nonetheless, there is no need for pre-loading activities to take longer than the actual time it takes to read the text (Gewertz, 2012). Gallagher (2009) monitored his own instructional choices by using a technique he calls *framing*. He sets up for the reading of the text by discussing the purpose for the reading, giving the background of the author, previewing archaic language, and using anticipatory guides. Gallagher's solution to the argument between cold reading and pre-reading activities before reading may be an answer for scaffolding difficult texts.

Scaffolding and contingency plans are necessary components when instructing students to use a close reading approach. In one of the few studies of teachers using a close reading approach, Fischer and Frey (2014/2015) gathered data from 12 teachers experienced in the use of the close reading approach and noted their contingency plans if students failed to understand the text. The study participants were students in grade 3 through grade 8. The results of their investigation showed that when teachers implemented a contingency plan of “re-establishing purpose, analyzing questions to identify likely answer locations, prompting and cueing, modeling, and analyzing annotations” (p. 231), the students could benefit from the use of this literacy strategy. Their comprehension was much improved.

Since close reading is considered a comprehension tool, Beck and Sandora (2016) presented two kinds of comprehension levels as either surface or deep. They distinguish between the two by suggesting that “surface” or gist comprehension comes first and allows one to go on to close reading, which then enables deep or deeper comprehension. Yet, if comprehension is the active function of making meaning of what one reads, then close reading can be defined as an explicit examination of a text with the purpose of gaining information. Gambrell, Malloy, Marinak, and Mazzoni (2015) stated, “Comprehension and close reading are clearly aligned in that close reading requires the student to uncover layers of meaning that lead to and support deep comprehension of the text” (p. 19).

Moss, Lapp, Grant, and Johnson (2015) considered the instruction of a close reading strategy to enhance the students’ ability to analyze a text with explicit goals in mind. Repeated readings lead to text-based discussions composed of questions that connect with students’ thinking. They contended that the objective is to teach students how to use this strategy automatically when they need to comprehend a text independently. Gambrell et al. (2015) concurred that close reading improves a reader’s analytical skills because when they are employing the close reading approach they are using inference and citing textual evidence. This deeper understanding of thorough analysis builds improved comprehension. Fischer and Frey (2012) advised that any implementation of a close reading approach should have the following parameters: establishes reading purpose; uses short, complex texts; allows for repeated readings; includes annotation while reading; provides teacher modeling through read and think alouds; and involves discussion and text-dependent questions.

Yet, even though discourse on the close reading method has led to enhanced recognition since the implementation of the CCSS, Hinchman and Moore (2013) revealed that it is largely ignored by those concerned with adolescent literacy research, such as The Carnegie Council on Adolescent literacy, Duke, and Pearson. They also pointed to a lack of studies on this method. Fang (2016) echoed their concern. He endorsed the use of the close reading approach as a relevant literacy strategy for building analytical skills and comprehension, but there is not enough present evidence for empirical validation. He also conceded, “Many teachers lack deep, explicit knowledge about language, text, and literacy; and this limitation hinders successful implementation of close reading” (p.113).

However, Scheppegrell, Glover, and Taylor (2008) studied the influence of professional development in language and text as a means for history teachers to implement a close reading approach. They attended an institute that taught teachers to analyze a text using functional grammar as a framework. This type of close reading involves the teacher showing students how to break down confusing terminology or sentence structures that impedes comprehension. By breaking down the complex text into sentences and discovering how grammatical structures work when making meaning, the teachers in the study were successful in implementing a close reading approach. The findings concluded that teachers can be effective close reading instructors, while becoming more knowledgeable as to how grammar and language impact comprehension. Additionally, all students showed gains in historical reading and writing ability as the result of having a teacher who attended professional development in language and literacy. With a lack of negative information concerning the use of a close reading

approach for aiding secondary students' comprehension, the mainly positive results (from not many studies) suggests that this literacy approach warrants more study.

CHAPTER THREE

ACTION RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Problem of Practice

The identified problem of practice is that the researcher's English I students' have low reading proficiency when comprehending content area texts. The researcher has found that English I students enter the content area classroom lacking the comprehension skills necessary for content knowledge acquisition. Their inability to comprehend a text is most apparent when they are required to read and respond to a text. After inquiry into what practices they use to read a difficult text, the researcher found that students often relied on the strategy of rereading the question and using key words from the question to search for the answers in the text. They also reported not knowing how to repair their reading challenges. However, strategic reading requires the student to be metacognitive of their comprehension needs and knowledgeable on how to engage in the reading process actively. The researcher is examining the use a close reading approach as an authentic reading strategy for students to repair their confusion while reading. It is the goal of the researcher to improve this problem of practice that hinders the students' acquisition of content area knowledge in the English I classroom.

Research Question

What impact will a close reading approach have on the comprehension level of 12 English I students?

Hypothesis

The close reading approach will have a positive impact on the comprehension level of twelve English I students' reading comprehension.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study has been to examine the effecting of implementing a close reading approach on the reading comprehension level of a sample of twelve English I students.

Action Research Design

The action research encompassed a mixed-methods design. The researcher investigated the effect of a close reading approach on the comprehension level of a sample of twelve English I students. The researcher collected quantitative data through pre-and post-test instruments. Qualitative data consisted of field observations, existing records, surveys, and an exit interview. Through both types of evidence, the researcher thoroughly examined the effect that a close reading approach would have on the sample.

Ethical Considerations

The researcher considered how the study would impact classroom instruction. The researcher designed the study to be part of the standard curriculum used in English I. Her intention was to provide comprehension strategy instruction that would enhance all students' comprehension levels. To reduce the possibility of embarrassment or anxiety, students were not separated for different instruction. The pretest/posttest treatment was applied by the researcher to all English I students in the researcher's classroom roster. To protect the identity of the participants in the study, the study assigned pseudonyms for participants and school.

The school district administration and site administrators approved the study. The researcher gave each parent or guardian information pertaining to all aspects of this study as part of the study permission slip (Appendix A). The researcher made the participants in the study aware of the study's parameters and that collection of data for research purposes was being performed daily throughout the study period. While implementing this study, there was low risk of possible harm to students.

Setting and Time Frame of Study

The general research site is a high school in one of the larger school districts within South Carolina. The school operates on a four-block academic schedule with an hour lunch for students to attend tutoring sessions if needed. Wavers High School has an approximate population of 2,000 students with a diversity ratio of 60% White and 40% people of color. The student population falls within the range of low income to high income status. The school reflects the ethnic and economic diversity of the broader community. The school district recently adopted and implemented a 1:1 technology plan; therefore, a major shift to paperless classrooms and computer use has occurred for both teachers and students. The specific research site is an English I content area classroom with typically 30 students in each block.

The timeframe for this study was an eight-week period in the spring semester. The researcher gave the participants a reading interest inventory and administered a pretest instrument in the first week. Throughout weeks two through seven, participants were instructed on using a close reading approach through teacher researcher modeling and subsequent practice in both whole, small, and independent groupings. The researcher (as teacher) made observations and collected student responses to surveys. In week eight, the

researcher conducted a post- study exit interview with all participants in a whole group setting.

Participants in the Study

The participants were twelve English I students approximately thirteen to fifteen years of age. Students were chosen for this study based on non-probability convenience sampling (Mertler, 2014) and their specific MAP reading scores. Parental consent forms (Appendix A) were sent home prior to the implementation of this study. For the purposes of this study, the participants were placed into four leveled subgroups based on existing fall 2016 MAP reading scores: Group One—below grade level reading, Group Two—reading at grade level, Group Three—reading above grade level, and Group Four—gifted/talented reading level (see Figure 3.1).

The participants' reading assessment scores were acquired through the Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) reading assessment and WIDA for ELLs. The 2015 MAP Normative Data Report was used to group the students because this data is frequently used to reference the school's English I students' reading levels in comparison to the published median results (see Table 3.1). An effort was made to represent both gender and ethnic diversity within the study population. There were seven females and five males of whom there were five students of color. Please note that the students' characteristics as stated are contemporaneous descriptions of them as they were the first day of the study.* The MAP scores as reported can be interpreted by reviewing figure 3.1 for understanding the students' reading and grade level correspondence.

2015 READING Student Status Norms						
	Begin-Year		Mid-Year		End-Year	
Grade	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
K	141.0	13.54	151.3	12.73	158.1	12.85
1	160.7	13.08	171.5	13.54	177.5	14.54
2	174.7	15.52	184.2	14.98	188.7	15.21
3	188.3	15.85	195.6	15.14	198.6	15.10
4	198.2	15.53	203.6	14.96	205.9	14.92
5	205.7	15.13	209.8	14.65	211.8	14.72
6	211.0	14.94	214.2	14.53	215.8	14.66
7	214.4	15.31	216.9	14.98	218.2	15.14
8	217.2	15.72	219.1	15.37	220.1	15.73
9	220.2	15.68	221.3	15.54	221.9	16.21
10	220.4	16.85	221.0	16.70	221.2	17.48
11	222.6	16.75	222.7	16.53	222.3	17.68

Figure 3.1 2016 reading student status norms, from “2015 NWEA Measures of Academic Progress Normative Data” by Northwest Evaluation Association, 2015 (<https://www.nwea.org/resources/2015-normative-data/>). In the public domain.

Group One: Below Grade Level Readers*

Clara is a fourteen-year-old Black female who is extremely hard-working and self-motivated to learn. However, she is insecure about her ability but flourishes with teacher support. She views herself as a reader. Clara tends to lead her peers in small group arrangements. Her reading map score is 212, and she is in the researcher’s first block class.

Steve is a fifteen-year-old, Black male who is a varsity basketball player. He has high potential for an athletic scholarship. He is well-liked by his teachers and peers. Steve does not like to read and views reading as a chore. However, when asked to report for

tutoring, Steve obliged, and improved with individual attention. When he is in small group settings, he is easily distracted and tends to do less work than his peers. His popularity with fellow classmates tends to be the general reason for his focus on non-academic happenings in the classroom. His reading MAP score is 214, and he is in the fourth block class.

Sherry is a fourteen-year-old White female. She is very quiet and reserved. Sherry prefers to be placed in the front row during seating chart changes. She sporadically turns in assignments late, but cares about her progress. In small group settings, she is more animated. Sherry's reading MAP score is 215, and she is in the first block class.

Group Two: Readers at Grade Level

Amelia is a thirteen-year-old Guatemalan female. She is intrinsically-motivated to learn, but also extrinsically-motivated by grade performance. She advocates for help when she views the classroom teacher as responsive to her needs. Prior to inclusion in the sample, Amelia was reluctant to speak in class or to a teacher due to former experiences when her needs as an ELL student were unmet. Nonetheless, she is an excellent reader and writer. Amelia does not view herself as a reader, yet she is an avid reader in my classroom. She has a reading MAP score of 222, and has a WIDA score of 5, which indicates that, as an ELL student, she is proficient in reading and requires fewer reading accommodations. However, this teacher-researcher accommodates her with any resources she requires in the form of graphic organizers and tutoring. She is in the first block class.

Emily is a fifteen-year-old White female. She is highly-motivated by grades and praise. She puts pressure on herself to earn exemplary scores on all assignments and assessments. She will revise any writing assignment until it is perfect. Emily is very

mature and is quiet but helpful in small group settings. She considers herself a reader, and enjoys SSR. Her reading MAP score is 221, and she is in my fourth block class.

Katie is a fifteen-year-old White female. She is hard-working and will ask for help when she requires it. She is well-liked by her peers. Katie consistently desires to do her best work. However, Katie has a difficult time coming to the teacher-researcher's lunch hour tutoring sessions because she has a third block class at a district technology school. However, she rectifies this by participating in the weekly online tutoring offered by the teacher-researcher for these specific academic situations. Katie does not view herself as a reader, but will read without complaint if she has assigned reading. She has a reading MAP score of 223, and is in the fourth block class.

Group Three: Above Average Readers

Johnny is a Vietnamese American male who is fourteen years old. He consistently volunteers commentary in whole class discussions. He admits to not reading unless forced to do so, and he does not view himself as a reader. He earns above average grades, but he is not anxious about maintaining As on assignments and tests. In small groups, he is a peacemaker when the group has disagreements. His reading MAP score is 229 and he is in the second block class.

Sean is a fifteen-year-old Black male. Extroverted, he enjoys learning, is inquisitive and consistently asks relevant questions to clarify his thinking. He has an excellent spoken and written vocabulary. He views himself as a reader and will read independent of being assigned texts to read. Sean is somewhat inconsistent in turning assignments in on time though this is more due to organizational issues rather than a behavioral matter. He has a reading map score of 233 and is in the fourth block.

Chris is a white, fourteen-year-old male. He is a reserved student who will participate in whole class discussion when asked specific questions, but he will not voluntarily offer them. Chris tends to be more of an introvert, but works well with peers in a small group setting. He is diligent in completing all assignments on time. He earns above average grades when compared to his peers. Chris views himself as an avid reader and he independently reads five to six books per year. He has a reading MAP score of 230 and is in the second block class.

Group Four: Gifted and Talented Reading Level

Ivy is a fourteen-year-old White female. She consistently earns exemplary grades on all assignments and assessments. She moved to South Carolina from an honors schedule in another state but could not be placed in honors due to the tracking requirements that did not meet reciprocity. Ivy's incorrect placement in the English I classroom began to hinder her progress. Therefore, the teacher-researcher provided her with differentiated instruction whenever possible. She is an avid reader and is advanced in comprehension and writing levels when compared to her peers. Ivy has a reading MAP score of 242 and is in my fourth block.

Harriet is a fourteen-year-old White female. She is outgoing and earns above-average grades on her assignments. In small group, she shares the work with her peers. She fully participates in whole group discussions. At times, she has turned in late assignments. Harriet is confident in her abilities and is easy going. She does not view herself as a reader and does not enjoy it. If she has choice in reading materials, she prefers non-fiction. She has a reading MAP score of 235 and is in the second block.

Evan is a fourteen-year-old White male. He tends to be nervous and it immediately surfaces when he feels overwhelmed with academic pressures. He is sporadically been absent for health reasons, but manages to complete all missing work by using the tutoring hour at lunchtime. He advocates for himself and is unafraid to ask the teacher-researcher for guidance in both academic and non-academic situations. Evan does not view himself as a reader and he does not like reading and writing in the English I classroom. His favorite class is Reserve Officers' Training Corps (ROTC) and his motivation to excel comes from future military service goals. He has a reading MAP score of 237 and is in the fourth block.

Research Methods

The data collection instruments used in this study are comprised of five main sets: Pretest/Posttest, field observations, existing records, surveys, and an exit interview. The researcher collected both quantitative and qualitative evidence to examine any effect the close reading approach may have had on the comprehension level of the 12 English I student participants in this study. To ensure triangulation of data, a mixed methods design was implemented (Mertler, 2014).

Pretest/Posttest

The teacher researcher used a pretest/posttest instrument to measure any impact the close reading approach had on the comprehension levels of the students before and after treatment. The pretest was comprised of a seminal document often used in the English I curriculum and eight follow-up reader response questions. The pretest provided a baseline on the participants' use of comprehension strategies by illustrating their strengths and weaknesses as exhibited in their answers to each question After the

completion of the full instruction and student practice of the close reading approach, the students took a posttest with the same reader response questions. This posttest instrument was used to determine any impact the close reading approach had on the students' comprehension. The researcher compared the students' posttest responses to pretest responses to understand the impact of a close reading approach on the students' comprehension levels when taught a self-regulating method of making meaning.

Field Observations Notebook

The teacher-researcher performed unstructured observations of student behaviors and recorded field notes in a field observations notebook during weeks one through seven of the study. The use of unstructured field notes allowed the teacher-researcher access to record student behaviors, while also allowing her to attend to general classroom events (Hubbard & Power, 2003, as cited in Mertler, 2014). Notes were recorded during each student grouping (teacher modeling, whole, small, and independent) phase of the gradual release of responsibility, which was the instructional delivery choice for the treatment in this study. The teacher-researcher wrote a summary of these notes at the end of each phase. Through reflection on the recorded field notes, the teacher-researcher looked for themes (repeating variables) that led to an answer to the research question and ruled out any outliers that presented themselves as the students progressed through the study.

Existing Records

Data was collected on the students' current high school MAP scores, which is a measurement of their reading comprehension level as of Fall 2106. For purposes of this study, students were placed in the following leveled reading groups: below average, on grade level, above grade level, and gifted and talented according to their MAP scores. To

maintain a locus of control over data collection and analysis, the leveled groups allowed the teacher-researcher to examine the impact of the close reading approach on students in homogenous groupings.

Surveys

Structured surveys were given to the students throughout the instruction and practice phases of the close reading approach administration. The surveys provided evidence of the students' perception and beliefs concerning the close reading approach. The teacher-researcher compared the data at different times in the instructional period (Dana & Yendol-Hoppey, 2014) to examine student engagement in the learning process. To address the research question, there was a need to gauge the students' thought process as they proceeded in learning and using the close reading approach.

Before the instruction of the close reading approach, students were given a reading interest inventory that would aid the researcher's understanding of the students' overall perception of reading. Thereafter, as the study proceeded, the teacher-administrator administered open-ended surveys to students either in hard copy or online formats. These surveys served as exit slips, which are informal, formative assessments frequently used in classrooms to measure if learning has occurred. The choice of open-ended surveys versus closed surveys, such as a rating scale or multiple-choice response survey formats, was made to lessen the possibility of researcher subjectivity slipping into the meaning-making process of data analysis (Johnson, 2008, as cited in Mertler, 2014).

Exit Interview

In the eighth week of the study, the teacher researcher conducted a post-study exit interview. The interview guide was comprised of questions that pertained both to

observations recorded during the study and to student responses to study surveys. The teacher-researcher conducted the interview in a focus group format with all four leveled groups in one large group. This type of interview provided information unique to formatting interviewees in a group setting. However, the researcher acknowledges that interviewees may be more likely to agree or disagree when others support their viewpoint (Mertler, 2014). Therefore, the teacher-researcher tried to solicit answers from less vocal students by prompting them to express their opinions during the interview. This type of interview provided data regarding the students' overall impression of the close reading approach once all instruction and practice was concluded. Furthermore, the researcher examined the transcript for any inconsistencies in answers from previous surveys and, if such were present, she could consider what might have caused a shift in beliefs concerning the close reading approach. She compared common themes from previous data analyses for a final time.

Procedure

Preliminary Actions

The school site approval was submitted and approved on June 28, 2016. The Institutional Review Board submission was approved for study on August 11, 2016. Parent permission slips were signed, and permission was granted for participants to be a part of the study as of January 15, 2017 (Appendix A).

Study Implementation Procedure

The goal of this study was to examine the impact that a close reading approach would have on student comprehension level. The overall instructional delivery used was the gradual release of responsibility instructional framework, which was initially created

for teachers to use in reading instruction. The tenet of this framework is that students learn more effectively if they proceed towards learning objectives in linear steps from focused, purposeful, and direct instruction (I do it), to teacher/whole groups practice (we do it), then group practice without the teacher (you do it together), to full independent work (you do it alone). In this framework, students eventually take on more of the responsibility for their learning as they go from teacher-directed instruction to group collaboration and finally individual practice of the learning objectives (Fischer & Frey, 2014). Therefore, the teacher-researcher delivered the treatment in the following linear steps within the eight weeks of the study period:

- The teacher modeled the close reading approach for the participants.
- The teacher and participants applied the close reading approach to a text simultaneously in a whole group setting.
- The participants applied the close reading approach in a small group setting.
- The participants individually applied the close reading approach on a text.

The teacher-researcher met with the students three times per week during 90-minute blocks on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays during the first 60 minutes of the class period for the duration of the study. During the entire study, the students were encouraged to use their close reading graphic organizer for reference during each phase of instruction and practice.

Week one. On Monday, the study began with the students taking a reading interest inventory survey concerning their reading habits and literacy experiences. During Wednesday's class period, they completed a pretest composed of a seminal document, *The Gettysburg Address*, and reader response questions (Appendix B). On Friday, the

students observed the researcher perform the close reading approach on a text. This was the “I do it” component of the gradual release of responsibility instructional framework, and the students’ first experience with the close reading approach as defined by this study. Upon completion, students completed an exit survey concerning their introduction to the close reading approach.

Week two. On Monday, the students were given a graphic organizer to aid them in implementing the close reading approach (Appendix C). The teacher researcher and students reviewed this document and the students were given time to ask questions concerning the close reading approach. On Wednesday, the teacher researcher and students performed a corporate close reading on literary fictional text. The students worked with the teacher in one large group for the “we do it together” phase of the gradual release of responsibility instructional framework. On Friday, the researcher and students completed the close reading, which was preceded by students filling out an exit survey concerning their second experience with the close reading approach.

Week three. On Monday and Wednesday, the students were placed in small groups to perform a close reading of a literary fictional text. The researcher observed each group and answered questions that students had while working with one another and a literary fiction text. On Friday, the small groups informally discussed the close reading approach process. The students also completed an exit survey concerning their experience with the close reading approach. This was the “you do together” phase of the gradual release of responsibility instructional framework. This was the students’ third experience with the close reading approach.

Week four. On Monday and Wednesday, the students individually performed a close reading on a literary fiction text. On Friday, the students informally discussed their individual practice implementing the close reading approach. Upon completion of the discussion, the students completed an exit survey regarding this experience. This was the students' last stage of the gradual release of responsibility instructional framework "you do it" phase, and their fourth experience with the close reading approach.

Week five. On Monday and Wednesday, after the students completed a full cycle of the gradual release of responsibility, the researcher decided upon consideration of the observation notes that the students should perform another "you do it together" phase of the gradual release of responsibility on a literary fictional text. The students were placed in small group and completed another close reading of a text. The teacher researcher's decision to skip the first two phases of the gradual release of responsibility instructional framework was made because the students had practiced and memorized the procedural steps of the close reading approach. However, the need for the teacher-researcher to collect data on the corporate use of the close reading approach was still warranted at this stage. This was the students' fifth exposure to the close reading approach. On Friday, the students completed an exit survey.

Week six. On Monday and Wednesday, the students individually performed a close reading on a literary fictional text. The researcher made the decision for the students to perform the "I do it" phase of the gradual release of responsibility instructional framework because the students needed more individual practice performing a close reading of a text. On Friday, the students informally discussed their individual

practice implementing the close reading approach. This was their sixth experience with the close reading approach.

Week seven. On Monday and Wednesday, the students were placed in small groups to perform a close reading of a non-fiction text. The researcher varied the texts from literary fiction to non-fiction to reflect authentic reading that occurs in an English I classroom that requires them to effectively read in both genres. They performed the “you do it together” phase of the gradual release of responsibility instructional framework on a non-fiction text. On Friday, the students individually performed a second close reading of a non-fiction text. This was the students’ last practice experience with the close reading approach before their final assessment, which was the posttest. Upon completion, the students completed an exit survey concerning the close reading approach.

Week Eight. On Monday, the students completed a posttest assessment that was an exact copy of the pretest assessment. They performed a close reading on a seminal document used in a standard English I curriculum and had to answer reader response questions. This was their final experience using the close reading approach in the implementation of this study. Upon completion, the students completed an exit survey concerning their perceptions of the close reading approach as a reading strategy for aiding comprehension of grade level texts. On Wednesday, the students participated in a group exit interview to discuss their use of the close reading approach and its validity as a reading comprehension tool. This interview was the final data collection in the study. On Friday, the students had a formal final discussion of the close reading method and the teacher shared the results of the study.

Data Analysis

The researcher used a mixed-methods design to analyze how the close reading approach influenced the study participants' comprehension levels. Butin (2010) pointed out that empirical studies involving both types of research methods lead to better validity in the findings due to the use of multiple sources of evidence collected either concurrently or in stages. To collect quantifiable evidence, the researcher chose a repeated-measures *t* test instrument to compare the study's pretest and posttest instruments to measure any growth in the student's comprehension after treatment (Mertler, 2014). The implementation of a mixed methods design required the researcher to utilize a qualitative approach for sources of information in answering the research question. Therefore, the researcher carefully collected evidence pertaining to the study participants' beliefs and perceptions of the close reading approach as a viable reading strategy, which was then reflected upon and interpreted for emerging themes. Since narrative forms of data collection must be reduced to relevant information, the search for themes across multiple instruments is critical (Johnson, 2008, as cited in Mertler, 2014). However, Schwalbach warned there is a potential for the teacher researchers to skew findings inadvertently while omitting extraneous data (as cited in Mertler, 2014). This required the researcher to judiciously consider and interpret the qualitative evidence: existing records, field observations, surveys, and exit interview to imbue as much subjectivity as possible in this action research study.

A critical component of the research process is creating a way to organize and store copious amounts of data. Mertler (2014) advocated the use of placing data into dedicated categories during the research process. Therefore, the researcher chose to

organize the data into weekly folders that corresponded with the linear steps of gradual release of responsibility instructional framework. This allowed the researcher to collect data that may indicate attitudinal changes over time as students had more practice using the close reading approach. The teacher-researcher compiled the data and placed into a large notebook. Concurrently, the teacher-researcher organized the field note observations and reflective journal by labeling each with the week date they were completed.

As the data collection was building in weeks one through seven, the teacher-researcher wrote weekly journal reflections derived from rereading observational field notes and student surveys. Throughout the study, the teacher researcher interacted with the participants by scaffolding their understanding of the close reading approach during the different phases of the GRRF: teacher modeling; whole, small, and individual groupings. In week eight, the teacher-researcher completed a transcription of the exit interview into analyzable notes.

The task of describing and interpreting the data required the researcher to read and reread systematically a volume of collected data searching for patterns and emerging themes that addressed the research question, without being distracted by “false positives” that were simply outliers that contributed nothing. Organization of data is critical in a thematic analysis approach. The researcher accomplished the initial reduction of data by the researcher carefully reading each week’s data collection and then compiling the findings into one narrative set of notes that reflected the weekly collected evidence. While writing the results, the teacher-researcher gave specific attention to the perceptions and beliefs of the students following their eight experiences with the close reading

approach. She also considered a possible relationship with the results of the pretest/posttest. Next, it was necessary to have a way to annotate systematically the narrative notes to organize them into specific foci; therefore, a coding system was used to expedite the reduction of data. The coding system was implemented as follows: Reading perception RP; Vocabulary V; Metacognition M, Reading concerns RC, Close reading CR, fiction/non-fiction FNF; and Reading strategies RS, (Mertler, 2014). The researcher concluded analysis by recording the findings that answered the research question on the impact of the close reading approach on student comprehension. These findings would determine future instructional decisions and implications.

Plan for Reflecting with Participants

Prior to Study

Two weeks before the first day of the study, the researcher held a conference with the students to verbally define action research and its purpose. The researcher informed the students that their participation in an action research study directed impacted a teacher's ability to perfect his or her instruction both during the study and post study. After the completion of a corporate reading of the parental consent form, the students were given time to discuss and question the action research process. The discussion involved explaining the length of time the study was going to take from start to completion. The researcher addressed their concerns for what their role in the study would be, and that all concerns that their privacy would be protected, and that the study's implantation did not equate with work above and beyond what would normally occur in the school semester.

During the Study

From week one through week eight, the teacher researcher addressed any questions concerning the study as they arose. As the students became more aware of their overall role in the research process, they asked questions about the process and about evidence collection. The teacher researcher also conducted informal class discussions after the first small group and subsequent individual experience phases of the study. This afforded the students an opportunity to reflect on their own learning. It also afforded the teacher-researcher the opportunity to reflect on her own design choices in the study and to modify those that required modification. The teacher-researcher provided time for individual feedback when needed during the regularly scheduled school tutoring sessions that were held daily during the school lunch hour.

Lastly, after the exit interview was completed, the eight participants had an opportunity to discuss with each other and with the teacher-researcher how their participation in this study influenced their reading comprehension skills and future instruction after treatment.

Post Study

A class discussion took place after the treatment to discuss the results of the study. The students were also interested in knowing post study what effect their participation would have on the researcher's future instruction in the close reading approach. The researcher felt it necessary to discuss the action research process with her colleagues. When gathered with colleagues in regularly scheduled English I professional learning community (PLC) meetings, the researcher explained the action research process, the implementation of the study, and the results to her peers. This study was

important to these stakeholders because of the current concern in the school district about content area teachers become literacy literate.

Plan for Devising an Action Plan

The goal of this action research study was to answer what Dewey (1933) referred to as “the perplexity or problem.” Action research provides a framework for ongoing improvement of pedagogy (Mertler, 2014). The researcher conducted an action research study to improve students’ reading comprehension skills, so they could effectively read both fiction and non-fiction texts in the content area classroom. The action plan formulated by the researcher is based on the findings of the study, which indicated the close reading approach is a valid literacy strategy that students can use to improve their reading comprehension.

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS

This study focuses on how the instruction of a close reading approach influences the comprehension level of twelve English I students. The problem of practice is that the researchers' students struggle when reading and responding to content area materials, which negatively affects content knowledge acquisition. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to examine the impact of a close reading approach on the comprehension level of twelve English I students. The findings of this study are representative of the researcher's objective to examine the students' use of a close reading method with a goal to improve their comprehension skills. This researcher hypothesized that instructing students in the close reading approach would improve their comprehension levels.

Using a mixed-methods data design, this study focused on recording data for twelve English I students' beliefs and perceptions of the close reading as a viable comprehension tool while learning how to implement its four steps and during repeated practice applying it to multiple texts. Furthermore, a pretest/posttest was used to determine the existence of any measureable effect the instruction using the close reading method. After a close examination of the data collected, the researcher synthesized the volume of information into two themes: (a) the necessity for secondary reading instruction and (b) the relationship between reading and metacognition.

Theme One: The Necessity for Secondary Reading Instruction

According to the first theme, secondary students require continued reading instruction beyond primary education. This theme presented itself in the data collected before the treatment with the close reading approach. Wolf (2007) denounced the often-used philosophy that learning to read happens until third grade, while reading to learn becomes the mainstay of reading experiences from fourth grade and beyond. The findings in this study revealed that older students need reading remediation in reading comprehension strategies for effective reading in the content areas. The underlying sub-themes critical to understanding this finding are as follows: (a) necessity for multiple strategies and b) lack of reading experiences.

Before the pretest instrument was deployed, the researcher surveyed the students concerning their reading lives. Using a multiple-choice instrument, the students were asked what reading strategy they employed when reading a difficult text. The data revealed that most students chose rereading as their comprehension strategy (Table 4.1).

Table 4.1 Reading Strategies

Choice of Reading Strategy	
Action Taken	By how many?
If I read the whole text but still do not understand it, I just answer it.	1
I just stop reading it.	0
I reread until I understand it, and I usually get the answers correct.	10
I ask for help.	1

Interestingly, there were two students who did not chose rereading as their comprehension strategy, Chris and Evan. Chris answered, “I ask for help”; yet, he never attended a tutoring session, nor had he asked the researcher for help in class. Evan’s answer consisted of “just answer it.” Shortly after this survey, the researcher gave them another reading survey to validate the students’ first survey results. In the second survey question, Chris changed his answer to the student majority response of rereading as his “go to” reading strategy, while Evan’s reply stayed consistent with his ever-present concern throughout the study that time was a pressure point for him. He said, “So you know I got to get to work, and even when I still did that I still needed time, you know it’s a time thing.” His response is consistent with a student wanting to complete the assignment on time and then hoping for the best results. Thus, the results of the second survey, 11 of the students stayed consistent in their answer. Chris changed his answer to rereading. This data confirms that the majority of students, except for Evan, reread to clear their confusion while reading. They also believed as shown in their responses that rereading usually aided them in answering questions correctly.

It was important for the researcher to verify that the students would indeed use this reading strategy or would change their approach when they were authentically engaged with a content text. Therefore, the researcher added a similar, but more specific, question concerning their choice of comprehension strategy while reading the pretest text, *The Gettysburg Address*. They were asked the following question in an open-ended survey: *When you had difficulty reading the speech, what did you do*

to try to comprehend the text better? Most of the students wrote their own version of how they use rereading as their comprehension strategy when given the opportunity to compose their own answer. The researcher considered that the reliability of this second instrument question may have influenced the students' answer in the second open-ended survey question; however, this possibility illustrated that the students may have chosen rereading again due to their lack of knowledge of multiple comprehension strategies to employ when they read difficult texts. For example, Steve, in the lowest reading level group, wrote, "I try to start over and take my time. Try to understand the text better" or Harriet, in the gifted/talented reading level, wrote, "I re-read the sentence I was having trouble with until I understand it."

Sean and Ivy (in the above average reading and gifted/talented groups, respectively) were the only student who provided a different response than rereading in the second survey. For example, Sam wrote that he used, "Context clues, prefixes, and other languages to figure out the words I didn't know." Ivy's stated, "When I had difficulty reading I first tried to reread the part, then if I didn't get it I would analyze the text for clues, and I would also use the main purpose of the text to make an inference on the meaning." Sean and Ivy showed use multiple reading strategies. However, both Sean and Ivy's failing assessment grades on the pretest, 38 and 56 respectively, showed they needed more instruction on implementing comprehension strategies that succeed when one strategy fails them. Therefore, the findings indicate that even students with above average reading skills require reading instruction to improve their comprehension.

Additionally, the finding that secondary students need reading instruction in multiple reading strategies is also supported through researcher observations. Recorded field notes also support the finding that students need remediation in multiple reading strategies. During the pretest implementation, the researcher recorded the following phenomenon concerning the students' behavior:

1. Although dictionaries were readily available, the students did not utilize this resource.
2. Annotation on the text was allowed, but the students did not employ this strategy.
3. Scrap paper was supplied, yet students did not utilize this resource.

The researcher noted that the students generally finished reading the text in approximately two to three minutes before picking up a pencil and writing on the pretest. The researcher noted distracted behaviors that showed a lack of concentration on the reading task. Shortly in the pretest, Steve asked to leave the room for the facilities, and within 15 minutes of this request asked to visit the water fountain. Johnny stopped several times during the pretest and looked around at the posters before going back to work. Evan and Harriet were breaking into conversations throughout the assessment. Amelia and Chris showed signs of anxiousness when they turned the sheets of the paper back and forth between the first and last pages. They answered the questions out of order despite the questions being organized in a linear fashion with the text.

In general, the students seemed to hurry through the assessment, while also hindering their comprehension of the text with these distracting behaviors. The

researcher imagined that these behaviors might signal a struggle with comprehending the text and answering the reader response text-dependent questions. The observations collected during the field test were supported in the students' post pretest survey concerning what challenged their comprehension on the text. Sherry wrote, "Trying to understand how he used to write and his choice of words," and Amelia wrote, "I know what the words mean but I don't know what he is trying to say, is like he is saying something with another meaning." The students' confusion was also confirmed in the pretest results. For example, the students' lack of comprehension strategies was illustrated in the students' answers to question 3 on the pretest instrument. Most of the students did not understand the diction or meaning of the text and rereading the text did not aid them in comprehending the text in the reader response question in Table 4.2.

Table 4.2 Pretest Reader Response Student Answers

Student/Reading Groups	What does Lincoln mean when he says, "We can not dedicate—we can not consecrate—we can not hallow—this ground"?
LL Readers	
Sherry	"Maybe that no matter what happens in the future we can not change our land."
Steve	"We can't take everything for granted. You never know what's going to happen next."
Clara	"I think that means that they can't give up. You have to fight and take pride in your country."
AL Readers	
Amelia	"When he says that he means that they cannot honor the land that they are on."
Katie	"I do not know because I do not know the meaning of consecrate. I do not know the word dedicate, and I think I know the meaning of hallow."
Emily	"I believe that what Lincoln says in this quote means that we need to stay strong and stop fighting. Also, that we need to remember all of the people that fought. My reason for this is because the tone of the sentences after that like the use of the words "brave amen. Living and dead."

AAL Readers	
Johnny	“We can’t win this war.”
Chris	“Lincoln means that the US can’t give up [sic]can’t just let the confederate win. Due to the line ‘we cannot hallow.’”
Sean	“We cannot forget these fallen soldiers”
GT Readers	
Evan	“They cannot give up because there [sic] family died there.”
Harriet	“He means that the living cannot. Only the dead because they fought and died for the cause. “He means we cannot add or take away the meaning, honor, and dignity of that battle field. Lincoln shows this in his next sentence explaining that we have little to no power to change this, when the soldiers have already honored the ground and showed the purpose far better than we could ever have. Therefore, Lincoln meant we cannot change the story.”
Ivy	

These findings indicate that the students had little to no experience in implementing multiple comprehension strategies to aid their understanding of a difficult text. Despite Johnny’s admission that “This text was on a different age and level to my knowledge,” he did not have a reading strategy that would guide him to understand the text more proficiently. Additionally, although Ivy’s answer was the best example of the 12 students (Table 4.2), it falls short of what a student with a 242 MAP score should be able to comprehend. The majority of the students’ inability to comprehend the pretest text well enough to answer text-dependent questions aligns with the understanding that readers must become strategic readers (Vacca, 2002). The students’ behavior illustrated that when given the time and resources such as paper, dictionary, and annotating permission, the students continued to read the text passively and to answer the questions. The possibility that the students did not know how to implement other comprehension strategies when reading is likely since they could have used the dictionary to look up unknown words. They also had access to

scrap paper to either brainstorm or rewrite the information in their own words. Using these strategies would have improved their comprehension of the text.

Lastly, the failure of rereading as the students' only reading strategy is highlighted in the data collected in the reading inventory survey when 9 of the 12 students admitted to having the specific problem of recall when they read a text. Recall, as defined for reading, is the ability to place information into working memory long enough not only to use it, but also to place it in context with the other information being read in a text (Wolf, 2007). The nine students who had difficulty with recall points to a flaw in the students' use of the rereading strategy as a comprehension tool. If rereading alone was a productive comprehension tool, the students would be able to more readily remember what they read. Rereading would aid their recall. The data showed that although 10 of the 12 participants were using rereading as their main method to repair challenges in comprehension, they also reported recalling information as a second challenge. This led the researcher to the conclusion leads that additional instruction in alternative reading strategies will benefit secondary students.

Challenges in perception of reading. Reading instruction that includes specifics on providing students with opportunities for consistent pleasurable reading experiences may aid in poor comprehension. The researcher collected data concerning the students' perception of reading and observations of their reading lives. Data collected in the reading survey showed only 3 of the 12 students viewed themselves as readers when it was defined as "choosing to read for extended periods of time, while 9 of the 12 did not view themselves as readers at all. Despite this

admission, all 12 students stated, “Reading was important to future success in employment” as opposed to the other answer, “No, I know lots of people who do not read well, and they are doing great.” Trelease (2013) contended that continued sustained reading experiences builds competent readers. An additional benefit that occurs with consistent, long-term reading experiences is that a student’s reading fluency is positively affected. According to Rasinski, Negeldinger, & Young (2017), fluent readers can effortlessly decode words on a text (automaticity), so their energy is instead used to make meaning of the text. In other words, comprehend the text. To become proficient readers, students must engage in multiple reading experiences over long lengths of time to improve fluency and develop general reading skills (Flowers, 2017).

The incongruous finding that the students were mostly not readers, yet they saw a value in being a proficient reader, prompted the researcher to ask the students more about their reading lives (Table 4.3). Of the 12 students, only one student, Sean, read more than six books in a year, although he stated it is a boring activity. Boredom with reading and difficulty reading were the main two reasons that students did not read or read more often. This data held sway despite reading levels or gender. Most of the students read only one to four books per year. Gardner (2005) contended that habitual reading improves comprehension and vocabulary acquisition. It is a skill that can be likened to a sports metaphor: to perfect it, one must practice every day. If the students are not reading by choice, they are not building their fluency skills, which in turn, retards their reading acquisition. Therefore, the findings indicate a possible connection between the students’ lack of reading skills and reading experiences as a

second possible reason why secondary students would benefit from reading instruction.

Concurrently, 6 of the 12 students in this study do not see their parent/guardians reading in the home. Of these students, four also do not like reading, and they do not see their parents reading in the home. On the other hand, of the four students who view themselves as readers, only one student did not view their parent reading at home (Table 4.3). This data supports the research-based fact that a child's perception of reading is strongly influenced by the reading viewpoint of the significant adults in their lives. Rasinski (2017) maintains that an important component of early literacy development and reading success is "Family and community dynamics, such as parents reading to and with their children, and access to books and other reading materials at home" (p. 519). Without the opportunity to witness authentic reading in the home, or understanding that reading is a worthwhile activity, the students do not view reading as pleasurable. If the students are not engaging in sustained reading activities, then they are not becoming deeper readers that decode effortlessly, so the more difficult task of making meaning is retarded (Vacca, 2002).

These survey findings that students do not enjoy reading were also corroborated by the researchers' field observations. During the study, the researcher provided students with time to choose and read books during independent time. The students who identified themselves as non-readers could not readily find books they wanted to read despite the researchers' extensive knowledge of high interest teen books. Steve, Evan, and Katie chose books from the media specialist's category

Table 4.3 Reading Interest Inventory Survey

Student	Do you view yourself as a reader?	Books Read Per Year?	Reason for not reading or not reading more often?	Do you see parent/guardian read in the home?	If you could read better, would you become a reader in your free time? This includes if you consider yourself a good reader.
Sherry	No	6	It is boring	No	Yes
Clara	Yes	4	It is boring	Yes	Yes
Steve	No	4	I have a difficult time reading.	Yes	Yes
Emily	Yes	4	I have a difficult time reading.	No	Yes
Amelia	No	2	It is boring.	Yes	No
Katie	No	2	I have a difficult time reading.	No	Yes
Sean	Yes	6+	It is boring.	Yes	Yes
Johnny	No	2	It is boring.	No	Yes
Chris	Yes	6	I have a difficult time reading.	Yes	Yes
Evan	No	2	It is boring.	No	Yes
Harriet	No	2	It is boring.	No	Yes
Ivy	No	6	I have a difficult time reading.	Yes	Yes

called “quick reads” for their short length and easy readability factors of action-based plots and more white space on the page than print. For example, Evan stated, “It doesn’t matter what it is about. I just have to read a book for SSR.” Steve commented, “You can choose one that you think I will like. Maybe sports,” while

Katie chose a “quick read” book saying, “It will be easier to read than the ones that are more interesting. Those are longer. I would rather watch the movie.”

However, when the researcher modified the definition of reading to “choosing to read for extended periods of time on social media sites or for texting,” all seven students changed their view of themselves from non-reader to reader indicating that ninth grade students are more likely to spend their reading time online rather than the deeper reading that improves comprehension as in longer reading selections that build reading stamina. For purposes of this study, comprehension is being described as “both a product and a process, something that requires purposeful, strategic effort on the reader’s part” (Beers, 2003, p. 45). Strategic and deeper reading is not occurring when students engage in online types of reading, such as perusing websites, text messaging, or social media sites such as Twitter that is mainly 140 characters or less of text. The rich, complex themes, vocabulary, and tone within content reading materials presents a challenge to readers who have less experience with these kinds of print (Trelease, 2013). The pretest text, *The Gettysburg Address*, is an example of a text that students would find difficult unless deeper comprehension strategies are activated. Lastly, the researcher was curious as to how the secondary students’ view of reading instruction in the classroom would change if the reading instruction meant they would read more successfully. All but two of the students, Amelia and Harriet, said they would read more if they were better readers. This data indicated to the researcher that the 10 students would read more if they could read better. Therefore, reading instruction that includes multiple approaches to comprehension and reading opportunities for secondary reading could improve students’ reading ability.

In summary, the decision to include reading instruction in the content area classroom impacts both the teacher and students. However, the findings in theme one illustrated that secondary students need more reading instruction in comprehension strategies. The students' "go to" method of rereading is insufficient to the task of reading content subject matter. During the pretest, the 12 students did not use the available dictionaries as a resource although they did not know the denotation of the words, which impacted their understanding of their contextual meaning as Lincoln intended. Rereading a text may lead to contextual clues on the denotation of an unknown word, but it is not the explicit action of step two in the close reading approach. Students use dictionary resource to consider which denotation the author is using in context. The students had difficulty answering text dependent questions as shown in Table 4.2. Their answers reflected the researchers' field note observations—that they read and wrote without asking questions or pausing to clarify misunderstandings. The students only strategy to reread the text, as Sherry stated, "Until I understood it" confirms that the problems inherent with adolescent reading challenges have required middle and high schools to focus on content literacy instruction that provides students with comprehension strategies necessary for reading deeply and writing accurately in the content subject areas (Vacca, 2002). According to Fisher & Frey (2015), the need is still present for educators to teach students how to close read for deeper comprehension. They stress what readers do while engaged with a text:

When readers read closely, they investigate, interrogate, and explore the deep meaning of a text. They form opinions and arguments based on a range of texts that

have been examined and can defend their positions as a result. It's the kind of reading that college professors expect of students –not to mention the type of reading required for jobs in the information age (p. 56).

Furthermore, the students' lack of engaging in authentic, voluntary reading experiences in conjunction with their perception that the significant adults in their lives do not read as an activity in the home may be rectified through targeted reading instruction that includes reading for pleasure. Concurrently, the data in the reading inventory survey also provided an understanding that most of the students do not view themselves as readers unless the answer is qualified to include reading experiences on social media or texting. Irvin, Meltzer, & Dukes (2007) argue that students engage in these reading and writing experiences because they value the purpose for their online reading and writing. They acknowledge that while these students are adept at communicating online, these reading skills are not transferable to the type of reading required in academia. The students' narrow view of enjoyable reading exacerbates the problem of poor comprehension skills. The deeper reading required in text engagement is unlikely to occur when students avoid reading due to an inability to comprehend. When they avoid reading, they lose more skills in vocabulary acquisition and fluency. This cycle repeats itself until explicit reading instruction is provided (Wharton-McDonald & Erickson, 2017).

Additionally, fluency, an important component of reading, is hindered when students do not engage in multiple, ongoing reading experiences over time. Fluency improves when students engage in ongoing reading experiences (Rasinski, 2005). If most of the students in this study do not read by choice, the possibility that they will

be able to improve their comprehension ability through the reading of academic texts required in English I content area classrooms is highly unlikely. The findings in this study indicate that secondary students require instruction in reading to improve reading achievement. Therefore, the students need for reading instruction may be addressed by providing the students with an active reading strategy such as the close reading approach. The close reading approach with its multiple strategies for repairing confusion while reading i.e., rereading, defining unknown words and their contextual use, chunking information into easier comprehensible foci, and summarizing the chunks (retelling), provides the necessary components to positively impact the students reading comprehension. The possibility exists that if secondary students are successful in their reading attempts, their motivation to read in academic situations may increase, (Irvin, Meltzer, and Dukes, 2007) which will in turn positively impact their overall reading comprehension ability.

Theme Two: The Relationship Between Reading and Metacognition

The second theme to emerge in this study is that secondary students' comprehension skills improved when the instruction of the close reading approach also enhanced their metacognitive awareness. For purposes of this study, metacognitive awareness is defined as the ability to understand one's own thought processes and how they function for optimal learning results (Flavell, 1976).

There were several challenges in metacognitive awareness. First, the data showed that the students' metacognitive skills were deficient with respect to the reading task placed before them, as illustrated by their perception that *The Gettysburg Address* was not a complex text (Table 4.4). This belief may have contributed to the

low grades on the pretest instrument assessment proving that despite their belief that the text was not complex, they all failed the assessment (Table 4.5). The data collected during the instruction of the close reading approach revealed that the students exhibited a lack of metacognitive understanding of their comprehension abilities in relation to a reading task that was too difficult for them.

The first indication that the students' metacognitive awareness may be challenged presented itself during the administration of the pretest. It became apparent to the researcher that the students were unaware that comprehension of the text was compromised by their lack of metacognitive skills. The researcher used a pretest/posttest instrument to measure whether the instruction in the close reading approach would affect student reading comprehension. Since this study was applying a treatment and measuring its effects on student achievement, to avoid influencing the results of the pretest or posttest results, my only instruction before the pretest was for them to read the text and answer the reader response questions. While the students were completing the cold reading and reader response questions for *The Gettysburg Address*, the researcher recorded field notes on student behaviors during their taking the pretest assessment. During the implementation of the pretest, the researcher recorded the following behaviors in her field notes journal:

1. The students read the text only once and immediately began answering reader response questions with a pen or pencil in hand.
2. The students did not annotate on the text even when given permission to write on it. (It is a common occurrence that students ask the question whether they can write on a text due to past experiences of teachers conserving paper.

Therefore, the researcher had given permission to write on the pretest without trying to influence their behaviors.)

3. Many completed the reading and reader response questions 20-40 minutes.

In the past, the researcher’s experience with her students reading and responding to the text, *The Gettysburg Address*, this often-used, ninth-grade curricular text presented an academic challenge to English I students in general. In this current study, this phenomenon presented itself again as identified in the student participants’ low pretest assessment performance (Table 4.4).

Table 4.4 Pretest Assessment Student Scores

Student	Pretest Grade		
	Earned Points	Total Points	Grade Percentage
GR-1			
Clara	9	32	28%
Steve	3	32	9%
Sherry	7	32	22%
GR-2			
Amelia	2	32	6%
Emily	8	32	25%
Katie	2	32	6%
GR-3			
Chris	3	32	9%
Johnny	7	32	22%
Sean	12	32	38%
GR-4			
Harriet	13	32	41%
Ivy	18	32	56%
Evan	6	32	19%

The researcher considered the following possible reasons that were generally illustrated in past experiences with ninth grade English I students: students were more concerned with assignment completion than their grade, or they mistakenly believed

they successfully comprehended the text and answered the questions correctly. However, the data collected during this study indicates that poor performance on this complex text, *The Gettysburg Address*, may be related to poor metacognitive awareness impacting their comprehension of the text. The students did not understand that the reading task before them required higher thinking skills and comprehension until after the close reading approach treatment was complete.

The researcher surveyed the students' perception of text complexity after completing the pretest instrument. Post pre-test assessment data revealed that most students felt *The Gettysburg Address* was an easy text to read and comprehend. An exception to this general perception was found within the gifted and talented readers' group—Ivy and Harriet believed the text was more complex than the other 10 students. Evan, the third member of the gifted and talented group, answered the question by considering the historical context instead of his own opinion of the text. Likewise, Johnny, an above average reader, did not give his opinion of text complexity, but looked at author's purpose (Table 4.5). Both Evan and Johnny's answer did not give the researcher the data necessary for completing understanding this question with the full sample population. Therefore, in a follow-up question to clarify their answers, the researcher verbally asked Evan and Johnny for their opinion of text complexity. In a recorded field note entry, Evan stated, "Lincoln's tone was very difficult to understand" and Johnny stated, "The text was difficult for me. Adults at that time could understand it." Their revised responses resulted in all three gifted and talented readers and one above average reader in agreement that the pretest text was complex. Therefore, there is evidence that of 8 of 12 student participants, who

had lower reading skills, believed the text to be simple to read. This may indicate that students with lower-to-average reading skills are even more disadvantaged by poor metacognitive awareness when reading (Table 4.5).

To insure reliability of the students' answers before the instruction of the close reading approach, the researcher gave the students a second survey question concerning text complexity and their thought processes while completing the pretest: *What is difficult to comprehend in this text?* Both Clara and Steve maintained that the text was easy. Clara (in the lowest reading level group) stated, "I really comprehended everything pretty good. I didn't struggle with anything really." Likewise, Steve claimed, "It really wasn't difficult to read. I understand what the text is trying to say." Eight of the students (represented in all reading groups) said that the vocabulary was a challenge because of the unknown words, but did not specifically state the text in its entirety was challenging to read. The highest-level readers reiterated that the text was complex. For example, Johnny stated, "It was a different age and level to my knowledge," while Harriet's believed, "The way Lincoln speaks makes it difficult to read." The researcher believes that the disconnect between the students' understanding of the pretest text complexity and their lack of metacognitive skills in knowing that this text required them to employ more effective comprehension strategies caused their subsequent inability to effectively comprehend the text. This offers a further reason for their failing grades on the pretest assessment (Table 4.5). The need for a reading strategy such as the close reading method with its inherent self-monitoring steps, which promotes active versus passive reading, may be an effective solution as hypothesized by the researcher before the study was performed.

Table 4.5 Text Complexity and Metacognitive Awareness: Student Reader Responses

Student	Question: Do you think <i>The Gettysburg Address</i> is a ninth-grade level text?
GR-1 LL Readers	
Clara	“No, because as short in [sic] simple as it is. Plus, I personally think a 9 th grade level should be more complex.”
Steve	“Yes, I think it’s ninth grade level because it feels like it is.”
Sherry	“No, I think the speech is something I would read in the seventh grade. I just feel like that speech isn’t really a hard speech.”
GR-2 AL Readers	
Amelia	“I think this text is a ninth-grade level text because it is not difficult.”
Emily	“Yes, because this text you read and answer simple question [sic] about how you think of things.”
Katie	“I do not think this is a ninth-grade level text. I believe this because we learned about the Gettysburg Address in elementary and middle school. I have read it before in those grades.”
GR-3 AAL Readers	
Chris	“This is a 9 th or 10 th grade text for some of the wording are difficult words.”
Johnny	“No, the president wrote this speech to other adults to hear [sic] not kids so to look professional as a president [sic] he wrote it in an adult way.”
Sean	“Yes, I can understand most of these words, and so should most ninth graders.”
GR-4 GT Readers	
Harriet	“No. It’s a short and a quick read and even if you can read the words [sic] you may not be able to understand what he is trying to tell you.”
Ivy	“The text is not a ninth-grade level because the vocabulary it contains is difficult. The text contains words such as consecrate and devotion. These two words and many other exceed the border of ninth –grade vocab.”
Evan	“I think it is lower than a ninth-grade reading level due to average intelligence of Abe’s time. A president’s speech should be for the common folk to understand.”

Close reading, improved metacognitive awareness, and academic performance. In the introduction of the close reading approach, the teacher-researcher noted that all student participants were unfamiliar with the term and reading strategy called close reading. As previously stated, the students experience with repairing any confusion consisted of rereading. In an exit survey, the students were asked for their overall impression of the close reading approach now that they had applied the reading strategy to a full cycle of the gradual release of responsibility instruction—I do it, we do it, you do it together, and you do it alone. Their answers revealed a new understanding that the use of a reading strategy could produce better reading skills. Furthermore, though they did not use the term metacognition, the value in teaching the close reading method was shown in the students' new self-awareness that their thinking process is part of their reading comprehension experiences using a reading strategy. For example, the students' responses to using the close reading approach confirmed that after the treatment they understood the necessity for a comprehension strategy for reading, and that it required activation of their thinking skills while completing a reading task. In the exit interview, the students stated the following observations:

You are teaching it for us to understand what we're reading more, so like looking up the definitions, help us figure out what the long words mean to help us understand that sentence more. I think the main reason why we are learning it is to understand what we are reading a lot more. (Steve)

I mean, it's good for poetry and like non-fiction texts and stuff like that, but I don't think it will be great in like testing or something cause you're on a time limit and then like you can't bring I guess a dictionary or electronic thing to define the word, so like I was like thinking is there any other way I can define words like context clues for testing. (Johnny)

I think like Steve said, it is a really good comprehension tool. Also like Johnny said on tests, you can't use a dictionary or something to define it on, but especially if you can't understand a text, this would be something that helps. But for me, I see this as something I am not going to use it all at once. I feel like I'm going to try to read something and then I can't understand a portion of the text, so I'm going to be like, okay I am going to take like a piece from this approach and maybe like I am going to look up this word really quick and then maybe I'll just chunk one paragraph and see if I can break it down a little bit better. So, I may not be using it in its entirety. (Sean)

I think it kind of serves as a wheelchair cause if you are having trouble getting the meaning, you can use it whenever you need it, and also when you can get the meaning without using it—you don't have to. More like a healing tool. (Ivy)

I think it's a way to organize it in a way easier for us to understand instead of reading it, and you don't know what to do next. It's a way to organize it. (Harriet)

I feel like it is a really good system for figuring out the meaning of a text. I kind of think of it an equation like math that you put this huge number and you like get a simple answer. I think it worked very well for me. (Evan)

I understood how it could help me in real life, though. I actually got excited about it! No more worrying about having to read something ten times without making any progress. (Emily)

I honestly think it helps, it helps you understand the text or the poem more better but also I think it also helps you become a better reader and a better writer at the same time. Because whenever you're doing the post reading like you have to write chunks, and whenever you write chunks, you always have the follow-up questions. (Clara)

I liked working by myself but I struggled with crunching [chunking] because I was trying to think like my teacher, and I was thinking too hard. (Sherry)

My overall impression of the [teacher] performing the close reading approach is that it didn't show how useful the approach could be, but it did show me how I should perform it and the way of thinking I should have, [sic] because you said exactly what you were looking for and said what you were thinking. (Ivy)

It was interesting seeing one on one thinking with each other and putting together what we know to understand the text. It was a learning experience seeing what I learned, and how well I can do this for myself. (Johnny)

I used the strategy and almost committed it to memory. Then I ran into some trouble. I attempted my own reading strategy, but I still failed. I needed assistance with the poem used, but I can tell my reading experiences is being enhanced with this strategy. (Sean)

The researcher believes that the students' metacognition was activated when they were given an active reading strategy that encouraged self-monitoring of their comprehension of the text. The finding that the students were more cognitively involved in the posttest reading task was shown in the students' reading behaviors recorded during the posttest instrument. For comparison purposes, the researcher recorded field notes during the implementation of the posttest assessment for comparison post treatment. The posttest reading behaviors showed a marked change in how the students approached the reading task when these were compared to their pretest behaviors:

1. The students reread the text before responding with a pencil or pen in hand.
2. The students annotated on the text while reading.
3. The students took an average of 60-90 minutes to complete the posttest.

The researcher also noted that the students implemented the four steps to the close reading approach on their posttest, which indicated a more active approach to reading. The students' perceptions of the close reading approach in the exit interview answered in part that the close reading approach does impact English I students reading comprehension by activating their knowledge of their thought process while reading. However, the researcher felt it was necessary to collect quantifiable evidence to further investigate any impact the instruction of the close reading approach had on students' comprehension skills.

The researcher was interested in fully understanding if the increase in the students' metacognitive awareness as shown in their exit interview answers influenced the posttest results. After the treatment was complete, the researcher found that the instruction of the close reading approach, which provided the students with a step-by-step comprehension strategy, successfully influenced the students' academic performance (Table 4.6). All groups tested achieved a mean growth of 32% in their

Table 4.6 Results of the Pretest/Posttest Student Scores

Student	Pretest Grade			Posttest Grade			Difference
	Earned Points	Total Points	Grade Percentage	Earned Points	Total Points	Grade Percentage	
GR-1							
Clara	9	32	28%	13	32	41%	13%
Steve	3	32	9%	9	32	28%	19%
Sherry	7	32	22%	10	32	31%	9%
Tot/Avg	19	96	20%	32	96	33.30%	14%
GR-2							
Amelia	2	32	6%	18	32	56%	50%
Emily	8	32	25%	21	32	66%	41%
Katie	2	32	6%	6	32	19%	13%
Tot/Avg	12	96	13%	45	96	47%	34%
GR-3							
Chris	3	32	9%	23	32	72%	63%
Johnny	7	32	22%	21	32	67%	44%
Sean	12	32	38%	26	32	81%	44%
Tot/Avg	22	96	23%	70	96	73%	50%
GR-4							
Harriet	13	32	41%	14	32	44%	3%
Ivy	18	32	56%	25	32	8%	22%
Evan	6	32	19%	24	32	75%	56%
Tot/Avg	37	96	39%	63	96	65.60%	27%

comprehension ability from pretest to posttest results. Individually, the leveled groups achieved the following mean growth: the lowest level readers—14%, the average

reading level readers—34%, the above level readers—50%, and the gifted and talented—27% growth. The groups most affected by the instruction of the close reading approach were the average and above average level readers. This data indicated that students with average to proficient reading skills may receive the maximum benefit when instructed on how to closely read and engage actively with a difficult text while considering how their own cognition works.

On the pretest, all 12 participants failed the reading task, which was assessed on a 10-point scale. Ivy, a gifted and talented level reader, scored the highest grade with a 56. Notwithstanding, the posttest samples do show that deeper reading occurred for all students after using the close reading approach. On the posttest using the same 10-point scale, 6 of the 12 participants earned a passing grade, which is a 50% passing rate recovery. Moreover, the students who failed the pretest all showed increases in academic achievement. For example, Amelia and Tommy, both ELLs, showed a 50% and 44% increase respectively. Steve gained a 19% increase in deeper comprehension of the text. The highest individual growth in comprehension of the text post treatment were Chris and Evan, with a 63% and 56% growth increase, respectively.

These results confirm the researcher's hypothesis that the close reading approach would positively affect English I students' reading comprehension and achievement.

Yet, to fully answer the research question on the effect of the close reading approach on the academic performance of English I students in this study, it is necessary to consider why six students improved in reading comprehension and

metacognitive awareness, but still failed the posttest. After analyzing the posttest results and field notes, the researcher believes the students' failure to fully implement the four steps of the close reading approach with fidelity led to their inability to show proficiency on the posttest reading task. An increase in metacognitive awareness is not the only variable that must be present for deeper comprehension to take place. The researcher found fidelity to the explicit instruction in the close reading approach's steps was a necessary component for better comprehension of the text. Regardless of instruction and practice in an active reading strategy, the students did not define, chunk, and summarize as specifically instructed during the teacher modeling "I do it" and whole group "we do it together" phases of the gradual release of responsibility framework. Their lack of fidelity to steps 2 through 4 while implementing the close reading approach interfered with their deeper understanding of Lincoln's tone or purpose in giving his speech that day.

A breakdown in using the close reading approach occurred first in the implementation of step two-denotation of unknown words. Lincoln's use of the words *devotion*, *consecrate*, *hallow*, *dedication*, and *devotion* were largely ignored by the students despite these words being significant to the tone and meaning of the text. When they either failed to completely define the critical vocabulary in the speech or to choose the correct contextual definition of the words, it caused the beginning of a failure in the full effectiveness of the close reading approach as a reading strategy. For example, Sherry did not choose the word *consecrate* when underlining unknown words, which means she did not define it. She also did not write down two to three denotations of the words, *hallow* and *dedicate*, as instructed in step two of the close

reading approach. The students were to write more than one denotation of the word until the correct contextual meaning was established while rereading and applying each definition during the third step—chunking the text in specific foci. Sherry’s lack of fidelity to the steps led her to an incorrect understanding of what Lincoln meant concerning the purpose of his speech: What does Lincoln mean when he says, “We cannot dedicate—we cannot consecrate—we cannot hallow—this ground?” Her reader response answer was to say, “I think Lincoln means that we cannot damage our kind and that we should protect our kind because men have died for us and we should honor them by protecting the kind they fought for.” In another example, Clara stated, “Lincoln means that we can’t give in to this land but that we need to take pride in ourselves” while Steve stated, “He means we can’t act like we found this land and act like we fought for this land because we didn’t. The people before us did.” Their answers do not show contextual understanding of the words they defined, nor an understanding of how these words suggest the author’s purpose or tone.

Furthermore, when step two is implemented correctly, it influences the readers’ ability to understand how to combine textual information into specific points of foci, which is step three of the close reading approach. This was reflective of 10 of the 12 students’ failure to chunk the text into smaller units of meaning, which negatively affected their comprehension of critical aspects of the speech. Tommy and Ivy chunked the text into 12 and 8 specific foci respectively, while most students created 3 to 6 chunks. When the students failed to breakdown all the information into easier comprehensible chunks, they missed key points Lincoln was presenting in his speech. Additionally, their error of not following this chunking step with fidelity also

affected step four, which required them to summarize each chunk. Without a complete retelling of what Lincoln meant in each chunk of information, the students' comprehension of the text was less than complete. The researcher believes through analysis of the posttest that the use of the close reading approach as a comprehension tool is more difficult to measure for its full impact on student achievement when the steps are not accurately implemented by the students. The researcher wonders whether, had the students followed the steps with more fidelity, the close reading approach would have had even more positive results.

In summary, the students' academic progress was positively impacted with the instruction of the close reading approach, which offered self-monitoring steps that caused the students to stop while read the text and consider their thinking process as they tried to fully comprehend the text. As shown in the evidence, the students believed the text to be easy; therefore, a conclusion can be made that the students lacked the understanding that it was necessary to self-monitor their thinking process while comprehending the pretest text. Griffith & Ruan (2005) point to the work of Brown & Baker (1985; 1984, respectively) in the field of metacognition and reading, which was based on Flavel's model of metacognitive processes. They report that according to Brown and Baker, metacognition has two important constructs in respect to reading skills. One is the readers' self awareness of their own cognitive abilities, and their understanding of the reading task. The second ability is regulation of cognition, which means the reader is able to implement reading strategies to monitor his or her reading comprehension as they engage with a text. The reader is able to use

multiple strategies to repair misunderstandings while reading, and make choices concerning which specific strategy is best for each reading task.

In the study, results of the students improved reading comprehension performance as indicated by their posttest assessment scores, implies a correlation between the students' use of the close reading approach and their acquisition of higher metacognitive awareness. This conclusion is supported by the students' response to their overall impression of the close reading approach and their posttest grades (Table 4.6). The findings indicate that when the students employed the close reading approach to the posttest instrument, after completing eight close reading experiences with multiple texts prior to the posttest assessment, that their reading comprehension improved due to a higher level of metacognitive awareness. Each experience using the close reading approach provided a concrete method of making meaning of the text. This contributed to their focused attention on their thought processes before, during, and after performing each reading task. Furthermore, the posttest results confirmed that the close reading approach, with its built-in self-monitoring steps, may have been the key to the students improved comprehension skills (Table 4.6).

The indication that the close reading approach impacted the students' metacognitive awareness may be indicated in their academic growth from pretest to posttest results. The students' confident tone as expressed in table 4.4 regarding text complexity and their ability to comprehend the text shows a disparity between their perception and their performance. The pretest scores show that all student did not achieve a passing grade on a 10-point grading scale. The students' lack of

comprehension of the text is apparent in the failing scores on the pretest (Table 4.5). The highest-level readers as a group scored the highest point percentage at 39%, while the lower level readers scored 23 % and under. These findings indicate that a students' metacognitive ability impacts their reading comprehension of a text, which further influences their academic performance. Again, these students disconnect with understanding that this text is complex in its tone, vocabulary, and themes shows in the pretest grades. The results of the pretest scores compared to the higher achievement in the post test scores indicate that all students, regardless of reading level ability, will benefit from an effective comprehension strategy that activates their cognition of knowledge and their regulation of cognition.

Conclusion

This study is part of a broader discussion concerning whether reading instruction should be provided in secondary schools and, if content area teachers do provide instruction, what constitutes a best practice in reading instruction for improving secondary students' reading comprehension. According to Fischer and Frey (2105), the issue of how to aid adolescent, struggling readers has been a topic of research for decades. Furthermore, even if teachers have a working understanding of research-based comprehension theory, it may not translate to how students learn to read while also acquiring content knowledge (Snow, 2002). Current research also suggests that secondary students reading below grade level need content area texts that are higher in complexity rather than texts that are at the students' individual reading levels (Gambrell, Malloy, Marinak, & Mazzoni, 2015). However, a complex

text will only increase reading achievement when the teacher provides support to struggling readers as they engages with the text.

The researcher's concern about how to address these specific needs of her students was at the forefront of her action research plan. The specific focus of this study is concerned with the impact a close reading approach has on the comprehension levels and reading achievement of English I students. After careful and thorough analysis of the data, the researcher found two major themes: English I students benefit from receiving reading support that includes the instruction of a close reading approach, and the use of a close reading approach improves student metacognitive awareness, which affects reading achievement.

The results of the pretest/posttest instruments showed that the instruction of a close reading approach had a measurable impact on English I students' comprehension levels and reading achievement, thus signaling that reading instruction in the content area classroom is a valid pedagogical decision for content area teachers concerned with student reading in the content area.

Additionally, Fisher and Frey (2014) stated that self-regulation during reading means the learner is "acting upon the metacognitive perceptions they experience during a task, such as rereading a passage when comprehension breaks down, consulting another resource to clarify the meaning of a vaguely understood vocabulary word, or checking one's work for errors" (Fischer & Frey, 2014, p.100). Evidence collected in the study identified a relationship between increased metacognitive awareness and improved reading comprehension. Fischer and Frey's description of the reader's active participation in making meaning of a text mirrors

the steps of a close reading approach. With its self-monitoring steps, the participants were more cognizant of what they needed to do to repair their comprehension.

Ultimately, secondary students have to be able to read in several content areas at a proficiency level necessary to acquire content knowledge, especially in the areas of math, history, English, and history. In particular, English I students in South Carolina have a high stakes, standardized test called End of Course (EOC) in the English I content area, which is a labor intensive reading assessment. Students reading below grade level are especially impacted with the pressure to pass this test. If reading instruction is not provided in some form by the content area teacher, this test has a marginalizing impact on their ability to earn an English I credit. Therefore, the close reading approach, as part of a targeted instructional plan in the content area classroom, provides the content teacher with a method of answering this challenge. Lastly, while these results cannot be generalized to a larger context without further study, they do indicate that content area teachers should consider instructing their students in a close reading approach to provide reading instruction to secondary students.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS

This study investigates the impact that the instruction of a close reading approach would have on the reading comprehension of 12 English I students. The problem of practice concerns English I students' inability to comprehend subject matter materials due to reading challenges. To ensure reliability, the research was conducted using a mixed method design that included the students' perception of the close reading approach as a reading strategy and a quantitative measurement of the close reading approach's impact on the students' reading achievement.

Research Question

What impact will a close reading approach have on the comprehension level of 12 English I students.

Hypothesis

The close reading approach will have a positive impact on the comprehension level of twelve English I students' reading comprehension.

Purpose of This Study

The purpose of this study was to examine the impact of a close reading approach on the comprehension level of twelve English I students.

Overview/Summary of the Study

In chapter four, the researcher thoroughly analyzed and interpreted the data collected during the study. The data collection consisted of pertest/posttest

instruments, field observations, existing records, surveys, and exit interview. The research question driving this study was addressed within each theme found in the analysis of the data. This final chapter discusses the major points of the study and how the findings lead to an action plan based on their implications

Point One: Close Reading Approach and Reading Instruction

One of the major findings of this study is that explicit instruction of the close reading approach resulted in improved reading comprehension for the English I students. The full sample of participants failed to pass the pretest with a 60 or higher prior to the instruction of the close reading approach. This result points to a need for secondary students to receive reading instruction in the content area classroom, especially when domain specific reading is required. Most of the students stated, “Rereading a difficult text until they understood it” as their main reading strategy when confronted with a difficult text; however, rereading without any other strategy failed as a comprehension aid when used on the pretest as a strategy for comprehending *The Gettysburg Address*.

Concurrently, the students’ reread strategy alone could not compensate for their inability to comprehend unknown words and/or their contextual use. Difficulty reading and understanding the meaning of domain specific vocabulary in the pretest signaled that reading comprehension was hindered when students did not know how to repair their misunderstanding. The students’ reread strategy alone could not compensate for their lack of comprehension of unknown words and/or their contextual use. However, the steps in the close reading approach—(a) rereading, (b) defining unknown words, (c) chunking, and (d) summarizing—provided the students

with a multi-strategy approach to comprehension. The students rose in overall reading achievement by 32% regardless of initial reading level. All students from lower level to gifted and talented reading levels benefited with instruction in the close reading approach, consistent with the researcher's hypothesis.

Furthermore, this study in the efficacy of the close reading approach revealed that only three participants viewed themselves as readers. Yet, when online reading was added to the definition of reading, 9 out of 12 students changed their answer to "view themselves as readers". Unfortunately, reading in the content area classroom requires a deeper reading of a text than is done when reading online. The success of a close reading approach, or any reading strategy instruction, may be limited by the students' regard for reading in general. The students' narrow perception of what constitutes reading has an impact on their academic progress when one considers that poor fluency is strongly influenced by a lack of reading experiences. Part of reading instruction in the content areas should involve providing students with reading opportunities that go beyond the surface reading involved in online reading into deeper levels of reading comprehension that exist in texts with more complexity. The close reading approach fulfilled the students' need for a comprehension repair kit when content area teachers use more complex texts. In turn, the use of more complex texts improves students' reading ability, which could lead to a more positive perception of themselves as readers and what constitutes higher reading.

Point Two: Close Reading and Metacognition Growth

Another important finding from this study is that a close reading approach played a role in the students' metacognitive awareness, which led to reading with

better comprehension. The results of this study illustrate that students' understanding and self-monitoring of their reading comprehension ability is a critical component in reading comprehension improvement. The post survey after the pretest was completed by the students revealed a dissonance between how the students viewed text complexity and their actual performance. Upon completing the pretests, the students emphatically stated that *The Gettysburg Address* was either below grade level or on grade level. Their metacognitive awareness that they could not comprehend the text was almost non-existent, which is revealed in their poor scores on the pretest assessment. However, after eight weeks of learning how to apply a close reading approach, the students' comprehension improved as a result of their becoming increasingly more self aware of how to engage their thinking when engaging with a text. The students learned how to self monitor and subsequently repair their misunderstanding of a text as they applied the close reading approach. The group interview also revealed that the students began to create a hybrid of the four steps of the close reading approach, thus indicating that they were taking responsibility for their understanding by choosing the steps they felt would give maximum aid to their comprehension of the text.

In another example of students' metacognition being positively affected, many students expressed serious concerns that while the close reading approach is helpful, the time needed to complete a close reading before answering reader response questions makes it time prohibitive. A few of the students felt that it would be difficult to use the close reading approach in a standardized testing situation. Their concern was that they are not allowed to use a dictionary or annotate on a text during

standardized testing. While the researcher was concerned that these legitimate reasons would deter students from using the approach, their insightfulness and anxiety concerning time and usefulness on standardized testing indicated to the researcher a growth in knowledge of cognition and regulation of cognition. The growth in the students' metacognition after the instruction in the close reading approach was apparent in the students' increased metacognitive awareness as the study progressed and their gain in reading achievement from pretest to posttest. Lastly, their thoughtful discussion of the close reading approach throughout the study was another indication of their gain in metacognitive skills.

Point Three: Close Reading Approach and Fidelity Challenges

The close reading approach is a reading strategy that requires students to apply its steps with fidelity to achieve its maximum benefits. Part of the research question on the impact of instructing a close reading approach to English I students must include why this approach did not bring all students to a passing score on the post assessment. One possible reason is that the steps of the close reading approach were not used with fidelity to the researcher's modeling in both the "I do it" and "we do it together" stages of the GRRF. Steps three and four, the most difficult steps were not performed adequately to by the students. After careful analysis of student artifacts, the researcher noted that the students were challenged in chunking foci and/or including key concepts from the text into their summaries. Although discussed in point two, the students' choices to manipulate the steps in the close reading approach signaled positive changes in metacognitive awareness, this behavior may have also impeded the full success of the close reading approach. The cliché phrase

concerning “not breaking a rule until you have mastered it” applies to the students not fully following this reading strategy. The researcher also considered a second possible reason for the close reading approach not being fully successful, namely, that when the instruction is given, perhaps the teacher and whole group stage modeling of the close reading approach should have been provided more than once during the study.

Point Four: Close Reading Approach and Diverse Reading Levels

The answer to the study research question of what impact the instruction of a close reading approach had on twelve English I students with diverse reading levels was also explored. In Table 4.6, the results show that the greatest gains in reading comprehension were in the average and above-average reading level groups with a 34% and 50% gain, respectively. This result may imply that below-grade-level readers were also lower in fluency skills. Moreover, it could suggest that on-grade level readers gained the most from reading instruction because their fluency is more developed, they lack knowledge of reading strategies. Additionally, the talented and gifted reading level group made an impressive gain of 27%, but its average was affected by Harriet, who achieved only a 3% personal gain, which was an unexpected outcome when her individual score of 40% on the pretest was higher than many of the participants. The lowest reading level group made a 14% gain in growth. Clara and Sherry rose in achievement by 13% and 19%, respectively, but the group’s overall average gain was reduced Steve’s 9% gain. Individually, all twelve participants increased in reading achievement. Therefore, a close reading approach was successful as a response to intervention for all students regardless of reading level upon entering the secondary content classroom.

Point Five: Close Reading Approach and Diverse Populations

Although there was not equal gender representation with five boys and seven girls, it is interesting to note that the females averaged a 25% gain, while the males averaged a 38% gain even though the females scored 31% in the pretest as opposed to the males scoring 16%. The lower gain in the female category was influenced by two individuals who did not achieve a double digits increase. The impact of the instruction of a reading remediation tool was more pronounced for the males than for the females. The males in the group interview were first to admit they created a hybrid method or omitted the first step, while only one female said she cut out the first step. It was also a female, Clara, who said she did not change anything because she did not want to be graded lower by the teacher. Perhaps this is indicative of the socialization of females always to follow the rules, or males' preferring concrete instructions when learning. However, more studies are necessary before drawing these conclusions.

Concerning the two ELLs in this study, Amelia and Johnny, their reading achievement rose by 50% and 44%, respectively. Amelia stated to the researcher during the initial instruction of the close reading approach that she was thankful to have a method that helped her read and understand poetry. She stated that before learning this literacy strategy, she was perplexed each time she engaged in figurative language analysis. Johnny was very vocal in the group interview in support of this being used for poetry. In the English I content area, figurative language within the poetry units of study is a challenge for ELLs. Perhaps, secondary ELLs need more support in literacy remediation, even when the students like Amelia and Johnny are

intrinsically-motivated learners. ELLs will benefit when provided with relevant literacy remediation tools in conjunction with ESL accommodations that encompass more support than the use of graphic organizers or extra time for assignment completion. The close reading approach had a measurable impact on the ELLs in this study regarding their improved perception of reading and quantifiable evidence of their reading achievement. Further study is necessary to confirm how a close reading approach will further benefit ELLs as they are expected to read and write in a non-native language.

Action Plan: Implications of the Findings of the Study

The researcher began this research process to examine the effects that a close reading approach would have on the reading comprehension of twelve English I students. The researcher's intention was to improve their comprehension skills, which would increase their reading ability when engaging in content subject matter. The following action plan is based on the results of the study and the implications noted.

Action Step One: Continue Reading Instruction

The pretest given to the students in this study illustrated that, regardless of initial reading levels, all English I students were challenged when asked to read deeply and respond to the pretest text, *The Gettysburg Address*, due to a lack of available self-monitoring reading strategies. The students relied on the strategy of rereading to repair their misunderstandings, yet as the results showed, they admitted to also having difficulty with recall, which should not occur if rereading alone was a successful strategy. Shanahan and Shanahan (2008) contended that students arrive in secondary classrooms without literacy instruction beyond the third grade, which

causes them to struggle when reading content area texts. This instructional switch from *learning how to read* (i.e., reading strategies, fluency building activities) to *independent reading* of content subject matter provides an answer as to why older students struggling with reading. This study has shown that the close reading approach, with inherent literacy strategies of rereading, defining, chunking, and summarizing, provided the students with multiple strategies for improving their comprehension of a posttest as evident in post-treatment results. Therefore, the researcher will continue to instruct English I students on using the close reading approach as a viable strategy for aiding with comprehension of complex text.

However, reading instruction must also include an effort to change students' perception of reading. This can be done by providing students with time to choose books or texts and providing them with time to read for pleasure during class time by building SSR into the daily agenda (Trelease, 2103). When students independently read books that they choose, it builds fluency (Allen, 2000) without the students' thinking of such an activity as reading instruction. By having multiple reading experiences, they become efficient decoders of words. This leads to them focusing on making meaning of the text, rather than decoding (Vacca, 2002). Comprehension skills improve. Trelease (2013) argues that young adult reading problems are directly related to years of negative reading experiences in school coupled with few messages in the home that build or maintain a positive perception of reading. As previously mentioned in the study, if students will not engage in reading for pleasure, improvement in fluency is limited, and the chance that they will purposefully implement deep reading strategies when reading a content text is greatly diminished.

The researcher will include, as part of a reading instruction and remediation plan, daily independent reading time with the intent that it will enhance the likelihood that the students will view reading more favorably.

Action Step Two: Challenges in Metacognitive Awareness Must Be Rectified

Misconceptions concerning text complexity led the researcher to an understanding that students with challenges in comprehension may also lack the necessary metacognitive skills to be proficient readers. The students' failure to understand that their own cognitive process was challenged while reading and responding to the pretest, *The Gettysburg Address*, indicates that this researcher must provide reading instruction that builds metacognitive skills due to the relationship between reading and metacognitive awareness. Any reading instruction should provide comprehension strategies that coerce the student into participating in their own knowledge construction. Minguela, Sole, and Pieschl (2015) contended, "Being fully competent in reading requires being able to process a text...using strategies to meet one's goals, making deliberate, goal-oriented efforts to control one's own behavior, examining one's own reading actions, modifying these actions and/or revising reading goals" (p. 272). Therefore, the choice of reading instruction must have qualities that encourage the student to "be aware of his or her thinking process" while engaged with a text. This researcher intends to continue instructing students in using the close reading approach when confronted with difficult texts due to its success at building metacognitive awareness as shown in the students' surveys and interviews. However, the researcher will continue to examine other methods of reading instruction, like reciprocal teaching, for their effectiveness in enhancing

students' metacognitive awareness, which has been shown to have a relational effect on the improvement of comprehension skills.

Action Step Three: Challenges in Reading Instruction

The researcher used the GRRF to teach the students how to use the close reading approach on a text. While it provided the students with many opportunities for practicing the close reading approach, it consumed a considerable investment of time to work through four stages of instruction. Due to this constraint, the researcher only used one cycle of instruction in the close reading approach. When I continued in the study with a second round of instruction, the researcher omitted the teacher modeling phase, *I do it*, and the whole group modeling phase, *we do it together*. However, in rereading field note observations and analyzing artifacts collected during the study, it was evident that the students had the most difficulty implementing the close reading approach steps three and four, chunking foci and summarizing, respectively. The researcher believes their lack of fidelity to both steps led to less comprehension improvement, and consequently, less reading achievement on the posttest. In future instruction of the close reading approach, I intend to implement the full cycle of the GRRF with each instruction period, while being more aware if the students fully understand how to implement steps three and four of the close reading approach effectively. Fisher and Frey (2014) maintained that during direct instruction, which is the mainstay of “I do it” and “we do it together,” the teacher must monitor the student “as the cognitive responsibility begins to shift from teacher to learner.” Accurate formative assessment during the initial instruction of the close reading

approach is critical for providing answers as to how much reinstruction or scaffolding is needed for full benefits to be realized in any reading instruction initiative.

Suggestions for Future Studies

A relevant and timely question concerning reading instruction for older students is prevalent in most states as they race to implement literacy initiatives like *Read to Succeed* in South Carolina. Content area teachers must take a required literacy course that supports reading instruction practices in the content areas. Regardless of this mandate, content area teachers should research best literacy practices that improve their students' reading overall comprehension. In turn, when a student reads more accurately, he or she is more likely to acquire the content knowledge that forms part of a content teacher's learning goals. This study focused on one reading instructional method called the close reading approach. The researcher makes the following suggestions for future research.

Suggestion One: Homogenously-Grouped Participants

In this study, there was diversity in reading levels, gender, and ethnicity. However, the impact of the close reading approach on homogenously-grouped students may provide important understandings for future literacy instruction for students within specific populations. Educational theory and research have identified several groups of students who have experienced marginalization within the educational system. The research question of how a close reading approach affects students' reading achievement among marginalized populations, for example, ELL learners, females, and African American Males, should be considered critical in future research on secondary reading instructional practices.

Suggestion Two: Larger Participant Size and Scope

A major limitation on this study was the sample size of the participant group and setting. Although there were twelve English I students, it was too small to generalize to larger populations. The generalizations made in this study pertained to a small group of students in a one school. The researcher suggests a larger study that includes not only larger sample sizes, but at least three, diverse demographic settings: rural, urban, and mixed rural/urban. With the influence of Common Core State Standards and the endorsement of a close reading approach from literacy experts like Doug Fischer, Nancy Frey, and Tim Shanahan, the instructional practice of close reading has become ingrained in the educational practices of teachers in classrooms from K-12; yet, there is not one definition of the best method of implementing a close reading, nor conclusive evidence that it fixes the reading challenges currently present in our schools. The researcher contends that new timely and dedicated research be performed concerning the establishment of a defined close reading approach, and its efficacy as the answer to poor reading skills.

Suggestion Three: Comparison of Fiction Versus Non-fiction Texts

In this study, both fiction and non-fiction texts were used to teach the close reading approach. However, understanding the effectiveness of a close reading approach on students' comprehension of specific texts in several genres would inform the researcher if this reading strategy worked best on non-fiction or fiction texts—or if there was no difference in efficacy for either type of text. Further research on what type of text is best suited for a close reading approach would aid English I teachers because the content area includes the following variation in texts: literary fiction

(created stories or poetry), non-fiction (informational), and literary non-fiction (true stories). If the close reading approach worked best on one type of text or on all types of texts—it would be valuable information to guide curriculum instruction.

Suggestion Four: Change the Instructional Delivery Method

In this study, using the gradual release of responsibility approach provided ample practice of the close reading approach, but there were multiple settings going on during the students' learning how to implement a close reading approach. The researcher is considering whether the choice of instructional method adversely affected the students' ability to learn step three and four of the close reading approach adequately. For example, in stage one, "I do it," the students were learning to observe the teacher's explicit modeling of a reading strategy, which is a best practice in reading instruction. Thinking aloud allows the student to hear what an expert reader does while trying to comprehend a text (Trelease, 2013). However, their second experience with the close reading approach was "We do it." This allowed more participants' active involvement, but the whole class discussion was chaotic at times with the teacher trying to clear the confusion of some students while keeping the attention of all students. Field notes recounted that several students were confused by other classmates' questions or answers during the board work. Likewise, during the "We do it together" stages the participants expressed in exit surveys that while they liked hearing alternative voices, it made them confused when they disagreed on what to focus constituted a chunk of information and/or what key ideas belonged in a summary of the chunk. The researcher wonders if a teacher modeling and student practice cycle of two to three close reading approach experiences would have yielded

higher reading achievement on the posttest results due to the participants' having more proficiency in mastering steps three and four.

Conclusion

This study focused on reading instruction in the English I classroom. The research question examined the impact of a close reading approach on the comprehension level and reading achievement of twelve English I students. The researcher hypothesized that a close reading approach would have a positive effect on the participants' level of comprehension and reading achievement. The participants included seven females and five males. Diversity within the sample population of twelve participants consisted of five White females, two White males, one African American female, two African American males, one Vietnamese male, and one Guatemalan female. For purposes of comparison, the participants were grouped by reading levels: lowest, average, above average, and gifted/talented. During the study, the students were asked to complete a reading interest inventory survey and a pretest before instruction in a close reading approach was implemented.

In the seven weeks to follow, the students received instruction on how to apply a close reading approach to multiple texts, which afforded them seven experiences using the close reading approach. The researcher used the gradual release of responsibility framework for the instructional delivery. The students participated in a full cycle of this instructional framework: "I do it," "We do it," "We do it together," and "You do it alone." Then, the researcher chose to have the participants complete two "We do it together" and one "You do it alone" following the full instructional cycle, as previously stated. During the study, participants completed surveys and

participated in an exit interview that elicited their perception of a close reading approach, and the researcher also recorded field notes during the study. The final instrument included a posttest to determine reading achievement after treatment was fully implemented.

The data analysis revealed two major themes. The first theme to emerge was the necessity for secondary reading instruction and the second one was the relationship between reading and metacognitive awareness. These themes presented themselves in the data collected in this study: pretest/posttest, field notes, existing records, surveys, and exit interview. The present study revealed that instructing the students on a close reading approach provided them with an active reading comprehension strategy that could be applied to reading in an English I classroom. This confirms the researcher's hypothesis that a close reading approach would have a positive effect on the participants' comprehension level and reading achievement. The data provided evidence of the students' affirmative perception of the close reading approach, and its positive influence on both their metacognitive awareness and reading achievement.

The students average increase of 32% across all reading level groups suggests that all participants benefited by learning and using the close reading approach for reading in the content area classroom. The results imply that continued research involving the close reading approach is warranted. The researcher believes content area teachers can use a close reading approach to provide reading instruction to their students. When students learned to use a close reading approach with proficiency, their reading comprehension and metacognitive awareness will be positively

impacted. Consequently, this study's results imply that teaching the close reading approach to students in a content area classroom will improve their acquisition of content knowledge.

Although the researcher believes further study is warranted on which instructional delivery best suits instruction of the close reading approach, the researcher's choice in using the GRRF for instruction delivery, with its multiple repetition of the close reading approach steps, allowed multiple opportunities for the participants to learn the strategy. It also afforded the researcher the opportunity to scaffold the participants' learning. Furthermore, while this study also showed that the instruction of a close reading approach did increase the comprehension levels of the participants, the reading approach did not bring all participants to mastery level on the posttest. The researcher is hopeful that reinstruction and closer monitoring of students when implementing steps three and four of the close reading approach may yield better results in future action research.

Additionally, the researcher noted that the participants' general dislike of reading may have affected their motivation to learn and use a reading strategy. Students' general opinion of a close reading approach was that it was a labor-intensive comprehension tool. Part of this reaction could be explained by their narrow view of reading and purposes for reading, such as online versus academic reading. Their negative view of academic reading may be connected to the students' lack of reading stamina, which is needed when actively reading a text versus online reading. Reading closely requires a deeper concentration and engagement with a text. Students must be trained in reading stamina: the ability to read for sustained periods

of time on a consistent basis. The researcher believes that a multi-strategy reading instructional approach is necessary to the success of any reading initiative. Finding opportunities to influence a love of reading, such as implementing a SSR segment in daily classes and reading aloud from high interest texts, may move students towards a positive view of reading. However, despite their negative perception of reading in general in the exit interview, all participants felt the close reading approach was a relevant and viable reading strategy to use in the English I classroom.

Lastly, with the current educational focus on standardized testing as a measurement of academic achievement, it is critical that student needs remain a priority to the content area teacher. The ability to read with effective comprehension directly affects the academic progress of each student beyond a one-day high stakes test. If secondary students lack reading strategies for understanding content subject matter and/or repairing their comprehension, their academic progress will suffer. While the close reading approach is not the only method of teaching students to deeply read a text, there are strong implications through the results of this study that it had a measurable impact on the participants' comprehension skills and metacognitive awareness. However, further study on how a close reading approach correlates to student reading achievement is necessary to address areas of inquiry unresolved in this current study.

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APPENDIX A

Parental Consent Form

Dear Parents & Guardians:

I am seeking permission for your child to participate in a field study I am conducting for the University of South Carolina Graduate Program of which I am seeking a doctoral degree. Mr. Ahl, principal of Rock Hill High School, and the Rock Hill School District 3 administrators approved the implementation of this study.

I will be teaching your child to use a reading strategy called close reading when he or she reads a non-fiction article or textbook. This reading comprehension strategy is closely related to the method of reading and responding to non-fiction texts as outlined in the South Carolina Career and College Readiness Standards and is reflected in our latest textbook adoption for English I students. Students will perform grade level reading and use textual-based evidence to respond. Students need a strategy for reading and responding to texts.

I will be teaching the close reading method to all of my English I students, and I will be collecting data to analyze its impact on students' reading comprehension throughout this semester. This research will not be above and beyond your child's English I coursework, meaning that your child will not have extra work to do because I am researching the effectiveness of the close reading method on your child's reading achievement. Since the close reading method is a part of our textbook curriculum, all of your child's academic needs will be addressed. The close reading method is just one of

the ways I will instruct your child in reading effectively.

I will be using a confidentiality protocol that will insure your child's anonymity. Your child's identification will never be revealed in any portion of this entire process before, during, and after completion. I am using a key/link method to ensure privacy of all participants. Your child will receive a number, and this will be linked to a key that I will keep in a secure place separate from the data collection and analysis. If a participant is mentioned for narrative purposes, a pseudonym will be used.

Thank you in advance for your consideration of this matter. If you have any questions please email me or call me with a date and time to speak to you on the phone. We can discuss your questions and concern once we are in verbal contact.

Please fill out the permission slip and have your child return it to me tomorrow.

Best regards,

Tina Marie Janus

Doctoral Candidate USC

NBCT

tjanus@rhmail.org

803-981-1300 Rock Hill High School

Permission for Student Participant in the Close Reading Method Study

I _____ (Please print name)
give permission for my child _____ (Please print
name)
to be a participant in the close reading field study conducted by Ms. Tina Marie
Janus
during his or her English I semester at Rock Hill High School.

Signature

Date _____

APPENDIX B

“The Gettysburg Address” & Reader Response Questions

Address Delivered at the Dedication of the Cemetery at Gettysburg

Abraham Lincoln

November 19, 1863

Four score and seven years ago our fathers brought forth on this continent, a new nation, conceived in Liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal.

Now we are engaged in a great civil war, testing whether that nation, or any nation so conceived and dedicated, can long endure. We are met on a great battle-field of that war. We have come to dedicate a portion of that field, as a final resting place for those who here gave their lives that that nation might live. It is altogether fitting and proper that we should do this.

But, in a larger sense, we can not dedicate -- we can not consecrate -- we can not hallow -- this ground. The brave men, living and dead, who struggled here, have consecrated it, far above our poor power to add or detract. The world will little note, nor long remember what we say here, but it can never forget what they did here. It is for us the living, rather, to be dedicated here to the unfinished work which they who fought here have thus far so nobly advanced. It is rather for us to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us -- that from these honored dead we take increased devotion to that cause for which they gave the last full measure of devotion -- that we here highly resolve

that these dead shall not have died in vain -- that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom -- and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth.

Questions on “The Gettysburg Address” by Abraham Lincoln

Please answer these questions without use of any electronic devices or dictionaries. Use the back if you need more space, but please number it, so I will know where you continued in your answer.

1. What is Lincoln referring to when he says, “Four score and seven years ago, our fathers brought forth on this continent, a new nation...”

2. What is the purpose of the address that Lincoln is giving?

3. What does Lincoln mean when he says, “we can not dedicate—we can not consecrate—we can not hallow—this ground?”

4. What does Lincoln mean in his statement: “For us to be dedicated to the great task remaining before us.”

5. What does Lincoln mean when he says, “That cause for which they gave the last full measure of devotion.”

6. What does the phrase “and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth.”

7. In the Declaration of Independence, *equality* among people is stated as a “self-evident truth.” However, in The Gettysburg Address, Lincoln states equality in the following way: “a new nation...dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal.”

What is the difference in the way *equality* is addressed in these two documents?

8. Lincoln's word choices, devotion, dedicate, consecrate and hallow, indicate his tone towards those who have died on this battlefield. What is his tone that could be derived from his use of these words?

APPENDIX C

The Close Reading Approach Guide

How to Perform a Close Reading

Step 1: *Read* the text from beginning to end without a pencil in hand.

Step 2: *Reread* the passage a second time. In this second rereading, you will mark (*annotate*) the words for the following reasons:

- You do not know the words.
- The words are being used in an unfamiliar way.
- You want to look them up to be sure your definition of the word is correct.

You want to clarify as many words as possible because this will aid your full comprehension of the text.

Using a dictionary, look up the words that you annotated. This requires that you may have to write more than one definition of your chosen word since you are trying to define the word in the context of the text, meaning the way the author is using it. It may not be the first definition given in the dictionary. Number the definitions—1, 2, 3...

Step 3: *Reread* a third time. In this third rereading, you will do your best to divide the text into specific *units of focus* called *chunks*.

While creating chunks, it is necessary to work with those words you do not know. In this step, you will try to decide which definition is the correct one and circle it. If you make a mistake by choosing the wrong definition, you can fix this as you complete the next step.

Step 4: *Reread* a fourth time. In this fourth rereading, you will write a summary of each chunk. This is another opportunity for you to try to choose the best contextual definition for your annotated words.

The summary should be a *retelling* of each chunk that is mainly written in your own words. Think of it as telling a friend what the chunk states.

It is critical that each part of the chunk is represented in the summary. You do not of the chunk. You must be able to look away from the text and still understand what is in the chunk.

Step 5: *Read* your summaries. You should have a retelling of the text in mainly your own words that show you can comprehend the text.

If you cannot retell what is in each chunk, then you repeat the steps from 1-4. You may need more words defined and/or smaller units of focus (chunks).

Now you are ready to answer text-dependent questions or constructed responses.

******Understandings About Performing a Close*

*Reading******

This process will go faster or slower depending on the complexity of the text and your reading ability. Some text will be easier to perform a close reading, while others will be more difficult. The important part is that you learn to use these steps, so it will become a natural act when engaging in a text.

It is not expected that you will be able to perform a full close reading to every difficult text you encounter. However, this reading strategy can train you to read more

closely by examining a text for information (active reading) rather than your eyes following a line of text with interacting with it (passive reading).