The Impact of a Reading Workshop Approach in a Seventh Grade Supplemental Reading Class

Diana Koscik

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THE IMPACT OF A READING WORKSHOP APPROACH IN A SEVENTH GRADE SUPPLEMENTAL READING CLASS

by

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DEDICATION

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ABSTRACT

This paper describes a problem of practice that developed due to a downward trend in reading achievement scores in an independent middle school in the Southeast. To address this problem, the researcher conducted an action research, mixed methods study to examine the impact of a reading workshop approach in a seventh-grade supplemental reading class. The mixed methods study was guided by one research question designed to collect quantitative data: What is the impact of a reading workshop approach on seventh-grade students’ reading achievement as measured by the STAR reading assessment? It was also guided by two qualitative research questions that sought to measure both students’ perceptions and teachers’ perceptions regarding the effectiveness of a reading workshop model in a seventh-grade classroom. The results of the study indicated an increase in student achievement when the program was implemented with fidelity. Both student and teacher perceptions validated these results. An action plan and implications for immediate classroom practice as well as future research are included based on this study’s findings.

Keywords: action research, reading workshop, middle school, reading achievement
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Learning to read is one of the most important skills students can acquire. Reading is not only the foundation of all other academic subjects, it is also integral to success in higher education and beyond (Allington, 2002). Proficient readers are more likely to graduate from high school, access higher education, and be gainfully employed (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2011). According to the International Literacy Association (2019), literacy instruction “builds a strong foundation for learning and, in turn, equips children to develop their potential, growing into adults who participate fully in their communities and society, enjoying the fullness that continuous learning brings to their lives” (p. 2). The need for adolescents to be able to comprehend and construct meaning from what they have read has only increased as they prepare to become productive citizens (Casey, Lenski, & Hryniuk-Adamov, 2019).

Research, however, has shown that time spent reading is on the decline in the United States. Students spend less time reading outside of school, and a 2014 survey showed that only 17% of school-aged students reported daily in-school independent reading (ILA, 2019). This decrease in reading time has had detrimental effects on reading achievement. On the 2019 National Assessment of Educational Progress, the percentage of eighth-grade students performing at or above the Proficient level was only 32% nationally. Further, evidence suggests that motivation to read declines as students move from elementary to middle school (Kamil et al., 2008). In addition to the
decrease in time spent reading, another area that decreases as students reach middle school is intentional reading strategy instruction (Allington, 2002; NCTE, 2007). Most elementary school schedules contain a reading class in which comprehension strategies are intentionally and explicitly taught, yet this class is often dropped in middle school due to other curricular demands (Allington, 2002; Humphrey, 2002; NCTE, 2007). Further, because upper elementary and middle school teachers primarily focus on teaching content, reading instruction as part of the formal curriculum decreases (NCTE, 2007). Many teachers and school leaders believe that adolescents should already be literate and that focusing on reading instruction in the middle grades should not be necessary (ILA, 2012). Yet evidence shows that reading instruction must continue through adolescence (Snow & Moje, 2010).

As an educator with over 20 years’ experience teaching language arts at the middle school level, I am particularly concerned with this troubling decline in reading achievement. I have seen first-hand the lack of motivation in middle school readers to read, and I lament the fact that many would rather pick up a device to scroll through social media or play a game in lieu of reading a book. Yet, I have also seen the opposite. I have seen students lose themselves in books so deeply that they become completely unaware of everything around them. I have seen readers vicariously experience the lives of the characters in their books. I have seen young faces light up when they find the next book in the series. I have seen tears, laughter, amazement, and most importantly, I have seen reluctant readers find that book – the one that makes them a reader. Krashen (2004) reveals that no single literacy activity has a more positive effect on students’ comprehension and overall academic achievement than free voluntary reading.
According to Atwell (1998), “If we want our students to grow to appreciate literature, we need to give them a say in decisions about the literature they will read” (p. 36). Atwell (1998) developed a reading workshop model in the late 1990’s that has set the foundation for similar workshop approaches. A reading workshop approach provides students with choice and time, and research shows that when students are given their choice of texts to read and the time to read them, they are more engaged and increase their commitment to learning (Guthrie, Klauda, & Ho, 2013).

Allington (2002) states that the amount of time children spend reading for fun correlates with positive reading achievement. A workshop approach, particularly in middle school when motivation to read often declines, can help students develop and strengthen their interest in reading (Stevens, 2016). Atwell’s model includes mini-lessons, structured scaffolding, collaboration, reading journals, and the overall idea that the only way to become a strong, fluent, critical reader is to read often. It is this approach to the reading workshop that provided me with my most meaningful teaching experiences.

The last fifteen years of my career have been as an English teacher, assistant principal, and currently, as the principal of Magnolia Country Day Middle School (pseudonym). I strongly believe that reading is a necessary and fundamental skill, and although I am no longer a classroom teacher, as a first year administrative goal, I chose to focus on the literacy needs and reading achievement levels of the students in the middle school. My own teaching experience, observations, and anecdotal evidence led me to believe that we were not effectively meeting our learners’ reading comprehension needs. An in-depth look at the data from five previous years’ standardized test results in the area
of reading comprehension corroborated my initial hunch: our student reading achievement scores have been decreasing at an alarming rate.

Students at Magnolia Country Day Middle School take the CTP-4 Assessment each spring. This Comprehensive Testing Program assesses verbal reasoning, reading comprehension, vocabulary, writing, mathematics, and quantitative reasoning. The data over the last five years indicate a decrease in the reading comprehension scores. The results from the 2012-13 school year show that 23% of seventh-grade students scored in the below-average range. While the assessment results showed a slight improvement in the 2013-14 school year, the percentage of students who scored below average on the reading comprehension section skyrocketed over the following three years. The test taken by seventh graders in spring of 2018 showed that a shocking 43% of students scored in the below-average range. Additionally, informal conversations with middle school reading teachers revealed that they are genuinely concerned about the reading levels of the students in their classrooms, and they have expressed interest in trying a new approach to better reach their struggling readers.

Currently, all middle school students at Magnolia are enrolled in a 45-minute English class. To meet the needs of our academically diverse student body, we also have a supplementary reading class, and about half of our students take this class. Traditionally, struggling readers are automatically placed in this course, and combined with the English class, have 90 minutes of language arts each day. Prior to this school year, the teachers of this supplemental reading class used a very traditional instructional approach in which the focus was on a whole-class format in which all students read the same novels, short stories, nonfiction articles, and poetry, all at the same pace. Aside
from a read-and-answer-question approach while studying the assigned literature, they
placed little focus on reading comprehension skills, and the teachers used an online
program to teach vocabulary.

In recent years, however, this elective course has been in jeopardy of being
eliminated. The curriculum leaders at Magnolia do not feel a supplementary reading
class should be necessary in an independent school and would like to take a different
approach in the middle school. Therefore, the course is currently at risk of being
replaced by more world language opportunities for middle school students. With an
identified problem of declining reading comprehension scores, I found it essential to
create an action research study to address the issue. Since data show that our students are
experiencing low reading comprehension scores, it is my position that the course is
necessary. Additionally, since the current instructional approach within the supplemental
reading class has not improved the reading comprehension skills of the students, this
study seeks to examine the impact of a student-centered reading workshop model in the
seventh-grade reading classes to determine whether this approach can result in improved
reading comprehension scores and student achievement. Finally, should the reading
workshop model prove to be a successful approach, evidence will exist to keep the
supplemental reading class as an essential component of the curriculum.

**Theoretical Framework**

This action research study is grounded in a constructivist learning theory. A
constructivist approach to learning allows students to actively construct their own
meanings and interpretations based on their prior experiences (Applefield, Huber,
Moallem, 2016; Ertmer & Newby, 2013). The prior knowledge a learner contains has a
direct impact on how they take in information and constructs meaning from it; the process of taking in new information and connecting it to prior knowledge provides for deeper comprehension of material (McNamara, Ozuru, & Floyd, 2011). To a constructivist, the process is more important than the outcome. In a reading workshop classroom, students actively choose their own reading materials and are in charge of the strategies they use to decode and comprehend their chosen texts. Students are not passive learners in the classroom, but instead construct their own interpretations of what they are reading.

Constructivist theorists also believe that learning is both active and social; people learn and make meaning through interacting with others and their existing environment (Applefield, Huber, Moallem, 2016; Ertmer & Newby, 2013; Gray, 1997). Reading workshop provides opportunities for students to actively collaborate with both their peers and their teacher, forming new knowledge based on these interactions. As students participate in group dialogue, they gain knowledge and make meaning of that knowledge in a more in-depth manner (Applefield, Huber, Moallem, 2016; García, Pearson, Taylor, et al., 2011).

One of the foundations of constructivism is Lev Vygotsky’s social development theory. Vygotsky’s theory consists of three major themes: social interaction, the more knowledgeable other (MKO), and the zone of proximal development (ZPD) (Applefield, Huber, Moallem, 2016; Beck & Condy, 2017; Porath, 2016). Like other constructivist theorists, Vygotsky believed knowledge is formed through social interactions with peers and teachers. Both teachers and other students guide students toward their own understandings (Miller & Anderson, 2011). The second component of Vygotsky’s theory
is the more knowledgeable other (MKO). Similar to the first theme, this component emphasizes the social learning aspect, yet it focuses on teachers and more competent peers. Vygotsky believed a more knowledgeable mentor can help learners understand at a higher level (Applefield, Huber, & Moallem, 2016; Beck & Condy, 2017; Garcia, Pearson, Taylor, et al., 2011). The final component of Vygotsky’s social development theory is called the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). This element refers to the distance between what a student can do independently and what he can do with help and guidance. A teacher or more competent peer will provide the necessary scaffolding process a student needs to take in information and form meaning. The reading workshop approach provides daily opportunities for explicit modeling, collaborative opportunities with both peers and the teacher, and scaffolded support for students as they practice the strategy (Dole, Brown, and Trathen, 1996).

In addition to Vygotsky’s social learning theories, Albert Bandura also emphasized the fact that people often learn in social environments. According to Bandura, humans learn and acquire knowledge by simply observing others (Schunk, 2012). When teachers model the process of learning in the classroom, students learn expectations, appropriate behaviors, and strategies for taking in and activating knowledge. Students go through multiple processes of learning through observation (Bandura, 1977). First, the learner’s attention must be available to take in new information, as well as retain it (McLaughlin, 2012). The daily mini-lesson in a reading workshop classroom provides the opportunity for instructor modeling and scaffolding of reading strategies. Next is a gradual release of responsibility, in which teachers first work directly with students before allowing them to work with a classmate, small group,
Bandura posits that students must be motivated to learn the behavior (Connolly, 2017). Classroom motivation might consist of positive reinforcement and feedback from the teacher, an emphasis on the value of learning, or a sense of accomplishment (Schunk, 2012; Vygotsky, 1978). In a reading workshop classroom, voluntary free reading, choice in what they read, and feedback from the teacher provide the necessary components of motivation (Atwell, 1998; Krashen, 2004).

Finally, an important component of Bandura’s social learning theory is self-efficacy, or a learner’s personal beliefs about his ability to learn material and accomplish tasks (Bandura, 1993; Schunk, 2012). Teachers can foster self-efficacy by providing feedback and helping students evaluate their own learning progress. Those students who believe they can achieve a task or goal have an increased chance of doing so; accordingly, students who set specific, proximal, and attainable goals will work harder and ultimately learn more than those who do not (Schunk, 2012). Students in a reading workshop classroom set personalized goals, read books at their level, and receive appropriate feedback; these aspects all serve to increase their self-efficacy.

**Purpose of the Study**

Middle school students deserve high quality reading instruction and a personal, differentiated approach to literacy achievement. The prior method used at Magnolia was a traditional, whole-class approach and had not served to improve the reading achievement of the middle school students. Calkins (2001) argues that a student-centered, reading workshop approach not only helps students gain meaning but also provides them with the tools to do so. Improving the performance of struggling readers is essential to their success in all subject areas throughout their school and adult years. This
student-centered model “offers possibilities for engaging all learners and encouraging them to be lifelong readers” (Stairs & Burgos, 2010, p. 41). Therefore, the purpose of this action research, mixed methods study is to assess the impact of a reading workshop approach on seventh-grade students’ reading comprehension.

**Rationale for the Study**

Action research can be defined as “an inquiry conducted by educators in their own settings in order to advance their practice and improve their students’ learning” (Efron & Ravid, 2013, p. 2). Educators can use this form of inquiry to gain knowledge and become empowered in making decisions about their classrooms and schools. As the principal of Magnolia Country Day Middle School and a former English teacher, I am extremely interested in the reading achievement levels for the students in my school. An in-depth look at the data from five previous years’ standardized test results in the area of reading comprehension highlighted the fact that our student reading achievement scores have been decreasing at an alarming rate. Our current schedule allows for a supplemental reading class to serve the needs of struggling readers, yet this class is in jeopardy of being replaced to allow time and space for other electives.

In analyzing this problem, I drew from my prior teaching experience. Having previously taught Language Arts in both a traditional and a reading workshop format, I understood the philosophy of both approaches. The research base for reading workshop shows that, if done with fidelity, students make greater gains than with a traditional approach. In fact, this student-centered approach has been shown to lead to higher-order literacy proficiencies (Allington, 2012). Similar to other action researchers, my intent was to understand the problem at hand, make an informed decision regarding a solution,
and investigate the potential of the effectiveness of the proposed solution (Efron & Ravid, 2013). Up until this school year, the reading teachers had been using a traditional instructional approach and were not seeing positive results. Knowing that action research is “best done in collaboration with others who have a stake in the problem under investigation” (Herr & Anderson, 2015, p. 4), the reading teachers and I determined that a differentiated, student-centered reading workshop approach had a greater potential to meet the needs of our diverse group of learners. Their perceptions, along with those of the students in the study, will provide meaningful data regarding the reading workshop’s effectiveness. The implementation of the reading workshop approach in seventh-grade reading classes, if successful, would immediately and positively impact student reading achievement. This study’s outcome also has the potential to inform school leadership when making decisions about both the existence of and the curriculum within the supplemental reading class. Finally, the results of this study also have the potential to guide other schools and help the reading achievement of the students in their schools.

**Action Research Design**

This study used a convergent, mixed-methods, action research design. A mixed-method design combines both quantitative and qualitative approaches in a single research study, and according to Efron and Ravid (2013), if the research being conducted seeks a deeper understanding of a problem than either quantitative or qualitative alone can offer, a mixed methods approach is the most appropriate. Using both types of data in a single research study can provide more depth and breadth (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). Additionally, this approach not only provides concrete, quantifiable data, but also adds participants’ point of view. When data are collected from multiple sources and multiple
methods of data collection and analysis are used, reliability as well as internal validity are strengthened (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Action research allows educators to study their own schools, classrooms, and personal practice to better understand them in order to improve the quality or effectiveness; additionally, it is relevant, collaborative, and practical (Mertler, 2014). Because the ultimate goal of this study was to improve the quality and effectiveness of the reading instruction in the seventh-grade reading classes, mixed-method, action research was justified. Chapter 3 will provide more details about the action research design.

**Setting**

This action research study took place at Magnolia Country Day Middle School, an independent school located in a large city in the suburban Southeast. Magnolia boasts academic excellence, extensive opportunities, global connections, and a diverse student population. In addition to diversity in race, ethnicity, religious beliefs, and gender identity, the school also prides itself on being academically diverse, offering multiple levels of academics and support opportunities to meet the needs of all learners. The middle school at Magnolia is comprised of grades seven and eight and, at the time of the study, contained 513 students. More specifically, the study took place within the classrooms of the two seventh-grade teachers who teach the supplemental reading classes.

**Participants**

Since I am an administrator and not currently teaching, two seventh-grade reading teachers volunteered to be part of this action research study. One of the teacher participants has been at Magnolia for eight years and has experience teaching with the
reading workshop model; she taught three sections of seventh-grade reading workshop. The second teacher participant has been at Magnolia for five years and this is his first experience with the reading workshop approach; he taught five sections. The seventh-grade class consisted of 245 students, and 128 of those are in the supplemental reading class. Some of the students within the classes were required to take the course due to prior low grades and low standardized test scores, while others have chosen to do so in lieu of a world language. Of the 128 students who participated in this study, 72 were male and 56 were female.

Data Collection

Multiple sources of data were used in this mixed methods study. Data were collected during the second semester of the 2019-2020 school year, between January and May of 2020. The qualitative instruments included semi-structured interviews for the purpose of collecting data regarding student and teacher perceptions, classroom observations to take note of students’ participation and motivation in the reading workshop, and document review of students’ reading response journals. The quantitative results were derived from a pretest and posttest of the STAR reading assessment.

Data Analysis

Following the advice of Efron and Ravid (2013), I collected and analyzed data throughout the duration of the study. The action researcher “begins analyzing data as they are collected, and the emerging preliminary understandings help shape, revise, and refine the investigation throughout the data collection process” (p. 166). I kept meticulous notes and prepared and organized the data as it was collected, being sure to transcribe data from the audio as soon as possible. Through the analysis and coding
process, themes, categories, and trends emerged, helping me to interpret the data and, ultimately, answer my research questions (Saldaña, 2009). According to Herr and Anderson (2015), the “use of multiple methods and analyses compensate for each other’s limitations and contribute to understanding concepts and phenomena” (p. 121). Because of the use of multiple data sources, I was able to triangulate the data to test for consistency.

**Positionality**

Efron and Ravid (2015) define positionality simply as self-awareness, or more specifically “taking into account the potential impact of one’s values, worldview, and life experience and their influence on the decisions made and actions taken during the research process” (p. 57). Within the context of this study, I was both a researcher and in a position of power as the principal of the middle school. This was important for me to remember as I have a direct influence on both my actions as well as the teacher and student participants. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) state, “human beings are the primary instrument of data collection and analysis in qualitative research” (p. 243); therefore, it is important to examine one’s own value system.

I have fifteen years of experience working at this school, and ten of those years were in the language arts department, having taught both the core English class as well as the supplemental reading class. The roles have allowed me to experience first-hand the curriculum and common instructional practices in the reading department. I have experience teaching with both a traditional approach to reading instruction as well as a reading workshop approach, allowing me to gain greater insight into the teacher participants’ experiences during the implementation of the reading workshop. Over the
years, I have also worked alongside the teachers and have had the opportunity to develop relationships and trust with the participants in the study, which can result in more accurate and thorough answers. However, I have carefully adhered to Bourke’s (2014) advice that researchers should take time to examine biases, as it is through this recognition that “we presume to gain insights into how we might approach a research setting, members of particular groups, and how we might seek to engage with participants” (p. 1).

I acted as an insider in collaboration with other insiders (Herr & Anderson, 2015). This type of collaboration “not only might have a greater impact on the setting, but also has the potential to be more democratic” (p. 45). Herr and Anderson caution researchers to ensure power relations do not inhibit the process. My current role as principal of the middle school had the potential to skew results if the teachers felt their job would somehow be threatened if they chose not to participate. I continually assured them that their participation was voluntary and that the results of the study would not threaten their role in the school in any way. I worked alongside the teachers as a supporting character and was careful to continuously acknowledge and grapple “with the power dynamics” throughout the study (Herr & Anderson, 2015, p. 42).

I am aware of my own bias and positionality for this study. I am also aware of the power differential and the possibility that teachers may have agreed to participate and allowed me to observe their classes only because I hold a supervisory role (Herr & Anderson, 2015). An additional point to note is that my presence during classroom observations may have initially impacted the normal routines that took place, yet I found that the more frequent my visits occurred the less the students noticed my presence.
Finally, I realized my desire to see the study succeed may have caused bias in data collection and analysis, so I worked to minimize bias by staying neutral, not asking leading questions, and remaining aware of any possible sources of bias to ensure accurate perceptions and formulate trustworthy data.

**Limitations**

This action research study has several limitations; according to Efron and Ravid (2013), the “[l]imitations of your study should be acknowledged and discussed” (p. 216). The first limitation concerns the lack of generalization, as the study was conducted in two seventh-grade classrooms in an independent middle school; because of this specificity, the study cannot likely be generalized to other settings with a high degree of confidence (Efron & Ravid, 2013). Still, the research is applicable within the current setting and has the potential to guide us in future decisions; further, it can provide a basis for other researchers to determine curricular decisions.

Another limitation with this action research study may be my positionality as an administrator in the building; teachers and students may have been hesitant to be honest and disclose true feelings about the impact of the intervention. Herr and Anderson (2015) warn researchers to be aware of “the limitations of one’s multiple positionalities” (p. 58). However, as long as researchers are honest and reflective about their role and the reporting of their data, and open to “new and different perceptions, viewpoints, and understandings” (p. 57), their results will be valid.

Another potential limitation is the timing of the data collection cycle. The teachers implemented the reading workshop in their classrooms at the beginning of the school year, yet the data collection period took place during the second semester.
students had already experienced the workshop approach for a full semester, and therefore their memory of other methods of reading instruction may not have been more limited than if the study of the intervention had taken place in August.

**Summary**

It is essential that high-quality reading instruction continue through the middle grades, and that adolescents be provided the opportunity to read books that they have chosen. The reading workshop format, with its emphasis on intentional and explicit strategy instruction, time, volume, and choice, has the potential to improve the reading achievement of middle school students. This action research study sought to determine whether the implementation of a reading workshop format could positively impact the reading achievement of the students in a seventh-grade supplemental reading class.

The first chapter of this dissertation introduced the problem of practice as well as the theoretical framework that supports the research. It reviewed the purpose of the study, the rationale, and the researcher’s positionality. Additionally, it previewed the research design, data collection tools and analysis methods, and both the significance and the limitations of the study. Chapter 2 will serve as the Review of Literature and a deeper dive into the Theoretical Framework. Chapter 3 will discuss the Methodology, Chapter 4 will discuss the Findings, and Chapter 5 will share the Implications and Recommendations, as well as a discussion of the study and its results.

**Glossary of Terms**

*Conferencing.* A meeting between the student and teacher that can be brief or in depth depending on the goals and needs of each student (Calkins & Ehrenworth, 2017).
Independent Reading (IR). A term that describes continuous opportunities for students to read texts, time to read them, and teacher support while doing so (Calkins & Ehrenworth, 2017; Fountas & Pinnell, 2019).

Mini-lesson. A brief lesson in which teachers focus on a specific reading strategy in a whole group atmosphere (Calkins & Ehrenworth, 2017).

Standardized Test for the Assessment of Reading (STAR): a standards-based, computer-adaptive assessment published by Renaissance Learning, Inc. used to measure students’ reading comprehension (Renaissance STAR, n.d.).
CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter begins by revisiting the problem of practice as introduced in chapter 1. Additionally, it provides the purpose for the research, along with an overview of the theoretical framework and research literature in order to frame the problem of practice and associated intervention for this study.

Statement of the Problem of Practice

The ability to read proficiently is a fundamental skill that is the basis for success in school and beyond. However, in 2017, the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) reported that nearly one fourth of eighth graders scored below basic in their reading proficiency on the annual reading assessment. While reading instruction is intentional in the primary grades across the nation, many schools stop measuring fluency for proficient readers in third grade (Allington, 2011). According to the Carnegie Council on Advancing Adolescent Literacy (2010), adolescents are not being adequately prepared to meet the demands of higher education and future employment. Evidence suggests that intervention strategies to help middle school struggling readers have the potential to be effective (Calhoon, Scarborough, & Miller, 2013). While studies have been conducted with struggling adolescents, the question remains whether a reading workshop model, with a focus on high volume, student choice of text, and intentional reading instruction, has a positive impact on middle school students’
reading comprehension. The intention of this action research study was to determine the impact of a reading workshop approach on seventh-grade students’ reading achievement.

**Purpose Statement and Research Questions**

The purpose of this action research, mixed methods study was to further understand whether the implementation of a reading workshop approach would positively impact seventh-grade students’ reading comprehension as well as to gain the perceptions of both the classroom teachers and the students impacted by the intervention. This study explored the following research questions:

1. What is the impact of a reading workshop approach on seventh-grade students’ reading achievement as measured by the STAR reading assessment?
2. What are students’ perceptions regarding the effectiveness of a reading workshop model in their reading class?
3. What are teachers’ perceptions regarding the effectiveness of a reading workshop model in a seventh-grade classroom?

**Chapter Organization**

This chapter begins with the purpose of the literature review, along with the researcher’s strategies. That section is followed by the theoretical framework that guided this study, with a focus on constructivism and social learning theory. The chapter then discusses the historical perspectives to provide context for the problem of practice. Next it provides a detailed overview of the importance of reading achievement before reviewing the research literature that guides the concepts of reading instruction, including differentiated instruction, explicit strategy instruction, independent reading, reading volume, student choice, and equity. Finally, it concludes with the rationale behind a
reading workshop approach, including the components of the mini-lesson, independent reading time, conferencing, reflection and sharing, assessment, and feedback.

**Purpose and Methodology**

This section discusses the importance of the literature review, as well as how the knowledge gained helped the researcher in understanding the problem of practice. Finally, it contains the literature review strategies utilized by the researcher.

The literature review serves as a method for researchers to survey prior research and studies and identify patterns, generalizations, and gaps within a particular topic (Rozas & Klein, 2010). The review allows the researcher to gather and synthesize current knowledge, which is then used to build a convincing case (Machi & McEvoy, 2016). This information can provide a foundation and help define the research questions and help frame the methods the researcher will use to conduct the research (Machi & McEvoy, 2016; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

The research reviewed in this chapter has served to create a framework of understanding of the stated problem of practice for both the researcher and readers for this action research study. The research found on constructivism and learning theories serve as an important framework to guide the understanding of how students learn. The information on reading achievement, the importance of reading instruction, and the components of the reading workshop have informed the problem of practice and the proposed intervention.

For this study, I used the University of South Carolina online library to search databases such as Taylor & Francis Online, ERIC, and JSTOR. Peer reviewed journals, textbooks, websites, and other books were relied upon for this literature review.
Theoretical Framework

As previously mentioned, this action research study is grounded in constructivist theory. Constructivism is based on the thought that learners construct new meanings and their own understanding by building on what they already know (Applefield, Huber, Moallem, 2016). Their prior knowledge influences how they learn and construct meaning of new information. Constructivist theorists believe that learning is social, and that people learn through their own experiences as well as by observing others (Applefield, Huber, Moallem, 2016; Ertmer & Newby, 2013). They emphasize that individuals make meanings through the interactions with each other and with the environment in which they live.

Constructivism. Building on prior knowledge and connecting that knowledge to new information is the foundation of constructivism. A constructivist approach to learning provides students the opportunity to construct their own meanings and interpretations from the text they are reading (Ertmer & Newby, 2013). If the reader activates prior knowledge and integrates this knowledge with the new information explicitly stated in the text, comprehension can be more successful and deeper (McNamara, Ozuru, & Floyd, 2011). The constructivist theory of learning holds that knowledge is constructed by experience, and learning is an active, not a passive, process. Under this theoretical pinning, knowledge is not something that is fixed or absolute, but “is constructed through our interactions with one another, the community and the environment” (Harasim, 2012, p. 12). Constructivists believe that individuals create their own meanings and build personal interpretations based on their own experiences.
and interactions; the process itself holds more importance than the outcome of the process (Derry, 2013; Ertmer & Newby, 2013; Harasim, 2012; Mergel, 1998).

Constructivists also believe that knowledge is constructed by the learner through experiences and interactions within the social context of the classroom (Gray, 1997). This process occurs when “learning is accorded center stage and learners both refine their own meanings and help others find meaning” (Applefield, Huber, & Moallem, 2016, p. 40). Instead of passively participating in the instruction, students actively problem-solve and construct their own interpretations through social interaction with others (García, Pearson, Taylor, et al., 2011). As students discuss concepts and ideas with others, they become aware of their peers’ thinking processes; at this point they learn and gain more knowledge of others’ ideas and ways of thinking (Applefield, Huber, & Moallem, 2016). Essentially, through learning that is social and collaborative, students will learn more and comprehend more deeply (García, Pearson, Taylor, et al., 2011).

Lev Vygotsky’s Social Development Theory is one of the foundations of constructivism, and it consists of three major themes: social interaction, the More Knowledgeable Other (M KO), and the zone of proximal development (ZPD) (Applefield, Huber, & Moallem, 2016; Beck & Condy, 2017; Porath, 2016). The first theme in Vygotsky’s Social Development theory is that of social interaction. Vygotsky believed that knowledge construction is formed through social interactions with peers and teachers. The reading workshop model provides time for whole-class, small-group, and one-on-one instruction, along with time for independent practice (Atwell, 1998; Calkins & Ehrenworth, 2017). A teacher using a reading workshop approach models reading strategies explicitly each day, then acts as a facilitator and support for students as they
practice the strategy (Dole, Brown, and Trathen, 1996). Students experience more
critical thinking and a deeper engagement with texts and take on greater ownership of
their learning (Vygotsky, 1978). Teachers serve as facilitators of knowledge in a student-
centered classroom, guiding students toward their own understandings (Miller &

A second component to Vygotsky’s Social Development Theory is the MKO, or
the more knowledgeable other. This theory emphasizes the important role of mentors,
who can be teachers or more competent peers, in enabling the learners to achieve and
understand at a higher level through these social interactions. This approach involves
students who learn from those with more expertise by collaboratively constructing their
own understanding (Applefield, Huber, & Moallem, 2016; Beck & Condy, 2017; García,
Pearson, Taylor, et al., 2011). In the Vygotskian classroom, the learner works out new
concepts in collaboration with the teacher and classmates. As the learner becomes more
aware of his own thinking, he draws on earlier modeling and explanations from the
teacher to grow as an independent student. According to Palincsar and Brown (1984),
this model results in greater proficiency and improved comprehension performance. In
the reading workshop classroom, teachers hold daily mini-lessons that consist of
intentional, explicit instruction on reading strategies (Dole, Brown, and Trathen, 1996).
Additionally, teachers hold one-on-one and small group conferences to provide guidance
and answer questions. The workshop time is also used for students to read together and
discuss what they have read and learned from the text (Atwell, 1998; Calkins &
Ehrenworth, 2017).
The final component of Vygotsky’s Social Development Theory is the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). The ZPD refers to the gap between what a student can do on his own without help and what a child can do with guidance from someone with more knowledge on the subject. According to Applefield, Huber, and Moallem (2016), learners may not be developmentally ready to accomplish a task alone. However, when working with a person more competent in the task, they can be more successful; Vygotsky calls this their zone of proximal development (p. 42). In the workshop model, the teacher can provide individualized scaffolding to learners, depending on each student’s needs. As an instructional model, reading workshop follows a constructivist approach because it “frames the act of teaching as ‘co-constructing knowledge with students, acting as conceptual change agent, mentoring apprentices through the zone of proximal development and supporting a community of learners’” (Porath, 2016, p. 881). Through this method, students become stronger, more independent readers, and most importantly, the workshop model has been found to improve students’ reading comprehension and attitudes (Atwell, 1998; Atwell, 2016; Calkins & Ehrenworth, 2017; Meyer, 2010).

Constructivists incorporate several components into their learning environments: authentic tasks, reflective practice, context- and content-dependent knowledge construction, and collaborative construction of knowledge (Mergel, 1998). Because the reading workshop model is student-centered and creates opportunity for student collaboration as well as modeling and one-on-one instruction by the teacher, the approach follows a constructivist framework in which students are active constructors of their own knowledge (Green & Gredler, 2002).
Social Learning Theory. Building on Vygotsky’s theory that learning is social, Albert Bandura’s social learning theory also stresses the idea that human learning often occurs in a social environment. Learners acquire knowledge, rules, skills, strategies, beliefs, and attitudes by observing and interacting with others. Instructors model appropriate behaviors and expected outcomes of their actions (Schunk, 2012). Bandura (1977) states that “human learning is a function of observing and imitating the behaviors of others or of symbolic models” (p. 153). This process of learning by watching others, however, is not automatic; cognitive processes intervene. Learners must process the information and determine whether to imitate it or not. These self-regulatory processes govern development and adaptation (Bandura, 1993).

While modeling can serve several functions in a classroom according to Bandura (1986), only observational learning refers to modeling that serves to teach new behaviors. There are four key processes of observational learning (Bandura, 1977). The first two, the attentional and retention processes, concern the availability of the learner’s attention as well as the learner’s ability to retain information. One component of the reading workshop that serves as observational learning is the daily mini-lesson; the mini-lesson is the teacher’s opportunity to garner student attention by making connections, using high-interest texts, and activating student engagement (Calkins, 2010). Additionally, the teacher uses explicit instruction that includes modeling and scaffolding (McLaughlin, 2012). This process of gaining and maintaining the learners’ attention fosters their retention of the material.

According to Bandura (1977), learners must form a memory of the modeled behavior if the memory is to stick. An appropriate strategy is chosen and modeled; in
this step, cognitive modeling, a technique that combines both physical modeling and verbal explanation, is more effective in teaching skills than explanation alone (Connolly, 2017). This modeling is repeated and scaffolded until students have enough opportunity to use the strategy independently. During this gradual release of responsibility, Bandura’s third process is apparent: the reproduction process. Here, students first work with the teacher, then a classmate or small group, and finally, independently to replicate the modeled strategy; throughout, the teacher continues to monitor and offer feedback while the learner practices the behavior. Finally, Bandura’s fourth component, the motivational process is integral because it is interwoven throughout each step of observational learning. If the rewards or positive reinforcement do not outweigh the cost for the learner or if the task is not important enough, he might not be motivated to imitate the modeled behavior (Connolly, 2017). In a reading workshop environment, the rewards might include positive reinforcement from the teacher, feedback that indicates increasing competence, or an emphasized value of learning (Schunk, 2012). Students’ will can also stem from an internal motivation, such as pride, satisfaction, and a sense of accomplishment when students begin to experience better performance and success (Vygotsky, 1978).

Bandura (1977, 1986) posits that motivation plays a key role on performance of learned behaviors and whether or not students experience success. Social learning theory contends that goal setting can enhance both learning and performance as people who set goals tend to exert more effort toward meeting their goals (Bandura, 1986; Schunk, 2012). However, goal setting alone does not automatically enhance learning and motivation; goals must be specific, proximal, and attainable (Schunk, 2012).
Importantly, how capable people believe they are at achieving a goal is instrumental in whether or not they actually achieve success with that goal. In other words, a person’s ability to learn is directly tied to the degree of self-efficacy the person has regarding his own success (Bandura, 1993). Self-efficacy refers to personal beliefs about one’s capabilities to learn or perform actions at designated levels (Schunk, 2012), and according to Bandura (1993), can influence students’ choice of activities. Students with low self-efficacy will avoid trying new things, while students with high self-efficacy will be more likely to participate. Students who feel efficacious about learning will work harder and persist longer than those who do not and will ultimately learn more (Schunk, 2012). Academically, “Self-efficacy is a significant predictor of learning and achievement even after prior achievement and cognitive skills are taken into account” (Schunk, 2012, p. 148). Teachers can foster self-efficacy by providing feedback and helping students evaluate their own learning progress. Helping students understand and improve their self-efficacy for learning can improve both motivation and learning (Schunk, 2012).

**Historical Perspective**

For decades, a great deal of attention focused on primary and elementary reading instruction, but little research had been done regarding adolescent readers (Allington, 2002). The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) releases reports that include the achievement level results on its annual reading assessment. During the years of 1992 and 1994, 30% of eighth grade students scored below basic in their reading proficiency (NAEP, 2017). The scores made slight gains over the next decade, but still approximately one fourth of eighth grade students scored at the below basic level.
According to NAEP (2017), students who scored below basic were unable to locate information such as main idea, theme, or author’s purpose; interpret meanings of new words; or make simple inferences from the text (“National Assessment,” 2017).

In response, the International Literacy Association (2019) produced a position statement focusing specifically on adolescent literacy. Realizing that adolescents were “being short-changed” (p. 3), the brief focused on the need for improved pedagogy and reading instruction during the middle years. While the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) seemed to emphasize only literacy and early intervention, several aspects of the report help to highlight the need for adolescent literacy as well (Conley & Hinchman, 2004). In 2004, the National Council of Teachers of English’s (NCTE) Commission on Reading wrote a call to action policy, emphasizing the need for adolescent literacy instruction and the need to support teachers. They found that reading is a developmental process, not a series of technical skills acquired only in the primary grades. The NCTE produced another brief in 2007 highlighting the concerning NAEP assessment results, and offering a number of resources for teachers of late elementary and middle school students. They note, as does Allington (2002), that most intentional reading strategy instruction diminishes toward the end of elementary school. During middle school, teachers expect students to be able to actively engage in content-area learning, yet they are not providing the skills and strategies students need (NCTE, 2007). The ideas that adolescents should already be literate and that focusing on reading instruction in the lower grades should be enough were prevalent (ILA, 2019). Furthermore, many middle school teachers, particularly those in the middle school content areas such as social studies and science, lack the knowledge of effective literacy instruction (ILA, 2019;
NCTE, 2007; Sturtevant & Linek, 2003). Sturtevant and Linek (2003) found that time
constraints, high stakes testing, and a curriculum-centered secondary school culture are
obstacles in most middle and secondary classrooms.

Since these early reports, the research on adolescent literacy has compounded,
and now a good deal of information exists on how best to address concerns. While there
is no easy fix, research shows that several principles and strategies can help support
adolescent literacy development (ILA, 2019; NCTE, 2007; NCTE, 2018; Sturtevant &
Linek, 2003). Two important principles consist of school culture and teacher
competency. School and classroom environments that nurture adolescent literacy
development and are encouraging and student-centered help to create thoughtful teachers
and engaged learners (IRA, 2012; NCTE, 2007; Sturtevant & Linek, 2003). When
teachers have access to and participate in professional development opportunities that
enhance their competencies in pedagogy, student motivation and engagement, and best
practices in reading instruction, they can help adolescents become more involved with the
content and deepen their comprehension levels (Afflerbach & Harrison, 2017; Conley &

Helping adolescents prepare for the increasing complexity of the concepts and
texts they are required to comprehend across the curriculum requires specific
instructional and pedagogical factors (ILA, 2019). One important factor is the use of
intentional instruction that includes specific reading strategies, teacher modeling,
demonstrating, and making thinking while reading visible to students (IRA, 2012; NCTE,
2004; NCTE, 2018). Modeling and scaffolding are deemed to be ideal comprehension-
students become better readers through engagement with a variety of text types. Researchers agree that access to a wide variety of print, electronic, and visual texts in various genres can offer multiple perspectives of different cultures and can enhance students’ motivation to read (Conley & Hinchman, 2004; NCTE, 2007). When adolescent readers have access to multicultural texts, they not only learn to develop critical thinking skills, they can also learn to confront and “bridge social, cultural, and personal differences” (NCTE, 2018, p. 2). This access also provides the opportunity for differentiated instruction, which serves to further meet the needs of students of all ability levels (Allington, 2002; Conley & Hinchman, 2004; IRA, 2012).

Motivation and engagement are two factors that play a role in the development of adolescent literacy, and a key component is student choice (Afflerbach & Harrison, 2017; Conley & Hinchman, 2004; ILA, 2019; NCTE, 2004; NCTE, 2007). Allowing students to have a choice in what they read can enhance motivation and engage students because they have ownership in the activity (NCTE, 2007). Choice also provides variety, and students can choose books that are connected to their own lives and experiences, making the activity more meaningful (ILA, 2019).

Another component that has proven to be essential to successful literacy development in adolescents is that of communication, collaboration, and feedback (ILA, 2019; IRA, 2012; NCTE, 2004; NCTE, 2018). Research shows that collaboration and “oral communication is an important precursor to both reading fluency and comprehension” (IRA, 2012, p. 9). Meyer (2010) found that in a collaborative approach to a reading workshop intervention there were more student-generated questions after students had a chance to work with peers, and their wonderings were more relevant and
intense than in prior, more traditional formats. Additionally, collaborative opportunities and feedback, particularly those that are authentic, student-initiated, and teacher-facilitated, can provide guidance to students who can then apply it to situations in the future (IRA, 2012; NCTE, 2018). The research is certainly available for policy makers, school leaders, curriculum writers, and classroom teachers to be informed about the importance of a high level of literacy for all adolescents.

**The Importance of Reading Achievement**

Reading is also one of the most important skills one can have, and integral to success in higher education and beyond (Allington, 2002). In fact, teaching children to read accurately, fluently, and with adequate comprehension is critical because a great deal of formal education depends upon being able to read with understanding (Hulme & Snowling, 2011). Students who are proficient readers are more likely to graduate from high school, access higher education, and be gainfully employed (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2011). The implications of poor reading abilities are widespread. Students with reading difficulties are much less likely to be academically engaged across the board (“Reading Proficiency,” 2015). Furthermore, deficits in reading comprehension limit many students' ability to learn in all content area classes, such as science, social studies, and even math; essentially, students cannot learn from texts that they cannot read (Advancing Adolescent, 2010).

While reading instruction is emphasized in the primary grades, older struggling readers are not provided quality effective instruction in reading comprehension, as many middle school teachers tend to be content experts, not reading instructors (Allington, 2011). Most core reading programs are published as kindergarten through fifth grade
only, and aside from a basic anthology, few curriculum resources exist for the middle school years (Allington, 2011). Additionally, the reading class that is an important component of the elementary school curriculum is frequently dropped completely, becoming absorbed into the English Language Arts classes; the literature competes for time with grammar, spelling, vocabulary, and writing, and consequently, the overall time spent reading is significantly less in the middle school years (Humphrey, 2002). Snow and Moje (2010) described the misguided assumption that we should finish reading instruction by the end of third grade as “inoculation fallacy.” In other words, an early vaccination of reading instruction in the primary grades does not protect permanently against reading failure. Reading instruction must continue through adolescence. The intentional, explicit strategy instruction in a reading workshop classroom is both differentiated and relevant to adolescent readers’ needs. The elements of time, volume, and choice create an environment conducive to learning and improved reading achievement of middle school students.

**Effective Reading Instruction**

The importance of reading instruction cannot be overstated. Multiple components of effective instruction include differentiated instruction, explicit instruction, and the elements of reading volume, choice, and equity.

**Differentiated instruction.** Today’s classrooms are full of a wide diversity of children, and to best meet each student’s needs, teachers need to engage in differentiated instruction (Fountas & Pinnell, 2012). Tomlinson (1999) defines differentiation as a pedagogical approach in which teachers modify their curriculum, teaching methods, learning activities, and student outcomes to maximize the learning opportunity of each
student. The International Reading Association (2012) includes appropriate differentiated literacy instruction among their recommendations for what adolescent readers deserve. Students have different learning preferences, different interests, and different abilities, and differences such as culture, race, gender, ability level, and personal interests are only some of the varying factors students bring with them to school each day (Tomlinson & McTighe, 2006). Differentiated instruction takes these ideas into account, as well as influencing factors such as “learner readiness, interest, and intelligence preferences toward students’ motivation, engagement, and academic growth within schools” (Algozzine & Anderson, 2007).

Teachers who differentiate place a great deal of importance on an inclusive learning environment that does not exclude any student (Algozzine & Anderson, 2007). Classrooms that encompass diverse learners work to include differentiated culturally responsive pedagogy (IRA, 2012). While teachers strive to meet the needs of the students in their classrooms, often they reach only the middle. The primary goal of differentiated instruction is to ensure effective learning for a variety of individuals (Tomlinson & McTighe, 2006). When everyone in the classroom reads the same text and completes the same assignments at the same time, the needs of the learners at the bottom and top end of the achievement scale are typically not met (Tomlinson, et al., 2003). Evidence suggests that this practice leaves many learners behind; it can also limit the opportunity of advanced readers because they are likely reading books that are too easy for them; additionally, their interest and engagement levels tend to drop because they are not being challenged (Little, McCoach, & Reis, 2014). Brimijoin (2005) acknowledges that teachers struggle to provide access when classrooms include a wide range of learning
needs. Furthermore, studies indicate that students in differentiated classrooms achieve better outcomes in a variety of ways, including study habits, social interaction, cooperation, attitude toward school, and general mental health (Tomlinson et al., 2003). Because of the wide variety in learning preferences and ability levels in a middle school classroom, differentiation is necessary in creating inclusive classrooms. In a reading workshop approach, differentiation comes naturally because all students are reading books of their own choice and at their own levels (Calkins & Ehrenworth, 2017).

**Explicit instruction.** Research supports the idea that the explicit instruction of comprehension strategies increases students’ comprehension (Duke & Pearson, 2002), and as each school year brings a greater amount of information students must learn by reading, it remains imperative that effective and explicit reading instruction continues to occur in these grades where demands increase. Students do not learn simply by reading or by maturing; they must receive instruction (Palincsar & Brown, 1984). To this end, one of the greatest tools available in meeting student needs is “explicit instruction—instruction that is systematic, direct, engaging, and success oriented” (Archer & Hughes, 2011, p. vii). Explicit instruction has been defined in a number of ways. Rosenshine (1983) defines it as “a systematic method of teaching with emphasis on proceeding in small steps, checking for student understanding, and achieving active and successful participation by all students” (p. 34). While the format may differ among instructors, explicit instruction generally involves modeling, scaffolding student practice and feedback, and independent activities; the goal is to take students who have little knowledge on a subject to mastery (Marchand-Martella & Martella). The mini-lesson and conferencing portions of the reading workshop are opportunities for explicit
instruction, and are integral for students to experience success as readers. A 2014 study by Cantrell; et al. investigated the implementation of explicit strategy-based intervention with three cohorts of sixth grade students from 12 different middle schools. The study found that the intervention had a significant impact on achievement, reading efficacy, intrinsic motivation, and extrinsic motivation. Miller (2009) describes the importance of explicit instruction in encouraging students to read, “Time and time again, I have seen a heavy dose of independent reading, paired with explicit instruction in reading strategies, transform nonreaders into readers” (p. 25). Essentially, effective teachers do not simply describe; they model a strategy, they explain how and why a strategy works, and they provide support and feedback until students are capable of completing the strategy on their own, aligning with constructivist theory. Impactful words of encouragement and constructive feedback are integral components of student growth and are incorporated naturally into the reading workshop (Zheng & Warshauer, 2017).

**Reading volume.** The interventions vary greatly, but most scholars agree that the more students read, the better (Allington, 2014; Atwell, 1998; Calkins & Ehrenworth, 2017; Fisher & Frey, 2014). Allington (2011) states, “there are too many research reports on the relationship between reading volume and reading achievement to continue to ignore the necessity of expanding reading activity for struggling readers” (p. 13). Struggling readers need to dramatically expand their reading activity. Reading takes practice, and the more readers practice without interference, the more they improve (Fisher & Frey, 2014; Stairs & Burgos, 2010). Additionally, these researchers emphasize the need for adolescents to have access to complex, grade-level texts that they can read with support. There is an absolute necessity to ensure that adolescent students, especially
those who struggle to read, are not denied the access and the time to find texts that are meaningful to them. Particularly when reading instruction is no longer intentional, middle school students need to read a lot of texts, with high comprehension, in order to become proficient readers (Allington, 2014; Calkins & Ehrenworth, 2017; Fisher & Frey, 2014).

**Student choice.** In addition to a high volume of reading, students need choice in what they read. Allowing students to select their own books is an instructional condition that helps students’ reading achievement (Atwell, 1998; Guthrie, Klauda, & Ho, 2013; Stevens, 2016). According to Atwell (1998), “[i]f we want our students to grow to appreciate literature, we need to give them a say in decisions about the literature they will read” (p. 36). Classroom libraries should be extensive and should contain books of varying genres and reading levels. In addition to being able to choose books they are interested in, another benefit of giving students choice is that they have the opportunity to choose books at their independent reading level. Choice matters because when students have ownership and opportunity to choose their own books, they feel empowered and encouraged to read (Miller, 2009). Choice “strengthens their self-confidence, rewards their interests, and promotes a positive attitude toward reading” (p. 23). Selecting their own books, reading them independently, and experiencing success helps students see themselves as readers, and when students begin seeing themselves as readers, their confidence, motivation, and engagement increase (Stairs & Burgos, 2010; Stevens, 2016). Choice in book selection and appropriate reading level is essential if students are to be engaged in what they are reading (Atwell, 2007; Ivey & Broaddus, 2001). Hudson and Williams (2015) implemented a reading workshop approach into their second grade
classroom and found that the power of choice improved the motivation and confidence of their students; additionally, their students showed significant growth on both assessments, and on average, students increased their independent reading level by 45%, or five reading levels on the Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA). Providing a classroom atmosphere in which students can both choose their books and have time to read them is essential.

**An equitable practice.** A reading workshop approach, consisting of the elements of volume and choice, has the potential to create students who read and reflect in authentic situations. A core value of the reading workshop approach is the belief “that raising the level of literacy for children is an act of social justice” (Research Base, n.d.). A tremendous benefit of providing choice for students and having an expansive classroom library is that students need diverse books, those that “put characters of different races and ethnicities, religions, orientations, and abilities in a variety of circumstances, settings, and time periods” (Dahlen, 2017, p. 31). Students need to see themselves in the literature they read, to see their own cultural values, to see characters experiencing similar lives. Seeing themselves in books can help readers make connections that they may not have made otherwise; this, paired with the activation of background knowledge, allows for a deeper comprehension of the text (Rodriguez, 2018). Not only can seeing themselves in literature help students understand their own background and history, it can help them feel more valued and important (Bishop, 2012). Bishop states, “Children need literature that serves as a window into lives and experiences different from their own, and literature that serves as a mirror reflecting themselves and their cultural values, attitudes, and behaviors” (p. ix). In her 2009
TedGlobal talk, Chimamanda Adichie discusses the power of a single story. When she was young, she only had access to books with white characters, and while they opened up new worlds for her and stirred her imagination, she did not know that people like her could exist in literature (Adichie, 2009). The consequence, she states is this: “It robs people of dignity. It makes our recognition of our equal humanity difficult. It emphasizes how we are different rather than how we are similar” (Adichie, 2009, 13:35). Seeing into one’s own history and background is important, but as Adichie mentioned, seeing into other worlds can be equally so. Reading about others’ lives and experiences can help people understand each other better and help change people’s attitudes toward difference (Bishop, 1990). Literature can help students’ understanding of other cultures, races, and ethnicities. This availability of a widely diverse library cannot be overstated in a reading workshop classroom as the availability of resources is a significant contributor to literacy learning. When students gain a better understanding of world cultures and issues, they develop greater cognitive skills as they become more engaged and better able to critically evaluate the texts (Norton, 2009).

**Reading Workshop**

Reading workshop is an instructional approach to teaching reading that is student-centered and focuses on high volume of reading and student choice. According to Atwell (2014), reading workshop is effective because of its powerful simplicity. Students become better readers because they practice reading, and when they grow as readers, they want to continue reading; thus, they continuously become better readers (“Nancie Atwell’s Elements,” 2014). A successful reading workshop is characterized by a safe and comfortable learning environment in which the teachers put books into students’ hands,
allowing them to make meaning through real reading and writing (Atwell, 2014; Miller, 2009). Reading workshops are deliberately designed to be simple and predictable, so teachers can focus on providing individual attention to student progress and needs (Calkins & Ehrenworth, 2017). According to Allington (2002), there are only three key conditions that adolescent readers need to thrive: time to read, access to books, and expert instruction. A classroom that incorporates the workshop approach provides opportunities for each of these conditions.

While the reading workshop format can vary slightly, most adhere to the research-based practices highlighted in Gambrell’s 2011 article regarding student motivation to read. Here, she highlighted seven research-based rules for engaging and motivating students to read: books should be relevant to students, students should have access to a wide range of reading materials and given time to engage in sustained reading, students should have choice in what they read, and be given time to interact with others - both students and teachers - about the books they read. Students should be given opportunities to be successful with challenging texts, and the classroom culture should reflect the value and importance of reading. Each of these rules corresponds to the different components in a reading workshop format.

**Reading workshop components.** The reading workshop consists of several components that help to foster engagement and motivation in students as readers. Each session begins with a daily mini-lesson, independent reading, conferencing, reflection and sharing, assessment, and feedback (Atwell, 2016; Guthrie, 2004; Guthrie, Klauda, & Ho, 2013; Rasinski & Padak, 2004).
**Daily mini-lessons.** Most reading workshops begin with a brief mini-lesson, in which teachers focus on a specific reading strategy in a whole group atmosphere (Calkins & Ehrenworth, 2017). According to Fountas and Pinnell (2019), mini-lessons are concise, explicit lessons about a strategy or concept that students can apply to their own reading. During the whole group instruction, teachers model using a read-aloud, or mentor text, to both explain and show the students how to accomplish the strategy. The goal of this brief instruction is to foster student growth and help students act like readers; mini-lessons can also provide an opportunity for the teacher to organize the class, give reminders, and shape the values of the classroom community (Calkins, 2010). The mini-lesson can be set up in a variety of ways and is generally organized into four types: management, literary analysis, strategies and skills, and writing about reading, which guides students in responding in their reader’s notebook (Calkins, 2010; Fountas & Pinnell, 2019). Effective mini-lessons are clear, focused, relevant, and visible; they help students make connections, develop a deeper understanding, and serve as a tool to help students become better independent readers (Fountas & Pinnell, 2019). In their 2001 study, Ivey and Broaddus found that students enjoyed the teacher read-alouds during the daily mini-lesson. Teachers can use this time to model inflection and animation while reading, pronounce difficult words, and share their own responses to the text. Atwell addresses mini-lessons with a slightly different approach; her mentor texts consist of daily poems chosen for their brevity and their concise ability to teach students about a variety of skills and strategies, such as diction, precise vivid words, figurative language, and even the necessity of punctuation and proper grammar (Atwell, 2006). Regardless of
style, topic, or method, the goal is for students to apply the strategy during independent reading time (Calkins, 2010; Fountas & Pinnell, 2019).

**Independent reading.** Independent reading is the heart of the reading workshop; it describes the consistent and continuous opportunities for students to read texts, time to read them, and teacher support while doing so (Atwell, 1998; Calkins & Ehrenworth, 2017). The independent reading time is ultimately the goal of the reading workshop, and should encompass the majority of the reading workshop time. Research supports reading volume as an indicator of future achievement (Atwell, 1998; Calkins & Ehrenworth, 2017; Fountas & Pinnell, 2019). According to Atwell, reading volume is the best way for students to achieve reading proficiency, stating that reading practice “builds stamina, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension ... and it encourages the development of critical and analytical skills” (“Nancie Atwell’s Elements,” 2014). The benefits of a high volume of reading are many; through consistent independent reading, students increase their stamina, develop the habit of daily reading, make connections to the lives of others, and become more engaged in meaningful conversations (Fountas & Pinnell, 2019).

Independent reading is considered authentic because it mirrors the reading activities that occur in the daily lives of people outside of a school setting (Hudson & Williams, 2015, p. 532). Ivey and Broaddus (2001), hoping to shed light on middle school reading instruction that fosters student engagement with reading, administered a survey to 1,765 sixth grade students in 25 different schools, ranging from urban areas in the northeastern United States to others in a rural/small city in the mid-Atlantic region. Survey results, along with follow up interview data, indicated that 63% of students valued the independent reading time in their language arts classrooms.
While independent reading is valuable, teachers are cautioned against allowing students to read any book they choose. A number of important considerations exist for independent reading, the most important being that the book is at the correct level for the reader (Allington, 2011; Calkins & Ehrenworth, 2017; Fountas & Pinnell, 2019). According to Fountas and Pinnell (2006), "Matching books to readers is the foundation for helping students build and expand reading strategies across the grades… You don't get better by struggling through material you do not understand; you do get better by meeting challenges successfully" (p. 83). Allington, McCuiston, and Billen (2015) found that students who read books that were at the correct level were on task longer and demonstrated higher comprehension levels; accordingly, students who read texts with lower levels of accuracy were on task only 22% of the time. Furthermore, they found that instructional texts should be read with at least 95% accuracy to produce gains in reading. Calkins & Ehrenworth (2017) believe that students should read texts that match their independent reading levels to become proficient readers.

**Conferencing.** Calkins and Ehrenworth (2017) define the conference as a meeting between the student and teacher that can be brief or in depth depending on the goals and needs of each student. Depending on the format of the reading workshop, students have multiple opportunities to confer and collaborate with classmates and the teacher. Kamil et al. (2008) recommend that students have ample opportunity to engage in high-quality discussions as a way to improve their reading comprehension, particularly those that focus on critical thinking or understanding the author’s meaning. When teachers talk about texts, they present examples for students for constructing meaning from the texts (Kamil et al., 2008). Calkins and Ehrenworth (2017) believe that teaching
reading is essentially the same as teaching thinking, so “social relationships are critical to a reading workshop” (p. 7). Atwell (2006) feels that the one-on-one daily conference she has with her students is essential to keeping her students reading.

**Reflection and sharing.** The sharing component in reading workshop provides an opportunity to reinforce the daily literacy objective. It also provides closure and allows for the students to gather, share, and reflect as a learning community (Calkins & Ehrenworth, 2017). Students need time to reflect upon what they have read, both verbally and in writing. Most reading workshop formats incorporate an opportunity at the end of each day for students to share. During this five-minute time, the teacher and students share what they have learned, book recommendations, or ideas that made them think; the authentic audience can be both instructional and inspirational (Calkins & Ehrenworth, 2017).

**Feedback and Assessment.** Feedback is an important component of assessment that can provide a valuable learning opportunity for students in a reading workshop. Hattie (2011) found that providing learners feedback ranks in the top ten percent of all factors that contribute to student achievement. Students move from activity to activity with frequent teacher interaction as they develop into self-regulated learners. With guidance, they learn to set their own goals and evaluate their own progress as readers (Fountas & Pinnell, 2001). Research indicates that a reading workshop approach is an appropriate strategy for meeting the needs of adolescent learners (Calkins & Ehrenworth, 2017).

Assessment in the reading workshop can take on a variety of forms. Assessment includes, but is not limited to, reading logs, reading notebooks, and whole-class, small-
Assessment is ongoing, formative, and critical, particularly with students who are reading below grade level (Calkins & Ehrenworth, 2017). Teachers facilitating a reading workshop may use running records to more accurately assess their students’ reading levels. Running records are a component of a three-part process to help determine students’ instructional reading level (Cleaver, 2018). The use of running records helps ensure that students are matched to appropriate book levels, which is an important element to the success of reading workshop (Calkins & Ehrenworth, 2017).

Formative assessment is an important component of the reading workshop. Formative assessment relies on an ongoing and cyclical process of feedback in order to provide the support that each student needs. Heritage (2007) defines it as “a systematic approach to continuously gather evidence about learning” (p. 141). The collected data is then used to identify individual levels of learning and appropriate lessons to address individual student needs. The one-on-one conferencing that takes place in a reading workshop classroom is the opportunity for teachers to connect with their students. Calkins and Ehrenworth (2017) explain that the formative assessment that happens naturally through this component of the reading workshop is a way to empower student learning, providing clear and accessible goals for each to achieve.

Another means of assessment is by using a standardized assessment instrument. Standardized tests are given in order to measure achievement and to inform instruction using data-based decision making. In a standardized test, students not only respond to the same questions, they also receive the same directions and have the same time limits as other students (Seifert & Sutton, 2009).
The Standardized Test for the Assessment of Reading (STAR) is a standards-based, computer-adaptive assessment published by Renaissance Learning, Inc.; it measures students’ reading comprehension, monitors their achievement and growth, and provides immediate feedback to educators (Renaissance STAR, n.d.). The STAR reading assessment uses a combination of both cloze and traditional reading comprehension passages; it consists of approximately thirty questions, is timed, and is adaptive to student performance. According to the National Center on Response to Intervention (2019), the STAR assessment has a median reliability level of .90.

Effectiveness of Reading Workshop

Many teacher-researchers have implemented the reading workshop into their classrooms, and their research studies suggest that the workshop approach has a positive impact on students’ reading achievement. Specifically, both qualitative and quantitative studies have measured reading achievement, literacy skills, and student attitudes towards reading. Some studies primarily gathered qualitative data such as classroom observations and student and teacher interviews to measure the impact of the reading workshop approach.

Thomas (2012) took part in a study in which two eighth grade language arts teachers implemented a reading workshop format in lieu of the traditional whole-group approach they had been using. They conducted a descriptive case study over a period of eight months, utilizing qualitative research methods, such as observations and interviews. The perceptions of the teachers showed that the intervention led to improvements with the students in the areas of increased motivation, comprehension, and opportunities for authentic learning experiences (Thomas, 2012).
In a 2007 study, Roessing chose a formative approach to assessment in her eighth grade reading workshop classroom. Students added daily entries to a log and kept a reading response journal that was checked weekly; periodically, longer writes and projects were incorporated into each student’s assessment portfolio. Roessing noted that at the end of the year, students read more, read better, and read willingly.

Other studies used a quantitative or mixed methods design, using standardized assessment tools, to measure the effectiveness of the reading workshop. In their 2015 study, Hudson and Williams utilized the Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA) to measure Hudson’s students’ independent reading level and found that as a whole, her students increased by 45%, or five reading levels on the DRA. Hudson’s study further showed that the reading workshop helped both struggling readers as well as those who began the school year reading above grade level. Hudson also used iStation as a pretest and posttest to measure her students’ reading achievement. The posttest results showed significant improvement in all areas, including vocabulary, comprehension, spelling, and fluency (Hudson & Williams, 2015).

In a 2011 study, Oszakiewski and Spelman examined the impact of a reading workshop approach with 31 fifth grade students to measure reading achievement, writing skills, and their independent literacy habits. Through a 75-minute English Language Arts and a 40-minute social studies class, the researchers implemented the student-centered approach, measuring the outcomes with seven assessments of both qualitative and quantitative in nature. Results showed that students made significant gains on both the formative and summative assessments; additionally, all students increased volume and stamina, and most continued to read beyond the requirements.
Oberlin and Shugarman (1989) used a pretest - posttest design to measure the impact of the reading workshop on one teacher’s middle school students, using the Heathington Intermediate Scale and Nancie Atwell’s reading survey. These instruments, used to measure reading attitudes and motivation as well as book levels, were given simultaneously to the group, with the posttest taking place 18 weeks after the implementation of the reading workshop. The study found that the students consistently responded more positively on both instruments on the posttest than they had on the pretest, showing the reading workshop to be an effective approach with middle school readers.

Williams (2001) also focused attention on struggling students through the use of reading workshop in her middle school classroom. She used pre- and posttest scores on the Stanford Diagnostic Reading Test and the Metacomprehension Strategy Index. The results showed growth in all eight of her most struggling readers in reading attitudes as well as reading skills and strategies. Overall, these studies show that a reading workshop approach can have a positive impact on students’ reading abilities.

Summary

As stated in my problem of practice, the ability to read proficiently is a fundamental skill that all students need, yet a large percentage of students are not reading proficiently and reading instruction often wanes in upper elementary school. Research shows the importance of reading achievement, as well as the necessity for explicit and intentional reading instruction throughout adolescence and middle school. Students who do not read proficiently are less likely to be academically engaged in school, therefore
leading to lower grades in all classes, while students who do read well are more likely to be successful both academically as well as with future employment opportunities. Fortunately, research has provided a number of principles that can help improve adolescent literacy: intentional strategy instruction that includes teacher modeling, student choice, access to, and engagement with a variety of texts, and time for independent reading. The reading workshop approach consists of these best practices for reading instruction and has the potential to better meet the needs of middle school students. Therefore, this study aimed to determine whether a reading workshop approach can have a positive impact on the reading achievement of seventh-grade students in a supplemental reading class, while also providing the necessary rationale to keep the supplemental reading class as part of the middle school curriculum. The following chapter will present the methodology of the study, including the research design, participant sample, data collection, and data analysis methods.
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Chapter 2 provided an overview of the literature and theoretical framework that supports this action research project. This chapter describes the research methodology utilized to answer the study’s research questions regarding the reading workshop intervention that took place over a four-month period in a seventh-grade supplemental reading classroom. It provides the research design, description of setting and participants, instruments, and procedures, along with the timeline and data analysis methods.

Problem of Practice

Recent test scores indicated a decrease in the reading comprehension scores of the seventh-grade students at Magnolia Country Day Middle School. The teachers of the supplemental reading class had previously revealed their concerns regarding the reading levels of their students and were actively pursuing different programs and approaches to better meet their needs. Prior to this school year, a more traditional whole-class novel format was utilized, but the data showed that this approach was not meeting the needs of the diverse learners in the seventh grade. The purpose of this action research, mixed methods study was to determine whether implementing a reading workshop approach would positively impact seventh-grade students’ reading comprehension as well as to gain the perceptions of both the classroom teachers and students impacted by the intervention. This study explored the following research questions:
1. What is the impact of a reading workshop approach on seventh-grade students’ reading achievement as measured by the STAR reading assessment?

2. What are students’ perceptions regarding the effectiveness of a reading workshop model in their reading class?

3. What are teachers’ perceptions regarding the effectiveness of a reading workshop model in a seventh-grade classroom?

**Action Research Design**

Action research is an inquiry-based process in which educators conduct research in their own settings to inform their own practice and ultimately improve their students’ learning (Efron & Ravid, 2013). Many educators have realized the benefits of action research and view it as a practical and sound method of improving the teaching-learning process within their schools or classrooms. Mertler (2017, 2019) describes action research as a systematic inquiry conducted by one with a vested interest in the teaching and learning process in a particular setting. Using the action research process, educators can try a new approach, collect and analyze data to assess its effectiveness, and then formulate decisions for next steps. Action research serves as a process by which current practice can be almost immediately improved (Mertler, 2017).

According to Sagor (2000), educational action research can be conducted by an individual or a group of educators and serves three distinct purposes: one, building the reflective practitioner; two, making progress on schoolwide priorities; and three, building professional cultures. Mertler (2017) also emphasizes these purposes of action research, finding the role of reflection to be integral to the action research process. Improving the
collegiality of teachers and overall school culture are also benefits of the action research process.

Action research models generally follow an iterative cyclical process (Sagor, 2000). While a variety of models exist, most designs follow Kurt Lewin’s iterative cycles of plan-act-observe-reflect (Herr & Anderson, 2015). For example, a researcher may plan and implement a particular intervention, observe outcomes to gain insight into the phenomenon being studied, and make decisions based on the observed data; the cyclical process may continue (Herr & Anderson, 2015). According to Mertler (2017), the cyclical process does not proceed in a linear fashion, and researchers might find the need to repeat steps or complete them in a different order. Mertler’s model, mirroring Lewin’s, consists of the four stages of planning, acting, developing, and reflecting; this concise model was used to guide this study.

A convergent mixed methods design was used for this study. A mixed methods design contains both qualitative and quantitative data, and both forms of data are integrated in the data collection, data analysis, and the interpretation components of the process (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). A mixed methods approach uses both qualitative and quantitative methods and therefore can be stronger than either approach alone. For this study, I found it more useful than either qualitative or quantitative separately to provide me with a more complete understanding of my research problem of practice. The convergent mixed methods design is an approach in which a researcher “collects both quantitative and qualitative data, analyzes them separately, and then compares the results to see if the findings confirm or disconfirm each other” (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 215).
Setting

Magnolia Country Day Middle School is an independent school in the suburban Southeast. It is a large, college-preparatory middle school, consisting of seventh and eighth grades, and is one of five schools that comprise a larger PK-12 institution. Based on the Day of Record numbers on September 1, 2019, the middle school consisted of 513 students in seventh and eighth grades. The demographics of the student population on that date were Caucasian at 45%, African American 30%, Asian/Pacific 13.6%, with the remaining consisting of Hispanic, Native American, and multi-racial. The seventh-grade class consisted of 245 students, and 128 of those were in the supplemental reading class.

When students enter the seventh grade, they either take a world language, such as Spanish or French, or a supplementary reading class as one of their five core classes. Some of the students in the reading class are struggling readers who are required to take it, while others choose to take it in lieu of a world language. Thus, the reading levels of the students in the class vary greatly.

To protect the identity of the participants and setting, pseudonyms were used throughout the study.

Sample

Because the goal of this study was to examine the impact of a reading workshop approach on seventh-grade students’ reading achievement, all of the students in the supplemental reading class were included. Therefore, this study used a purposeful sampling of the seventh-grade reading teachers and students at Magnolia Country Day Middle School. Specifically, the sample for this study consisted of the two seventh-grade reading teachers, one male and one female. The teachers vary in years of educational
experience, as well as in experience teaching reading with the reading workshop approach.

The first participant is a Caucasian female who has been teaching at Magnolia for eight years; she has previously taught language arts in a neighboring public school and has a total of 26 years’ experience. She also has experience as an elementary school media specialist. She has taught reading with both the traditional model of whole-group novel-based instruction, as well as with the reading workshop approach.

The second participant is a Caucasian male; he has been teaching at Magnolia for five years, and this is his first experience with the reading workshop approach. He attended a week-long training seminar in June and enthusiastically started the year using this approach.

The study also included all 128 seventh-grade students enrolled in the eight supplemental reading classes during the 2019-2020 school year. Of these students, 72 were male and 56 were female. The demographics of the population were as follows: 44.53% Caucasian/White (57); 34.38% African American/Black (44); 7.81% Asian/Pacific (10); 7.03% Biracial (9); 2.34% Hispanic/Latino (3); and 3.91% (5) did not identify a race in our student records.

**Data Collection Instruments**

To determine the impact of the reading workshop intervention, multiple sources of data were utilized. Data were collected during the second semester of the 2019-2020 school year, between January and May of 2020. I used multiple sources of data to ensure I was able to provide a complete picture of the teachers’ and students’ perceptions of the reading workshop; these instruments included two individual semi-structured interviews
with teachers, individual semi-structured interviews with students, field notes from observations of the teachers in the classroom during the reading workshop, the students’ reading response journals, and the results from the STAR assessment.

**Qualitative instruments.** In order to elicit a complete picture of the teachers’ perceptions of the reading workshop, instruments included two individual semi-structured interviews with the teacher participants, individual semi-structured interviews with students, and classroom observations of the teachers in the classroom during the reading workshop. In addition, students kept a reading response journal to record notes about books they have read; this journal will be part of the data collection process.

**Semi-structured interviews.** I conducted two semi-structured interviews with the teachers, one in the first week of the timeline and one at the conclusion of the timeline, in order to capture a full picture of their perceptions. I also conducted one semi-structured interview with fourteen selected student participants. Many interviews in qualitative research are semi-structured, in which the interviewer has prepared open-ended questions in advance that can be followed up for more information. A semi-structured approach allows the interviewer to pursue a particular line of questioning, dependent on previous answers (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The first interview with the teacher participants took place in my office, was audio-taped, and lasted approximately 45 minutes. The second interview with each teacher participant took place over a Zoom call, was audio-taped, and lasted approximately 45 minutes. Additionally, in order to gather student perceptions of the reading workshop, I conducted semi-structured interviews with fourteen students, seven boys and seven girls. A wide range of reading abilities was represented within this student population.
**Observations.** Observations are common in qualitative research, as they can provide “powerful insight into the authentic life of classrooms and schools,” including nonverbal behaviors and body language that might not show themselves in an interview (Efron & Ravid, 2013, p. 87). These authors suggest several strategies to help an investigator make the most of observations; the most important is that an investigator should remember that the overall purpose is to help answer the research questions. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) also recommend keeping reflective comments, which can include “the researcher's feelings, reactions, hunches, initial interpretations, speculations, and working hypotheses” (p. 151). Observations can be a powerful data collection tool, but the observer needs to be aware that her presence alone can skew results, making the strategy of triangulation essential. I conducted four classroom observations of each teacher during the months of January and February.

**Document Review.** Documents and artifacts can provide good sources of qualitative data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Although personal documents, such as student reading response journals, can be “highly subjective in that the writer is the only one to select what he or she considers important to record” (p. 162), they serve to reflect the perspective of the participant. Therefore, in order to gather additional information regarding the students’ perceptions, I reviewed the reading response journals of the student participants.

**Quantitative instruments.** A quantitative component was utilized in this study to determine whether the mode of reading instruction will impact the reading achievement of seventh-grade students. The STAR is a standards-based, computer-adaptive assessment published by Renaissance Learning, Inc. The two reading teachers
administered the STAR assessment during September, January, and May. The STAR consists of approximately thirty traditional reading comprehension passages. Students have approximately one minute per question before the software automatically moves them to the next question. Also, the assessment is adaptive to student performance, meaning the online test adjusts the difficulty of questions throughout the assessment based on the students’ prior responses. This provides a customized, accurate measurement. It is intended to measure students’ reading comprehension, monitor their achievement and growth, and provide immediate feedback to educators (Star Reading, n.d.). According to the National Center on Response to Intervention (2019), the STAR assessment has a median reliability level of .90. Table 3.1 contains the research questions and corresponding data collection instrument and type.

Table 3.1 Research Questions and Type

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Question</th>
<th>Data Collection Instrument</th>
<th>Data Collection Type</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Research Question 1</td>
<td>What is the impact of a reading workshop approach on seventh-grade students’ reading achievement as measured by the STAR reading assessment?</td>
<td>STAR Reading Assessment by Renaissance Learning, Inc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Question 2</td>
<td>What are students’ perceptions regarding the effectiveness of a reading workshop model in their reading class?</td>
<td>Semi-Structured Interviews Observations Readers’ Journals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Question 3</td>
<td>What are teachers’ perceptions regarding the effectiveness of a reading workshop model in a seventh-grade classroom?</td>
<td>Semi-Structured Interviews Observations</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Data Collection Timeline

The data collection procedures began in the summer of 2019, and continued through the 2019-2020 school year, according to the timeline in Table 3.2.

Table 3.2 Data Collection Timeline

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>July 2019</td>
<td>Reading teachers attended training on the Reading Workshop Method</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August 2019</td>
<td>Reading teachers implemented the Reading Workshop approach in 7th grade reading classes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December 2019</td>
<td>Researcher obtained permission from IRB to conduct study</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January 2020</td>
<td>Reading teachers administered STAR assessment to students in reading workshop classes. Researcher conducted first of two interviews with reading workshop teachers. Researcher conducted first of four observations in reading workshop classrooms.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February-March 2020</td>
<td>Researcher conducted multiple observations in reading workshop classrooms.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April-May 2020</td>
<td>Researcher conducted semi-structured interviews with students. Researcher conducted second of two interviews with reading workshop teachers. Reading teachers administered STAR assessment to students in reading workshop classes. Researcher completed data analysis.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Intervention

Beginning in July of 2019 and prior to the study, the reading teachers attended professional development sessions on the reading workshop model, engaged in book studies, and read relevant articles to prepare for the implementation of the reading workshop model into their reading classes. The school provided the necessary resources,
As the school year opened in August of 2019, the seventh-grade reading teachers implemented a reading workshop approach to instruction (Calkins & Ehrenworth, 2017). Throughout the first semester, the workshop followed a predictable structure. Each day’s reading workshop began with a daily mini-lesson that ideally lasted from five to ten minutes; occasionally, the mini-lesson extended past this planned time, taking approximately fifteen to twenty minutes to complete. Initial mini-lessons focused on classroom procedures and expectations for the new format of the classroom. After initial expectations and procedures were put into place, the teachers conducted mini-lessons that discussed the reading process and covered topics regarding how to choose a book, when to abandon a book, how to annotate a book with sticky notes, and how to write a journal entry. Over the next several weeks, mini-lessons consisted of read alouds by the teacher. Poems, short stories, articles, and book chapters were modeled and discussed in a whole group format on the topics of genre, characterization, theme, conflict, vocabulary in context, and a variety of other literary devices. Mini-lessons conducted by students were woven throughout the quarter, and consisted of students sharing journal entries, book choices, and reading excerpts from books they were reading. Essentially, the construction and implementation of the daily mini-lessons was dependent on the students’ needs.

After the mini-lesson each day, students spent the remaining 30-35 minutes of class independently reading a novel of their choice. This time was strongly desired for and protected by the teachers as it is the heart of the reading workshop, yet occasionally
the independent reading time was shorter in duration. While students read silently, the teacher spent time reading and conferencing with students each day about their books, taking time to discuss what they were reading and answer any questions. This pacing allowed teachers to meet with students approximately 2-3 times per week. At the end of each class period, the students recorded the date, the title of their book, and the pages read in their reading response journals. This is a shared journal used by the student and the teacher to keep track of what was read, thoughts about what was read, and any questions the student had (Calkins & Ehrenworth, 2017). Students also used the journal to record notes from mini-lessons and relevant applications they noticed from their books.

Data Collection Methods

The first round of interviews with teachers took place during the first week of January. Questions in the first round of interviews were derived from the study’s research questions and aimed to measure each teacher’s perception regarding the impact of increased volume of reading, increased student choice, as well as the perceived benefits and drawbacks of the reading workshop format. I began analyzing the collected data from these interviews while the data was fresh, as well as to ensure time for follow up questions; to wait until the collection period is over to begin analysis “is to lose the opportunity to gather more reliable and valid data” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 236).

Upon the culmination of the first round of interviews, I began classroom observations. I conducted four observations of each teacher while they were actively facilitating reading workshop, and to ensure accuracy of the observations, I kept detailed, highly descriptive notes. The descriptive notes contain information regarding student
behavior during various tasks: selecting books, reading independently, conferring with peers, and/or participating in off-task behavior. Teacher behavior was also noted, including their activity during student conferences, assisting students with book selection, and monitoring student behavior. Each of the four observations took place during a forty-five minute class period during the months of January and February. I spent approximately two weeks analyzing the field notes collected from the observations.

Magnolia’s spring break was the first week of March, and I accompanied students to Europe for the annual spring break trip. Upon our return, we learned that all students and chaperones would need to immediately quarantine due to the COVID-19 outbreak in Italy and France. Within the week, our entire student body was quarantined at home, and the remainder of the year would take place with teachers and students working from home. During the months of March, April, and May, I continued with the planned individual student interviews, yet instead of taking place in person, they took place using the video conferencing software Zoom. The semi-structured interview questions (Appendix E) aimed to measure the students’ perceptions of the reading workshop components such as student choice, volume of reading, and their personal opinions of the reading workshop format. I began transcribing and analyzing the collected data immediately after the conclusion of the interviews.

During the month of May, the second round of semi-structured interviews of the teacher participants took place. Several of the questions were similar to round one in order to compare the change in teachers’ perceptions. Some questions were new, based on the data collected in the initial interviews as well as the classroom observations. I spent approximately two weeks analyzing the data from the second round of interviews.
The STAR was administered to students as both a pretest and as a posttest. During the first week of January, each student was administered the STAR as a pretest assessment during their reading class by their classroom teacher. Throughout the second semester, the students continued participation in the reading workshop. At the end of the time period, the STAR was again administered as a posttest measure during their reading class by the classroom teacher. Students’ scores on the posttest were compared with their scores on the pretest to give me an in-depth view of the impact of reading workshop on students’ reading achievement as measured by the STAR assessment.

**Data Analysis**

As stated, this study utilized a convergent, mixed-methods research design. Both quantitative and qualitative data were collected, analyzed, and compared throughout the research study with the goal of answering the study’s research questions.

**Quantitative data analysis.** I used a *t*-test for paired samples to determine whether a significant difference between the students’ pre-test and post-test scores on the STAR assessment was present. A *t*-test for paired samples measures the statistical difference between “pretest and posttest scores on the same or similar test obtained for the same students” (Efron & Ravid, 2013, p. 204). A significant increase in the students’ scores from the pretest to the posttest indicates effectiveness of the reading workshop.

**Qualitative data analysis.** The purpose of qualitative analysis is to interpret the data and the resulting themes in order to facilitate understanding of the phenomenon being studied, and ultimately find answers to the research questions (Sargeant, 2012). After each collection period, I organized and prepared the data, and then organized and coded it repeatedly until categories and themes emerged. According to
Saldaña (2009), coding is a method of arranging information into systematic categories to allow researchers to better group and analyze data. Applying and reapplying codes to qualitative data to search for patterns is called codifying. Creswell (2012) recommends using the coding process to generate a description before finally making meaning from the data either through personal interpretation or through a theoretical lens. Coding is a cyclical process requiring several rounds before breaking down data into usable, clear themes and categories (Saldaña, 2009).

To begin the qualitative data analysis process, I began by organizing and preparing the different types of data (Creswell, 2012). The recorded interviews were transcribed by Rev transcription software, observation notes were typed up, and images were scanned from students’ reading response journals. Creswell (2012) states the intent of the data analysis stage is to make sense out of all the data; it involves taking apart the data like peeling layers of an onion, and then putting it back together. Saldaña advises assigning a code, a word or a short phrase, to further capture the essence of the information, with the primary goal of finding consistencies and patterns of action (2009). Codes should be applied and reapplied to qualitative data until categories and themes emerge.

Saldaña (2009) recommends that beginning qualitative researchers should first code by hand, as “manipulating qualitative data on paper and writing codes in pencil” (p.22) can give a researcher more control over and ownership of the work. I began with several readings, making notes and coding with a different color pen each time. After manually coding on paper, I then uploaded the interview transcripts and classroom observation notes into the software NVivo to help organize and categorize the
codes. Saldaña (2009) advises researchers to do multiple cycles of coding, and my first cycle included In Vivo coding, which codes verbatim from the actual language used by the participants. Saldaña (2009) notes that In Vivo coding is informative when working with youth as “adolescent voices are often marginalized, and coding with their actual words enhances and deepens an adult’s understanding of their cultures and world-views” (p. 74). I also employed descriptive coding in which I assigned words and short phrases to the data, followed by subcodes to help narrow and categorize the codes. Themes emerged from the categories and are summarized and interpreted below.

**Rigor and Trustworthiness**

Researchers should ensure that the study, data collection tools, and interpretation of data are accurate in order for the findings to be useful and to enable the researcher to make decisions regarding future actions (Efron & Ravid, 2013). Researchers typically handle qualitative and quantitative studies differently. The next section provides an overview of the steps taken to achieve rigor and trustworthiness in this study.

**Quantitative.** The STAR Reading has a test-retest reliability of greater than .90. According to Campbell; et al. (2019), the STAR Reading reliability has yielded split-half reliability coefficients between .88 and .91 by grade and .92 overall. Furthermore, STAR Reading scores display evidence of criterion validity through correlations to the Comprehensive Test of Basic Skills, the Stanford Achievement Test, the California Achievement Test, the Metropolitan Achievement Test, and the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (Campbell, Lambie, Sutter, & Tinstman Jones, 2019).

**Qualitative.** To ensure rigor and trustworthiness of the qualitative data, I used the following strategies for validity (Creswell, 2012).
**Prolonged engagement.** Prolonged engagement was achieved naturally due to the timeline of the intervention and the amount of time the teachers and I spent together in observations and interviews.

**Triangulation.** Triangulation was achieved through the variety of data sources, such as interviews, observations, and document review. Utilizing multiple data sources helps triangulate the data and find emerging themes: “If themes are established based on converging several sources of data or perspectives from participants, then this process can be claimed as adding to the validity of the study” (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 278).

**Peer review and debriefing.** I have shared my written process, along with the research timeline and data collection process with several colleagues, peers within the program, and my dissertation chair.

**Clarifying researcher’s bias.** I have discussed any bias or prejudices regarding past experience that might affect the approach to the study or the interpretation of the results.

**Member checking.** Member checking involves taking the collected data and reports back to the participants so they can determine the accuracy. I shared the transcripts from the individual interviews with the participants for their review and to ensure I properly captured their perspectives (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Participants were given the opportunity to comment on findings and participate in follow up interviews if desired.
Ethical Considerations

Creswell and Creswell (2018) state that researchers “need to protect their research participants; develop a trust with them; promote the integrity of research; guard against misconduct and impropriety” (p. 159). To this end, I kept in mind several ethical considerations.

Prior to the intervention, I sought approval for my study from the university’s institutional review board, and then the Head of Magnolia Country Day School. Once the study was approved, I provided the teacher participants each with a consent form (Appendix A). Additionally, because the students are under the age of 18, I provided their parents with a consent form (Appendix B) and students with an assent form (Appendix C). Because of my role as principal, I worked directly with the teachers and students I supervised. Creswell and Creswell (2018) warn against any possible power imbalances, and while researchers cannot always heed this advice, I made it clear that this was a voluntary study, and the results, whether positive or negative, would not in any way impact their positions at the school. Finally, I used pseudonyms for the school and all participants to protect their identity and promised to respect their anonymity through each step of the process.

Summary

The purpose of the study was to determine the impact of a reading workshop approach in a seventh-grade supplemental reading class. This chapter has described the methodology, the data collection methods, and data collection procedures used to answer the study’s research questions. The next chapter will present the findings of the study.
CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

Chapter Four begins with an overview of the problem of practice, the research questions, and the methodology before providing the quantitative and qualitative results for this mixed methods, action research study.

Problem of Practice

In recent years, reading comprehension scores on standardized tests declined among the seventh graders at Magnolia. Despite the supplemental reading class, the traditional whole-class novel format did not seem to meet the needs of this student population. Teachers, concerned about the reading levels of their students, actively pursued other approaches, including a reading workshop approach to reading instruction. Therefore, the goal of this action research, mixed methods study was to determine whether the implementation of a reading workshop approach would have a positive impact on the seventh-grade students’ reading achievement as measured by the STAR reading assessment. Further, it sought to gain the perceptions of both the classroom teachers and students impacted by the intervention.

Research Questions

According to Efron and Ravid (2013), the goal of including both quantitative and qualitative research into a single study enables the researcher to explore different aspects of a problem of practice. To that end, this study was guided by the following research questions:
1. What is the impact of a reading workshop approach on seventh-grade students’ reading achievement as measured by the STAR reading assessment?

2. What are students’ perceptions regarding the effectiveness of a reading workshop model in their reading class?

3. What are teachers’ perceptions regarding the effectiveness of a reading workshop model in a seventh-grade classroom?

Findings and discussion are presented as related to each research question.

**Methodology**

As discussed in chapter 3, a mixed methods design contains both qualitative and quantitative data, and both forms of data are integrated in the data collection, data analysis, and the interpretation components of the process (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). I used a convergent mixed methods design to determine whether a reading workshop approach would positively impact seventh-grade students’ reading achievement. To quantitatively measure the students’ reading achievement, the two teacher participants administered the STAR reading assessment as a pre- and post-test instrument to determine whether the intervention of a reading workshop approach would prove statistically significant. The qualitative measures consisted of two rounds of semi-structured interviews with the teacher participants to gather their perceptions about the effectiveness of the reading workshop approach in their classrooms. Another qualitative method included semi-structured interviews with a purposeful sample of students in the reading classes. Purposeful sampling occurs when a researcher intentionally selects a small number of participants from a larger population, with a focus on gaining more in-depth information and understanding of individual experiences (Creswell, 2012;
Ivankova, 2015). Using the results from the initial STAR assessment in September, I purposely chose fourteen students who represented both genders, all racial groups, and a wide range of reading abilities. Specifically, eight students were female and six were male. Six students were Caucasian, four students were African American, two were Asian/Pacific, one was Hispanic, and one was Biracial. According to the pretest given in September, seven of the students read below grade level, three of them read at grade level, and three of them read above grade level, according to the Individual Reading Level (IRL) provided by the STAR assessment. The scores ranged from an IRL of 4.4, which indicates that the student reads at a fourth grade student during the fourth month, to an IRL of 11.1, or eleventh grade, first month. This group of purposely chosen students was representative of the entire group.

**Changes in Procedure**

The data collection was originally planned for the three-month period of January - March. However, after chaperoning a student trip to Europe, I was quarantined at home for two weeks due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Shortly thereafter, Magnolia was also closed with the goal of preventing the transmission of the virus, and it remained closed for the final ten weeks of the school year. Because of this, the final post-test of the STAR reading assessment was administered to students while they were learning from home. The first STAR assessment was given in September 2019, and 127 of the complete population of 128 students took that initial assessment; however, only 102 students participated in the post-test in May. I believe this study attrition can be explained by two related factors; one, the COVID-19 pandemic had a major impact on student attendance and accountability due to fatigue and distress, and two, the STAR assessment was not
included in the students’ cumulative grades at any time throughout the year, and therefore 26 students simply neglected to take the final post-test.

Another change in the original action plan concerned the semi-structured interviews and document review. All 14 student interviews and the second round of teacher interviews took place via the video conferencing software Zoom. I do not feel this negatively impacted the quality of the interviews; in fact, the students were more available and not distracted by other school-related factors, as were the teachers. The students’ interview responses generated rich descriptions. Finally, I was able to access the students’ reading response journals after the interviews but did not have a chance to ask the students questions about individual entries as I had originally hoped.

Data Analysis Results

As stated, this chapter explains the quantitative and qualitative data of the study. It provides the quantitative data derived from the STAR assessment, along with the themes and interpretation of the qualitative data. After independent analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data, I triangulated both forms of data to gather multiple perspectives and to draw more enriched conclusions from the research (Ivankova, 2015).

Findings related to research question 1. Quantitative data were derived from the students’ STAR reading pre- and post-assessments to establish a baseline and to determine the impact of the reading workshop intervention. Quantitative data were gathered to answer the following research question:

What is the impact of a reading workshop approach on seventh-grade students’ reading achievement as measured by the STAR reading assessment?
According to Renaissance Learning (2018), the Scaled Score (SS) is calculated based on the difficulty of questions and the number of correct responses, and is “useful for comparing student performance over time and across grades” (p. 2). The same range is used for all students, so it is useful in comparing student performance across grade levels. Therefore, I used the students’ Scaled Scores, which range from 0 to 1400, for this study. Descriptive statistics were calculated using the scaled scores from the pre- and post-test data to determine the mean, frequency, and standard deviation. Then, I used a t-test for paired samples to compare the same group under two different conditions, the pre-test and the post-test. The t-test is the appropriate statistical analysis to use when comparing two mean values to determine if they are statistically different (Efron & Ravid, 2013). In quantitative research, a statistical test is considered to have significance if the observed scores reflect a pattern other than chance (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Efron & Ravid, 2103; Ivankova, 2015). This study uses the p-value, or probability, of .05 as a cutoff point in determining whether the results are statistically significant. If the p-value is less than .05 (p < .05), this indicates the probability of the results being obtained by chance is less than five percent (Efron & Ravid, 2013; Mertler, 2014). Therefore, a significant increase in the students’ scores on the post-test would indicate the effectiveness of the reading workshop intervention.

I first found the descriptive statistics of the population including the frequencies of the variables of gender and race. See Figures 4.1 and 4.2.
Next, I found the measures of central tendency for the complete population on the pre- and post-test. The mean (M) of the scaled score and the standard deviation (SD) are in Table 4.1. The date of the STAR assessment pretest was in January and the posttest was administered in May. The STAR assessment was administered three times throughout the 2019-2020 school year, one each in September, January, and May; the latter was administered while the students were learning from home during the COVID 19 pandemic. Only the 102 students who completed all three assessments were included in this study.
Table 4.1 Pre- and Post-Measures of Central Tendency - Scaled Scores of STAR

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date of Assessment</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>January</td>
<td>924.45</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>216.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May</td>
<td>877.30</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>241.58</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I used the IBM SPSS statistical software program to calculate the paired sample t-test to determine whether a statistically significant difference existed among the students’ STAR assessment scaled scores. Table 4.2 shows the scores during the time period of the intervention, January through May, 2020.

Table 4.2 Pre- and Post-Test Paired Samples t-Test

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time Period</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>T</th>
<th>Sig (2-tailed)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>January - May</td>
<td>47.15</td>
<td>163.37</td>
<td>2.92</td>
<td>0.004</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. p < 0.05

These results show a significant difference in scores between the students’ pre-test in January (M= 924.45, SD= 216.58) and the post-test in May (M = 877.30, SD = 241.26). The M difference = 47.15, with p = 0.004. Therefore, the results suggest that students’ reading achievement according to the STAR reading assessment scaled scores dropped at a statistically significant level. The study included a diverse student population, so I broke down the results by both gender and race. However, because there were no differences between each individual group and that of the whole population, I did not include those findings in this report.

As I mentioned earlier, the final post-test used for these results took place at the end of the school year after the students had experienced the unexpected pandemic and nine weeks of remote learning. I believe that this situation had a major impact on the results as students reported fatigue and teachers reported drops in attendance and an
overall decrease in student engagement. Additionally, because the classroom teachers chose not to include the STAR assessment results into the classroom grades, I believe that, combined with all other factors, the students neglected to take the post-test seriously.

Because we had previous data from the STAR assessment taken in September, I wanted to see if a similar trend occurred between the September test \( (M = 859.05, SD = 220.41) \) as compared to the January test \( (M = 924.45, SD = 216.58) \). This test shows a significantly statistical difference in the two scores, indicating that the improvement by the students from the implementation of the reading workshop in September through January was statistically significant. Results are indicated in Table 4.3.

Table 4.3 Pre- and Post-Measures of Central Tendency – Scaled Scores of STAR

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date of Assessment</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>September</td>
<td>859.05</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>220.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January</td>
<td>924.45</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>216.58</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Again, using the IBM SPSS statistical software program, I calculated the paired sample \( t \)-test to determine whether a statistically significant difference existed among the students’ STAR assessment scaled scores. Table 4.4 shows the scores during the time period of the intervention, September through January, 2019.

Table 4.4 Pre- and Post-Test Paired Samples \( t \)-Test

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time Period</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>( T )</th>
<th>Sig (2-tailed)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>September – January</td>
<td>-65.40</td>
<td>138.14</td>
<td>-4.78</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. \( P < 0.05 \)

Finally, to gain a more global view of the intervention of the reading workshop, I compared the data from the original pretest in September \( (M = 859.05, SD = 220.41) \) to
the post-test in May ($M = 877.30, SD = 241.26$). While data does show an increase between the two tests, the comparison does not indicate a significantly statistical difference in the two scores, indicating that the improvement by the students from the implementation of the reading workshop in September through May was not statistically significant. Results are indicated in Table 4.5.

Table 4.5 *Pre- and Post-Measures of Central Tendency – Scaled Scores of STAR*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date of Assessment</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>September</td>
<td>859.05</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>220.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May</td>
<td>877.30</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>241.58</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I calculated the paired sample $t$-test to determine whether a statistically significant difference existed among the students’ STAR assessment scaled scores for the school year. Table 4.6 shows the scores during the time period of the intervention, September, 2019 through May, 2020.

Table 4.6 *Pre- and Post-Test Paired Samples $t$-Test*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time Period</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>$T$</th>
<th>Sig (2-tailed)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>September – May</td>
<td>-18.25</td>
<td>138.14</td>
<td>0.56</td>
<td>0.57</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. $P < 0.05$*

**Interpretation of quantitative results.** Throughout the time period of the intervention, which was the second semester of the school year, the students’ STAR assessment results show a statistically significant drop. However, a look back to the results of the assessments that took place during the first semester, while we were in school and the reading classes met daily, showed a statistically significant increase in the students’ scaled scores. The reading workshop was implemented at the beginning of the school year and continued throughout both semesters. The results of the assessments
during the entire time period do show an increase, yet statistically, not significant. The reading workshop is structured so that each day consists of several components that foster engagement and motivation. These include explicit instruction, independent reading time, conferencing, and feedback (Atwell, 2016; Guthrie, 2004; Guthrie, Klauda, & Ho, 2013; Guthrie & Klauda, 2014; Rasinski & Padak, 2004). Based on the data collected, when these components were included and the reading workshop was taught with fidelity, this intervention had a positive impact on reading achievement.

Profiles of student participants. To gain more insight into the effectiveness of the reading workshop approach, I used maximum variation purposive sampling to form a smaller group of students to interview. The fourteen students were chosen due to their wide range of reading abilities according to the scaled scores on the STAR assessment pretest, along with their variation in gender and race. This group of purposely chosen students was representative of the entire group.

This group consisted of eight females, six males, six Caucasian students, four African American students, two Asian Pacific students, and two Biracial students. The fourteen students’ scaled scores ranged from 533 to 1327 on the STAR Assessment pretest. The STAR assessment scaled scores are based on the difficulty of questions and the number of correct responses. The Enterprise scale has a range of 0-1400 (Star Reading, 2018). A scaled score of 533, as interpreted from the STAR reading assessment pretest, is in the Below Average range, while a 1327 is considered Above Average. For clarity, I am also including the Grade Equivalent (GE) of each of the following students. According to STAR (2018), the GE scores range from 0.0 to 12.9+ and are norm-referenced scores that provide a comparison of a student’s performance with that of other
students nationally. If a student receives a GE of 7.0, for example, this means that the student scored as well on the Star Reading test as did the typical student at the beginning of grade 7. A brief profile of each participant is below. To protect the anonymity of the student participants, I have used pseudonyms.

**Cameron.** Cameron is a Biracial male whose STAR assessment pretest indicated a scaled score of 790 and a GE of 1206; based on the national norms at the beginning of the year, Cameron read at a level greater than a typical tenth grader. Cameron began Magnolia in kindergarten, and shared that he learned to like to read in fourth grade. He enjoyed the reading workshop’s focus on choice, and his STAR assessments stayed consistent throughout the year, showing only a slight increase from pretest to posttest.

**Carter.** Carter is an African American male whose STAR assessment pretest indicated a scaled score of 832 and a GE of 6.9; based on the national norms at the beginning of the year, Carter read at a level equal to that of a typical sixth grader after the ninth month of the school year. Carter began MCD in the second grade. He shared that he has always loved reading, so he really enjoyed having time in the school day to just read. Carter showed slight but insignificant increases in his STAR assessment scores.

**Charlie.** Charlie is a Caucasian male whose STAR assessment pretest indicated a scaled score of 910 and a GE of 7.8; based on the national norms at the beginning of the year, Charlie read at a level equal to that of a typical seventh grader after the eighth month of the school year. Charlie’s STAR assessment scores showed a significant increase throughout the year, and he shared that he was surprised that he actually enjoyed reading now. Charlie began Magnolia in kindergarten.
**Eleanor.** Eleanor is a Caucasian female whose STAR assessment pretest indicated a scaled score of 790 and a GE of 1206; based on the national norms at the beginning of the year, Eleanor read at a level of a typical eleventh grader after the ninth month of the school year. This was Eleanor’s first year at Magnolia. She enjoys reading, and her posttest showed a GE of PHS, or post-high school scores. Eleanor struggled with finding books that were both appropriate and at her grade level.

**Emma.** Emma is an Asian Pacific female whose STAR assessment pretest indicated a scaled score of 906 and a GE of 7.7; based on the national norms at the beginning of the year, Emma read at a level equal to that of a typical seventh grader after the seventh month of the school year. Emma began Magnolia in pre-kindergarten. She shared that she was surprised that she learned to like reading this year, sharing that she hated it before. She showed significant increases in her STAR assessment, ending the year reading with a scaled score of 1148 and at a level of a typical tenth grader in the fourth month.

**Ethan.** Ethan is a Caucasian male whose STAR assessment pretest indicated a scaled score of 726 and a GE of 6.3; based on the national norms at the beginning of the year, Ethan read at a level equal to that of a typical sixth grader after the third month of the school year. Ethan began at Magnolia in the second grade and shared that he has always enjoyed reading; he enjoyed being able to respond to the books he reads through his reading response journal rather than taking tests. His STAR assessment scores remained consistent throughout the year.

**Gracie.** Gracie is a Caucasian female whose STAR assessment pretest indicated a scaled score of 783 and a GE of 6.6; based on the national norms at the beginning of the
year, Gracie read at a level equal to that of a typical sixth grader after the sixth month of the school year. Gracie began Magnolia in the fourth grade transition program, which is a program for students with diagnosed learning disabilities. Gracie enjoyed talking about reading, and shared that learning how to find the right book has led to her reading more and enjoying it for the first time. Her STAR scores showed significant increases.

**Grayson.** Grayson is a Caucasian male whose STAR assessment pretest indicated a scaled score of 874 and a GE of 7.3; based on the national norms at the beginning of the year, Grayson read at a level equal to that of a typical seventh grader after the third month of the school year. Grayson began at Magnolia in the fourth grade, and shared that he only read one book prior to his seventh-grade year. While his STAR assessment scores stayed consistent, he read a high number of books and learned the types of books he likes and found reading easier.

**Jayden.** Jayden is an African American male whose STAR assessment pretest indicated a scaled score of 975 and a GE of 8.7; based on the national norms at the beginning of the year, Jayden read at a level equal to that of a typical eighth grader after the seventh month of the school year. Jayden began at Magnolia in kindergarten, and despite the fact that he reads above grade level, he does not like to read and has trouble finding books he likes. Jayden’s STAR scores showed significant decreases between the pretest and posttest.

**Madison.** Madison is an African American female whose STAR assessment pretest indicated a scaled score of 533 and a GE of 4.7; based on the national norms at the beginning of the year, Madison reads at a level equal to that of a typical fourth grader after the seventh month of the school year. This was Madison’s first year at Magnolia,
and she admittedly struggled academically. Her STAR scores were below the class average and showed a slight decrease on her post-test scores. However, she shared that she read more due to the reading workshop and felt that she became a faster and more fluent reader.

**Michael.** Michael is a Caucasian male whose STAR assessment pretest indicated a scaled score of 790 and a GE of 6.7; based on the national norms at the beginning of the year, Michael read at a level equal to that of a typical sixth grader after the seventh month of the school year. Michael began at Magnolia in the fourth grade transition program, which is a program for students with diagnosed learning disabilities. Despite his struggles with reading comprehension, Michael shared that he likes to read and understands the importance of being a good reader. Michael’s STAR scores stayed consistent throughout the school year.

**Mia.** Mia is an African American female whose STAR assessment pretest indicated a scaled score of 691 and a GE of 6; based on the national norms at the beginning of the year, Mia read at a level equal to that of a typical sixth grader at the beginning of the school year. Mia has been at Magnolia since kindergarten, and only learned to like reading in seventh grade, citing the fact that she enjoyed not having to take a test on books she reads. Her STAR scores remained consistent throughout the year.

**Sarah.** Sarah is a Hispanic female whose STAR assessment pretest indicated a scaled score of 1299 and a GE of 11.5; based on the national norms at the beginning of the year, Sarah read at a level of a typical eleventh grader after the fifth month of the school year. Sarah began Magnolia in kindergarten, and while she did not enjoy the class...
at the beginning of the year, she did enjoy reading at her own pace. Sarah’s STAR scores showed slight decreases as the year progressed.

**Sophia.** Sophia is an Asian Pacific female whose STAR assessment pretest indicated a scaled score of 1125 and a GE of 10.2; based on the national norms at the beginning of the year, Sophia read at a level of a typical tenth grader after the second month of the school year. Sophia began Magnolia in the first grade. She has always enjoyed reading and really enjoyed the quiet time to read each day. Sophia’s STAR assessment scores were inconsistent throughout the year, and her final assessment in May showed a significant decrease.

**Findings related to research question 2.** Qualitative data were derived from semi-structured interviews with students, document review of the students’ reading response journals, and multiple classroom observations to explore the following research question:

*What are students’ perceptions regarding the effectiveness of a reading workshop model in their reading class?*

**Summary of themes.** Three themes emerged from the analysis of the students’ semi-structured interviews, students’ reading response journals, and classroom observations: 1) Comfortable Classroom Environment, 2) Personalized Learning, and 3) Collaborative Relationships and Feedback.

**Comfortable classroom environment.** The first theme that emerged from the coding process was the comfortable classroom environment. Because this theme was rather large, after further analysis of the data, four sub-themes emerged as well. The first sub-theme of a comfortable classroom environment is that of physical comfort. The
classrooms of both teachers contained flexible seating, such as sofas, pillows, lamps, and a large quantity of books. The lighting in both rooms was soft and the rooms were inviting. The focus was clearly on being student-friendly. The following is an excerpt from my first classroom observation of Mr. Grant during a mini-lesson: “The students are sitting at tables, but pillows, a sofa, and soft seating options can be found around the room. The room is spacious, comfortable, and dimly lit.” Being in a comfortable classroom was important to the students, and I found it to be a contributing factor to the effectiveness of the reading workshop.

During one of my observations, I was seated on the sofa beneath the windows in the classroom. At the conclusion of the mini-lesson, the students could disperse and sit wherever they chose to read independently. Some students stayed in their chairs, some situated themselves among pillows, and others chose the soft chairs. One student came to sit near me on the sofa, stating that this seat was her favorite, “This is the best spot in the room, the lighting is really good here.” The topic of comfort came up in my student interviews as well. When asked what she liked about reading workshop, one of the things Sophia mentioned was the comfortable places to read in the classroom; she shared, “I liked the pillows, because we just get comfy and then we start reading.” In answer to the same question, Emma noted, “It’s just more chill, you know, I can walk in, his lights were always off, which was really nice… And then you just get to sit there and read, which is awesome.” One of Madison’s favorite aspects about the reading workshop was the comfortable classroom atmosphere: “I think maybe reading in your own space... in here, I can read without people being super close to me and not being uncomfortable.” In addition to the physical comfort of the room, several students discussed the fact that the
classroom atmosphere was much less stressful than their other classes. Grayson shared, “I liked that I had a 45 minute break in between my classes to read I guess, and relax without any distractions. So that was nice.” Michael, Emma, and Gracie all shared similar sentiments that one of their favorite things about the reading workshop was that they could relax and read. The fact that students could find a comfortable place to relax and read within their school day contributed to the effectiveness of the reading workshop.

In addition to the physical comfort of the classroom environment, students noted the quiet and relaxing classroom atmosphere. Early in the school year, the teachers emphasized this aspect, and it proved effective. Sophia mentioned, “It was really pin drop silence, so it was nice. And while you were reading, you didn’t really get disturbed.” Carter also noted his favorite part of reading workshop was the independent reading time, and specifically the lack of noise: “the time in class just to read. It’s really quiet and there’s no distractions.” The emphasis on the quiet classroom atmosphere was noted, especially when students did not adhere to it. Mia expressed frustration when her classmates were not quiet during independent reading time, “it’s not as quiet sometimes because some people will start like talking and whispering. And it’s like to me, worse than talking, because I can hear you.” The silence in the classroom for students to be able to concentrate on their own independent reading is a contributing factor to the effectiveness of the reading workshop approach.

The physical comfort and quiet atmosphere of the classroom were both important to the students’ perception of the reading workshop, but another important sub-theme emerged as well: opportunity and time to read during class. This independent reading
time is an essential component of the reading workshop approach. The time and opportunity to simply read was an unexpected surprise for many of the students who had not experienced it in prior reading classes. Of the fourteen students I interviewed, thirteen of them shared that they were reading more now than they ever had before, and they attributed this to the time both in class and at home. Grayson shared that he has read close to 40 books this year, and when I asked him if he is reading more now than he had in prior years, he shared, “Yeah, yeah, I think I might’ve read one book in the lower school if I’m being honest.” Madison shared that she too was reading more this year, saying “I think because I had a lot of time to read more and finish books faster.” An important finding for several students is that the opportunity to read seems to have promoted a love of reading that they did not have before. Charlie noted that his teacher was consistent with the independent reading time each day. He compared it to his previous reading class: “last year, I don’t really remember doing that much reading. There might’ve been a reading log, but nothing to this degree. Which I kind of like. It’s actually kind of nice reading, especially if you have a good book.” I noticed that several students found the reading more laborious at the beginning of the year, but once their stamina increased, they began to enjoy it more. According to Emma, she has read 45 books this school year. When I noted the high quantity, she laughed:

    EMMA: Yeah. It’s funny. Over the summer, I’d be like Do I really want to read a book? but now I’m like, Oh my gosh, I actually like reading.

    ME: So you weren’t a reader before?

    EMMA: No, I hated reading so much.

    ME: Really?
EMMA: And then I was like, oh, this is actually kind of nice.

ME: What changed, do you think?

EMMA: I don’t know. Honestly, I feel like... I don’t know, because at the beginning of the year, I was starting to get used to reading every single night, for 20 to 30 minutes. And then it was just kind of like at first, I don’t really like this but as it kept going on, I was like, Oh, it’s kind of like watching a movie, but it’s even better. Cause you can visualize how you want it to be.

Emma’s and Charlie’s feelings about the independent reading time are representative of other students as well, and an important factor in the students’ perceptions of the effectiveness of the reading workshop approach.

The final sub-theme that emerged within the classroom environment concerned the students’ access to books. The time and opportunity to read are integral to students’ motivation to read, but access to books to browse and choose is an important factor in the students’ perceptions of the effectiveness of the reading workshop. Both teachers’ classrooms had small classroom libraries and there seemed to be no shortage of access. I noted in one classroom observation: “There were small stacks of books on the front table, and much larger stacks on Mr. Grant’s desk to be used as mentor texts during mini-lessons. A nearby student shared how he used them; ‘he gives book talks about these books, and tells us what they are about’.” In addition to the classroom libraries, and in an effort to share resources, the two teachers consolidated their books into one centralized reading room adjacent to their classrooms. Students were allowed to browse during class time. Additionally, Magnolia has a library used by both middle school and upper school students, but it is located on the upper school campus. The librarians provide a delivery
service, informally dubbed Uber Books, and students can submit requests for books to be
delivered to their classrooms. When asked about finding new books to read, Gracie
shared, “we browse in either the middle school reading room or sometimes you go to the
[campus] Library if we can't find anything in the reading room.” Charlie enjoyed visiting
the larger library, noting, “I like how many books they have. That library is huge. You
could literally find any book there.” Unfortunately, Grayson did not have the same
success. When asked what he did not like about reading workshop, he shared the
following:

I would say I feel like the middle school doesn't have, we have access to a lot of
books, but I wish we'd have more access to like a ton more books. We only have
a few comic books in there. I just feel like we should have a bigger variety to all
the books that we get to read.

According to the students, having access to books of all genres is a key component to the
effectiveness of the reading workshop.

**Personalized learning.** Personalized learning is another theme that emerged
during the coding process. As defined by the U.S. Department of Education in the
National Educational Technology Plan (NETP), personalized learning refers to
“instruction in which the pace of learning and the instructional approach are optimized
for the needs of each learner” (U.S. Department of Ed, 2016, p. 7). The objectives,
pedagogy, and content all vary based on individual student needs, and the learning
activities are meaningful and relevant to learners. Teachers who subscribe to
personalized learning also create a classroom environment where each students’ needs
are met, regardless of reading level, making it an inclusive learning environment. The
reading workshop approach lends itself to personalized learning, and I found a great deal of evidence that shared that this aspect added to the students’ perceptions of the effectiveness of the reading workshop. Within the theme of personalized learning, three sub-themes also emerged: student choice, goal setting, and student agency.

The first sub-theme, and a key component of personalized learning, is student choice. Many traditional reading classes choose whole-class novels that meet the needs of the learners in the middle. Choice of books is important in a personalized learning classroom because it allows the teacher to meet the needs of those who read at lower levels, while not limiting the opportunity of the more advanced readers. When asked about their favorite part of the reading workshop, every single participant mentioned the power of choice. Eleanor, whose scores ranked at the top of the class, said it simply: “Yeah, Yes. I think [choice] is my favorite part.” Cameron, another advanced reader, agreed: “So I definitely like that we get to choose the book that we want to read. Last year it was just, okay read this book and if you didn't like it … it was definitely harder to study for books that we didn't like because we were not interested in it and it just didn't go well.” Both of these readers were able to find books to read at their reading level, which hadn’t happened in prior years. Likewise, several readers who scored at or below grade level on the STAR assessment shared similar sentiments about having a choice in what they read. Michael shared, “I like choosing my own book because I'm more likely to enjoy it than having a book that someone chose for me.” The other students echoed this, and several added the reason behind this as enjoyment. Mia added, “I like having much more choice because if I don't like a book, I won't really enjoy it or understand it.” When students are allowed to choose their own books, they are more likely to continue to
read, particularly once they find books they enjoy. Sarah, an advanced reader, shared, “he lets us try to figure out what we like to read. And once we do figure that out, we can just keep picking books that we like to read. And it just sparks more of an interest when you read books that you want to read.” Emma’s scores were on grade level, which implies that the whole class novels she previously read, were appropriately chosen for her. However, she still appreciated the choice aspect:

I love reading workshop because you can choose whatever book you want, whether it's a graphic novel, or a 1,000-page book, not going to do that, but you know [laughter]. But it's kind of cool as you get to read...because I feel...sometimes last year you would have to read a book that the teacher chose and if you didn't like it, I found myself not paying that much attention to it, because I was just bored reading it. But now I can choose different books that I like. And then I actually enjoy reading and it's made me want to read more because I can choose whatever book I want.

In addition to the choice of books, students can also choose how much they read. Charlie shared that he liked being able to set his own pace, stating, “I didn't really recognize how much better reading is if you can go at your own pace, and if you’re not getting rushed.” Sarah agreed with the idea of setting her own pace and not feeling limited by a whole class novel approach. She noted, “since we read what we want, say if something ends in a cliffhanger, we can just keep reading and go till we want to stop.”

During one term, the teachers implemented a book club approach; during this time period, students found they had less choice in what they were able to read, as well as the pace at which they read. Eleanor shared that she did not enjoy the book clubs as
much because “we didn’t really get to choose the books that we did. I mean, we kind of got to but we kind of really didn’t, but I like having more control over what I do.”

Several students agreed with the decrease in student choice, while several others added that their pace was affected too. Carter felt that he was a faster reader than his book club group members, which limited his reading, and Sophia agreed: her group “slowed [her] down on [her] reading.” Overall, students found that choice in both book selection and pace is essential in determining a reading workshop’s effectiveness.

The second sub-theme that emerged from the analysis of personalized learning is that of goal setting. Goal setting is another component that plays a key role in students’ perceptions regarding the effectiveness of a reading workshop approach. In order to help teachers assess students’ reading volume and progress, students participated in a timed reading check periodically during each term. For these reading checks, students would read a book on their level for a period of approximately twenty minutes. They would then count the number of pages read in order to calculate the number of pages they could reasonably read in a week; these reading checks were the basis for the students’ goals for reading volume (see Figure 4.3).

![Figure 4.3: Timed Reading Calculation](image-url)
This, similar to the daily independent reading time, took practice and an increase in stamina for some learners. Gracie found the reading checks helpful, not only for her but for her classmates, “I thought it was good to do because not everybody reads the same. If you have a really long book and you’re a fast reader, then you probably finish that book in the same time as someone who isn’t.” Ethan found it difficult at first, but then a motivator to keep reading: “At first I wasn’t really a big fan of timed reading. That was just hard, but I know how many pages I read in 20 minutes, and that was good to know so I can get it updated more. It’s good to beat my challenge.” Mia discussed her goal setting within her reading response journal; after sharing that she had met most of her reading goals, she stated, “I would like to work on my sticky notes and my interactive bookmark more.” Goal setting is an important component in personalized learning; it played an important role in the reading workshop.

Student agency, which emerged as the final sub-theme of personalized learning, played a substantial role in the effectiveness of the reading workshop. Student agency includes the aforementioned topics of choice and goal setting, but also includes reflection and self-efficacy. During the reading workshop, students had an opportunity to reflect upon their reading, both in one-on-one conferences with their teachers, as well as via their reading response journals. Within their reading response journals, students kept a Weekly Reflection, which served as a structured way for students to show their thinking and reflect upon their goals, reading, and journaling efforts for the week. An excerpt from Eleanor’s weekly reflection form stated that she reached her goal of staying on task, and “really listened to the other group members.” Mia’s reflection contained her thoughts on exceeding her reading goals: “I believe I did a fantastic job reading outside
of class. I believe my reading life has changed drastically since before I used to read little to none every month.” Mia’s noted improvements tie into her self-efficacy as a reader. See Figures 4.4 and 4.5.

**Figure 4.4: Student Weekly Reflection**

The students were able to identify areas of growth and set goals to achieve them, making the reading more personal and enjoyable, as Michael portrays. When I talked with Michael about why he likes to read when he has not in the past, he shared, “Maybe because I know what I like now.” In addition to knowing how to choose the right book,
some students noticed their individual reading skills were improving. The students had been taught to annotate using sticky notes when they read; this lesson was difficult for some at the beginning of the year. Ethan noticed an improvement in his ability to annotate while he was reading. He noted,

In my book I used to put not a lot of notes because I didn't really know how to take them in a book. I didn't know what to look for. Then now I know what to look for in a book, like social problems, a character trait or stuff like that, or like big things that happen in the book.

Knowing what to look for and what to notate while reading is an important skill to becoming a better reader. See Figure 4.6.

Madison, who reads below grade level, experienced growth and an increased efficacy in her own abilities. Having read more books this year than she had in the past, she shared that her fluency had increased and that the daily reading practice was helpful.
She stated that she enjoyed reading now more than before, “Because for me, I was never a good reader, and I used to take super long on books because I would read super slow, but then I started reading more books to where I got more fluent with the reading and stuff, and so I've gotten faster.” Gracie noticed her own ability to actively read and think about what she is reading. In response to her own goal setting and improvement, she stated that instead of allowing her mind to wander while she was reading, she said that “actually paying attention to what you're reading” is an important aspect in becoming a better reader. Self-efficacy plays a large role in whether or not students like to read and feel confident that they do it well. Through reflective opportunities, students gained confidence and agency; both of these are important aspects in the effectiveness of the reading workshop.

Collaboration and feedback. A final theme that emerged regarding the students’ perception of the reading workshop is that of collaboration and feedback. Collaboration took several forms, which I divided into three sub-themes: teacher-to-student collaboration, student-to-student collaboration, and small group collaboration during the book clubs. Teacher-to-student collaboration took two forms; the first was during the daily explicit instruction of the mini lesson and the second was during the one-on-one conferences the teacher had with each student.

The mini-lesson was typically the only time during the reading workshop that the students were seated at their desks in a whole group format. While this is an important component of the workshop, the teacher-student conferences play a more important collaborative role. The conferences also served as the next step in the scaffolded learning, when students began to apply their knowledge to their own books. Both
teachers’ goal was to meet with each student every single day; however, due to class sizes, daily mini-lessons, and time constraints, both admitted to only meeting with their students in a 1:1 conference two to three times a week. Nevertheless, the conferences remained important in the individual feedback and growth of each learner. I observed these conferences in each of my classroom visits; once the students were arranged in their choice of seating around the room, the teacher would move from student to student, spending approximately three to five minutes with each. In this capacity, the teacher acted as a co-learner, often having students read an excerpt from their book or asking for a brief summary. Together, they look for meaning or attempt to solve any problems the student might be having with comprehension.

The students looked forward to this one-on-one time with their teacher, as Michael put it simply: “It was good, it was nice to talk about the books with him.” Carter agreed, adding that it was something he thought was an improvement from the more traditional reading classes he had experienced in the past, “this year is a bit better because we get to talk with our teacher more about the books.” In addition to enjoying talking with his teacher in this format, Carter also noted that these conferences were instrumental in helping him understand what he was reading in order to write about it: “the teacher would ask us what's going to go on in the book, and it really helps us get our thoughts down, because we have to think of them to write about and do a reading response.” Emma felt similarly, sharing:

Hearing his perspective… because either I'd be stuck about when I'd be writing the, what do you call it? The reading responses. I'd be you know, I don't know, there's so many different themes, which ones should I do? And he'd say an
entirely new theme and I'd be like, oh my gosh. I never thought of that. So I think they really did help see different points of view from the story.

One goal of the conferences, aside from checking the students’ progress and helping with clarity of plot, is to provide the scaffolding necessary to help students grow as readers. Often, the conferences would serve as a bridge between the whole group lesson of the day and the individual’s application of the lesson. Mia discussed the unit the class did on relationships among characters; her teacher helped her find the similar relationships in the book she was reading.

Often these conferences centered around choosing books, a skill important to reading. Many of the students mentioned learning this during the reading workshop and found their teacher was instrumental in this process. Gracie shared that her teacher learned what type of books she read and then was able to help her find others, stating, “she makes good recommendations of books.” Grayson, an admitted non-reader, had quite a bit of trouble finding a book at the beginning of the year. He shared:

Before, I'd kind of go in there [library] and [my teacher] could help me look for books. He'd ask what I like, what I'm interested in, and then he would look up books that I would like. So it was kind of like he'd recommend some books, I'd read the back, the one I liked or I could tell him I didn't really think I wanted that one, and he would look for something different. So that's what we did.

These one-on-one conferences between the teacher and the student proved integral to motivating students to read and important to their positive perceptions of the reading workshop.
A second sub-theme to emerge under the category of collaboration and feedback is that of student-to-student collaboration. During one of my classroom visits, I observed a mini-lesson in which Ms. Charles was reading from a mentor text. The story was about a character’s overcoming of an obstacle, in this case, a specific fear. After the excerpt was read and a class discussion took place, the students were asked to ‘turn and talk’ with a table mate. Each person shared a similar example from the book they were reading, and compared it to the mentor text the teacher read. The partners were then asked to share back to the class to check for understanding and promote the larger classroom discussion. This scaffolded concept of modeling and then providing opportunity for the students to practice with a peer allows the students to construct their own knowledge in a low-risk manner, ultimately helping them become stronger readers. The turn-and-talk approach was used in a variety of ways; Mr. Grant referred to it as Think-Pair-Share. During my observations, I also witnessed Mingle-Pair-Share, in which students found a new partner to discuss. Both teachers used sticky notes as a way for individuals to reflect upon their own thinking before sharing it with another student. Student-to-student collaboration is an important component of the reading workshop as it provides students with an opportunity to learn from and with their peers.

Small group collaboration emerged as the third and final sub-theme under the larger theme of collaboration and feedback. During the book club unit, the students had the opportunity to collaborate with their peers as well as their teacher. The book club theme was social issues, and each book club consisted of three to four students. They were grouped according to the results of an interest survey as well as by reading level, and once formed, collaborated with each other to choose the book they would read. Once
chosen, they worked with their group to set goals, choose discussion topics, participate in group dialogues, and complete a final project. Gracie shared the following about how book clubs took place in her class:

When we were doing book clubs, and you would get in your book club, and you would all read the same book. You would discuss the books and the topic of other books that we were reading was social issues. And my group, we read a book called Faceless … it was about a girl with a disability. And that was my group, we were on disability. And another group was gender identity, and they read about transgender. And then another group read about being bullied, and it was all just kind of social issues. And we would talk about those in class, how those happen and what themes we see in those kinds of books.

As mentioned earlier, not all of the students enjoyed the book club unit due to their perceptions of more limited choice of both books and pace. However, they did like the opportunity to collaborate with their peers. During our discussion about book clubs, Gracie continued, “I did like the book clubs, because you could see multiple perspectives of who likes the book, what kind of book, and you could discuss it. And if you didn't understand a part, if it was confusing, someone could be like, ‘Oh yeah, this is what happened.’” Ethan shared that he liked “Having other people so we can get different perspectives of the book.” Carter agreed that he enjoyed talking with his peers during his book club discussions, and felt that those talks helped him process and reflect upon his reading: “It's definitely better than just talking to the teacher, because we can all agree on something, and that'll help us in our writing.” The opportunity for students to work with and learn from their peers was important to many and helped them construct new
meanings from what they read. Students found collaboration and feedback to be important components that contributed to the effectiveness of the reading workshop.

**Findings related to research question 3.** Qualitative data were derived from semi-structured interviews with both teacher participants along with multiple classroom observations with the intent to answer the following research question:

*What are teachers’ perceptions regarding the effectiveness of a reading workshop model in a seventh-grade classroom?*

**Teacher profiles.** Two individuals teach the seventh-grade supplemental reading class at Magnolia. Both teachers have experience with the traditional model of whole-group, novel-based instruction, and they both have been trained in the workshop approach to teaching reading. However, the teachers vary in years of educational experience.

*Ms. Charles.* Ms. Charles is a White female who has been teaching at Magnolia for eight years, but has over twenty-six teaching reading and language arts. She has experience teaching with both a traditional model, as well as the reading workshop model. Having trained under Nancie Atwell and having taught with this approach in her previous school, Ms. Charles had been a proponent for the reading workshop approach since joining the Magnolia faculty. She had implemented it in small ways, yet due to prior departmental constraints, she had not been able to fully implement the approach. She was eager to implement the reading workshop approach into her classroom and offered to take the lead on lesson planning and assessment collaboration. Ms. Charles taught three of the eight sections of the supplemental reading class.
Mr. Grant. Mr. Grant is a White male who has been at Magnolia for five years, and this is his first experience teaching with a reading workshop approach. Mr. Grant did not have prior teaching experience, but served as an instructional aide within the reading department before becoming a lead teacher. Mr. Grant attended professional development through the Teachers’ College Reading and Writing Project and was eager to implement the approach to his classroom. Mr. Grant taught five of the eight sections of the supplemental reading class.

Summary of themes. Three major themes emerged from the analysis of the teachers’ semi-structured interviews and classroom observations: choice, connection, and student growth.

Choice. The idea of choice was dominant with both the students and the teachers. Both Ms. Charles and Mr. Grant found choice to be the most powerful aspect of the reading workshop approach. The concept of choice fosters independence because students learn how to choose a book at their own level, as well as learn the types of books they enjoy. These two aspects are intertwined and work to create successful, life-long readers (Conley & Hinchman, 2004; ILA, 2019; NCTE, 2004; NCTE, 2007). One component of the mini-lesson curriculum at the beginning of the year is designed to help students learn their own reading level and learn how to choose books that will help them grow and bring them enjoyment.

Ms. Charles shared, “By choosing their own books, it helps them develop their likes and dislikes and their interests. I think that's a huge benefit to the children to learn that early on, to learn how to choose those things.” Mr. Grant agreed, stating,
Choice is powerful. You can't, you can't make a kid read against their will. You can get them to put a book in front of their face and run their eyes across the page but if they're not engaged, and it's not a book they want to read, you're not going to get nearly as much out of it. So the biggest strength is choice. And the power of choice.

Part of student choice is teaching students what type of books they enjoy. Ms. Charles fosters the idea by giving 30-second book talks during her daily mini-lessons. These book talks can be likened to a movie trailer, in which the teacher provides context by sharing the genre, gives enough of the plot to interest the listeners, and ends with a teaser. The genres change; sometimes the teacher chooses funny passages, sometimes sad, sometimes mysterious. The intent is to provide students with quick excerpts to generate interest and provide students with ideas of books they might like to help foster their choice of books. Mr. Grant shared:

At the beginning of the year, it took kids a long time to pick a book and stick with it. Not every kid, but a lot of kids, had difficulty picking a book that they liked, knowing what they liked, and, you know, a huge part of being a better reader is knowing what you enjoy reading.... Nearly every child in my class, could probably now tell you what kind of books they like, and, if you set them loose in a library, or in a bookstore, they could probably find a ... no, they would definitely be able to find a book that they would enjoy reading. Which is a skill they did not possess, when they started the year.

Another method that both teachers use is to allow students to abandon books they are not enjoying. When students choose books that are too easy, too hard, or a genre they
are not enjoying, allowing them to abandon books increases their time to choose books they will enjoy and shows them that their choice and voice truly matter. See Figure 4.7. Providing and encouraging student choice was extremely important to both teachers’ perceptions of the effectiveness of the reading workshop approach in their classrooms.

![Student Notes on Book Abandonment](image)

*Figure 4.7: Student Notes on Book Abandonment*

**Connection.** The second theme that emerged from the teacher data was that of connection, and specifically, the relationship that the teachers were able to form with their students due to the reading workshop approach. When asked about the strengths of the reading workshop approach, Ms. Charles shared that it is the relationship she is able to build early on with her students. She feels that connection is helpful in helping them become better readers:

I get to know my students so much better. And I get to see what they really enjoy, and like, and where their heart is, and I get to share those kinds of things back with them. So, I feel like we have real conversations about not only the books, but their lives and how they apply to it. I think that's probably the biggest reason I think it's so important.
Understanding kids’ interests and likes/dislikes is integral to helping them find the right book. Mr. Grant talked about the relationship building that happens at the beginning of the year and his role as a facilitator rather than a teacher or a lecturer. He found this connection an important component in the success and effectiveness of the reading workshop. He put it like this, “once you have a chance to, kind of, establish that trust, the class just sings. It almost teaches itself.”

Ms. Charles shared that she felt the one-on-one conferences she had with students were the most important part of the reading workshop, sharing that “that's where the relationships are developed, and that's where they really get to talk about what they're reading.” She noted that she wishes she was able to get to the students every day, but because of the aforementioned time constraints of the daily schedule, she often only conferenced three times a week with each student. She realized the importance of this when several of her students began asking how they could get it approved for her to talk to everybody every day. The connection that the teachers were able to create and maintain with their students was one of the major contributing factors to the effectiveness of the reading workshop.

*Student Growth.* The third and final theme that emerged from the teacher data was that of student growth. Although they both administered the STAR assessment to their students, both Ms. Charles and Mr. Grant mentioned they saw growth in ways that could not be measured by an assessment. They noted an increase in student stamina, in their level of discussions about books, and the more tangible written assessments the students completed throughout the year. Both teachers performed a daily formative
assessment to check students’ reading progress; this allowed them to keep track of how much students were reading and help keep them on track. See Figure 4.8.

![Reading Progress Chart]

*Figure 4.8: Reading Progress Chart*

Ms. Charles noted that the “volume that they read is so much more than they would, even the kids who don’t put forth the effort we ask of them are still reading so much more than they did in previous years.” She noticed an increase in their independence and the rate at which they read, as well as the fact that their writing became more thoughtful. She expressed frustration at the contrasting STAR results of several of her students. When asked to unpack that, she gave the following example, which is representative of several other students as well:

Joy came to me in the middle of the year. We worked and worked and worked to try to find books she likes. She would go through four books and abandon them. By the end of the year, she was able to pick her own books. She was talking to me more in depth about her reading. She was very proud of how much she was enjoying reading and saying that she was reading instead of doing other things. And the level of book that she was reading has gone up. However, her STAR
score went down. So I talked to her about that. I told her what her STAR scores were. And I said, "Are you a little surprised?" And she said, “Yeah, but you know, I just don't like STAR. My mind wanders, and I just want it to be over with.”

Ms. Charles struggled with the assessment piece of the reading workshop; she did not feel that the STAR was truly a representative measure of what her students could do, and she wondered if the writing and the projects were taking them away from actually reading. She wondered, “Is journaling enough? Can we put a grade on a journal? To me, that's the drawback.” She struggled with applying letter grades to their reading and writing, sharing that her observations and time working with them each day should be enough: “I think I would just know because we're educators and we know if children are growing.”

Mr. Grant noted similar growth in his students, regardless of the results on the STAR assessment. He shared with me that, “I have never been more certain that my children are better readers, then they were when I started, than I am this year.” I asked him what evidence led him to that conclusion. He shared the following:

I know that the books they chose to read increase in text complexity. The quality of response I was getting from them, improved, along with the complexity of the book, which tells me that they were comprehending, but more than comprehending, they were actually internalizing meaning from books, better than they were, prior to the class.

Mr. Grant agreed with Ms. Charles regarding the assessment in the reading workshop approach. They both understood the benefits of assessment in helping students
choose appropriately-leveled books, but both felt conflicted with the assessment piece of the reading workshop. Both teachers felt strongly that they could recognize their students’ growth, and that formally assessing them often took away from the overall purpose of the class - to foster a love of reading and create life-long readers. Mr. Grant shared:

Children leave this program more excited about reading than they came to it. The strength is, by doing so, we actually succeed in the goal of making kids readers. The success of reading workshop is shifting the goal from assessing a kid's ability to read for meaning, and acknowledging that that will happen organically, if we just get them reading.”

Both Ms. Charles and Mr. Grant noticed improvement in their students’ reading and writing that could not be measured by a standardized assessment. For them, the focus on student choice, connection, and growth were factors that contributed positively to the effectiveness of the reading workshop.

**Triangulation of Findings**

In mixed methods designs, triangulating data sources serves as a means for seeking convergence among both qualitative and quantitative methods to help ensure validity of the data (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Triangulation of the data allows for a deeper understanding of the results.

My data analysis began by analyzing the results of the quantitative data: the pretest that was administered at the beginning of the intervention and the posttest administered at the end. The results during the intervention period did not show a statistically significant positive impact, yet during the first semester, when the students
were in school and the workshop was taught with fidelity, the results showed a significant improvement. Because I wanted to further understand this data, I integrated my quantitative results with the qualitative data I collected through multiple sources, including classroom observations, document review of the students’ reading response journals, and semi-structured interviews of both teachers and students. Going through this process enabled me to understand the bigger picture of the data. I found that the qualitative data findings largely supported the quantitative results.

The classroom observations I conducted of the teachers’ classrooms during the intervention provided insight into the classroom atmosphere and its impact on the reading workshop. As noted, the quantitative data suggested that when the reading workshop was taught with fidelity, it positively affected student achievement. My observations supported this claim; when the teachers taught a daily mini-lesson and conducted frequent teacher-student conferences, the students were engaged and actively reading. This further supports the importance of the explicit instruction component of the reading workshop.

Importantly, the perspectives of the students about the effectiveness of the reading workshop, based on their semi-structured interview responses and their reading response journals, further supported the claim that the reading workshop was an effective intervention. The students all shared consistent responses regarding their affinity for the comfortable classroom environment, the aspect of choice, the independent reading time, and the collaboration component. Thirteen of the fourteen students shared that they were reading a higher quantity of books than in previous years, and every student said they enjoyed both the class and reading more than they ever had. The findings from the
student interviews corroborate the findings that the reading workshop is an effective approach to teaching reading.

Finally, the data gathered regarding the teachers’ perceptions during the semi-structured interviews indicated that they too found the reading workshop to be an effective approach in their classrooms. They cited the elements of choice, time for independent reading, and conferences and feedback to be essential, which confirms the point that close adherence to the components of the reading workshop approach matters. Overall, I found that the qualitative data supported the quantitative data, and that the reading workshop is an effective approach, and when the program is taught with fidelity, a positive impact on student achievement is achieved.

Summary

Quantitative and qualitative data were collected during this mixed methods action research study for the purpose of answering the following research questions:

1. What is the impact of a reading workshop approach on seventh-grade students’ reading achievement as measured by the STAR reading assessment?
2. What are students’ perceptions regarding the effectiveness of a reading workshop model in their reading class?
3. What are teachers’ perceptions regarding the effectiveness of a reading workshop model in a seventh-grade classroom?

To answer the first research question, I used the quantitative data derived from the paired sample t-test calculations to determine whether there was a statistically significant difference. The pre- and post-assessments, conducted in January and May respectively, indicated a statistically significant decrease in scores. Noting that this was during the
COVID-19 pandemic and the workshop was being conducted via online video conferencing software, I revisited the STAR assessment data from the beginning of the year. Using the September results as the pretest and the January results as the posttest, I again calculated the differences between the students’ scaled scores using a paired sample t-test. The results of this showed that there was a statistically significant difference, indicating improvement on the STAR assessment.

Qualitative data were collected in order to answer the second and third research questions. Based on the students’ responses in our semi-structured interviews, they believe the reading workshop is an effective approach. Likewise, the teachers’ responses indicated that their perceptions of the reading workshop approach were positive. The classroom observations and document review of the students’ reading response journals supported the findings from the interviews.

I concluded that if the reading workshop approach is taught thoroughly and with fidelity, the intervention has a positive impact on student achievement as measured by the STAR reading assessment. The teachers’ and students’ perceptions of the reading workshop approach further validate these findings. Chapter 5 will discuss the implications and recommendations based on the findings.
CHAPTER 5
IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter includes a review of the purpose of this action research study, along with the research questions, methodology, and findings of the study. It also contains an action plan and implications for future research and immediate classroom practice. Finally, the chapter concludes with limitations of and reflection about this action research study.

Overview of the Study

Because of a five-year decrease in reading scores of the middle school students at my independent middle school, I conducted an action research study to examine the reasons behind the downward trend. Additionally, I hoped to provide the necessary data and rationale to maintain the course within the curriculum. To this end, the seventh-grade reading teachers and I participated in research and professional development regarding best practices in adolescent literacy. Finding that a more constructivist approach to learning would allow students to participate more actively and learn to construct their own meanings, I determined a reading workshop approach had the potential to positively impact student achievement. Constructivists believe that learning is active and social, and that collaboration with teachers and peers can help learners form new knowledge while tying it to prior knowledge (Applefield, Huber, Moallem, 2016; Ertmer & Newby, 2013; Gray, 1997). Realizing the prior, more traditional whole group methods were lacking these essential elements, we decided to implement a reading
workshop approach beginning in August of 2019. Therefore, this action research, mixed methods study was designed to determine the impact of the reading workshop approach on seventh graders’ reading achievement scores, as well as to measure the teachers’ and students’ perceptions of the effectiveness of this program. Instruments used in the study included the STAR reading assessment as a pre- and post-test, classroom observations, and semi-structured interviews.

Research Design

A convergent mixed methods design was used for this study. Because a mixed-methods design combines both quantitative and qualitative approaches, it lends itself to a deeper understanding than either method on its own (Efron & Ravid, 2013). Creswell and Creswell (2018) state that collecting data from multiple sources and using multiple methods of analysis strengthens both reliability and internal validity. Further, action research provides opportunity for educators to study problems in their own schools, it is both relevant and practical (Mertler, 2014).

Research Questions

To achieve my purpose, this study was guided by the following research questions:

1. What is the impact of a reading workshop approach on seventh-grade students’ reading achievement as measured by the STAR reading assessment?
2. What are students’ perceptions regarding the effectiveness of a reading workshop model in their reading class?
3. What are teachers’ perceptions regarding the effectiveness of a reading workshop model in a seventh-grade classroom?
Methodology

I collected the quantitative data from the STAR assessment data that the teachers administered both as a pretest and a posttest. Using SPSS statistical software, I analyzed it using both descriptive and inferential statistics. The qualitative data consisted of two interviews with each of the teacher participants, one interview from each of the fourteen student participants, classroom observation notes, and document review of the students’ reading response journals. For this data, I coded each separately, identifying categories and themes that led to the findings of the study.

Summary of the Findings

For the first research question, what is the impact of a reading workshop approach on seventh-grade students’ reading achievement as measured by the STAR reading assessment, I analyzed the quantitative data from the pre- and post-assessments. Using the January assessment as the pretest and the May assessment as a posttest, results indicated a statistically significant decrease in scores. Importantly, during this time period, our entire school was quarantined due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the workshop was being conducted via online video conferencing software. Realizing that this situation likely had a major impact on the results of the test, I reviewed assessment data from earlier in the school year. Because the teachers implemented the reading workshop at the beginning of the school year, STAR assessment data was available from September. I used the assessment data from September as the pretest and the January data as the posttest. I followed the same quantitative data analysis protocol as I did with the January - May data. During this time period, I noted that there was a statistically significant difference, indicating improvement on the STAR assessment.
The qualitative data were derived from both the students’ and teachers’ responses in the semi-structured interviews, along with classroom observations and document review. For the second research question, *what are students’ perceptions regarding the effectiveness of a reading workshop model in their reading class*, I conducted fourteen semi-structured interviews, then analyzed and coded the results. The results indicated that students believed the reading workshop to be an effective approach. For the final research question, *what are teachers’ perceptions regarding the effectiveness of a reading workshop model in a seventh-grade classroom*, I conducted two semi-structured interviews with both of the teachers, and their results mirrored those of the students.

Therefore, I concluded that, when taught thoroughly and with fidelity, the reading workshop method is an effective approach in a seventh-grade supplemental reading class. The action plan and next steps for moving forward based on my findings are below.

**Action plan**

Action research is a cyclical process, from which a study’s results lead to the implementation of findings and the assessment of outcomes. The answers to research questions in one study can often lead to more questions (Efron & Ravid, 2013). From the acquired results, an action plan is formulated and implemented as next steps based on the results of the study. Once the study’s results are put into action, continuous review is necessary to determine whether the desired changes have occurred, or other strategies are required.

The original purpose of this action research study was to determine whether the reading workshop approach could result in increased reading comprehension and student achievement; this will remain the purpose of this action plan. Although the conditions
during the spring semester were not ideal for true implementation of the reading workshop, evidence from earlier in the school year indicated that gains in reading achievement did occur. Overall, I was pleased with the results and the positive impact of the reading workshop model and found that the data gathered provided me with enough information to formulate an action plan for the upcoming school year. This action plan will build upon what we have already implemented, and with adjustments to the approach and a commitment to close adherence to the program’s components, the information can be used to further improve reading achievement in the supplemental reading classes.

In order to make the best decisions moving forward, the two teachers who had completed year one of this approach and I took time during May of 2020 to reflect upon both the areas of success and the areas of improvement during year one of the program’s implementation.

Understanding that a close adherence to the essential components of the reading workshop approach is necessary for continued student growth, the teachers acknowledged that trying to incorporate each component on a daily basis was quite difficult, if not impossible. Therefore, a large focus of this reflection revolved around determining the most essential parts of the program, and which areas to prioritize. The qualitative data contributed greatly to this discussion.

Another point of consideration that emerged in this reflective discussion was that of assessment. As noted earlier, neither teacher felt the STAR assessment was the best way to assess their students’ growth. Because of this, neither placed much emphasis on it within their classroom, which directly affected the students’ buy-in, as many of them did not take it very seriously. Neither teacher wanted to continue with a standardized
instrument, opting instead for more formative, ongoing assessments, so we chose to eliminate the STAR assessment from the reading class.

After this reflective period, the two teachers, along with the three eighth grade reading teachers who will be implementing the program for the first time, participated in reading workshop professional development in early June. We participated in collaborative time during the summer to ensure the new program goals were prioritized as well as to provide support for the teachers new to the program.

The details of this action plan are outlined below.

Table 5.1 *Action Plan*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Activities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Summer 2020     | - Current seventh-grade teachers participate in Professional Development sessions to review the Reading Workshop Methodology and reflect upon the areas of success as well as areas of improvement.  
                  | - All eighth grade teachers participate in Reading Workshop Methodology Professional Development sessions.  
                  | - All department area teachers participate in collaborative planning sessions to provide support and ensure alignment. |
| August 2020     | Teacher modeling and classroom observations will take place to provide support for teachers in year one of implementation.                      |
| September 2020  | Beginning of the year assessments will be conducted with all Magnolia students to provide a baseline of data to be measured throughout the school year and provide comparative results with students outside of the supplemental reading class. |
| January 2021    | Mid-year assessments will be conducted and analyzed for student growth; data will be analyzed and adjustments made for the second semester of the school year. |
| May 2021        | End-of-year assessments will be conducted and analyzed for student growth; data will be analyzed and adjustments made for the 2021-2022 school year. |
| October 2020 –  May 2021 | - Continued implementation of the reading workshop program in the supplemental reading class, with a higher priority on student |
conferencing time.
- Assessment data will be continuously monitored and adjustments will be made accordingly.

Summer 2021
- End of year reflection will take place, highlighting areas of success and areas of improvement.
- Teachers will participate in relevant and necessary professional development opportunities.
- An action plan for the next school year will be developed and implemented.

These findings have immediate implications for classroom practice and will be used to formulate professional development and curriculum-related decisions.
Additionally, the results of the study have been shared with the school’s curriculum director to provide the necessary rationale to continue with the supplemental reading class.

**Implication for Classroom Practice**

As noted above, we have realigned the program’s goals and made a commitment to place a greater focus on more frequent formative assessment, including more opportunities for individual student conferences and daily student journals. Because these components will take more class time than before, the teachers agreed to provide fewer daily mini-lessons. These individual conferences will retain the component of explicit instruction.

Additionally, through the qualitative data analysis process, several themes emerged during the analysis of student and teacher interviews and will serve as important factors to be included in this action plan. The three themes that developed from the student interviews were a comfortable classroom environment, personalized learning, and collaborative relationships and feedback, while the three that emerged from teacher
interview data were choice, connection, and student growth. Because of the overlap among these themes, I have combined several of them to apply the steps in our action plan into our immediate classroom practice.

**Comfortable classroom environment.** The theme of a comfortable classroom environment developed, along with the sub-themes of physical comfort, a quiet and relaxing classroom atmosphere, the opportunity and time to read during class, and easy access for students to find books. Each of the classrooms had soft lighting, contained pillows and comfortable furniture, and maintained quiet. This component was mentioned in multiple student interviews. Additionally, providing time for daily reading and access to books is essential. This data were shared with teachers, and steps were taken to ensure the comfortable classroom environment continues. As part of the action plan moving forward, the budget for individual classroom libraries was increased, and each teacher completed a wish list for a classroom library in order to have plenty of options for students to browse and choose. To ensure access in the case of remote learners and another possible quarantine, the digital library component was improved so students can check out books efficiently using their school-issued iPads. This step in the action plan is to ensure students have a space, access, and opportunity to read.

**Personalized learning.** This theme falls under the main components of the reading workshop: choice, goal-setting, and student agency. Both the students and the teachers found the component of choice to be among the strongest contributors to the effectiveness of this approach. Students mentioned frequently that they preferred finding their own books, being able to abandon those they did not enjoy, and reading books at their levels. Teacher noted the increased reading levels as students’ confidence and
comprehension levels increased. The action plan includes continuation of the personalized goal setting component; an addition from last year includes personal reading inventories and a daily writing journal. These components seek to help teachers learn what their students like to read, which in turn will help them learn how to find books on their level that they enjoy. This was noted in several student interviews as being an important component to the effectiveness of the workshop approach.

**Collaborative relationships, connection, and feedback.** Both the teachers and the students mentioned the positive outcomes from the opportunities to collaborate within the workshop time. This took the form of teacher-to-student collaboration, student-to-student collaboration, and small group collaboration during the book clubs. While teachers noted the connections they made in their small group conferences, they also noted that this was the most difficult component to integrate on a daily basis. Taking daily attendance, providing a mini-lesson with student collaboration opportunities, and helping students pick out books tended to take the majority of time. While the goal is to meet with students each day, teachers noted that they often were only able to meet with students two to three times each week. Additionally, students noted that their one-on-one meetings with their teacher were invaluable in helping them understand what they were reading, learn what they liked to read, and learning how to find similar, high-interest books. Referencing Vygotsky’s More Knowledgeable Other (MKO), we understand that students achieve more and understand at higher levels through the collaboration with a mentor, teacher, or student who reads at a higher level (Applefield, Huber, & Moallem, 2016; Beck & Condy, 2017; García, Pearson, Taylor, et al., 2011). We realized that making the conferencing a higher priority in the daily routine was essential to continued
student growth. Additionally, this decision allows for more frequent formative assessments, which are important in determining student growth and achievement. This data had been shared with teachers so they understood the necessity of providing opportunities for student conferences on a daily basis.

To this end, our daily schedule this year has been redesigned to allow for longer class periods; this simple change will allow for more time for teacher-student conferences. In lieu of daily mini-lessons, which seemed to have inevitably eaten up most of the class period, teachers will only teach two or three mini-lessons per week, with specific follow up questions during the individual student-teacher conferences. Any explicit instruction that previously took place during the daily mini-lesson will now happen during the one-on-one conference time. Further, teachers will strive to ensure that the conferences are differentiated and personalized to meet each student’s individual needs. To encourage accountability and adherence to more frequent conferences, a timeline for conferencing frequency has been implemented into the class syllabus and gradebook.

**Student growth.** The final theme that has contributed to the action plan and classroom practice is that of student growth and assessment. Even though the students showed growth on the STAR reading assessment during the time period that the teachers were able to closely adhere to each component, both the teachers in this study are fundamentally against the concept of a standardized assessment in measuring the growth their students achieved during the school year. Because of this, they placed very little emphasis on the STAR assessment, noting that their own personal judgment, the increase in students’ reading volume and their level of discussions about books, and the students’
written assessments provided much richer data and proof that the approach is effective. Because the teachers did not incorporate the STAR into their gradebook, students did not always put forward their greatest effort. In fact, during the spring semester while the students were experiencing remote learning, 26 students did not bother to complete the final post-assessment. The assessment component of the action plan is an area that we are constantly working to improve. As a school, we have moved away from the STAR assessment as a means of measuring student growth, and the teachers of the supplemental reading class are implementing more frequent formative assessments, such as daily reading journals and self-assessment measures, scheduled conferencing, and longer more formal writing assignments. Further, as noted, the middle school has adopted an assessment that will provide results for both the students in the reading class as well as students who do not participate in it. This will result in a more comprehensive profile of achievement for all students.

Implications for Further Research

The reading workshop approach is a well-researched and highly-documented approach as a strategy for teaching reading, particularly as an appropriate strategy for adolescent readers (Calkins & Ehrenworth, 2017). Further research is suggested in the area of assessment; it may prove to be beneficial to compare classrooms using a reading workshop approach with classrooms who are not, providing the student populations are similar. At Magnolia, we will be expanding the study by incorporating students who do not take the supplemental reading class. As noted, only approximately half of the student body take this class, while the others take a world language class such as Spanish, French, or Mandarin. Yet, all students participate in a daily English class. We will be
conducting beginning, middle, and end-of-year assessments using a comprehensive assessment and instructional program to provide us with more actionable data on all of our students. The goal of this part of the action plan is two-fold. One, teachers in other subject areas will have access to this data, thus allowing them to better meet student needs, address any learning gaps, as well as to offer necessary support and enrichment. Two, this data will allow us to gather data on both groups, better assess the effectiveness of the reading workshop approach, and make programmatic and curricular decisions for future school years.

Another area of future research concerns maintaining the effectiveness of the reading workshop in terms of reading achievement. One area of immediate focus concerns access to books. As shown, this is an important component to the effectiveness of the approach, yet during the spring when students were learning from home, their access to their classroom libraries was obviously limited. Prior to the COVID-19 quarantine, the teachers in this study were hesitant to allow students to read digital books accessed via the digital library or reading apps such as Kindle or iBooks. They were also resistant to allowing students to use audio books in place of print books. They felt that the active reading and note-taking components that take place when reading a print book would be compromised, yet these restrictions are potentially limiting to the important aspect of access. Students at Magnolia have access to a school-issued iPad, so further research into the areas of digital books and audiobooks could provide necessary data in times when browsing and accessing print books are difficult.

Finally, another consideration for future research is the possibility of expanding this student-centered approach to other content areas such as the seventh and eighth grade
English classes. Pursuing a writing workshop approach in lieu of a more traditional writing curriculum and instructional methodology area may allow for similar gains in student achievement.

**Limitations**

Upon reflection, it became evident that several limitations impacted this study. Herr and Anderson (2015) state that it is important to reflect upon any limitations of one’s positionality that may interfere with the study’s methodology and/or results. As the principal of the middle school, I took several strides to alleviate any concerns that the power differential may have contributed. The teachers were both conflicted with the use of the STAR assessment as a means of measuring student growth, so I made sure to share that the outcome of that assessment was only one part of the study, and its results, even if negative, would have no negative impact on them as individuals nor the continuation of the reading workshop approach. The students did seem at ease during our interviews, yet for each, I intentionally made unrelated and low-risk conversation with them prior to the discussion of the reading workshop. This conversation typically related to their activities during quarantine, their pets, or any TV shows they might be watching. If I were to conduct this study again, I would have included an interview with the fourteen students at the beginning of the study so I could better understand their feelings both before and after the intervention.

Another limitation of the study concerns the time period and the impact the COVID-19 quarantine may have had on the study’s findings. The STAR assessment post-assessment results have already been noted, yet the qualitative data collection was quite different than the original plan indicated. Instead of conducting interviews in
person, I met with the teachers and the fourteen students over the video-conferencing software Zoom. While the students seemed relaxed, and we actually had more time than we would have while physically here in school, the interview data may have been skewed. Further, while I still had access to the students’ reading response journals, I did not have the ability to review or discuss them with the students.

Summary

In an effort to improve the academic achievement and reading comprehension scores, we implemented a reading workshop approach into the seventh-grade supplemental reading classes. Quantitative data were collected from a pre- and posttest quantitative assessment, and qualitative data were collected from two teacher semi-structured interviews, fourteen student semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and document review of students’ reading response journals. The STAR quantitative data provided me with an objective data set to measure growth, but the qualitative data gave me a deeper understanding of the program and the components that are most beneficial.

This chapter summarized those findings and included an action plan and implications for classroom practice as a result of the findings. It also included implications for future research, such as conducting a more comparative study with a group of students in the same school who had not experienced the reading workshop. Another suggestion was to explore the use of digital text and audiobooks and their impact on student achievement and as a means of access when print books are not available.

As I reflect upon this action research study, I am grateful for the opportunity to identify a problem of practice during my first year as the middle school principal,
propose and implement an intervention, and analyze the results of that intervention. This process helped me grow as a practitioner and has given me the necessary experience in identifying and solving problems in my school. As a former English teacher who had previously found success in using the reading workshop approach, I am thankful to be able to specifically assess this instructional model. Surprisingly I am also grateful for the time period in the spring when the teachers and students were teaching and learning remotely. The assessment data collected during that time provided the contrasting findings necessary to prompt a more in-depth analysis of prior data; I believe this gave me richer, more interesting results, thus providing necessary data to inform our decisions for the second year of the program. As we continue throughout the next school year, I will continue to monitor and make any necessary adjustments to ensure the students are receiving the best possible reading instruction.
REFERENCES


Research base underlying the Teachers College reading and writing Workshop's approach to literacy instruction. (n.d.). *The Teachers College Reading and Writing Project*. https://readingandwritingproject.org/about/research-base


The National Council of Teachers of English. (2004). *A call to action: What we know about adolescent literacy instruction and ways to support teachers in meeting students’ needs*


readiness, interest, and learning profile in academically diverse classrooms.


APPENDIX A

CONSENT TO BE A RESEARCH SUBJECT FOR TEACHERS

The Impact of a Reading Workshop Approach

KEY INFORMATION ABOUT THIS RESEARCH STUDY:
You are invited to volunteer for a research study conducted by Dee Koscik. I am a doctoral candidate/graduate student in the Department of Education at the University of South Carolina. The University of South Carolina Department of Curriculum and Instruction is sponsoring this research study. The purpose of this study is to determine the impact of a reading workshop approach on seventh-grade students’ reading achievement. You are being asked to participate in this study because you are a seventh-grade reading teacher who is facilitating the reading workshop approach in your literature classes. This study is being done at ______________ and will involve approximately two adult and 130 student volunteers.

This action research study intends to measure the impact of a reading workshop approach in a seventh-grade classroom. The study will take place during the third quarter of the 2019-2020 school year and will last approximately eight weeks. During this study, you will be expected to facilitate a daily mini lesson, provide time for independent reading, daily conferences, and feedback. Additionally, you will administer the STAR assessment as a pre- and post-assessment to all of your students. I will be conducting two open-ended, semi-structured interviews with you. I will also observe your classroom multiple times over the eight-week period. The study poses minimal risks and benefits to participants. Your participation in this research is voluntary, and you may choose not to participate or to withdraw from the research at any time.

PROCEDURES:
If you agree to participate in this study, you will do the following:

- Facilitate a reading workshop approach in your literature class, including daily mini-lessons, daily conferencing and feedback, and time for independent reading.
- Administer STAR assessment as a pre- and post-assessment to the students in your literature classes.
- Participate in two interviews regarding your perceptions about the impact of a reading workshop. The semi-structured interviews will include open-ended questions.
- Have your interview recorded in order to ensure the details that you provide are accurately captured.
• Have your classrooms observed at different days and times to help provide an accurate picture of the reading workshop, understanding that the observations will include me keeping detailed notes.

**DURATION:**
Participation in the study involves four or more visits over a period of eight weeks. Each classroom observation and interview will last approximately 45 minutes.

**RISKS/DISCOMFORTS:**
The study poses minimal risks to the you as a participant. However discomfort may occur in the following situations.

• Interview: You may be unsure how to answer questions or uncomfortable providing answers that may not be positive in nature. Please be assured that all answers are welcome and necessary to provide accurate results. Additionally, you have the option to skip any questions.

• Field Observations: You may feel anxious or uncomfortable by having an outside observer in their classroom. Please be assured that the purpose of the study is not to assess your performance as a teacher. If you have any questions or concerns before or during the observation, you can ask at any time.

• Loss of Confidentiality: There is the risk of a breach of confidentiality, despite the steps that will be taken to protect your identity.
  o The interviews will be conducted in a room or a location of your choice.
  o Data collection will be limited to the amount necessary to achieve the aims of the research. In the event that unnecessary personal, sensitive, or identifiable information is provided, it will either not be recorded or removed from the research record as soon as possible.
  o Pseudonyms will be used.

**BENEFITS:**
Taking part in this study is not likely to benefit you personally, aside from allowing you to share your perspectives regarding the effectiveness of the reading workshop. However, this research may provide us important data about the program, including but not limited to guiding us in how best to structure the literature class in the future in order to provide the best environment for student reading achievement.

**COSTS:**
There will be no costs to you for participating in this study.

**PAYMENT TO PARTICIPANTS:**
You will not be paid for participating in this study.

**CONFIDENTIALITY OF RECORDS:**
Information obtained about you during this research study will remain confidential and released only with your written permission. Data collected will be stored securely and
identifiable information will be removed from documentation before publication. Results of this research study may be published; however, it will not include your name or other identifying information about you.

**VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION:**
Participation in this research study is voluntary. You are free not to participate, or to stop participating at any time, for any reason without negative consequences. In the event that you do withdraw from this study, the information you have already provided will be kept in a confidential manner. If you wish to withdraw from the study, please call or email the principal investigator listed on this form.

I have been given a chance to ask questions about this research study. These questions have been answered to my satisfaction. If I have any more questions about my participation in this study, I am to contact the author.

Concerns about your rights as a research subject are to be directed to, Lisa Johnson, Assistant Director, Office of Research Compliance, University of South Carolina, 1600 Hampton Street, Suite 414D, Columbia, SC 29208, phone: (803) 777-6670 or email: LisaJ@mailbox.sc.edu.

I agree to participate in this study. I have been given a copy of this form for my own records.

If you wish to participate, you should sign below.

_________________________________________  Date
Signature of Subject / Participant

_________________________________________  Date
Signature of Qualified Person Obtaining Consent
APPENDIX B

CONSENT FORM FOR PARENTS

The Impact of a Reading Workshop Approach

I am a student at the University of South Carolina, and I am working on a study about students’ reading achievement. I am seeking your permission to have your child participate in this study. Please read the following information carefully before you decide whether or not to give your permission. Also note that if you do give your permission, your child will also have to agree to be part of the study.

KEY INFORMATION ABOUT THIS RESEARCH STUDY:
This action research study intends to measure the impact of a reading workshop approach in a seventh-grade classroom. Your child will participate as always in the reading class, but will also be asked to do the following:

PROCEDURES:
If you give permission for your child to participate in this study, they will do the following:

• Complete a written survey about the reading workshop. The survey will probably take about 15 minutes.
• Complete the STAR Reading Assessment at the beginning and the end of the study.
• Your child may be asked to answer some questions from me about how you feel about the reading workshop; this conversation will be during study hall and last about 20-30 minutes. This conversation will be recorded so I can be sure that I accurately capture what you have shared.

DURATION:
The study will take place during the third quarter of the 2019-2020 school year and will last approximately eight weeks.

RISKS/DISCOMFORTS:
The study poses minimal risks to you or your child. Aside from possible discomfort ordinarily encountered with surveys and/or assessments, there are no foreseeable discomforts or dangers to either you or your child in this study. Being in the study will not affect regular class work and will not have any impact on your child’s grades.
BENEFITS:
Taking part in this study will not directly benefit you or your child. The results of this study will increase our knowledge and provide important data about the reading workshop approach in the literature classes.

CONFIDENTIALITY OF RECORDS:
Information obtained about your child during this research study will remain confidential and released only with your written permission. Data collected will be stored securely and identifiable information will be removed from documentation before publication. Results of this research study may be published; however, the data will be presented in group form and individual children will not be identified. Pseudonyms will be used for the school and any involved adults.

VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION:
Your child’s participation is voluntary. If you feel your child has in any way been coerced into participation, please inform the faculty advisor. We also ask that you discuss this letter to your child and inform your child that participation is voluntary. They are free not to participate, or to stop participating at any time, for any reason without negative consequences. In the event that you do withdraw from this study, the information you have already provided will be kept confidential. If you wish to withdraw your child from the study, please call or email the principal investigator listed on this form.

I have been given a chance to ask questions about this research study. These questions have been answered to my satisfaction. If I have any more questions about my participation in this study, I am to contact the author.

Concerns about your child’s rights as a research subject are to be directed to, Lisa Johnson, Assistant Director, Office of Research Compliance, University of South Carolina, 1600 Hampton Street, Suite 414D, Columbia, SC 29208, phone: (803) 777-6670 or email: LisaJ@mailbox.sc.edu.

I give my child to participate in this study. I have been given a copy of this form for my own records. If you wish your child to participate, you should sign below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I, the parent or guardian of ______________________________, a minor ________ years of age, permit his/her participation in a program of research named above and being conducted by Dee Koscik.</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Signature of Parent or Guardian</td>
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Please print your name here.
APPENDIX C

ASSENT FOR STUDENTS TO BE A RESEARCH SUBJECT

The Impact of a Reading Workshop Approach

If participants include those under 18 years of age:
1. The subject's parent or legal guardian will be present when the informed consent form is provided.
2. The subject will be able to participate only if the parent or legal guardian provides permission and the adolescent provides his/her assent.
3. In statements below, the word "you" refers to your child or adolescent who is being asked to participate in the study.

I am a student at the University of South Carolina. I am working on a study about students’ reading achievement, and I would like your help. I am interested in learning more about how you feel about the reading workshop and whether or not it is helping your reading comprehension levels. Your parent/guardian has already said it is okay for you to be in the study, but it is up to you if you want to be in the study.

If you want to be in the study, you will be asked to do the following:
- Complete the STAR Reading Assessment at the beginning and the end of the study.
- You may be asked to answer some questions from me about how you feel about the reading workshop; this conversation will be during study hall and last about 20-30 minutes. This conversation will be recorded so I can be sure that I accurately capture what you have shared.

Any information you share with me will be private. No one except me will know your answers to the questions. You do not have to help with this study. Being in the study is not related to your regular class work and will not help or hurt your grades. You can also drop out of the study at any time, for any reason, and you will not be in any trouble, your grades will not be affected, and no one will be mad at you. Please ask any questions you would like to about the study.

Sign this form only if you:
- have understood what you will be doing for this study,
- have had all your questions answered,
- have talked to your parent(s)/legal guardian about this project, and
- agree to take part in this research

__________________________  ____________  ____________
Signature of Minor          Age of Minor       Date
APPENDIX D

TEACHER INTERVIEW INSTRUMENT

Date of Interview:
Time started:
Time completed:
Location:

Statement read by the interviewer/researcher:

The first set of questions concerns your experience and knowledge base of reading workshop.

1. How many years of teaching experience do you have?
2. How many years of teaching experience do you have at this school?
3. What degree(s) do you have?
4. How many years have you been teaching using a reading workshop format?
5. What professional development do you have in the area of reading?
6. What professional development do you have in the area of reading workshop?
7. Do you like to read?

The next set of questions concerns your perceptions and interpretations of reading workshop. For the purpose of this interview, ‘perception’ refers to your insight and understanding of reading workshop.

1. What are the strengths of the reading workshop?
2. What are the most important components of the reading workshop? Why?
3. What are the limitations of the reading workshop?
4. What challenges have you faced when implementing the reading workshop?
APPENDIX E

STUDENT INTERVIEW INSTRUMENT

Student Name:
Date of Interview:
Time started:
Time completed:
Location:

The first set of questions is about you.

1. How old are you?
2. How many years (counting this one) have you attended this school?
3. Do you like to read?
4. How many books/pages have you read this year so far?
5. What’s your favorite book?

The next set of questions concerns your feelings about reading workshop.

1. What is your favorite thing about reading workshop? Why?
2. What is your least favorite thing about reading workshop? Why?
3. How is literature class like other reading classes you’ve had? How is it different?
4. What are some things you’ve learned this year in literature class?