Reading Strategies: Impact on Fifth Grade African American Males’ Reading Comprehension and Motivation to Read

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READING STRATEGIES: IMPACT ON FIFTH GRADE AFRICAN AMERICAN MALES’ READING COMPREHENSION AND MOTIVATION TO READ

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DEDICATION

First, I want to thank God for allowing me the opportunity to pursue my doctoral degree. To my loving and supportive family, I simply wish to say, “thank you”. I thank you for the encouraging words, I thank you for providing me with quiet time when I needed it and most of all, for the hugs. To my mother, Tammy Gordon, there is no way I could have done this without you and your prayers. You have been just as committed to my success as I have; I can never repay your endless sacrifices that have allowed me to reach this position. To my sister, Kelly Barrett, you have supported my dreams from dolls to dissertations. Thank you to my supportive coworkers who understood the “assignment” and knew when I needed encouragement. Thank you to Matthew Nyabba, for your assistance through this entire journey. Thank you to my aunt Janice Gordon who supported my love for teaching and learning. Your dedication to education inspired me to make a positive impact on literacy education; I’m grateful for the opportunities we had to talk about teaching, and your memory will survive through my efforts. Lastly, thank you to my grandfather, Benny Gordon, who always told me “take care of business”.

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this action research was to implement four close reading strategies (Aha moment, Hmm moment, B.U.R.N. strategy, and R.A.P.) and evaluate its impact on fifth grade African American male students’ reading comprehension skills and their experiences with reading at Wisteria Lane Elementary. This intervention study focused on two research questions: how does the implementation of close reading strategies impact the reading comprehension skills of fifth grade male students, and in what ways does the implementation of close reading strategies influence fifth grade male students’ motivation to read in other classes? Nationally, African American boys suffer with weak reading comprehension skills that can lead to fewer job opportunities and increased likelihood for dropping out of high school. This 11-week action research innovation had nine fifth grade African American male participants. The students were taught how to use each close reading strategy introduced and given the opportunity to practice with guided instruction, a partner, as well as independently. A pre-post Reading Comprehension assessment, formative assessments, weekly student reflection journals, a survey, and a focus group interview comprised the data sources used to measure reading comprehension skills and student perceptions about using close reading strategies on their motivation to read in other classes. Quantitative findings revealed that the posttest scores were not significantly higher than the pretest scores and participants favored the Hmm moment strategy. Qualitative findings showed that participants saw benefits of using the
close reading strategies and the close reading strategies motivated students to read. Recommendations for future research and limitations of the study are discussed.
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

National Context

When students move up through elementary school without the necessary reading skills, this has consequences on their future. This is particularly true for African American boys who struggle with reading comprehension in elementary school and subsequently have lower high school graduation rates. One study presented data on sixth-grade students who failed English courses found that 60% of those students did not complete high school (Balfanz, Herzog, & Mac Iver, 2007). Another study based on the New York public school system found several trends among African American and Latino male dropouts; factors that contributed to students dropping out included repeating ninth grade, performing below grade level on eighth grade reading performance tests, and failing English courses (Meade, Gaytan, Fergus, & Noguera (2009). Therefore, there is a correlation between reading performance and graduation rates.

According to the Schott Foundation (2010) for public education, only “47% of black men graduated from high school in 2008” (p. 3). As reported by Holzman and Jackson (2015), in 2013 “only 59% of African American boys will graduate from high school” (p.7). The lack of a high school diploma severely damages a person’s ability to find quality jobs, support their community, and contribute to society. There are deficiencies in the literature relating to solutions for African American male graduation rates, but their context for the disparities among African American boys regarding their
lacking reading skills and the academic as well as occupational consequences are notable.

African American male graduation rates indicate that students of color have been subjected to cultural racism, which is the behavior and values of the dominant group reflected in society’s norms (Fenzel & Richardson, 2019). Cultural racism is when the dominant groups' values represent the accepted norms in society and its institutions, and all other racial groups are judged according to the dominant groups who are typically privileged and powerful (Hicken, Kravitz-wirtz, & Jackson, 2019). African American people have to learn adaptive strategies to function in historically White spaces (Hing, Lee, & Hicken, 2018). Races or cultures that fall out of the dominant group are judged harshly by the norms. Cultural racism impacts the constructs in society, and it can even influence inequalities in education.

The lack of reading skills from struggling African American boys has severely affected their test scores, high school graduation rates, and increased representation in special education programs and prison compared to their peers (Bell, 2014; Ennis, 2017; Howard, 2013; Stanford & Muhammad, 2018). According to the National Alliance of Black Educators (2002), an “overrepresentation in special education occurs when a group’s membership in the program is larger than the percentage of that group in the educational system or within a given disability category” (p. 8). Overrepresentation is the high occurrence and increased likelihood of one population being classified into specific categories compared to their peers. African American students are more likely to be enrolled in special education than their peers, despite representing a smaller population of children in the educational system (Gregory & Roberts, 2017).
The same overrepresentation trend can be found in the number of African American males in the prison population, despite this demographic making up less than half of the nation’s population. According to the Office of Educational Research and Improvement, past prison populations were comprised of “35% white, 44% black, and 18% Hispanic, [while] the household population in America [was] 76% white, 11% black, and 10% Hispanic” (1994, para. 26). Based on data from The Sentencing Project (2018), these disparities have persisted. The details in the report indicate that African Americans were incarcerated in state prisons at a rate that was 5.1 times the imprisonment of whites, and in some states, this ratio is 10 to 1. African Americans represented 27% of those arrested while only making up 13% of the general population (Hinton, Henderson, & Reed, 2018; The Sentencing Project, 2018). This implies a continuing overrepresentation of African American individuals in the prison population compared to their proportion in the general U.S. population, as previously stated by the Office of Educational Research and Improvement (1994).

The school-to-prison pipeline phenomenon systematically increases the likelihood that children of color, or children from low socioeconomic backgrounds, will be suspended, expelled, criminalized, and institutionalized instead of graduating high school. The research demonstrates the school-to-prison pipeline is a result and combination of decades of institutional racism, a violation of civil rights, zero tolerance policies, and limited access to adequate public schools (Grace & Nelson, 2019; Nelson, 2020; Stanford & Muhammad, 2018). The achievement gap between white students and African American students is even present within the prison system. Results of prisoner literacy scales revealed, “white prisoners demonstrate higher averages of literacy skills
than black prisoners, who showed greater proficiency than Hispanic prisoners” (Office of Educational Research and Improvement, 1994, p. 49). According to Michon (2016) white inmates had higher literacy levels than black and Hispanic inmates. Meanwhile black and Hispanic males who had not entered the prison system had lower literacy rates than those of their white counterparts in or out of prison (Michon, 2016). This suggest the immediate need for education evaluation as previously implied by the Office of Educational Research and Improvement (1994). If students enter prison systems without adequate literacy skills, they remain at risk of not continuing their education or finding gainful employment. Scully (2012) writes, “by eliminating these (underperforming) students, the schools protected their performance evaluations and made clear just how disposable some children were” (p. 4). African American male students need intensive support with reading skills to avoid the detrimental effects of being incorrectly labeled as special education students and avoid the school-to-prison pipeline. Resources and solutions must be put in place to motivate schools to help all students achieve, despite their academic struggles and environmental backgrounds.

Educational statistical data plays a vital role in developing programs, funding, teaching tools, and historical texts. When educational statistics are presented, they should be crafted in a way that provides specific information on participants, backgrounds, settings, and goals. Statistics should improve and benefit educational settings without dismissing the intended population’s significance and characteristics. Multiple studies present data without the local context, thus making it difficult to gauge how well the statistics represent multiple communities (Fantuzzo, LeBoeuf, Rouse, & Chen, 2012; Nelson, 2016; Neugebauer & Blair, 2020). Trends involving African American males
must be studied, as well as provide the context for which the study is being conducted on a state or international level. The implementation of close reading strategies should be studied prominently with African American males to possibly close the achievement gap.

Close reading consists of responding, rereading, and analyzing text, and has been used to help readers comprehend text that contains new information (Boudreaux-Johnson, Mooney, & Lastrapes, 2017; Harris, Ray, Graham, & Houston, 2018). This type of reading can be used in various teaching structures, classroom settings, and even digital applications and “involves an investigation of a short piece of text, with multiple readings completed over multiple instructional lessons” (Baker & Mcenery, 2017, p. 2). While close reading has been found effective and encourages critical thinking, it is not often embedded in traditional classroom routines. Due to district mandates and a high focus on test scores, teachers have begun teaching the standardized state test instead of the student’s current academic needs (Hock, Brasseur-Hock, Hock, & Duvel 2017; Howard, 2013). State departments of education should consider less standardized testing and mandate close reading for critical thinking purposes to support students’ reading comprehension skills.

A classroom comprises three tiers of students: each tier represents where students fall academically and to what degree they need support (Jefferson, Grant, & Sander, 2017; Mariage, Englert, & Mariage, 2020; Williams et al., 2016). Tier 1 supports are the general supports a teacher provides to the entire class, like PowerPoints, handouts, or lectures. Tier 2 is the next level of support a teacher offers to some students, such as putting them in a small group of students. These students can receive special graphic organizers, partially completed notes, or more assistance from the teacher. Tier 3 is the
most intensive intervention that can be provided for students, including the support from reading resource teachers. Some schools may only use close reading with Tier 3 students; however, close reading should be embedded in general classroom settings as well to assist all students.

One close reading study on tier 2 students saw improvement in final intervention scores for four out of the five student participants (Mariage et al., 2020). Victor (2017) examined student comprehension scores when students utilized close reading strategies, and the results were successful. One study using African American students saw an increase in intervention scores after using various close reading skills for six weeks (Boudreaux-Johnson et al., 2017). Use of close reading strategies support students in reading comprehension and equip them with strategies to comprehend new text and improve their analytical reading skills (Mariage et al., 2020). Few studies, however, have focused specifically on African American students and their use of close reading strategies, and no study was found in the existing literature that focused solely on young African American males.

**Local Context**

My school is located within School District 2 of a rural region in South Carolina. The town’s population has approximately 2,800 people with 81% identifying as African American, 12% as White, and 7% as Hispanic (US Census Bureau, 2018). About 52% of the population has completed high school in this area (US Census Bureau, 2018). The community at large falls within the lower socioeconomic status based on at least 73% of the students receiving food stamp assistance (IES, 2021). All of the students at Wisteria Lane (a pseudonym has been used to protect the privacy of the school and students)
receive a free lunch due to a district-provided grant. Due to the lack of employment in the area, the school’s student population has significantly decreased.

Wisteria Lane Elementary School serves approximately 400 students in pre-kindergarten through fifth grade and is in the southern region of South Carolina. The school uses several additional buildings and portable classrooms to house classes. The portable classrooms have been in use since the 1990’s to accommodate the increase of the town’s population at one time. The school population is not very diverse in ethnicity. African Americans (93%), Hispanic/Latino (4%), and White (2%) students make up the school’s ethnicity demographics (Education, 2021).

There is limited data on test scores that were subdivided by ethnicity and gender at the state level. South Carolina College and Career Ready Assessments (SC READY) is a state-level assessment administered to students from third through fifth grade in South Carolina at the end of each school year. Test scores for third graders revealed that in 2016, only 25% of African American students scored at or above average in reading, whereas 57% of White students scored at or above average in reading (South Carolina Department of Education, 2018). In 2019, the reading SC READY scores showed that 30% of African Americans in third grade scored at or above in reading, whereas 64% of White students scored at or above in reading (South Carolina Department of Education, 2018). According to the SC READY scores, 78% of third grade students do not read at grade level, while 63% of fifth graders do not read at grade level (South Carolina Department of Education, 2018). Sixty-three percent is a significant number of learners who are not prepared to enter the sixth grade.
Beginning in 2017 the school received a South Carolina rating of good; however, it dropped to below average in 2018 (South Carolina School Report Card, 2018). The school’s rating has stayed the same and due to the COVID pandemic, school scores have not been released since last year. The South Carolina state test scores consistently indicate 75% of the upper grade students read below grade level. Wisteria Lane Elementary scored below average on the school report card (South Carolina School Report Card, 2018). This school is a Title I school. The current SC READY test scores for Wisteria Lane Elementary School help demonstrate the need for intense reading intervention. The school is subscribed to several instructional programs to support academic achievement including Freckles, System44, Read180, Waterford, Get Epic, and Dreambox.

Once our students complete middle school, they attend the high school located on the same campus. The superintendent of education reports that the high school dropout rate in District 2 for non-white males went from "3.6% in 2014 to 0% in 2016" (Spearman, 2018, p. 23). Non-white males include African American and Hispanic males from District 2. South Carolina's current graduation rate for African American students is 76%, white students is 84%, and Hispanic students is 79% (US Department of Education, 2019). However, during the time of this study, there were no White males in the graduating classes. Wisteria Lane High School was rated unsatisfactory in 2018 by the State Department of Education (South Carolina School Report Card, 2018). This means the school's performance does not meet the criteria and expectations to prepare students to be South Carolina ready based on the learning environment and academic reports.
While high school graduation rates are essential, it is just as important to evaluate the trend of African American boys reading below grade level in elementary school. Based on my observations, fifth grade boys struggle with fluency, reading multiple genres, comprehension skills, phonics skills, and essay writing skills. In reference to the data relating to fifth grade struggling readers, we know that students who lack reading skills are more likely to struggle in high school and beyond (Thompson & Shamberger, 2015; Washington, Branum-Martin, Lee-James, & Sun, 2019).

Parent participation varies depending on the event. Evening events such as parent-teacher conferences, awards day, and spelling bees, will generally include 70% parent participation. Evening events such as grade-level town hall meetings and PTA meetings have less than 20% parent participation at any given time.

Socially, the school is filled with outspoken children, most of whom love to talk at any given time. Outside of school sports, the local area lacks activities or attractions for students to participate in. Despite the general environment and town climate on any given day, many of the male elementary students can be heard aspiring of becoming music rappers and NFL players.

Wisteria Lane Elementary school has a high staff turnover rate (Wright, 2016). There are only two certified teachers who have been at the school for over two decades; they are the pre-Kindergarten teacher and the Physical Education teacher. There are a few paraprofessionals who have been at Wisteria Lane Elementary for more than ten years. The current principal, now in her fifth year at Wisteria Lane Elementary, is a former teacher and assistant principal in the district. Once a student starts kindergarten, it is
likely a new teacher will be in place by the time they arrive in second or third grade. There is no one in the building who holds a terminal degree.

I am employed as the school’s first reading interventionist as well as being the only reading interventionist within the district. The school heavily relies on its teachers, paraprofessionals, and substitute teachers to support struggling readers. Related arts teachers also pull students into small group sessions for supplemental reading and math interventions. However, these support personnel are not thoroughly trained in teaching reading or math. The related arts teachers often complain about being overworked, and not understanding the new way to teach math steps. A recent school mandate dictates that related arts teachers teach fundamental literacy or math skills during the first 20 minutes of their class time.

Based on the school rating results and student test scores, District 2 has created and is to follow a district strategic plan focused on increasing student academic achievement. The program includes professional development, intervention blocks, researched-based strategies, developing classroom libraries, electronic student portfolios, and improvement in use of technology tools and applications (Wright, 2016). The strategic plan and its results will be monitored by district and school-level stakeholders based on teacher observations, parent surveys, and student test scores. There has been no professional development on technology this academic school year, and I perceive the previous year of professional development to have been inadequate.

**Statement of the Problem**

Research and current data trends demonstrate that African American boys are not reading with proficiency at an alarming rate (Steele-Mosley, 2013). According to
Holzman and Jackson (2015), the national high school graduation rate for African American males is 59%, while the rate for White males is 80%. Graduation rates for African American boys strongly correlate with student reading levels; approximately 57% of African American boys in the fourth grade read below grade level (Holzman & Jackson, 2015; Nations Report Card, 2019). Based on recent data from Wisteria Lane Elementary school, 68% of the African American boys in fourth grade do not read on grade level. In comparison, 73% of the fifth graders do not read on grade level (South Carolina Department of Education, 2018). By lacking the necessary reading skills, these students are at risk for not completing high school and not obtaining gainful employment (Bell, 2014; McDaniel & Kuehn, 2013). Close reading strategies combined with technology integration will be used in this study to support these struggling African American male readers. The use of close reading strategies has shown effective results in increasing student reading comprehension abilities (Dalton, 2013; Victor, 2017).

**Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this action research was to implement close reading strategies and evaluate its impact on fifth grade African American male students’ reading comprehension skills and their experiences with reading at Wisteria Lane Elementary School.

**Research Questions**

The specific questions to be explored are:

1. How does the implementation of close reading strategies impact the reading comprehension skills of fifth grade African American male students at Wisteria Lane Elementary School?
2. How and in what ways does the implementation of close reading strategies influence fifth grade African American male students’ motivation to read in other classes?

**Researcher Subjectivities & Positionality**

The researcher is an African American woman and the sole reading interventionist teacher in a rural school district. I have degrees in early childhood education and language and literacy instruction, and my experiences in education revolve around phonics instruction, parent workshops, and teaching first through fifth graders. At previous schools where I was employed, educational technology was used for PowerPoint presentations, test-taking, interactive online quizzes, digital read alouds, and virtual field trips. I used these instruments in a way that required minimum student cognitive abilities. I do believe educational technology should be used to boost critical thinking skills and comprehension reading skills. However, based on my limited understanding of the instruments and increasing higher-order thinking skills, I did not use them to their total capacity. I believe we do not need technology to help educate students effectively. However, if we are going to use technology, it should be structured and effective.

My research interest aligns with the transformative worldview. The transformative paradigm provides a framework for using research to bring about political changes to injustices using mixed method approaches (Mertens, 2007). I believe African American boys have been mishandled by the educational system, thus resulting in their underperformance in K-12 schools (Grace & Nelson, 2019). The transformative paradigm suggests researchers should create change for the marginalized and oppressed groups.
within one’s sphere of influence (Creswell, 2014). The transformative worldview can be used to support my attempt to use educational technology and close reading strategies to help close the achievement gap of African American fifth grade boys, especially regarding their reading comprehension skills.

My positionality will vary during my study from insider to outsider. While I am teaching or implementing the intervention during my study, I expect my students to see me as an insider and work with them as insiders because teaching is my normal duty (Herr & Anderson, 2005). However, when I begin to interview students and use surveys to collect data about student personal perceptions, I will be operating in the reciprocal collaboration positionality (Herr & Anderson, 2005).

I entered my study with an awareness of various factors that influenced my positionalities, such as a higher level of education, difference of socioeconomic status, age difference, gender difference, and some cultural differences. I negotiated my positionality by being aware of my subjectivity and noting when my subjectivity influenced my actions (Peshkin, 1988). I also followed ethical protocols to protect student’s vulnerability and provided them with the opportunity to have informed consent (Jones, 2019; Roberts et al., 2005). One way I negotiated my positionality was to accept that my students may not be eager about the intervention or may view me as an outsider. I tried to see the study from the students’ perspective and shared with them some of my experiences as a student with reading skills in the fifth grade while I attended Wisteria Lane Elementary School.

My experiences as a former Wisteria Lane Elementary school student and as a current teacher will contribute to my bias as a researcher and could have played a role in
the study. I hold all stakeholders involved accountable for the low comprehension skills of fifth grade African American boys, including parents, teachers, and department policymakers. However, my values and passion for education support my willingness to combine research and reflective practice to benefit all stakeholders involved in this study. I believe my values contributed to this study because I have gained a lot of insight over time about successful reading interventions and possible ways to use technology to boost academic achievement and motivation.
**Definition of Terms**

**Close Reading Strategies.** Close reading is a widely used teaching strategy created to explore reading deeply for readers of all backgrounds. Close reading provides students with strategies to interact with the text physically and emotionally to develop interpretations of the main idea and make inferences (Baker & Mcenery, 2017; Day, 2018; Fisher & Frey, 2014). Close reading strategies can vary from performing mental actions and strategies to physically making notes on specific articles or books (Mariage et al., 2020).

**Digital Close Reading:** Digital close reading is very similar to traditional close reading methods; however, a digital close reading occurs on a student's laptop instead of in traditional journals or on paper post it notes. The researcher modeled close reading steps, and the students utilized digital annotations tools while they read the text in small groups or independently on their computers.

**Educational Technology:** Educational technology played a vital role in this action research study. In a metanalysis study (Cheung & Slavin, 2013), educational technology was defined as “a variety of electronic tools and applications that help deliver learning content and support the learning process, in this case for elementary struggling readers” (p.279). By combining traditional close reading skills with educational technology practices, students were able to practice close reading skills in a digital environment and communicate their understandings with their peers as well as the teacher.

**Motivation:** Student motivation is essential to their commitment to engaging with learning activities. Motivation can be defined as a construct used to measure...
determination in an area (Buckley & Doyle, 2016). Motivation entails the amount of effort students put toward specific instructional activities. Students can display their motivation through how they value learning content and how much success they expect to acquire in that area (Cook & Artino, 2016).

**Reading Comprehension:** Comprehension is the measure of understanding a person has gained from the text they are reading. Comprehension is “defined as a child’s ability to understand what he or she has read and is a critical part of students’ K-12 education” (Joyner, 2019, p. 1). Comprehension is a necessary skill that is important for success in all subject areas and is known as the interpretation of language through verbal or written communication (Dotson, 2017). Within this action research study, students completed an initial researcher-created assessment and a post-assessment at the conclusion of the study. The researcher-created assessment was used to measure the student’s reading comprehension skills. Reading comprehension scores can help determine if a student possesses the necessary skills to read material on grade level.

**Traditional Close Reading:** Close reading is known as a set of skills that prompts the reader to interact with the text on an emotional and mental level. Close reading provides the reader with multiple perspectives to address the author’s meaning. Mariage et al. (2020) state that close reading includes “annotating text and jotting down notes” (p. 31). Students practice close reading skills when they review a text multiple times and attempt to read the text multiple ways (Victor, 2017). Historically, “New Criticism theorists such as Richards (1929) and Brooks (1947) have stipulated close reading as a rigorous, objective method for extracting the correct meaning of a text” (as cited in Hinchman & Moore, 2013).
CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this action research was to implement close reading strategies and evaluate its impact on fifth grade African American male students’ reading comprehension skills and their experiences with reading at Wisteria Lane Elementary School.

The research questions for this study include:

1. How does the implementation of close reading strategies impact the reading comprehension skills of fifth grade African American male students at Wisteria Lane Elementary School?

2. How and in what ways does the implementation of close reading strategies influence fifth grade African American male students’ motivation to read in other classes?

I used the research questions to provide the main variables that would be used to support my literature research: (a) close reading, (b) reading comprehension and (c) motivation to read. I used various databases to collect resources for this review, such as Academic Search Complete, Education Source, and JSTOR. These databases yielded peer-reviewed articles, dissertations, academic reports, and book chapters. I focused on resources published within the last five years; over time, I extended my search to include material published within the past 12 years. I used the following keywords in various combinations to conduct the searches: comprehension, African American boys, black
males, student achievement, reading motivation, social annotation, black boys, text comprehension, close reading, annotation, student perceptions, student attitudes, reading strategies, comprehension strategies, reading comprehension, elementary students, struggling readers, literacy, social constructivism, and nonfiction.

This literature review is organized into four main sections. The first section discusses young African American boys and reviews the unique academic concerns and specific learning needs that a teacher should consider when providing instruction to this population of students. The following section examines reading comprehension and addresses evidence of poor and strong comprehension skills. The third section focuses on close reading strategies and the components of different types of reading strategies. The final section within this literature review identifies the theoretical framework underpinning this research, cognitivism, and social constructivism.

**Young African American Boys**

The needs of African American boys are unique and require a teacher's familiarity and consideration offered before designing and providing effective instruction (Essien, 2017; Walker & Hutchison, 2021). Key areas of concern in teaching African American boys include social concerns, the deficit framework model, other academic disparities, and reading challenges. Research indicates specific instructional strategies could be more beneficial when used with African American boys based on their unique learning needs (Husband, 2012; Nelson, 2016). The following section includes content reviewing (a) key concerns for African American boys and (b) specific needs of African American boys.
Key Concerns for African American Boys

There are several key concerns for African American boys, and educational researchers support each concern. Although financial success should not correlate to how much academic success students have, the closer African American boys are to the poverty line the increased likelihood they will have academic struggles in the U.S. education system (Fantuzzo et al., 2012). Public school education portrays that all students have an equal opportunity; however, this single-minded belief does not include certain conditions that inhibit the academic success of marginalized groups like black boys thus leading to negative stereotypes (Pabon, 2017).

Although the underachievement of African American boys, has been studied and analyzed from all sides, these students remain underrepresented in gifted and talented classes, which may lead one to believe that the education system globally is ineffective for these males (Ford & Moore, 2013). African American boys need urgent classroom instruction that combines good pedagogy with their needs as learners, and identities as African American boys in American society (Robinson, 2019). The achievement gap for African American boys cannot be attributed to one factor; it is the result of systemic racism, school to prison pipeline, negative stereotypes, ill created curriculums, social economic factors, and access to decent schools with great resources (Bryan, 2017; Howard, 2013; Kang & Husband, 2020). The following topics will be covered to further elaborate on these areas of concern for African American boys: (a) social concerns, (b) deficit framework, (c) academic disparities, (d) reading challenges and (e) specific needs of African American boys.
**Social concerns.** There are several social factors that contribute to the learning needs of African American boys. Students from low socioeconomic backgrounds are more likely to have challenges with reading because they may have parents who work full time; they also might not have access to quality teachers, high achieving schools, or quality reading materials and resources (Orrock & Clark, 2018; Washington et al., 2019). Many of these social factors are out of the students’ control. Students with parents who work full time may lack homework support, or there may be a gap in the home and school connection. Students from low socioeconomic backgrounds may not attend schools that put their identities and needs of their learners as priorities (Easton-Brooks & Brown, 2010). These schools could also lack teachers with the qualifications to teach this population.

African American students from low socioeconomic backgrounds are also more likely to attend schools that lag in technology and lack culturally relevant classrooms and libraries, thus impacting their engagement and self-perspective (Orrock & Clark, 2018). While each of these social factors may describe other special populations of students with needs, teachers need to be prepared to teach each student who sits in their classrooms as a unique individual who deserves their care. When black students come from impoverished backgrounds, their experiences directly correlate to their achievement skills (Smith, Kumi-Yeboah, Chang, Lee, & Frazier, 2019).

Students may feel a disconnect from educational settings due to observations of inequality. Therefore, they may disengage from their academic environment which would allow their behavior to portray a negative stereotype (Wasserberg, 2018). Teachers need to be aware of all potential factors impacting African American students’ learning needs.
as well as their motivation for learning. Success and reading achievement in school can be perceived as 
girly or nerdy behavior by boys; this especially pertains to African American boys (Davis, 2003). At first glance, it may appear a student finds learning to be boring and seem disengaged; however, teachers must be mindful that this specific group of students may make fun of education outwardly, but internally have a desire to be academically successful. Black boys struggle with internal battles regarding masculinity, femininity, academic success, and perceived measures of equality and blackness (Johnson, 2018). Some African American boys view learning and school as a place for girls; therefore, participating in reading class would be feminine and threatening to one's masculine appearance (Young, 2004). Socially internalized views of proper masculine behaviors could present themselves in boys as refusing to ask for help, denouncing educational importance, or mocking those who get assistance (Warren, 2020).

**Deficit framework.** The deficit model is a theory (Gorski, 2012) associated with minority students, including weak academic skills, socioeconomic status, and low projected outcomes for success. According to this theory, “one of the problems with the current literature on black males is an almost exclusive focus on them as being poor and residing in urban communities and the challenges that are present in such environments” (Howard, 2013, p. 61). The word deficit stereotypes minority children as lacking a passion for education and automatically lacking the necessary materials to succeed. This language and type of thinking prompt teachers to “blame black boys for their educational experiences”; it also limits resources educators may use in their classrooms to support students (Kang & Husband, 2020, p.21). Thus, educators adopt low expectations when using a deficit framework model of thinking. Teacher perception and attitudes also
impact student outcomes (Thomas & Stevenson, 2009). Therefore, teachers need to be aware of the harmfulness of this perspective and teach from an anti-deficit viewpoint (Nelson, 2016). According to Orrock and Clark (2018), most literature about African American boys is based on the deficit framework.

The deficit framework provides a harmful perspective about minority students. This framework places White male students as the standardized norm for every other child in the country as a reference (Smith et al., 2019). The deficit framework acknowledges the achievement gap, which measures learning in a centralized way (Gorski, 2012). Additionally, this framework does not provide the flexibility to give minority students empathy or recognize their fund of knowledge. This historical deficit framework model perspective disregards the minority students' talents, potentials, and eagerness to grow (Howard, 2013; South-Manning & Rabadi-Raol, 2018). It is equally harmful for researchers to associate African American boys with the deficit framework model. When research articles start with the many factors against African American boys or the many factors that cause African American boys to underachieve, it sets a tone for the reader to view the students as having a deficit (Boutte & Johnson, 2013; Nelson, 2016; Souto-Manning & Rabadi-Raol, 2018). If readers or teachers spend decades reading literature that supports the deficit model of thinking, this could impact the academic success of African American boys and other minority students (Howard, 2013). This kind of literature could lend itself to African American boys viewing themselves from the deficit perspective as well. Thus, it is relevant and crucial to study positive literature about African American boys and contribute to research about African
American boys in a supportive manner regarding their reading and academic achievement.

**Academic disparities.** African American boys are at high risk for experiencing disparities and unfair policies that impact their learning environment. Academic disparities for African American children begin as early as pre-kindergarten in the United States (Dexter et al., 2018). Additionally, African American students make up less than 20% of the national pre-kindergarten population but make up almost 50% of pre-kindergarten children suspended multiple times. African American boys are more likely to be suspended than their White counterparts for less severe actions (Morris & Perry, 2016; Thomas & Stevenson, 2009) which the elevated suspension rates could impact the literacy trends for African American boys in pre-kindergarten. Suspension trends could also have a rippling effect on students' academic achievement skills if they continuously miss school.

If African American boys observe or perceive that their suspensions occur at higher and unfair rates than their counterparts, this could contribute to their lack of faith in the equity and justice of the educational system (Wasserberg, 2018). In many large urban districts across the country, African American males without disabilities had lower reading scores in Grades 4, 8, and 12 and lower grade-level proficiency than White males with disabilities (Howard, 2013; U.S. Department of Education, 2019). African American students are more likely to be placed in special education classes nationally; however, the data demonstrate an overrepresentation of African American males in special education (Thomas & Stevenson, 2009). This should be an area of concern for teachers and school districts. Understanding why African American males in regular education classrooms
struggle with reading at a higher degree than students who have been diagnosed with reading disabilities is another example of a social concern and/or academic disparity that is also a contributing role for this kind of data. Unfair policies that increase the likelihood of placement in special education and high suspension rates also impact the students’ learning environment. Therefore, studies should be conducted to reevaluate the education of African American boys within our United States educational systems.

**Reading challenges.** Several factors can impact students' reading comprehension skills. African American boys are more likely to demonstrate reading comprehension difficulties in early grade levels (Robinson, 2019; Thomas, 2019). Poor comprehension skills can impact this population’s relationship with reading, have a severe impact on reading achievement, test scores, grades, and increase the likelihood of students dropping out of high school (Colbert, 2017; Miller, 2015). African American boys with low reading scores often demonstrate weak word-attack skills, influencing their fluency and reading comprehension skills (Washington et al., 2019). Educators should consider these social and academic struggles when working with this population of students.

**Specific needs of African American boys.** African American boys come from various home environments and have a wide spread of cultural influences. Their backgrounds as students impact their specific needs as learners (Kang & Husband, 2020). African American boys are more likely to succeed in an environment that uses a curriculum that perpetuates positive characters that reflect their identity. To further their success potential, African American boys need to be engaged in an academic environment that allows them to be social learners within an interactive setting (Howard, 2013; Steele-Mosley, 2013). Finally, African American boys need a sense of choice when
it comes to the selected reading materials to boost their motivation as thinkers and readers (Kang & Husband, 2020; Wood & Jocius, 2013). The following topics identify the benefits of an African American boy's motivation to read: (a) culturally relevant text, (b) interactive learning, and (c) reading motivation.

**Culturally relevant text.** African American boys need books that are culturally relevant. Culturally relevant and culturally responsive texts are interchangeable. Culturally relevant texts are books and instructional techniques that relate to the students' backgrounds (Thomas, 2019). Culturally relevant text can help African American boys increase their reading interest, use context clues, and most importantly, increase their reading performance (Clark, 2017; Walker & Hutchison, 2021). African American boys can make more sense of unfamiliar words when the content of the text reflects the students' cultural backgrounds (Bryant, 2015; Clark, 2017; Essien, 2017). They must be taught explicit strategies to analyze texts and have personal connections with the text to make the content of the text meaningful to them as readers, so they can understand the author's intended meaning (Husband, 2012; Thompson & Shamberger, 2015). This instructional technique is intensified when classrooms use culturally relevant books that reflect the lives and environmental settings for African American boys on a daily basis.

**Interactive learning.** Students of color need environments with interactive learning (Walker & Hutchison, 2021). According to Husband (2012), African American boys would benefit from using “highly stimulating & arousing activities rather than passive strategies” (p. 9). Arousing activities could be using strategies like the Make a Movie and a Hmmm moment close reading strategy (Petersen 2020). African American students would benefit from having the opportunity to read a text several times, with
explicit and constructed purposes combined with simulating activities (Husband, 2012; Thompson & Shamberger, 2015). A 2019 case study (Salvo, Shelton, & Welch, 2019) saw an improvement in African American male student test scores from learning in an online environment accompanied with peer to peer interactions. Reading is an interactive process, and the findings of scholars demonstrate African American boys should engage with interactive techniques for academic success (Kang & Husband, 2020; Tatum, 2014).

**Reading motivation.** Reading motivation is a personal factor that plays a role when it comes to African American boys and reading comprehension. Teachers can increase African American boys’ motivation by providing them with multiple choices of books and text genres to choose from (Kang & Husband, 2020). Readers should have access to books on a variety of levels and different types of text structures. For example, teachers can set up classroom libraries of books to include graphic novels, superhero books, urban fiction text, historical picture books, poetry books, sports books, or even books that reflect the lives of celebrities. African American boys need to have ample access to text that reflects their identities and the opportunity to choose multiple books (Wood & Jocius, 2013). African American boys would also benefit from reading books with their peers due to their social nature (Tatum, 2014). Since African American boys struggle with reading comprehension (Cartwright et al., 2017), they should receive effective student-centered instruction that helps them understand multiple ways of constructing meaning from a text. Use of association strategies and connection techniques are examples of how teachers could support African American boys while helping them become successful readers.
Reading Comprehension

Reading comprehension encompasses abilities, expertise, strategies, and prior knowledge. Students with weak reading comprehension skills may struggle with focusing, while stronger students have internal strategies to read texts accurately (Bulut, 2017). Teachers should consider which routines would be effectively used to support reading comprehension abilities. This section will address the following topics: (a) operationalized definition for reading comprehension, (b) evidence of poor comprehension skills, (c) evidence of strong comprehension skills, (d) strategies for building comprehension skills, and (e) previous research methods used to study reading comprehension.

Operationalized Definition for Reading Comprehension

Reading comprehension includes decoding, metacognitive skills, and meaning-making skills for a thorough understanding of the printed text (Capodieci et al., 2020; Connor, 2019; Fraumeni-McBride, 2017). Reading comprehension involves a multitude of mental actions involving decoding skills. When readers cannot decode specific words in a text, it inhibits the likelihood of fully understanding the story (Hogan, Bridges, Justice, & Cain, 2011). Although some readers have excellent decoding skills, and can accurately read and pronounce new words, they may not have the necessary comprehension skills to succeed. Successful readers have the ability to navigate text and extract implied meaning and explicit meaning from the text (Kiili & Leu, 2019). Supporting further, reading comprehension skills involve multiple processes to make meaning. Reading below grade level means the student cannot keep up with the grade-
level textbook for comprehension or decoding skills, which will likely result in academic failure (Thompson & Shamberger, 2015).

Reading comprehension is a skill that must be taught to students. Reading comprehension involves combining "cognitive and linguistic abilities" using past experiences to make sense of the printed text (Morfidi et al., 2018, p. 2). Beck and Condy (2017) believe reading comprehension interprets print to construct meaning for various purposes, including leisure and learning. Capodieci et al. (2020) assert reading comprehension as a complex cognitive ability involving linguistic, metacognitive, and inference-making skills. Robinson (2019) concludes that reading comprehension is the ability to classify, process information, and develop personal meaning or understanding of the content. This specific skill is the overview and message students take away from the text after reading it to themselves.

Each definition relating to reading comprehension possesses its own merits. The Morfidi et al. (2018) definition acknowledges the reader's past experiences and how it contributes to their reading comprehension skills. The definition by Beck and Condy (2017) emphasizes that reading comprehension skills are used for functioning in life, including entertainment usage and gaining information. The definition by Capodieci et al. (2020) highlights that reading comprehension involves the need to make inferences. What is notable about each definition is that they include thinking about the text and making meaning from it.

For this study, reading comprehension will be defined as the intentional skill to use appropriate cognitive strategies to extract meaning, make personal connections, and select accurate responses to the text. The rationale for this definition is different from
previously described because students should use reading comprehension skills to read and not use reading to comprehend. A student reading can be observed. However, reading comprehension occurs inside the mind, is an intentional act, a cognitive act, and a mental process (Fisher & Frey, 2014b; Schrock, 2014; Teng, 2020). Comprehending to read a text will require understanding the text in various layers or perspectives.

**Evidence of Poor Comprehension Skills**

Reading comprehension skills play a vital role in students’ academic success, and they are necessary to function fully throughout life (Russell & Drake Shiffler, 2019; Stevens, Park, & Vaughn, 2019). One of the first signs of a struggling reader is their inability to paraphrase an author's text. Teachers often use various methods to prompt students to gauge comprehension, including written questions and verbal questions. When students struggle with understanding, they create and respond with inappropriate answers (Supramaniam et al., 2020). If students cannot accurately put the story into their own words, this implies they do not understand the text. Even if a reader cannot read all the terms in each story with 100% accuracy or if the student cannot accurately describe the story in their own words, these would indicate a failure to comprehend the message (Wang, 2016).

When students respond with inappropriate answers, this indicates they do not understand and are not able to make sense of the author’s meaning (Supramaniam et al., 2020). When students read a text, they should begin to form connections that place the events in the text in a movie-like display in their minds that they can understand (Hogan et al., 2011). Sometimes, students continuously read text, but their minds have not been trained to make connections or make visual movies. This could also indicate that the
student is unfamiliar with the pattern of writing used by the author and therefore makes inaccurate guesses out of confusion because the cues in the story do not make sense to them as a reader (Pilten, 2016).

Struggling readers may have trouble forming connections. Readers who struggle with understanding, such as connecting new experiences with previous information, have weak attention spans and lessen their chances of conceptualizing the authors' meaning (Leidig, Grünke, Urton, Knaak, & Hisgen, 2018). Struggling readers also demonstrate issues in the area of making inferences. Inferences are when readers can make observations and use their current knowledge to reach complicated or straightforward conclusions (Kendeou et al., 2014). For example, “one source of reading comprehension problems concerns the ability to generate inferences” (p.2). When readers cannot independently form inferences, it leaves them void of grasping the author’s meaning. Readers need inferences and schema to make connections to comprehend text. Students who have trouble making inferences have weak comprehension skills (Beck & Condy, 2017b; Congdon, 2015).

As readers grow from first to third grade, they are learning how to read, and teacher lessons focus on the foundational skills of how to read. As readers navigate from third to fifth grade, they begin reading to learn (Hogan et al., 2011). Teachers’ lessons focus on what students learn based on what they read. When readers do not learn foundational reading skills and the use of perspectives with a text, “they will inevitably fail to comprehend all but the simplest texts, because they cannot identify meaningful connections that lend coherence to their text representations” (Kendeou et al., 2014, p.3). This will impact their ability to make inferences and have strong comprehension skills.
Evidence of Strong Comprehension Skills

There are a variety of ways readers can demonstrate comprehension skills. This includes using a multitude of strategies or demonstrating certain behaviors. According to Jozwik et al. (2019) and Spencer and Wagner (2019), reading comprehension is the active process of understanding the text. One of the first apparent ways readers can demonstrate they understand a text is by paraphrasing what the author wrote in their own words. When readers can combine the text with their understanding to develop their own meaning, it becomes evident that they comprehended the text. Many teachers look for reading comprehension demonstrations through use of open-ended questions. Many standardized tests require higher-level thinking, open-ended essays for students to show they can write an analytical essay of text read, citing evidence and including paraphrased ideas within their writing to support their thinking.

One way readers can demonstrate reading comprehension skills is by interpreting the author’s message through text and visualizing the words. Good readers can visualize the text by creating accurate “mental representation of a text’s meaning” in their minds (Hogan et al., 2011, p. 3). Strong readers can read a text, make an inference, and place a mental image in their minds (Baron, 2016; Hogan et al., 2011). When strong readers use visualization skills, they can comprehend the text they have read. Creating a mental picture involves the use of a reader’s schema, where schema is the parameters of the reader's thinking.

Another way readers can demonstrate their reading comprehension skills is through the observations of connections. When readers can explain how elements of a narrative plot (including the introduction, rising action, climax, and the falling action) all
contribute to the author’s theme or support the story’s conclusion, this indicates strong comprehension skills. When readers can see a pattern woven between the words or can explain how elements of a text work together, they are making a connection and using strong reading comprehension skills (Dotson-Shupe, 2017).

**Strategies for Building Reading Comprehension Skills**

There are a variety of techniques and instructional strategies teachers can use to build comprehension skills within readers. For the purpose of this study, reading comprehension skills are the intentional cognitive actions taken to understand a given text (Fisher & Frey, 2014a). Techniques include incorporating graphic organizers, the SQ3R method, and peer reading. Each of these strategies are active reading strategies that help the reader view reading as a transaction.

Graphic organizers are physical charts students or teachers use to keep track of their thoughts while reading. Students can use graphic organizers to support reading comprehension skills (Husband, 2012a; Mahdavi & Tensfeldt, 2013; Williams et al., 2016). Graphic organizers come in a variety of structures and formats, from digital templates to paper-pencil templates. Some graphic organizers are used to track the sequence of events, a transformation of a character’s emotions, or even the main ideas (Mahdavi & Tensfeldt, 2013; Ponce et al., 2020). Graphic organizers also help students organize their ideas as they reflect on fiction or informational texts (Jefferson et al., 2017).

The SQ3R method is an active process that guides students through understanding the text. The SQ3R method includes “survey, question, read, recite and review” (Kasmawati & Sakkir, 2020, p. 3). Unlike graphic organizers, which come in various
formats, shapes, and sizes, the SQ3R process has a general structure of questions or prompts that students can follow to review various concepts within the text. The SQ3R approach “helps students think about the text they are reading and can activate their thinking then evaluate their knowledge through reading” (Kusumayanthi & Maulidi, 2019, p. 3). The first step includes pre-reading strategies where readers’ skim the text. The next step allows the reader to create several questions and prepares a view for reading the text. The third, fourth, and fifth steps are to read the text, recite (either verbally or in written form) what was read, and to review what was just read.

Teachers can also implement self-questioning by using a strategy referred to as a self-questioning strategy routine (SQSR). Once the teacher provides explicit instruction for developing questions, students can use self-questioning independently or with their peers as they read a variety of texts (Brown & Pyle, 2021; Rouse-Billman & Alber-Morgan, 2019). Self-questioning can be used to help students monitor their comprehension, be active readers, and give students a direct path for focusing on the text content (Brown & Pyle, 2021; Rouse-Billman & Alber-Morgan, 2019). According to Brown and Pyle (2021), self-questioning strategies can increase reading comprehension in expository text.

Another essential technique students can explore is using their past experiences as a framework to make sense of events in the text they are reading. Students refer to their prior knowledge to make mental and visual representations of the text or connect their past experiences to events in a book to create their own meaning of a text (Bulut, 2017; Mahdavi & Tensfeldt, 2013). Readers can draw on “prior experiences or knowledge as a strategy to form a connection between real-world knowledge with textual content for
generating meaning construction” (Wang, 2016, p. 9). As readers go through a text, they can notice the similarities of the text and their personal lives to build a conclusion for understanding the author’s meaning.

There are various strategies that can be used to support reading comprehension. Teachers can implement the use of graphic organizers, the SQ3R method, the use of self-regulated questions, or connecting with their own past experiences to help students understand the meaning in text across various genres. Each of the included strategies helps students reflect on their thinking or break down the text in a simplified way for meaning. These methods can be combined with close reading strategies to support students in increasing their reading comprehension abilities.

**Previous Research Methods Used to Study Reading Comprehension**

There have been various research methods used to examine the implementation of reading strategies in relation to reading comprehension. Researchers have used quantitative and qualitative methods to examine various data sources to provide insight on student behavior and academic performance. Previous studies that focused on measuring reading strategies and comprehension have used quantitative measures to gather data, including reviewing and evaluating test scores and counting student annotations (Chen & Chen, 2020; Glover, 2017; Mariage et al., 2020; Pilten, 2016). Researchers have utilized data drawn from the Woodcock- Johnson Psychoeducational Battery—Revised (Katz & Carlisle, 2009), the Reading Comprehension Evaluation Scale (Pilten, 2016), the Curriculum-Based Measurement test (Mariage et al., 2020), the Assessment for Learning (Glover, 2017), and the Progress in International Reading
Literacy Study (Chen et al., 2020) to quantitatively measure students’ reading comprehension.

Studies have also focused on qualitative measures to observe the change in student behavior and reading comprehension scores using interviews, discussions, and observations (Chen et al., 2020; Glover, 2017; Mariage et al., 2020; Pilten, 2016). The qualitative methods included teacher and student interviews (Chen et al., 2020; Pilten, 2016), classroom observations (Glover, 2017), and student discussion transcripts (Mariage et al., 2020). The interviews inquired about the reading strategies utilized and the students’ perceptions about the effectiveness of the reading strategies on their reading comprehension. The purpose of the interviews that covered annotation behaviors, reading comprehension, and immersion experiences were "to gain an in-depth understanding of their opinions on the comparison between gamified and non-gamified learning material (Chen et al., 2020, p. 11). Pilten (2016) interviewed teachers and students. Teachers provided insight on the effectiveness of reciprocal teaching while the students identified the effectiveness of the reciprocal teaching strategy, offering both their difficulties as well as areas of convenience in using this reading strategy. Glover (2017) used classroom observations to explore the success of a reading intervention, whereas Mariage et al., (2020) analyzed student discussion transcriptions to identify if there was a difference in the number of student discussions pre- or post- intervention.

Researchers have measured reading comprehension using various measurements and scales. Studies have used common assessments such as the Northwest Evaluation Association Measure of Academic Progress testing (Walker & Hutchison, 2021), the Gate-Macginite Reading Test (Williams et al., 2016), the Woodcock-Johnson
Psychoeducational Battery Test (Katz & Carlisle, 2009), the teacher-created Reading Comprehension Evaluation (Pilten, 2016), and text-dependent questions (Petersen, 2020). The Measure of Academic Progress test is an untimed, computerized test given several times a year with results indicating if students perform below grade level, at grade level, or above grade level based on their reading comprehension results. The Measure of Academic Progress results can also project students’ literacy growth (Walker & Hutchison, 2021). The Gate-Macginite Reading test measures word decoding and comprehension. The Woodcock-Johnson Psychoeducational Battery Test has multiple components for measuring students’ word identification skills, picture naming, oral vocabulary, listening comprehension, and reading comprehension (Katz & Carlisle, 2009). Whereas a standardized test can provide specific data, like students’ weaknesses, or break down where they may have comprehension issues, teacher-created comprehension tests may provide general data that summarizes a student's understanding of a passage (Farkas & Jang, 2019). Table 2.1 lists several reading comprehension tests and their specific purposes.
Table 2.1 Comprehension Tests

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Test</th>
<th>Measurement of</th>
<th>Scholars</th>
<th>Age group</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Northwest Evaluation Association Measure of Academic Progress (MAP)</td>
<td>Literacy achievement, grade reading level</td>
<td>Walker &amp; Hutchison, 2021</td>
<td>Elementary students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gate-Macginite Reading</td>
<td>Word decoding, reading comprehension</td>
<td>Williams, Kao, Pao, Ordynans, Atkins, Cheng, &amp; DeBonis, 2016</td>
<td>Beginning readers to adults</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Woodcock-Johnson III Tests of Achievement</td>
<td>Reading vocabulary, word attack, reading fluency, passage comprehension, identification</td>
<td>Katz &amp; Carlisle, 2009</td>
<td>Elementary students</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Washington, Branum-Martin, Lee-James, &amp; Sun, 2019</td>
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Reading comprehension is the combination of a student’s mental processes to extract meaning from the text and can be measured through a variety of tests and assessments. When students respond to questions with off-topic answers or score extremely low on a reading comprehension test, this could indicate weak reading comprehension skills. Standardized tests on which students must identify plot elements and answer open-ended tasks correctly can demonstrate strong comprehension skills.

Close Reading

Close reading is a widely used teaching strategy created to explore reading deeply for readers of all backgrounds. There are several definitions of close reading, and the definitions are not specific to any group or researchers. Close reading strategies take on different techniques such as discussions, underlining, or even highlighting particular
phrases. Researchers have used specific, close reading strategies as interventions in their own studies. The following sections will discuss (a) operationalized definition for close reading, (b) close reading strategies, (c) student perceptions of close reading, and (d) research methods on student perceptions of close reading.

**Operationalized Definition for Close Reading.**

The purpose of close reading is to provide students with strategies they can use independently while reading to comprehend printed texts accurately (McConn, 2018). Close reading can also be referred to as metacognitive strategies or annotating strategies (McConn, 2018; Zorfass, 2014). Close reading should be modeled and explicitly taught to students with opportunities for practice and time to answer questions (Brown & Kappes, 2012). If close reading strategies are adequately implemented, students will use these techniques throughout their lives (Hinchman & Moore, 2013) as they interact with informational texts to make sense of what they are reading. Elementary through college-aged students could also use similar close reading strategies. The most critical variable for teaching close reading is the selection of the reading material. Close reading does not change across content areas; instructors can use the same strategies for reading, science, social studies, and historical fiction texts (Brown & Kappes, 2012; Hinchman & Moore, 2013). Reading materials should be complementary to the readers’ skill level. Close reading can even support written instruction through the use of analyzing text for deeper reflections (Harris et al., 2018).

While close reading cannot be universally defined, all close reading strategies require repeated readings, text reflections, and emotional responses. Close reading provides students with strategies to interact with the text physically and emotionally to
develop interpretations of the main idea and make inferences (Baker & Mcenery, 2017; Day, 2018; Fisher & Frey, 2014). Boudreaux-Johnson et al. (2017) positively clarifies close reading as a process of analysis, which means the text is examined closely. Examining a text closely includes looking at the author's purpose, perspective, main idea, and viewpoints to assess what view the author excluded.

Close reading can also be defined as an analysis that includes multiple readings (Hinchman & Moore, 2013) with annotations and text-dependent questions (Boudreaux-Johnson et al., 2017). The teacher usually creates text-dependent questions; however, students can form text-dependent questions during group discussions. When readers use these text-dependent questions, they are forced to search the text for answers and gather evidence to support their thinking. This type of activity helps the reader switch perspectives and use critical thinking skills, which can help make reading texts more engaging (Fisher & Frey, 2014). Close reading strategies help students perform interactions with the text; thus, after answering text-dependent questions, readers should have a stronger sense of comprehension, identify valuable details, and develop their own meaning (Fisher & Frey, 2014). Dalton et al. (2015) believe close reading is a focused method to go deeper into the author's message by interpreting a quote or analyzing the author's word choice through repeated readings.

Each description of close reading has its value; however, none of the definitions mention looking for patterns through texts nor when using close reading strategies that there is a transaction of thinking. Close reading as a transactional process requires unique insight from each repeated reading (Harper & Milman, 2016; Kalir, Morales, Fleerackers, & Alperin, 2020). For this current research process, close reading is the deliberate action
of reading printed or digital material with a specific purpose that covers all aspects of comparative analysis to further my fifth grade readers comprehension skills.

As the reader reads using a different close reading strategy for a book read, they must demonstrate evidence of interaction with the digital tools (i.e., taking notes, responding to questions, text annotations, personal connections, or student reflections) (Boudreaux-Johnson et al., 2017). Close reading is a job that students must work through with an assigned text (Dalton, 2013; Harris et al., 2018). As students perform their job with the text, they gather their tools. There are various tools readers can use for close reading, such as writing utensils for marking the text, highlighters, Post-It Notes, or even text structured graphic organizers. Students should first begin to identify the author’s purpose then work through the text to capture large and small details the author used to gain their attention (Nelson, 2019). Lastly, students should think about ways the text relates to other passages they have read by reflecting on the work they have put into understanding the authors’ message to remember what strategies they used to make the text make sense (McConn, 2018).

**Close Reading Strategies**

This section will address types of close reading strategies. Close reading strategies can vary from performing mental actions and strategies to physically making notes on specific articles or books (Mariage et al., 2020). Close reading interventions can include underlining specific language in books or articles, discussing sections of the text with a partner, and developing questions about the text. Close reading aims to possess a thorough understanding of the authors’ meaning and interpret the intended message (Boudreaux-Johnson et al., 2017). This section will introduce five examples of close
reading strategies that correspond with the four close reading strategies used in the intervention of this study: (a) traditional annotation, (b) digital annotation, (c) coding, and (d) metacognitive strategies.

**Traditional annotation.** The traditional form of close reading occurs using a pencil to write comments or questions in the margins of books. While several close reading strategies encourage the use of traditional annotation, writing about the text in the margins or making a response in a notebook that aligns with the text, the B.U.R.N. strategy encourages the students to offer annotations regarding the central idea in the text as well as draw a box around paragraphs and underline text they perceive to be an important idea (Mariage et al., 2020).

**Digital annotation.** While traditional highlighting or margin writing occurs in books, digital annotation occurs on laptops or electronic screens. Digital annotation appears on electronic devices, where readers write on the screens of books and passages while highlighting features and working through the text. Learners can post virtual sticky notes with annotations, questions, or comments about what they read (Baker & Mcenery, 2017). For my study, students will be using the highlight, comment, and draw annotation tool features of the digital books they chose to read. Consistent with the Aha moment close reading strategy, readers stay in tune with the text and make personal connections, reflections, and contributions to the text as readers (Azmuddin, Nor, & Hamat, 2020) through use of digital annotation.

**Coding.** Coding the text uses different symbols to record the readers' reactions to the text (Nelson, 2019). Students can perform the coding technique on their digital books by selecting symbols to represent their reactions or creative thoughts about what they
have read. Consistent with the Hmm moment strategy (Petersen, 2020), my students can digitally mark text that they feel a personal connection with, including moments they find interesting or confusing. They can annotate the text with different symbols, for example a happy face can represent a positive emotion, an exclamation point can represent an essential idea, or a question mark can represent an area of confusion. Some form of coding and annotation will be used with each of the four close reading strategies in my study as they are metacognitive strategies having been found in the existing literature to improve elementary student reading comprehension skills improvement (Hinchman & Moore, 2013; Mariage et al., 2020).

**Metacognitive strategies.** Metacognitive strategies increase student reading comprehension by providing an approach to help the reader monitor, evaluate, reflect, and regulate their understanding of the author’s content (Babayiğit, 2019). Examples are the B.U.R.N. and R.A.P. close reading strategies. Using the B.U.R.N. strategy, students reread the paragraphs, underline the unique details, and note the main ideas in the margins (Fisher & Frey, 2014a; Mariage et al., 2020). This strategy can be completed using traditional or digital annotations. Using the R.A.P. strategy students read a paragraph, ask themselves what the main idea is, and paraphrase the main statement in their own words (Leidig et al., 2018; Stevens et al., 2019). For both reading strategies, students can place a circle or a box around words or phrases that confuse them. Students can then use context clues after several readings of the text to interpret the general meanings of the phrases (Fisher & Frey, 2014a).
Student Perceptions of Close Reading

K-12 and higher education students have been studied to identify their perceptions about use of close reading strategies. There were mixed findings across the perceptions of students in different grade levels. The findings from the researchers who conducted the studies found either mixed perceptions or positive perceptions, with no one study having all negative views (Chan et al., 2017; Fisher & Frey, 2014; Lem & Hew, 2014). The research of both Kalir et al. (2020) and Zheng et al. (2018) found only positive perceptions among college student participants with each of these studies using digital annotation techniques (Kalir et al., 2020; Zheng et al., 2018). Using elementary students as their participants, the research of Fisher and Frey (2014b) and Mariage et al. (2020) found either mixed or positive student perceptions when using close reading strategies on improving their reading comprehension skills and overall reading experience.

Previous Methods on Student Perceptions of Close Reading

While many researchers have explored student perceptions about close reading strategies (Fisher & Frey, 2014b; Kalir et al., 2020), according to William and Portman (2014) and Kang and Husband (2020) very few researchers have explored African American boys' perceptions of what they believe they need to be successful readers. William and Portman (2014) define student perceptions as “attitudes, opinions, and beliefs” (p. 16). Researchers who studied the perceptions of students using close reading strategies used a variety of data collection methods. Teachers and researchers collected data on both teacher and student perceptions to add to the literature and improve instructional practices (Fisher & Frey, 2014b; Kalir et al., 2020). Although the perceptions on close reading strategies as an intervention are limited, several researchers
provided insight into their data collection methods. Semi-structured interviews and observations (Beck & Condy, 2017b; Pilten, 2016), surveys (Kalir et al., 2020; Kuhn, Rausch, McCarty, Montgomery, & Rule, 2017), and student discussion transcripts (Mariage et al., 2020) were used to evaluate students’ attitudes towards reading intervention methods. Observations were conducted by Beck and Condy (2017a) to evaluate challenges students faced while independently reading and which close strategies they implemented during independent reading time or small group instruction had the greatest impact. Kalir et al. (2020) used surveys to assess student perceptions of their learning and sense of community after use of a close reading strategy intervention. Kuhn et al. (2017) used surveys to measure students’ attitudes about school and repeat reading strategies during their intervention. Mariage et al. (2020) used a pre-and post-intervention survey to rate their students’ perceptions of the close reading strategy intervention effectiveness, their enjoyment of the intervention, and their use of the strategy in other classes.

Measuring reading comprehension is crucial for educational environments and reading comprehension results can indicate the strengths or weaknesses of instructional practices (Joseph, Alber-Morgan, Cullen, & Rouse, 2016). Close reading strategies and their impact on reading comprehension have been analyzed using different methods. Many studies have used a mixed-method approach with a pre-and post-test intervention. One of the commonalities among the studies is that researchers wanted to measure if students’ reading comprehension levels change with use of close reading strategies. Despite these noted studies on close reading strategy interventions, there remains a gap in the existing literature. Close reading has not been extensively studied as an instructional
strategy, and especially not with struggling fifth grade African American boys. Therefore, this study would add to the literature by using action research to investigate the use of close reading strategies in a digital and traditional format in a reading intervention class. The results from this study could provide valuable insight to teachers and learners in different educational disciplines and fields.

**Theoretical Framework**

This action research will be integrating three theories as the framework for its design and purpose. Cognitivist and social constructivism will be intertwined into this intervention to support improvement in fifth grade students reading comprehension scores following the introduction and use of four close reading strategies. The cognitivist theory provides teachers with the support for helping students monitor their learning (Hattan & Lupo, 2020). The social constructivism theory provides teachers with a framework for structuring engaging classrooms and supports using peer interaction as an instructional technique (Farkas & Jang, 2019). The expectancy value theory provides teachers with the support that students will be as successful as they believe can become and that motivation is impacted by how much they value the idea of reading. This section explores the following topics: (a) cognitivist theory, (b) social constructivism theory, and (c) expectancy value theory.

**Cognitivist Theory**

Cognitivism is one of the three early learning theories used to create instructional content and lessons. Cognitivist focuses on “inner mental processes such as thinking, memory, and problem-solving” (Altuna & Lareki, 2015, p. 2). Cognitivism emphasizes that a learner can “learn better if the information is presented logically, making it easier
for the learners to assimilate the knowledge” (Arghode et al., 2017, p.14). Thus, teachers should use instructional techniques like graphic organizers and thinking charts to help students see content logically. The cognitivist theory lends itself to support learning as a mental process, and knowledge must be acquired (Arghode et al., 2017). Cognitivist theory identifies how the learner processes information based on the teachers’ careful selection of materials (Yilmaz, 2011). The cognitivist theory supports the usage of graphic organizers since learning is a mental process (Yilmaz, 2011).

According to Davidson (2010), cognitivists believe that proper reading development should occur in stages, and students experience difficulties when they miss certain stages. Cognitivist theory suggests it is necessary to build literacy skills in a particular order and avoid specific deficits within students' thinking and skills (Davidson, 2010). Classrooms that operate with cognitivist techniques help students understand how knowledge is activated, integrated, and revised (Hattan & Lupo, 2020). Readers activate their knowledge by recalling what they have already experienced relating to the text, integrate the perceived meaning with their understanding to make conclusions, and decide if they need to revise any parts of their thinking based on their reading (Hattan & Lupo, 2020).

The close reading intervention of this study will help students build their own metacognitive repertoire. Metacognitive strategies are helpful for self-regulated learning and revising one's thinking for comprehension while reading or learning (Hattan & Lupo, 2020; Yilmaz, 2011). Close reading strategies implemented will help students become aware of their thinking through cognitivist instructional routines and strategies.
Social Constructivism Theory

The social constructivism theory is based on Vygotsky's (1978) view that learning is a social process, and learners acquire learning through social interaction and various behaviors. The theory is introduced into the educational environment to help learners construct meaning in their own way. Social constructivism draws on the idea that learning is situated in circumstances, activity, or culture. Social constructivists believe "knowledge is internalized via social engagement in the world" (Handsfield, 2016 as cited in Farkas & Jang, 2019, p. 57).

Social constructivism focuses on developing meaning for the environment through interactions with others. Learning is “acquired through an active process” (Amineh & Asl, 2015, p. 6). Social constructivism theorists claim learning occurs through events coupled with human dialogue (Martinez, Dye, & Gonzalez, 2017). For example, teachers should use techniques like “Webquest, peer collaborations, problem-based instruction and other methods that involve learning with others” (Ardiansyah & Ujihanti, 2018, p. 8). Social constructivism theorists emphasize participants being active and engaged constructors of their own knowledge.

The social cognitivism theory asserts that “meaningful learning occurs when students are engaged in activities such as interactions and collaboration” (Amineh & Asl, 2015, p. 6). Classrooms that adhere to this theory help students become involved, have opportunities to be in charge, and have space for constant engagement and communication with each other. Social constructivism centralizes the stories of students, mainly “how their realities and knowledge are constructed” (Martinez et al., 2017, p. 5).

The use of close reading strategies with social constructivism theory supports learning
that can be socially and culturally created by the students and would benefit readers of all levels as there is a collective understanding when students learn in groups.

A classroom that uses the social constructivism theory allows students to learn through collaboration and unique cooperative social skills (Ardiansyah & Ujihanti, 2018). Teachers can develop a classroom of shared learners by emphasizing peer-to-peer interactions (Farkas & Jang, 2019). Social constructivism theory relies heavily on helping learners develop their meaning (Beck & Condy, 2017; Orrock & Clark, 2018; Whaley et al., 2019). African American boys would benefit from a social constructivism learning environment based on their reading and conversational needs (Howard, 2013). Wood and Jocius (2013) suggest that African American boys need collaboration in the classroom. Husband and Grace (2020) build on this research, revealing that these “boys are likely to be engaged and thrive in classrooms and activities where literacy is viewed as a social and collaborative process, rather than in classrooms where literacy is viewed solely in individualistic terms” (p. 9). In other words, if African American boys are taught to read in environments where social engagement is actively encouraged in the reading process, then they are more likely to be successful.

Looking beyond the classroom to the holistic school environment, Orrock and Clark (2018) explored several factors contributing to African American male students’ success within the classroom. One theme that emerged from their qualitative data was "belonging to a school community" (Orrock & Clark, 2018, p. 20). This study demonstrated that their population of African American male students increased their academic success by having relationships with their faculty and peers. They were motivated to participate within the classroom community because they felt like they
belonged. Orrock’s and Clark's research supports the findings of both the conclusions of Wood and Jocius (2013) and Husband and Grace (2020) in that school environments should be social, community and collaboration oriented to support African American male youths achieve the desired learning outcomes. According to Husband (2012b), African American boys require reading environments to interact physically and mentally with the text rather than listening and sitting still. Teachers who work with African American boys should model close reading strategies that show students how to interrogate the text, which will require students to examine their thinking, the author's meaning, and previous connections with the text (Husband, 2012a). African American students should have critical conversations about the text, including discussions that analyze character perspectives and authors' opinions and allow them to make their meaning of the text (Wood & Jocius, 2013).

This intervention will include using close reading strategies in a digital format that is supported by peer collaboration. Research demonstrates that learning is a social process and supports the need for African American boys to succeed in learning environments that provide social interaction using theories including social constructivism.

**Expectancy Value Theory**

Expectancy value theory plays a large role in a students’ motivation. Reading motivation is influenced by several factors such as a student’s confidence as a reader and how they value reading, which in turn affects their reading performance (Baba Öztürk & Aydogmus, 2021; Griffin, Farran, & Mindrila, 2020). A student’s self-perception about reading correlates to their beliefs about how well they will do in that area (Walgermo,
Levels of expectancy value also impact how much interest and value, or effort, students put into their chosen activities at school or at home. Therefore, when students have higher expectancy values in certain areas, they are more likely do well in that area (Cook & Artino, 2016). Motivation is a result of the perceived value and expected level of success. How a student perceives the usefulness of the reading activity affects their motivation (Cook & Artino, 2016). This is why students need reading comprehension strategies to bridge the gap from being a struggling reader to becoming a competent reader. Expectancy value impacts academics and even students career choices (Cook & Artino, 2016). When students see themselves as struggling readers they are more likely to stray away from certain career fields, they expect themselves to do poorly, or they do not see that area bringing value to their lives. When students have a low level of expectancy value in reading, they naturally avoid reading based activities within and outside the classroom (Cook & Artino, 2016; Griffin et al., 2020). When students have a high expectancy value, they are optimistic about their reading, their learning, and their occupational potentials.

**Summary**

Researchers have demonstrated that young African American boys struggle with reading comprehension (Howard, 2013). Educators should be mindful of which instructional strategies should be implemented to meet the needs of these unique learners (Nelson, 2016). This chapter discusses social, systematic, and academic factors that severely impact the learning needs of young African American boys.

Reading comprehension can be defined as combining multiple mental processes to interpret the printed text (Beck & Condy, 2017a). Readers must gather the author's
intended meaning to demonstrate success with comprehension skills. Research has used mixed methods designs with close reading intervention methods to show an increase in student reading comprehension skills and scores.

Close reading is one instructional strategy that can be used to support struggling readers. Close reading will be combined with digital annotation to support learners via the use of underlining, highlighting, questioning the text, and sketching visuals that match the author's meaning. The cognitivist and social constructivism theories inform this action research study while the expectancy value theory underpins a students’ motivation to read.
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this action research was to implement close reading strategies and evaluate its impact on fifth grade African American male students’ reading comprehension skills and their experiences with reading at Wisteria Lane Elementary School. The study used an action research design to gain insight into the students’ levels of motivation to read, as well as motivation to read in other classes, and evaluate their reading comprehension skills after using four close reading strategies implemented during the study. This action research occurred in a title one elementary school located in a rural school district in South Carolina.

The research explored the following questions:

1. How does the implementation of close reading strategies impact the reading comprehension skills of fifth grade African American male students at Wisteria Lane Elementary School?

2. How and in what ways does the implementation of close reading strategies influence fifth grade African American male students’ motivation to read in other classes?

This chapter is organized into nine main sections. The first section discusses the research design and the reasons for using a mixed methods study. The second and third sections review the setting and participants of the study, respectively. The fourth section explains the innovation of this study in detail.
The next two sections cover the data collection process and the data analysis procedures, respectively. The procedures and timeline of the innovation are covered in the seventh section. The eighth section examines the rigor and trustworthiness of the study. The final section identifies the plan for sharing the findings of the study with the local and state community.

**Research Design**

My purpose as a researcher was focused on implementing close reading strategies and evaluating its impact on fifth grade African American male students’ reading comprehension skills and their experiences with reading. I used action research to address my research questions. As a budding researcher and experienced teacher, I wanted to work collaboratively with my students and school officials to identify factors that contributed to my current research questions and evaluate the influence of the research intervention. Action research is an inquiry process that allows teachers to learn from real classroom settings to improve the quality of instruction (Vaughn, Parsons, Kologi, & Saul, 2014). Research shows that African American boys have been marginalized academically by the United States school system, which has led to drastic gaps in test scores and graduation rates compared to their counterparts (Educational Testing Service, 2011; Fenzel & Richardson, 2019; Howard, 2013). This study allowed me to partner with the students, introduce new reading strategies in a digital setting, and analyze their written reflections and perceptions about the study. This information helped improve my practice for teaching in my local community. It was also important to analyze the voices of the students and give them the opportunity to be partners in the curriculum. Action research supports social justice by prompting researchers to evaluate their practices and
beliefs within educational contexts (Mertler, 2017). Action research provided me the opportunity to advocate for African American boys by contributing to the literature relating to close reading skills (Spector, Merrill, Elen, & Bishop, 2014; Wasserberg, 2018). By using an action research design, I had the opportunity to explore ideas that could improve my sphere of influence in my current school setting.

Action research includes several cycles of planning, acting, developing, and reflecting. Action research differs from traditional social science research by focusing on an intervention within the research setting, often in multiple phases (Vaughan, Boerum, & Whitehead, 2019). While using the action research process through the stages of my research, I was able to adjust plans, gauge the success of the research methods, and reflect on data as a whole in response to the research questions. This followed the “action research four-step framework which includes (a) studying and planning, (b) taking action, (c) collecting and analyzing data, and (d) reflecting on the data” (Buss, 2018, p. 25).

This was the most appropriate method for answering my research questions because it allowed me to create a well-organized plan, implement the intervention and interviews in phases, and collect and reflect on the data. At the end of the research project, I performed several processes of self-reflection to improve my research design. I used a convergent parallel mixed methods approach to combine my quantitative and qualitative data, which also allowed me to collect quantitative and qualitative data simultaneously. A mixed-methods approach was the most appropriate choice to answer my research questions about fifth graders' perceptions and the impact of the intervention on their reading comprehension skills and motivation to read.
A mixed-methods approach allows researchers to use both quantitative and qualitative data because it provides a thorough approach for understanding the research problem (Creswell, 2014). My study collected student pre-test and post-test scores from the Reading Comprehension Assessment, which were combined and analyzed with student focus group interviews, student perception surveys, formative assessments, and weekly student reflection journal responses for triangulation.

Triangulation is the analysis of multiple sources of data for complete understanding (Campbell et al., 2020). This triangulation method provided me with validity and reliability. The quantitative data was used to analyze student numerical scores before and after the intervention. The advantages of using quantitative data includes a statistical analysis of data and the ability for it to be replicated by other researchers or teachers (Daniel, 2016). The qualitative data included student focus group interviews, weekly student reflection journal responses, and one open-ended question from the student perception survey, which allowed the students to have a voice within their learning environment (Wasserberg, 2018). Qualitative data also provides descriptive information given by interviews, which allows participants to be contributors during the research process (Daniel, 2016). The qualitative data collected in this study was analyzed and provided insight into fifth grade boys’ perceptions to improve current teacher instruction. Finally, action research can help teachers influence their surroundings (Spector et al., 2014). This mixed-methods action research study helped me contribute to the literature and provided a holistic perspective on the utilization of close reading strategies based on the research findings.
Setting

This action research took place in my reading intervention classroom at Wisteria Lane Elementary School. My classroom was located in the main Wisteria Lane Elementary school building. All of the buildings and portable classrooms on campus needed complete renovations, as they represent a time before elementary schools were made to look fun (e.g., the walls are a pale yellow and made of cement). The Promethean boards and high-tech cameras look out of place on chipping walls and the historic appearing classrooms. The possibility of returning to virtual-lead instruction would require technology upgrades such as the installation of newer working cameras, microphones, Promethean boards, and additional Wi-Fi connectivity. This classroom was formerly a fourth-grade classroom. In the past, I have taught first grade and third grade; however, I do not teach subjects outside of reading intervention presently. Due to the students' schedules and district mandates, I was only allowed to pull students out of their science or social studies classes.

The classroom used in this study had a Promethean board at the front of the room. There were also two wall sized white boards. My classroom had six movable desks for students and one kidney-shaped table. I had a rectangle table that I used as a desk located in the front corner of the room. My room also had 12 file cabinets that housed reading intervention materials for first through fifth grade students. The instructional materials in the filing cabinets were approximately worth $10,000 and were a few years old. When it was time to introduce the close reading strategy, students spaced themselves out in their
individual desks as I gave instructions on the board. When it was time for students to. When it was time for students to work in pairs, they pulled their desks together to form a pair. The remaining students worked with me for direct instruction. A maximum of two students worked with me at the kidney-shaped table for close observations. All participants in this study used school-issued laptops and had access to outlets and microphones to charge their laptops when needed. While my reading intervention classroom had cameras and microphones installed in 2020, we did not use them during this study.

Reading intervention is a class session to help students who struggle with reading. The purpose for my reading intervention classroom was to provide students with strategies for improved reading comprehension and to strengthen students in the area of literacy. If a student is in the fifth grade, at a minimum they should be able to read on grade level. However, students who were below grade level needed extra support to become stronger readers. Students assigned to receive reading intervention services had demonstrated through several data points such as an online test, teacher observations, or even paper pencil reading tests to have had a weakness in the area of reading. Therefore, students who read at least one to two grade levels below their appropriate grade level were assigned to attend my reading intervention classroom. I also supported students in grades 3 through 5 whose scores on the SC state reading tests results were deficient. As the reading interventionist, I also hosted monthly parent literacy nights to support their parents and held a contest among the students to encourage reading participation.

Due to the severity of the weakness in my students’ foundational reading skills, the students continued with reading intervention sessions throughout the entire academic
year. The 45 minutes, three times a week, reading intervention sessions provided students with activities that helped the student manipulate phonics sounds to build their decoding skills. Students practiced rereading text, looking for the author’s meaning of the text, and only worked on material that helped promote their reading growth. A Promethean board was used daily to project text, watch videos, and for students to interact with the board. Students were required to bring their school issued laptops to each class session. However, there were many days when laptops were in repair or students left them at home. A web-based instructional materials program called Raz Kidz was purchased when we were forced into virtual teaching and learning secondary to the COVID 19 pandemic. I continued to use Raz Kidz to provide student with electronic access to thousands of books across different genres and for varied reading levels. In using Raz Kidz, students could record themselves as well as listen to text being read to them.

**Participants**

The school serves 264 students from pre-kindergarten to fifth grade. Each year I serve 30-40 students as the reading interventionist. During one reading intervention class period, I have four to six students in my classroom. Throughout the day, I hold four or five classes. Initially each class had only five students; however, when homeroom assignments shifted, it affected my reading intervention classroom size. The criteria for inclusion in this study included: (1) African American males in the fifth grade; (2) regular education students who did not receive Special Education services like Resource, Occupational Therapy, or Speech Therapy; and (3) students with below grade-level reading levels. I purposefully selected these students because African American boys’ graduation rates and reading scores have been significantly lower than their counterparts
for decades (Educational Testing Service, 2011; Orrock & Clark, 2018). Statistics demonstrate this group of students have been marginalized by the United States educational systems (Ford & Moore, 2013; Howard, 2013). Reading below grade level indicates that students may not possess all the necessary skills to comprehend grade-level text accurately and need supplemental instruction (Kuhn et al., 2017; Vadasay & Sanders, 2008). Recent South Carolina READY scores demonstrate that 63% of the fifth graders at Wisteria Lane Elementary do not read at grade level (South Carolina Department of Education, 2018). This percentile dictated the students are required to have reading intervention services. A parent of each child provided informed, written, consent for participation in the research study (see Appendix A). Additionally, each student provided assent to participate in this study (see Appendix A). Nine students turned in parental consent and assented to participate in this dissertation research study.

All students of this study were enrolled in one of my reading intervention classes and each attended my class three times each week. The students made up a mix of reading levels. All students classified as reading below the fifth-grade level, but students had to at least read on a third-grade level to enter the study. Reading levels indicated what level of books students could read independently or with teacher support (Dotson-Shupe, 2017). Reading levels could range from every month of the year. For example, a student could read at the grade equivalent of 3.1, which represented one month in the third grade or read at a grade equivalent of 3.5 which represented five months in the third grade. Students could read at a 4.3 which represented three months into the fourth-grade year. Thus, the students in this population represented a broad range of reading levels, but each had to be at a third to fourth grade reading levels. During this intervention, students
worked as a whole class, worked in pairs, and worked individually. Six students participated in the Focus Group Interview. See Table 3.1 for the demographics of students in this study using the pseudonym created for the protection of each student.

Table 3.1 Student Demographics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Reading Level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>*Ayden</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vincent</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*Christian</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*Khalil</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*John</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dareal</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*Dwight</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*Keaton</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matthew</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: * indicates those students who were included in the focus group interviews.

Innovation

This innovation employed close reading techniques as a reading intervention strategy to help fifth grade students who have a minimum of two years’ delay in their reading skills improve their reading comprehension, with a hope of also increasing their overall interest in reading. These close reading strategies were new to the students as well as using the strategies in a digital environment. The students read a variety of fiction and nonfiction text during this intervention. The objectives for this study were that students were able to use close reading strategies to successfully pass the researcher-created post assessment. The reading strategies learning objectives included noting the transition of
character attitudes, noting events in the text, recognizing important details, and recalling
the main ideas. This innovation consisted of three stages. Stage one included students
taking an initial researcher-created assessment and informing students about the study
and their daily routines for engaging with the intervention strategies. Stage two provided
students with the opportunity to participate in the four different close reading strategies
over the course of ten weeks. The students read several books in digital print during the
innovation period. To understand the impact of utilizing close reading strategies on the
students’ motivation to read, students completed a critical thinking reflection journal at
the end of each week. The way the innovation was designed was that each week students
would engage with a different close reading strategy for either the first time or second
time. Four texts were selected, and the students used each book for two weeks. At the end
of the second week, which then covered the use of two different close reading strategies,
the students took the formative assessment using Raz Kids on the book they just
completed reading. During stage three, at the end of this study, students completed a
student perception survey, participated in a focus group interview, and completed the
Reading Comprehension Assessment.

**Justification for the Innovation**

This unique intervention included researched-based close reading skills to engage
fifth grade readers (Beck & Condy, 2017). Close reading strategies were chosen based on
comprehensive research that these reading strategies could help support students with
improved reading comprehension skills (Glover, 2017; Petersen, 2020). Close reading is
traditionally done using a paper-pencil format. Some close reading techniques required
marking the text with symbols or making small notes called annotating (Kalir et al.,
2020). The innovation of my study furthered the limited, existing research that supports best practices with close reading using digital annotations and digital texts. The close reading strategies were new to the students; however, the students had become exposed to the digital text environment called Raz Kids during the COVID pandemic.

**Stages of the Innovation**

This innovation had three stages. The stages progressed from orientation, implementation, to assessment. The innovation was included as a part of the students’ existing reading intervention classes, which convened for 45 minutes, three times each week.

The students used the digital text environment called Raz Kids for this innovation. Students were familiar with their laptops and logging into the Raz Kids portal. While they have used Raz Kids in the past, the implementation of the close reading strategies within this environment was new to them. The first three days of the 11-week study housed the orientation and introduction to the study and its protocols. On the first day of each week that there was a new reading strategy used, there was an introduction to the strategy and how to use the digital tools within Raz Kids. Table 3.2 displays the stages of the innovation process.

**Supplemental digital tools used for the innovation.** Raz Kids has several annotation tools for students to use to support learning. For the purpose of this study students used the note pad, digital pen, sticker selection, and the highlighting tools. Students used the same digital pen and note taking feature for every week of the strategy. The digital pen allowed the students to mark on the digital text. Students used the pen to circle words or write words directly on the digital text. The note taking feature is a digital
Table 3.2 Stages of Innovation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>Student Activity</th>
<th>Duration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stage 1 –</td>
<td>Students were introduced to the study, the technology used, the reading strategies covered. Students completed the Reading Comprehension pre-assessment.</td>
<td>1 Week</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orientation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage 2 -</td>
<td>Students used each close reading strategy twice. Students completed a critical thinking reflection journal at the end of each week. The last week was a time for students to make up use of a reading strategy if they were absent.</td>
<td>11 Weeks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implementation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage 3 -</td>
<td>Students completed the Reading Comprehension post-assessment and a survey. Students participated in a focus group interview.</td>
<td>1 week</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessment</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

notepad in the form of a square where students write comments or questions about the text. Students could think of this as a sticky note and write their thoughts or comments in real time. The highlighting tool allowed students to highlight words or phrases in the text. There were several color options. The stamp tool provided stamps like stars, arrows, question marks, and a smiley face.

During the Aha moment strategy students used the digital pen to mark on the text and the note taking feature. For the Hmm moment strategy students used the stamp features and the note taking features to write comments about the text. The B.U.R.N. strategy required the students to use the highlighting tool, the digital pen, and the note-taking feature. The R.A.P strategy asked the students to use the digital pen and the note-taking feature. Table 3.3 identifies the week of the innovation, the close reading strategy being used, and the textbook being read.
Table 3.3 *Week of the Innovation, Close Reading Strategy Used, and Text Title*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Close Reading Strategy</th>
<th>Text Title</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Orientation</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Aha moment</td>
<td>100th day Project</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Hmm moment</td>
<td>100th day Project</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>B.U.R.N.</td>
<td>Jackie Robinson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>R.A.P.</td>
<td>Jackie Robinson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Aha moment</td>
<td>Jessica Loves Soccer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Hmm moment</td>
<td>Jessica Loves Soccer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>B.U.R.N.</td>
<td>Inside Your Body</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>R.A.P.</td>
<td>Inside Your Body</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Student choice</td>
<td>Make up Week</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Stage 1: Orientation (1 week).** At the start, Stage 1 of this innovation, students completed an initial Reading Comprehension pre-assessment of their reading comprehension abilities. Then, students were introduced to the layout, procedures, digital and non-digital materials used, and routines of the study involving the use of close reading strategies. My role as both their reading intervention teacher and researcher were explained. The students’ role and the actions needed for a successful intervention were explained. They had the opportunity to ask questions throughout the week and during the study. I showed the students how our desks were to be organized and explained the digital tools to be used for annotating the text with close reading strategies. We spent time locating the book of the week in Raz Kids and practicing using the highlight and note taking features. I introduced the students to their digital weekly student reflection journals that were to be completed at the end of each week. I did a mini demonstration of
each strategy showing where each poster for the close reading strategies were in the classroom. We discussed using inside voices in the classroom and the process of rereading to comprehend the text as a part of our daily procedures.

**Stage 2: Implementation (11 weeks).** In Stage 2 of this innovation, students began to work with the close reading strategies using the Raz Kids digital environment on a week-by-week basis. Each strategy was used for one week with all the strategies being used twice during the implementation stage. The implementation stage included one week (the last week) for students to make up time, to work with strategies if they had been absent during the innovation stage. For the remaining students during the last week of the implementation stage, they chose one close reading strategy to reuse again. The following paragraphs will explain the four close reading strategies used (a) Aha moment, (b) Hmm moment, (c) B.U.R.N strategy, and (d) R.A.P. strategy.

**Aha moment.** I modeled with the students how to use the Aha moment strategy (Beers & Probst, 2013). The Aha moment requires that readers mark the text when they realize something new, or the character realizes something new in the text (Petersen, 2020). Petersen (2020) found the Aha moment strategy to be preferred by her students during her close reading study. This strategy allowed students to connect more with the text, students used it to notice their own thoughts, and students used it with eagerness because of its flexibility (Petersen, 2020). Aha moments help readers stay in tune with the text and make personal connections, reflections, and contributions to the text as readers (Azmuddin et al., 2020). These types of thinking skills support reading comprehension (Aisyah & Arief, 2021). The learning objectives for this strategy were to identify the transition of the characters’ behavior or attitudes. The Aha moment strategy was
introduced for the first time with the 100th Day Project text. The text has characters that are young African American students, which helped make the text culturally relevant. Culturally relevant text has been known to have a positive impact on reading motivation and engagement with African American boys (Bryant, 2015; Essien, 2017). The second text that was used with the Aha moment strategy was Jessica Loves Soccer. I modeled marking the text digitally with the pen to write the word Aha and using some central phrases. Then, we worked as a class to use the same phrases throughout the book. There were two central phrases used with the Aha moment strategy including “I realize”, and “the character realized”. On the second day, the students worked in a small group to use the strategy, leaving annotated comments throughout the digital text, and I provided feedback verbally as I walked around the classroom. I monitored student interactions by walking around the room and looking through the digital portal. As I reviewed the student's annotations from my computer, I saw who still needed suggestions and encouragement to think deeper about the text as they decided what Aha moments caught their attention. I provided the students with written feedback that allowed them to add to their annotations. I gave individualized verbal feedback. Finally, on the third day we were together, the students then practiced using the Aha moment strategy independently as they continued to read the text. The students practiced using the Aha moment during week 2 and week 6 of Stage 2. However, during week 6 of using the Aha moment strategy students did not get to practice it in its entirety. During this week our district experienced severe weather, and our schools were closed. On the last day of each week, students were scheduled to write in their weekly student reflection journal their experience in using the Aha moment strategy. Only eight of the 18 student weekly
reflection journal responses were collected from both cycles of the Aha moment close reading strategy.

**Hmm moment.** The next close reading strategy students were introduced to was called the Hmm moment (Petersen, 2020). The Hmm moment strategy encourages readers to mark text that they feel a personal connection with, including moments that remind them of their lives or moments they find interesting or confusing. In the research of Ellis (2020), African American male students made personal connections with the text, helping them to remember what they read. For this reading strategy, the students could annotate the text with different symbols like a question mark or a star and then add the necessary notes to the text using the annotation tools. The learning objectives for this strategy were to see if the text related to their lives and to explain any sequential events in the text. The Hmm moment strategy was introduced for the first time with the 100th Day Project text. When the students used the Hmm moment close reading strategy the second time, the text was *Jessica Loves Soccer*. On the first day the class used the Hmm moment reading strategy, I modeled for the students during an all class read-aloud. I modeled what to do when I got to a confusing part of the story, and how to annotate that part of the text. We used phrases like “this reminds me of,” or “I am confused by,” or “Hmm,” or “I want to reread this section because…” For the remaining part of this first day of class, we continued to work as a class using the Hmm moment and together looked for areas of the text that students felt a connection with. On the second day we were together, the students worked in a small group using the phrases associated with the Hmm moment strategy. I joined each small group and encouraged peer discussions by asking the students to share comments they made while using the Hmm moment. This close reading
strategy helped readers recognize how stories connected to their lives and helped make meaning of the text and monitored their thinking (Mariage et al., 2020). As a part of peer discussions, students explained to their peers their personal connection with certain parts of the story as well as responded to others’ comments as another layer for reading engagement. Finally, on the third day we were together, the students continued using the Hmm moment strategy independently as they continued to read the text. The students practiced using the Hmm moment close reading strategy during week 3 and week 7 of Stage 2. Students were supposed to complete the formative assessment created within Raz Kids when they finished reading the 100th Day Project and Jessica Loves Soccer texts. However, there were many days that students did not bring their laptops to class, and that slowed their individual progress to practice the strategies as well as impacted their abilities to complete the formative assessments. As a result, only three students completed the formative assessment for the 100th Day Project text. I did not have any students complete the formative assessment for the Jessica loves Soccer text. On the last day of each week, students were scheduled to write in their weekly student reflection journals about their experience in using the Hmm moment strategy. Only 12 of the 18 student weekly reflection journal responses were collected from both cycles of the Hmm moment close reading strategy.

**B.U.R.N. strategy.** The next close reading strategy the students used was the B.U.R.N. strategy. The B.U.R.N. strategy encourages readers to perform several actions with the text to support reading comprehension (Baker & Mcenery, 2017). Consistent with the B.U.R.N. strategy, students drew a box around a paragraph, underlined important ideas, read over details, and noted the central idea in the text (Mariage et al.,
When used with third graders, Mariage et al. (2020) found the B.U.R.N. strategy helped students with annotating, discussions, and reading comprehension, ultimately showing improvement in the students’ reading comprehension. The final step of the B.U.R.N. strategy was to note the main idea of the text in the margins, which helps readers solidify their thinking (Mariage et al., 2020). Baker and Mcenery (2017) found when readers incorporated the B.U.R.N. strategy with their reading, it provided a framework to both read and think as they worked through the text to paraphrase after each paragraph. Additionally, rereading text more than one time is a big component of close reading. The objectives of this strategy were to recognize important details. The B.U.R.N. strategy was introduced with the Jackie Robinson text and then again with the Inside Your Body text. On the first day, the week that the B.U.R.N. strategy was used, I modeled how to follow each letter of the acronym of B.U.R.N. I modeled with the digital pen how to select a paragraph and then draw a box around the paragraph. I then used the pen to underline key details and reread the text out loud to the students. Finally, I used the pen and the text features to note my main idea in the margins. We then practiced this strategy all together as a class, and I asked students to explain the B.U.R.N strategy in their own words to see if they understood its purpose and the steps it uses. On the second day we were together, the students worked in a small group. I joined each small group and asked one of the students to read the text to their small group and asked another student to perform the B.U.R.N. strategy steps in order. Together, we discussed the central idea as we practiced this together. Finally, on the third day we were together, the students practiced this close reading strategy independently as they read the text. While students were working independently, I supported students with using the digital
annotation tools and in their practice using the B.U.R.N. strategy as they continued to read the text. Students were scheduled to use the B.U.R.N. strategy during week 4 and week 8 of Stage 2. During week 8 of the innovation, I became sick, therefore this strategy was not used for those three scheduled days. Additionally, there was not a formative assessment completed during the B.U.R.N. strategy weeks. On the last day of each week, students were scheduled to write in their weekly student reflection journals about their experience in using the B.U.R.N strategy. Only eight of the 18 student weekly reflection journal responses were collected from both cycles of the B.U.R.N. close reading strategy.

**R.A.P. strategy.** The last strategy that I introduced to the students was called the R.A.P. strategy. Each letter stands for an action from the student. The R stands for reading a paragraph, A stands for asking yourself the main idea, and the P stands for paraphrasing (Joseph et al., 2016; Leidig et al., 2018). By including paraphrasing as a step, it was increasing students' ability to summarize, reflect, and develop their own meaning from text (İlter, 2017). The R.A.P. strategy involved the use of self-regulated learning techniques that helped support student metacognition skills (Smith, 2018). Metacognition’s skills help students monitor their thinking and their reading skills which impact reading comprehension. Leidig et al. (2018) conducted three studies with children under the age of 11 and found that students made gains in reading comprehension when the R.A.P strategy was used with trained instructors. Another study using the R.A.P. strategy with three 4th grade male students using nonfiction text found their reading comprehension skills were enhanced (İlter, 2017). The study also demonstrated how two of the students were able to generalize the strategy and use it across multiple content
areas successfully. The lesson objectives for this strategy were to recall the main idea. I introduced the R.A.P. strategy using the Jackie Robinson text and the Inside Your body text. On the first day the R.A.P. close reading strategy was used in the innovation, I modeled reading the paragraph or pages of the text in front of the students and then verbally asked myself “What is the main idea?” Finally, after modeling the R and the A part of the strategy, I used the digital pen and the notepad features to paraphrase the text.

We repeated these steps as we navigated the text as a class. For my study, the students were instructed to use this strategy for reading multiple pages of text, instead of using it for just a paragraph. During the all-class read aloud, when it was time to perform the asking yourself the main idea strategy, I demonstrated for the students how to comment on the text using their annotation tool. On the second day we were together, the students worked in a small group. They used the R.A.P. strategy and interacted with each other about what they wrote for the ask yourself the main idea comment. Finally, on the third day we were together, students read independently, asked themselves questions, and paraphrased the text in the digital book. Students were scheduled to use the R.A.P. strategy during week 5 and week 9 of Stage 2. During week 9, none of the students attended the three reading intervention sessions that week as their homeroom teachers kept the students in their class to prepare them for benchmark testing. Students were scheduled to complete the formative assessment created within Raz Kids when they finished reading the Jackie Robinson and Inside Your Body book. There were two students who completed the formative assessment for the Jackie Robinson book. Only one student completed the formative assessment for the Inside your Body text. On the last day of each week, students were scheduled to write in their weekly student reflection
journals about their experience in using the R.A.P. strategy. Only 11 of the 18 student weekly reflection journal responses were collected from both cycles of the R.A.P. close reading strategy.

Make-up and student choice. Students were encouraged to attend school regularly; however, if students do have unforeseen absences, they had the opportunity to make up missed practice time using one or more of the close reading strategies. Use of my researcher’s journal and review of the weekly student reflection journals served to keep track of which strategies students needed to make up. During the make-up sessions, students had the opportunity to work with me to review the close reading strategy they missed during the original instruction. As best as possible, the student had the opportunity to engage with the close reading strategies as described above. There were three days scheduled for makeup instruction during the last week of the Implementation stage. Due to my absences, severe weather, and school benchmark testing, we only had two days for make-up instruction for one class of students and one day of makeup instruction for the second class of students. Students who did not miss any days during the study had the opportunity to reuse any of the close reading strategies they preferred with a book of their choice. Both make-up use of close reading strategies and student choice of close reading strategies took place during week 10 of Stage 2. On the last day of the week, students were scheduled to write in their weekly student reflection journals about their experience in using the close reading strategy that week.

Stage 3: Assessment (1 week). At the conclusion of this study, the students participated in three separate activities during their normal reading intervention time.
Students completed the Reading Comprehension post-assessment, a survey, and participated in a focus group interview.

After 10 weeks of the innovation and utilizing the four close reading strategies in a digital environment, the first day during week 11, students individually took the Reading Comprehension post-assessment. This assessment was the same instrument used at the beginning of the study. Students independently completed this assessment using a paper and pencil format and it took them approximately 50 minutes to complete it. On day two of week 11 that we were together, students completed a student perception survey. On the third day of week 11 that we were together, students were in a small group and participated in a focus group interview with me.

**Data Collection**

To investigate the research questions of this study, I used five data collection sources. I incorporated both quantitative and qualitative data sources, including a researcher created Reading Comprehension Assessment, formative assessments, weekly student reflection journals, focus group interviews, and student perception surveys. See Table 3.4 for how each data source aligned with the research questions of this study.

**Quantitative Data Sources**

**Reading Comprehension Assessment.** The first source I used to gather information about students’ reading comprehension skills was the researcher created Reading Comprehension Assessment (see Table 3.5). This researcher created the 17-multiple choice question assessment utilizing stories from SC READY that were
Table 3.4 **Research Question and Data Source Alignment**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research questions</th>
<th>Data sources</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. How does the implementation of close reading strategies impact the reading</td>
<td>• Pre – Post Reading Comprehension</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>comprehension skills of fifth grade African American male students at Wisteria</td>
<td>Assessment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lane Elementary School?</td>
<td>• Formative Assessments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. How and in what ways does the implementation of close reading strategies</td>
<td>• Student Perception Survey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>influence fifth grade African American male students’ motivation to read in other</td>
<td>• Focus Group Interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>classes?</td>
<td>• Weekly Student Reflection</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>Journal Responses</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

designed for students reading at the 3rd grade level (see Appendix B). My elementary
school reading coach and another third-grade teacher at my school reviewed the Reading
Comprehension Assessment for accuracy of questions related to the reading level of my
participants. Each student completed both the Reading Comprehension pre- and post-
assessment in a paper and pencil format. This test tracked student data from the
beginning of the intervention to the conclusion of the intervention to add to the gap in the
existing literature regarding use of close reading strategies with African American boys
in the fifth grade. The outcomes of the post-test assessment provided further data about
the students’ comprehension levels of a third-grade text. The scoring of the test was
completed by me. These tests took 30-40 minutes to complete.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reading Strategies</th>
<th>Lesson Objectives</th>
<th>Assessment Questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Aha moment</strong></td>
<td>The student will be able to identify the transition of a character’s behaviors, or attitude. The student will be able identify changes they may have realized while reading the text.</td>
<td>Fiction: “Panning for Gold“, a long story 1. How did Ben’s attitude about his sister change in the story? 2. Which sentence represents how Ben felt in the beginning of the story? 3. Which sentence represents how Ben felt at the end of the story? 4. How did Sarah’s attitude change from the start to the end of the story?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Hmm moment</strong></td>
<td>The students will explain or identify events in the text that they consider interesting or confusing. The student will explain or identify events from the text that relate to their lives.</td>
<td>Fiction: “Enjoy the Moment“ 1. Which answer identifies a significant or interesting event in the text? 2. Which describes the process Sam took to bring the fish in? 3. What is the main idea of this text? 4. What event best describes how Gran helped Sam catch a fish?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>B.U.R.N. Strategy</strong></td>
<td>The student will identify important details and recognize the central idea in the text.</td>
<td>Nonfiction: “Sea Turtles” 1. Select the answer choice that best represents one of the key details from this text. 2. What is the main idea from this text? 3. Select the answer that best represents the life of a sea turtle after they hatch. 4. What is important to know about sea turtles surviving?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>R.A.P. Strategy</strong></td>
<td>The student will recall the main idea after reading the text. The student will interpret the events of the text by paraphrasing.</td>
<td>Nonfiction: “Wild Kangaroos”, a short story 1. Which answer below is correct information about kangaroos? 2. What is the main idea of this text? 3. From the options below, which could be another appropriate title? 4. What was the author’s purpose for writing this text?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Formative assessments. The second quantitative data collection method used to answer my research questions was formative assessments. Formative assessments provide real time observations of skills and give information to help teachers monitor student growth as it relates to the current objectives (Gaston, Martinez, & Martin, 2016; Hall, Cohen, Vue, & Ganley, 2015). During this study, the students were scheduled to complete a digital formative assessment after reading each of the books used in the innovation. The formative assessments were created within Raz Kids to show their reading comprehension of the book read (see Appendix C). The online quizzes had five to six questions covering lower and higher order thinking comprehension questions as it related to using the close reading strategies. Higher order thinking questions required students to make inferences, drawing on details from the book and experiences from their real lives.

Student perception surveys. The next data source I used for collecting quantitative data was a student perception survey. At the end of this study, students completed a survey to collect information about their motivation to read in other classes, and their selection of which reading strategies learned and experienced within this study could be transferred to other content areas. The survey (see Appendix D) was created by this researcher and was influenced by survey questions asked in the studies of Fernanders (2020), Petersen (2020), Treptow (2020), Victor (2017) and Sperling, Sherwood, & Hood (2013). The students in this research completed the survey online using Google Forms and in a paper pencil format. Some of the students did not have their laptops, and thus completed their surveys using a paper copy. The student perception survey included five rating questions, six multiple choice questions, and one open ended response. The fifth
grade students had three face options to choose as a response to the first five questions. The face options were inspired by Emergent Readers Motivation and Reading Scale (ERMAS), which measures student motivation and used face options for students answer choices (Sperling et al., 2013). The student perception survey had an answer key that explained what each face symbol represented. See Table 3.6 for the alignment between survey questions and research question 2 of this study.

Qualitative Data Sources

Focus group interviews. My first qualitative data source was the student focus group interviews. The data from the focus group interviews helped me answer research question 2, which focused on student motivation for using close reading strategies in other classes. Focus group interviews allow researchers to collect shared understandings from the perspective of the student about the study (Azmuddin et al., 2020). Focus group interviews also allow the student's voice to be in place beyond the classroom when the research findings are shared at conferences. Students participated in a focus group interview where they were allowed to give their opinions and perceptions of the close reading strategies used in this study (Williams & Portman, 2014). This allowed my students to voice their insight and personal thoughts about the study, as well as give them the opportunity to communicate their opinions and critiques about the study and the usefulness of each close reading strategy. Focus groups encouraged my fifth grade students to feel comfortable enough to express their insights, so they could present their takeaways from the study (Mertler, 2019). According to Carey (2010) focus groups allow “students to share multiple perspectives” (p.61). The focus group interview questions were read to the students and posted where students could reread the questions for
Table 3.6 Alignment Between Research Question 2 and Survey Questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research questions</th>
<th>Survey questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2. How and in what ways does the implementation of close reading strategies influence fifth grade African American male students’ motivation to read in other classes?</td>
<td>1. Do you get distracted when reading textbooks while you are at school?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Do you think any of the close reading strategies will help you focus better when reading textbooks for other classes at school?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. How would you rate your motivation to read before we practiced our close reading strategies for 10 weeks?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4. How would you rate your motivation to read after we practiced our close reading strategies for 10 weeks?</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>5. Will you use one or more of these reading strategies in your other classes?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6. Which close reading strategy would motivate you to read Social Studies textbooks?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7. Which close reading strategy would motivate you to read Science textbooks?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8. Which close reading strategy would motivate you to read English Language Arts textbooks?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9. If I use close reading strategies this will make me a _____?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10. If you are reading a nonfiction book which close reading strategy would you most likely use _____?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>11. If you are reading a fiction book which close reading strategy would you most likely use _____?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>12. Explain how using at least one of the close reading strategies would motivate you to read more often?</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
clarifications. Allowing students to verbally communicate their thoughts removed the barrier of spelling and written communication frustrations.

Due to the unique nature of this study, it was a challenge to find validated interview questions that directly aligned to the needs of this research study. Therefore, this study used focus group interview questions created by the researcher that had been influenced by the research of several studies and interviews including Ives et al. (2020), Miller (2015), and Treptow (2020). The focus group interview questions (see Appendix F) were modified and rephrased to meet the needs of the learners (see Table 3.7). These focus group interview questions were reviewed by my committee chair, a pair of third to fifth grade teachers at Wisteria Lane Elementary, a fifth-grade instructional coach, and a retired reading teacher to make sure the questions were appropriate for student participants of this study. Two focus group interviews took place, each having three to five African American male student participants. Each focus group interview lasted no more than 45 minutes and took place during one reading intervention class session the week following the intervention phase of this study.

Table 3.7 Alignment Between Motivation Characteristic and Focus Group Interview Questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Motivation Characteristic</th>
<th>Focus Group Interview Question</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Student self-concept (Orellana et al., 2020) | 1. Did you know when you were using the close reading strategies you were mostly teaching yourself how to read?  
   a. (Follow up) Knowing you were teaching yourself how to read, share with me examples how that motivates you to read in other classes or when you are at home? |
strategies would motivate you to read different genres of books.

a. Some genres include biographies, comics, historical fiction, realistic fiction, fantasy books, poetry books, or books about space?

3. Pretend you’re talking to a friend who doesn’t like reading the textbook in Science, Social Studies, or English because they thought it was too hard. Which close reading strategy do you think would motivate them to read in which classes?

a. Which one would you show them how to use and why?

4. Share with me examples how using the Aha moment strategy might motivate you to read in another class.

5. Think about when you were introduced to the B.U.R.N. strategy and one day you shared with others and another day you completed it independently. What are some of your reasons why either sharing or reading alone motivated you the most to read?

6. In thinking about using the R.A.P. strategy, what are some examples for how it might be used in another class?

7. Share with me some examples for how the Hmm moment strategy motivated you to read the text.

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**Weekly student reflection journals.** The second qualitative method I used to collect data for this action research study was weekly student reflection journals (see Appendix G). Reflection journals can be used to explore students’ perceptions and feelings (Israel, Marino, Basham, & Spivak, 2013). Also, journals provide students with the opportunity to discuss their experiences in their own voice. The weekly student reflection journals were used to answer research question 2. The two prompts offered the
were the same in the weekly student reflection journals and allowed students to share what they felt confident and motivated about as it related to using the close reading strategy of that week. An example of the weekly student reflection journal prompt is “This week you had the opportunity to use the Aha moment strategy. Thinking about this close reading strategy and your experiences using it this week, please answer the following prompts adding examples to help me understand your ideas. I feel more confident to _____ and I feel more motivated to _____”. This helped provide authentic insight at the end of each week after using the specified close reading strategy for the first and second time. The same cycle of writing prompts was used for each close reading strategy introduced that week.

**Data Analysis**

In this action research study, five sources of data were collected. I used quantitative and qualitative data analysis procedures to find the outcomes of the (1) Reading Comprehension Assessment, (2) online formative assessments (3) student focus group interviews, (4) weekly student reflection journals, and (5) student perception surveys. Table 3.8 shows the alignment between the research questions, data collection sources, and data analysis methods. What follows will describe the quantitative data analysis methods used. I will conclude with the description of the qualitative data analysis methods used in this study.

**Quantitative Data Analysis**

**Reading Comprehension Assessment.** The first quantitative data source that was analyzed for this study was the students’ pre-assessment results with their post-
assessment results. Descriptive statistics and inferential statistics were used to analyze

Table 3.8 Research Questions, Data Sources, and Data Analysis Methods

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research questions</th>
<th>Data sources</th>
<th>Data analysis methods</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 1. How does the implementation of close reading strategies impact the reading comprehension skills of fifth grade African American male students at Wisteria Lane Elementary School? | • Pre-Post Reading Comprehension Assessment  
• Formative Assessments                                                                 | • Descriptive Statistics  
• Paired Samples t-Test                                                                 |
| 2. How and in what ways does the implementation of close reading strategies influence fifth grade African American male students’ motivation to read in other classes? | • Student Perception Survey  
• Focus Group Interviews  
• Weekly Student Reflection Journal Responses | • Descriptive Statistics  
• Inductive Analysis                                                                 |

these test results. Using descriptive statistics, I calculated the mean score and the standard deviation of the pre- and post-assessment using JASP software. In calculating these measures of central tendency, a single value was representative of an entire distribution, and it aims to provide an accurate description of the entire data (Field, 2013). I also analyzed if there were multiple outliers within the results. I compared the medians of the Reading Comprehension Assessment scores using a Wilcoxon signed rank test to determine if there was a statistical significance of the intervention of the students reading comprehension skills. I used an alpha level of 0.05 to determine levels of significance (Field, 2013).

**Formative assessments.** The online Raz Kids portal where the students read textbooks from provided online assessments for each book used in this study to measure the reading comprehension of the students. Formative assessments provide vital
information that demonstrates what students know in the midst of course instruction and what information they still need to learn (Vogelzang & Admiraal, 2017). Action research provides teachers with the chance to improve their teaching skills, while formative assessments provide insight on what students understand relating to content (Fernandez, 2017). When these two elements are combined teachers can improve their instruction by paying attention to the data created from the formative assessments. I used descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation) to measure student reading comprehension (Murphy, 2021). An overall mean score of the student’s online assessment results helped determine the effectiveness of the close reading strategy innovation used in this study.

**Student perception survey.** I used descriptive statistics to help me organize the data and find the measures of central tendency (Chakrabarty, 2021; Saidi & Siew, 2018). The student perception survey was in three sections. The first section asked the student to identify their feeling to the statement using emoji faces as their response. For example, I first assigned a number equivalency to each face image used in the student perception survey, imputing that data into Excel (e.g. a frown emoji was given a score of 1, a flat line emoji a score of 2, and a smiling emoji a score of 3). The next section asked multiple choice questions about the reading strategy the student would prefer based on the statement. The outcomes of the remaining multiple-choice survey question responses were also uploaded into Excel; assigning a numerical value for each response choice option consistently (e.g. a response of A transcribed in the numerical value of 1). The last section was one open-ended question asking the students to identify how a close reading strategy would motivate them. Using the analysis functions of Excel, I calculated the means and standard deviations of the survey responses. These values measured the
average distance between the values of the data in the set and the mean (Delmas & Liu, 2005). I noted that a low standard deviation indicated that data points tended to be very close to the mean and a high standard deviation indicated that data points were spread out over a large range of values (Delmas & Liu, 2005). This statistical information from the survey results helped me gain insight into the students’ motivation for reading as well as their perception of the close reading strategies utilized in this study.

**Qualitative Data Analysis**

There were three sources of qualitative data analyzed for this study. The qualitative data sources included focus group interviews, weekly student reflection journal responses, and the one open-ended question on the student perception survey. Each of these data sources were combined into one file and collectively analyzed using inductive analysis. I used analytic cycles to review qualitative data (Creswell, 2018). This inductive analysis research method required reflection and “coding and organizing themes, representing the data, and forming an interpretation of them” (Creswell, 2018, p. 83). This inductive analysis approach condensed raw textual data into themes that were reflective of the participants' experiences and voice (Thomas, 2006).

**Focus group interviews.** The focus group interviews were digitally recorded through a Microsoft Teams meeting with transcripts downloaded into a Microsoft Word document. The transcripts were reviewed for accuracy and researcher familiarity prior to any analysis occurring. The transcripts were analyzed sentence by sentence for a thorough analysis (Saldana, 2016).

**Weekly student reflection journal responses** Reflective journals ensured that students engaged in reflective practices by putting them in charge of their learning and
contributing to the researcher’s study (Bruno & Dell’Aversana, 2017; Pieper et al., 2021). The first two weeks of the weekly student reflection journal responses were collected through use of Flipgrid. For the rest of the intervention, the students’ responses were captured by students writing their responses. The Flipgrid transcription was typed and edited in a Microsoft Word document, and I typed each boy's weekly student reflection journal response into that same document. The student’s weekly reflection journal responses were then added to the other qualitative data sources for inductive analysis.

Inductive analysis began with the researcher becoming familiar with the textual data. I used Delve, a CAQDAS software tool (2019), as an "efficient means for storing and locating qualitative data” (Creswell, 2014, p. 245). Using an open-coding framework, codes were assigned to the text-based content. The codes were extracted from the software and placed into a Google Sheet for further analysis. Upon several reflections and reviews, I turned the codes into categories and then narrowed the categories down further into themes (Creswell, 2014). I presented the themes that emerged from the qualitative data sources in a table with sufficient quotes from the participants being included to support the outcomes found. The themes that emerged from the focus group interviews helped me understand the students’ perspectives about themselves as readers. In combining the two qualitative data sources, the qualitative data analysis outcomes helped inform me about the fifth-grade African American males’ motivation to read in other classes after having been introduced to four close reading strategies. I removed identifying information from all qualitative data sources and assigned pseudonyms to protect participant identity. Each student reviewed their own transcript and their weekly journal responses for member checking and to ensure the accuracy of the results.
Finally, the outcomes from the quantitative and qualitative analysis were reviewed holistically. Once the quantitative and qualitative data analysis had been completed, I combined the outcomes of each. Converging the data methods allowed me to explore each data set in depth as well as use each source to support the research topic in an analytical way (Turpin et al., 2015; Zhang, 2014). Converging quantitative and qualitative data helped answer different aspects of the research question and provided insight collectively in a stronger way than they would individually (Turpin et al., 2015; Zhang, 2014). I used thick, rich, descriptive writing, and created a table to show the converged outcomes; the results provided answers to both research questions that guided this study.
Procedures and Timeline

This study took place over the course of the Spring, Summer, and Fall 2022 semester and consisted of four phases. Phase 1: Consent; Phase 2: Data collection; Phase 3: Data Analysis; and Phase 4: Sharing. Table 3.9 summarizes the activities and timeline for the phases.

Phase 1: Consent

Phase 1 occurred during the Spring and Summer of 2022. IRB approval was obtained from the University of South Carolina followed by the approval of the school district this research took place in (see Appendix E). Once students were assigned to receive reading intervention services, I identified the students who met the eligibility criteria of this study. I sent an email to the eligible students’ parents requesting them to meet with me, to learn about this action research study’s purpose and processes. After answering their questions, I obtained parental written consent (see Appendix A) of those who agreed to have their son participate in my dissertation research study as well as obtaining student assent (see Appendix A). Finally, I met with my students’ primary teachers to inform them about the study and answer any questions regarding the study and its potential impact on the students’ reading during different subjects taught.

Phase 2: Data Collection

The data collection phase lasted 11 weeks. The intervention portion lasted ten weeks, while the focus group interviews, and final assessments occurred in the last week of this phase. During the week of September 25th, Wisteria Lane Elementary fifth grade students completed the Reading Comprehension Assessment. Students were introduced to
the close reading strategy being used, the technology used, and how to access digital books in Raz

Table 3.9 Timeline for Procedures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase</th>
<th>Activities</th>
<th>Timeframe</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Consent</td>
<td>• Obtain IRB and district approval</td>
<td>2 weeks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Select students</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Obtain consent</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Data collection</td>
<td>• Complete the pre-assessment</td>
<td>11 Weeks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Implement reading strategies</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Complete weekly student reflection journals</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Complete formative assessments</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Complete the post-assessment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Focus group interviews</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Student perception survey</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Data Analysis</td>
<td>• Transcribe the focus group interviews</td>
<td>8 weeks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Compile and analyze qualitative data sources using inductive analysis</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Use parametric tests to analyze the pre and post-test</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Use Descriptive Statistics to analyze the student perception surveys</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Converge qualitative and quantitative findings</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Kids. When a new close reading strategy was introduced, the first day was spent orienting and modeling for the students how to implement this strategy. The remaining two days of that week were spent engaging with the close reading strategy introduced. During week ten, students engaged in any close strategy they missed during the prior week’s secondary to being absent. Student participants who had 100% attendance made a close reading strategy of their choice to engage in. Each week, at the conclusion of the last class period of the week that we were together, the students completed their weekly student reflection journal. During the last week of the phase, the students completed the student perception survey during one class period, engaged in a focus group interview during another class period, and completed the Reading Comprehension Assessment post-assessment during the last class period of the week that were together. A select group of student participants were asked to participate in one of two focus group interviews. I used purposeful sampling to choose students for the focus group interviews to have a representative sample of my study population (Palinkas et al., 2015). The criteria I used to select participants for the focus group interviews was:

- students who can communicate their opinions
- students who had few or no absences during the intervention period

**Phase 3: Data Analysis**
The third phase of this intervention was the data analysis phase. This occurred during the Winter 2023 semester and lasted eight weeks. I used descriptive statistics with a Wilcoxon signed rank test to analyze the Reading Comprehension Assessment pre- and post-assessment scores and descriptive statistics to analyze the student perception survey responses and formative assessments. I transcribed the focus group interviews and compiled them into one file along with the qualitative data from the weekly student reflection journals and the open-ended student perception survey response question. Using inductive analysis, I watched for themes to emerge from the coded data. To conclude this phase, I converged the qualitative and quantitative data analysis outcomes as a means of answering each research question of this study.

**Phase 4: Sharing**

In this final phase I shared my research results with my dissertation committee, with the students, their families, and my school administration. I also shared results at local, state, and national conferences.

**Rigor & Trustworthiness**

Rigor and trustworthiness are essential components in supporting action research designs. Rigor and trustworthiness are critical to establishing accuracy and credibility with a study’s findings (Nowell et al., 2017). My mixed-methods study used several methods to increase rigor and trustworthiness such as triangulation, peer debriefing, thick rich descriptions, and member checking. These methods helped ensure that the study was valid, reliable, and of high quality (Creswell, 2014).
**Triangulation**

Triangulation was used for the qualitative methods in the action research study to ensure rigor and trustworthiness. Triangulation is the collection of multiple data sources (Onwuegbuzie, Leech, & Collins, 2012). Triangulation involves “the use of different methods, especially observation, focus groups and individual interviews, which form the major data collection strategies for much qualitative research” (Shenton, 2004, p. 65). My quantitative data consisted of student formative assessments, student perception surveys, and student pre- and post-intervention assessment results. My qualitative data included student focus group interviews, weekly student reflection journals, and the one open-ended question from the student perception survey. As I examined each source of data this contributed to validating my research methods (Onwuegbuzie et al., 2012; Shenton, 2004). I compared the findings from the qualitative and quantitative data sources (Herr & Anderson, 2014). I analyzed the student test results to see if they reflected the information from the weekly student reflection journals and the focus group interviews. The various methods of data contributed to the accuracy of the study's findings.

**Peer Debriefing**

Peer debriefing was used to support the rigor and trustworthiness of the study. Peer debriefing allows the researcher's dissertation chairs to view the study's methods and results while asking reflective thinking questions (Creswell, 2018). During my study, I worked weekly with my dissertation co-chair to review my research and make any necessary changes before data collection began. I continued to meet weekly with my dissertation co-chair as I conducted the analysis on each data source. Finally, peer debriefing with my dissertation co-chair helped me process the qualitative data sources,
helped my abstract thinking of the qualitative data grow, and after an intense peer
debriefing session allowed me to see the emergence of three themes out of my qualitative
data sources. This insight helped me craft my action research results in an easily
understood and replicable way.

**Thick and Rich Descriptions**

Use of thick rich descriptions helps the reader see the study visually and adds to
the research’s rigor and trustworthiness (Creswell, 2014; Shenton, 2004). Thick rich
descriptions are detailed observations of the research and its participants. They “convey
the actual situations that have been investigated and, to an extent, the contexts that
surround them” (Shenton, 2004, p.7). I drew these think, rich descriptions from detailed
notes kept in my researcher journal about my observations, thoughts, and settings and
used them to describe my study for the readers. Content from within the researcher
journal included descriptions of my teaching environment, comments from the students,
an attendance tracker, notes about test results, and student responses throughout the
intervention.

**Member Checking**

Member checking is the use of the participants or informants as internal auditors
of the data. Member checks helped ensure the accuracy of the study’s findings and the
clarity of the results (Brear, 2019). The member checking ensured that I, the researcher,
understood the subject's voice and correctly interpreted their voices. Guba and Lincoln
(as found in Shenton, 2004) considered member checking the “single most important
provision that can be made to bolster a study’s credibility” (p.68). The participants had
the chance to clarify statements from the interviews. At the end of the study, I presented
my findings to school stakeholders, including the study participants and parents. They had the opportunity to review the interview and anonymous test results for the accuracy of the study’s final written report.

**Plan for Sharing & Communicating Findings**

The results of this action research project will be shared with a variety of stakeholders; therefore, the entire community can benefit from the knowledge gained during the project. The study results will be generalized averages of student gains or students who stayed the same; this will protect student confidentiality by presenting averages instead of individual student data (Drew et al., 2007). Students’ identities will be protected by assigning pseudonyms. Once the data is organized into a graph and simplified handouts, I will share it with the fifth-grade participants for their reflections, feedback, and insight about the intervention. This data will be presented in a PowerPoint format for parents as well. The first meeting will showcase student results of this study, and the second meeting will be an interactive workshop for parents on close reading strategy implementation at home. I plan to share this information with all grade level teachers during three scheduled Professional Learning Community meetings. The teachers will see summarized findings of the test data, methods used to conduct the study, and attend a workshop on the four close reading strategies used for the intervention of this study. Based on the final data, I will recommend the upper-grade teachers to implement close reading strategies into their curriculum.

Next, this information will be shared with the school board, including the curriculum coordinator and superintendent, during a special meeting after the dissertation research has been approved by the dissertation committee of my final oral defense. This
digital presentation will include student growth percentages, anonymous student quotes about the intervention, specific information about the close reading strategies utilized, and ideas for integrating one or more of the close reading strategies into reading, science, and social studies classes. This presentation will inform district officials about the benefits of using close reading strategies and could help in their decision-making if these reading intervention strategies should be implemented within all upper-level classrooms in the district to increase student reading comprehension scores. I would also like to share this information at the annual National Literacy Conference held in Myrtle Beach, SC as well as at the Association for Educational Communications and Technology 2024 convention.
CHAPTER 4
ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

The purpose of this action research was to implement four close reading strategies and evaluate its impact on fifth-grade African American male students’ reading comprehension skills and their experiences with reading at Wisteria Lane Elementary School. Both quantitative and qualitative data were used to answer the following questions:

(1) How does the implementation of close reading strategies impact the reading comprehension skills of fifth-grade African American male students at Wisteria Lane Elementary School?

(2) How and in what ways does the implementation of close reading strategies influence fifth-grade African American male students’ motivation to read in other classes?

This chapter will review the analysis and findings from three quantitative sources, followed by presentation of the findings from two qualitative sources.

Quantitative Analysis and Findings

This study included three quantitative data sources: 1) Reading Comprehension Assessment, 2) formative assessments, and 3) student perception surveys. This section will include the results of each data source using descriptive statistics and the levels of significance for each source. Excel was used for the data analysis tests conducted.
Reading Comprehension Assessment

The researcher created an assessment called the Reading Comprehension Assessment used stories from SC READY that were designed for students reading at the third-grade level. The assessment questions were revised to match the objectives from the implemented close reading strategies. The Reading Comprehension Assessment contained 16 items. My chairperson and a fellow teacher reviewed the assessment for content validity. The Kuder Richardson (KR) 20 was used to assess how well the Reading Comprehension Assessment measured what was intended. The results ($p_{KR20} = 0.79$) show an acceptable level of reliability (Traub, 1994).

Descriptive Statistics. Descriptive statistics were used to provide readers with a summary of the findings (An et al., 2017). The maximum score possible on the Reading Comprehension Assessment was 16, or 100% for 16 out of 16 questions answered correctly. The pre-assessment questions answered correctly by the students ranged from 5 to 13 with a mean of 10.00 and a standard deviation of 2.45. The post-assessment questions answered correctly by the students ranged from 4 to 13 with a mean of 8.33 and a standard deviation of 3.87. Of the nine students, only two scored better on their post-assessment compared to their pre-assessment score. Both students increased their score by two points (John, pre-assessment score 12, post-assessment score 14; Vincent, pre-assessment score 10, post-assessment score 12). While all seven remaining students scored lower on the post-assessment compared to their pre-assessment score, Dareals’s score difference was the greatest (pre-assessment 10, post-assessment 4). Overall, the students performed worse on the post-assessment than on the pre-assessment.
The percentage of questions answered correctly on the pre-assessment ranged from 33% to 89% with a mean of 62.56% and a standard deviation of 19.18. The percentage of questions answered correctly on the post-assessment ranged from 11% to 78% with a mean of 52.13% and a standard deviation of 17.79. Questions 5 and 10 had the fewest answers correct on the pre-assessment (33% respectively). While students scored better on question 5 on the post-assessment, “Which answer identifies a significant or interesting event in the text.” Question 10 was still answered incorrectly by 56% of the students. Question 10 was “What was the main idea from this text?” Questions 13, 15, and 16, each from the Wild Kangaroos reading passage and corresponded with recalling main ideas and events reading objectives, had the most answers correct on the pre-assessment (89%). Question 4, asked students to identify a character’s attitude with “How did Sarah’s attitude change from the start to the end of the story?” This item had the fewest answers correct on the post-assessment (11%). Question 6 had the most answers correct on the post-assessment (78%). Question 6 was “Which describes the process Sam took to bring the fish in?” and asked students to identify events in the text. Of the 16 assessment questions, only three questions were answered correctly with the same proportion on the pre-assessment and the post-assessment (question 6, 78%; question 7, 67%; and question 9, 44%). Questions 7 and 9 asked students to identify the main idea of the text and key details of the text, respectively. The percentage of each question answered correctly is reported in Table 4.1.
Table 4.1 *Percentage of Questions Answered Correctly on Reading Comprehension Assessment (N=9)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question Number for Assessment Short Stories</th>
<th>Learning Objective</th>
<th>Percent Correct Pre-Assessment</th>
<th>Percent Correct Post-Assessment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Panning for Gold</em></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. How did Ben’s attitude about his sister change in the story?</td>
<td>Identify the transition of a character’s behaviors, or attitude.</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Which sentence represents how Ben felt at the beginning of the story?</td>
<td></td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Which sentence represents how Ben felt at the end of the story?</td>
<td></td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>56%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. How did Sarah’s attitude change from the start to the end of the story?</td>
<td></td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Enjoy the Moment</em></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Which answer identifies a significant or interesting event in the text.</td>
<td>Identify events</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Which describes the process Sam took to bring the fish in?</td>
<td></td>
<td>78%</td>
<td>78%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. What is the main idea of this text?</td>
<td></td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. What event best describes how Gran helped Sam catch a fish?</td>
<td></td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Sea Turtles</em></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Select the answer choice that best represents one of the key details from this text.</td>
<td>Identify important details</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. What is the main idea from this text?</td>
<td></td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Select the answer that best represents the life of a sea turtle after they hatch?</td>
<td></td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>56%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. What is important to know about sea turtles surviving?</td>
<td></td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>56%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Wild Kangaroos</em></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Which answer below is correct information about kangaroos?</td>
<td>Recall the main idea</td>
<td>89%</td>
<td>67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. What is the main idea of this text?</td>
<td></td>
<td>78%</td>
<td>67%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
15. From the options below, which could be another appropriate title?

16. What was the author’s purpose for writing this text?

Inferential statistics. Having only nine participants in this study, the nonparametric Wilcoxon signed rank test was used to compare the pre-assessment and post-assessment scores of questions answered correctly by the students on the Reading Comprehension Assessment. The output indicated that posttest scores ($Mdn = 11.00$) were not significantly higher than the pretest scores ($Mdn = 10.00$), $Z = 0.25, p = 0.86$.

Formative Assessments

The four formative assessments used in this study were the Raz Kids created digital assessments. The students took the digital assessment upon completion of each book used throughout the intervention. The students completed the formative assessments on their school issued Chromebook device, which was found to have compromised the student’s ability to complete many of these assessments (e.g., Chromebook not brought to class or not charged). Additionally, multiple students were absent on days when the formative assessments were to be completed. When reading the first book, 100th Day Project, the Aha moment and Hmm moment reading strategies were implemented. Three of the nine students completed the Raz Kids created digital assessment with a mean score of 96.67. When reading the second book, Jackie Robinson, the B.U.R.N. and the R.A.P reading strategies were implemented. Two of the nine students completed the Raz Kids created digital assessment with a mean score of 95.00. When reading the third book, Jessica Loves Soccer, the Aha moment and Hmm moment reading strategies were implemented for the second time. No students completed the Raz Kids created digital assessment. When reading the last book read, Inside Your Body, the B.U.R.N. and the
R.A.P reading strategies were implemented for the second time. One of the nine students completed the Raz Kids created digital assessment with a score of 40.00. Overall, caution is offered in interpreting the formative assessment findings secondary to the few numbers of students completing the Raz Kids created digital assessments.

Table 4.2 Formative Assessments

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Text</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>M</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>100th Day Project</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>96.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jessica Loves Soccer</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jackie Robinson</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>95.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inside Your Body</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>40.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Student Perception Survey

The student perception survey used in this research study was an adapted version of the ERMAS to fit the needs of the study and the students (Sperling et al., 2013). The ERMAS survey was created for young students and is a two-section survey that incorporated answer responses using a series of emoji faces. The survey was distributed at the end of the study and all nine participants completed the survey. The first survey section contained five questions where the students responded with either a happy emoji face, a neutral emoji face, or a sad emoji face. The first survey section contained five questions where the students responded with either a happy emoji face, a neutral emoji face, or a sad emoji face. The second section, consisting of six multiple choice questions, asked students to identify which reading strategy they would find appropriate to use in other academic classes.
First section. Data was entered into an Excel spreadsheet, converting the emoji face response to a numerical value. A value of 1 represented a sad emoji face. A value of 2 represented a neutral emoji face. A value of 3 represented a happy emoji face. Descriptive statistics were used because it “summarizes data in the form of simple quantitative measures such as percentages or means” (An et al., 2017, p.2). Descriptive statistics for the first five questions on the student perception survey were calculated resulting in a mean score of 2.10 ($SD = 0.65$; see Table 4.3). The lowest mean score of student responses was to Question 2 ($M = 1.89$, $SD = 0.60$). The mean of 1.89 means the average number of faces selected fell between sad and neutral emoji faces. Question 2 was “Do you think any of the close reading strategies will help you focus better when reading textbooks for other classes at school?” The question with the highest mean score was Question 1 ($M = 2.44$, $SD = 0.53$) which read “Do you get distracted when reading textbooks while you are at school?” The mean of 2.44 means the average number of faces selected fell in the middle between neutral and emoji faces.

Second section. The second section of the student perception survey consisted of six multiple choice questions and one open-ended question. For the six multiple choice questions, the students were asked to identify which, if any, of the reading strategies implemented for this study would they likely use in another academic subject or genre of book. The fourth question in this section, Question 9, instead asked the students to identify their perception on using any of the close reading strategies in making them
Table 4.3 Survey Results Section One (N=9)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questions</th>
<th>M (SD)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Collective Responses to Questions 1 - 5</td>
<td>2.18 (0.65)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Do you get distracted when reading textbooks while you are at school?</td>
<td>2.44 (0.65)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Do you think any of the close reading strategies will help you focus better when reading textbooks for other classes at school?</td>
<td>1.89 (0.60)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. How would you rate your motivation to read before we practiced our close reading strategies for 10 weeks?</td>
<td>2.22 (0.83)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. How would you rate your motivation to read after we practiced our close reading strategies for 10 weeks?</td>
<td>2.11 (0.78)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Will you use one or more these reading strategies in your other classes?</td>
<td>2.22 (0.44)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

become good readers. Frequency statistics were calculated to determine which of the reading strategies (e.g., Aha moment, B.U.R.N., R.A.P, and Hmm moment) students would use more often and which strategy they would most likely use in another subject. Frequency counts are a part of descriptive statistics and are used to help the reader see the findings in a clear numbers format (An et al., 2017). Frequency counts also helped organize and support the data described. See Table 4.4 for the outcomes of the students’ responses to questions six through 11.

Based on the data, seven of the nine students identified B.U.R.N. as the reading strategy they would most likely use in another academic subject. The Hmm moment reading strategy was the second reading strategy most likely to be used in another academic subject. Five of the nine students identified Hmm moment as the reading strategy they would most likely use in another academic subject. The R.A.P followed by the Aha moment reading strategies were identified the fewest times to be used in other academic subjects. Three of the nine students identified R.A.P. as the reading strategy
Table 4.4 Student Perception Survey Frequency Responses (N=9)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Aha</th>
<th>B.U.R.N.</th>
<th>R.A.P</th>
<th>Hmm</th>
<th>None</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Which close reading strategy would you most likely use in:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Social Studies</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Science</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. English Language Arts</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subtotal</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. If you are reading a nonfiction book which close reading strategy would you most likely use?</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. If you are reading a fiction book which close reading strategy would you most likely use?</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subtotal</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

they would most likely use in another academic subject. Two of the nine students identified Aha moment as the reading strategy they would most likely use in another academic subject. When reading a nonfiction book, four of the nine students reported their likelihood of using the Aha moment reading strategy. Three of the nine students reported their likelihood of using the R.A.P reading strategy. Only two of the nine students identified the B.U.R.N reading strategy as another strategy they would use when reading a nonfiction book, meaning none would choose the Hmm moment reading strategy. However, when reading a fiction book, seven of the nine students reported their likelihood of using the Hmm Moment reading strategy. Only the B.U.R.N reading strategy was identified by two of the students as another strategy they would use when reading a fiction book. Collectively, the two reading strategies the students identified as most likely to be used when reading were the Hmm Moment strategy (frequency count of 12) and the B.U.R.N. strategy (frequency count of 11).
Question 9 asked students to identify their perception on using any of the close reading strategies in making them become good readers. The question 9 item read “If I use close reading strategies this will make me a…” Of the four options for a response, three students chose “very good reader” and three students chose “good reader.” Of the remaining three students, one answered, “ok reader” and two answered “the same reader.” Therefore, 66.67% identified the use of a close reading strategy to positively impact their reading skills. The results of the open-ended question (question 13) asked on the student perception survey were included in the qualitative data analysis.

Analysis of Qualitative Data

Qualitative data from two focus group interviews and eight weeks of weekly student reflection journals were analyzed using inductive analysis. The inductive analysis approach allows the researcher to collect data, observe the patterns, and develop themes (Mitchell, 2018). I used four first cycle coding methods during the coding process to begin to understand the data, *Structural Coding, In Vivo Coding, Emotional Coding,* and *Process Coding.* After the first cycle coding process, a total of 212 codes were created. Pattern Coding was used as a second cycle coding method, which facilitated the development of 11 categories and the emergence of three themes.

Table 4.5 *Summary of Qualitative Data Sources*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Qualitative Data Source</th>
<th>Number of Sources</th>
<th>Number of Unduplicated Codes Applied</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Focus Group Interviews</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>148</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weekly Student Reflection Journals</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>9</strong></td>
<td><strong>212</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
First Cycle Coding

First, I conducted *Structural Coding* to help me analyze both qualitative sources for resemblances, variations, and connections based on my research questions (Saldana, 2016). *Structural Coding* was useful in organizing the data into tiny key fragments (Saldana, 2016) and aligning the large amounts of data to both of this study’s research questions. As I combed through the qualitative data, I looked for excerpts of text that aligned with the research questions or the ideas embedded in those research questions. For example, John stated in his focus group interview response, “I feel like the B.U.R.N. strategy is the best strategy when you box your strategy is easier to see what’s more important” (see Figure 4.1). I coded this as student comprehension as it aligned with research question one that asks about close reading and reading comprehension skills.

Figure 4.1. Structural Coding in Delve.

As another example, Ayden referenced the B.U.R.N strategy in his weekly student reflection journal response: “Social studies has a lot of history and the box in one paragraph and underline some details in case you tryna get the main idea” (see Figure 4.2). I coded this as a close reading strategy because it aligned with research question two which encased close reading strategies and making a connection with another subject area.
Second, I conducted *In Vivo Coding* to highlight the participants’ voice and honor their language (Saldana, 2016). *In Vivo Coding* was used in this study because it allowed the researcher to create codes derived directly from the participants’ perspectives and language, thus highlighting their worldviews and perspectives. In all, 47 codes were generated from this round of coding. For example, Christian stated in a focus group interview “and we get a hang of it” (see Figure 4.3). I coded this sentence as “*get a hang of it*” because it was a phrase that summed up how he felt about using the Aha moment reading strategy. This example also represented the language that Christian was comfortable using and offered representation of his normal language.

As another example of *In Vivo Coding*, John stated in a focus group interview “trying to count your money then you really can’t rely on reading to really help you reading is not really important in our life” (see Figure 4.4). I coded this sentence as
“reading is not important” because it was a phrase directly taken from the student reflective of what this participant thought about reading. The goal of In Vivo Coding is to highlight the students’ voices and perspectives (Saldana, 2016). The code of “reading is not important” reflects just that about John. Some other examples of In Vivo coding were “your own words”, “it wasn’t appealing”, “be more good”, “better understanding”, and “good readers”.

![Image of Delve interface showing In Vivo Coding]

Figure 4.4. In Vivo Coding in Delve.

Third, I conducted Emotion Coding to gather feelings expressed or inferred from the participants’ language (Saldana, 2016). Emotion Coding was used in this study because it allowed the participants’ experiences to be attached to emotions and feelings. During this round, 66 codes were generated. For example, Khalil stated in a focus group interview, “R.A.P. it is easy for me. For the homeboy he would be able to understand it just like I did” (see Figure 4.5). I coded this sentence as reflection because it was showing the Khalil’s view of the R.A.P. strategy and their overall idea of using it and sharing it with their friend. The student believed the R.A.P. strategy was easy and was willing to share it with a friend because he saw it as a useful tool. This kind of thinking requires reflection.
The goal of Emotion Coding is to capture the experiences of the participants and associate those experiences with emotions that emerged through the data (Saldana, 2016). As another example of Emotion Coding, Dwight stated in a focus group interview “It motivates me to read because I can just pick up a book and use any strategy” (see Figure 4.6). I coded this sentence as comfortable because it was expressing how the participant felt about using any of the close reading strategies. Some other examples of Emotion Coding were focused, delighted, pride, confusing, and cheerful.

Lastly, I used Process Coding to extract actions from the participants’ language and to gather observable actions from the data (Saldana, 2016). From this method of coding, 41 codes were generated. For example, Ayden stated in a focus group interview “because when you take a test, you use all the strategies and the moments and the other thing because the important thing is that when you take a test you can it helps you a lot” (see Figure 4.7). I coded this sentence as recalling because to be successful when taking a
test, the student recalled how useful reading skills are.

![Image](image_url)

**Figure 4.7. Process Coding in Delve.**

Additional examples of *Process Coding* were found from Khalil when he stated in a focus group interview “it helps me read nonfiction because nonfiction books are the hardest” (see Figure 4.8). I coded this as *admitting* because the student was admitting that when using the R.A.P close reading strategy, it helped him comprehend best the genre of books he found hardest to read, a nonfiction book. As well from Christian, who stated in a focus group interview, “If you take a school test, you will have to read to find all of the answers. You might need to know the answers you might fail” (see Figure 4.8). I coded this as *considering* because the student was realizing that if he did not use his reading skills to go through all the answers, then he could possibly fail the test. Some other examples of codes generated from *Process Coding* were *recommending*, *justifying*, *bargaining*, *assessing*, and *describing*.

**Second Cycle Coding**

Prior to beginning second cycle coding, I exported all of my codes created in Delve into a Google Sheet. I worked with one of my dissertation chairs to process what
was happening. I used the coloring tool within Google Sheets to organize and combine codes together and condense repetitive codes into just one code. For example, within both qualitative data sources, the words recommend (twice), I recommend, recommendation, and recommending (twice) were coded. I consolidated these codes down to just one code, recommending. Through multiple peer debriefing sessions and looking at what the students were experiencing through the representation of codes, 11 categories were developed.

**Themes and Findings**

A theme is a pattern that represents a principle idea of data as it relates to the research questions and the topics (Scharp & Sanders, 2019; Xu & Zammit, 2020). Themes are important in qualitative data because they involve the reflection about categories and their relationships that represent the given research focus (Lester et al., 2020). The process of inductive analysis was used to gather all data in a holistic way and reduce data down to the production of themes (Lester et al., 2020). This analysis included the act of coding data, developing categories, and uncovering hidden patterns among the
categories to produce themes (Scharp & Sanders, 2019; Xu & Zammit, 2020). Themes, therefore, emerged from the inductive analysis process. To ensure this study’s trustworthiness, I participated in weekly peer debriefing sessions with one of my dissertation co-chairs (Vidoni & André, 2019). My dissertation co-chair challenged my thinking at each step of the inductive analysis process, including how to color codes and combine codes into the formation of categories. As I began to find patterns within the categories, my dissertation co-chair kept reminding me of the importance of my African American male voices, to explore what was important to them, and how they perceived this intervention to impact their reading skills. She helped me decide what was most important to showcase from my research data and findings. I also met with my school reading coach to review the qualitative data, manipulate the codes and categories, and to uncover themes that I may have been missing. The conversations with my school's reading coach as well as my dissertation co-chair helped me to see the students' ideas, experiences, and voices in an insightful way. From my two qualitative data sources, the 11 categories were reduced into the three themes that emerged: 1) Students saw the benefit of using reading strategies in their future, 2) Reading strategies motivated them to read, and 3) Students had a voice about their abilities in reading.

Theme one: Students saw the benefit of using reading strategies in their future. For students to see the benefit of using the close reading strategy in their future, they had to form a connection with the strategy. The inductive analysis of the qualitative data uncovered how the students used the close reading strategies in the reading intervention classroom as well as reveal how they would the strategies outside of the reading intervention classroom. The significance of theme one is based on the population
of males in this study who struggled with reading. However, after the use of these four close reading strategies, the students could articulate which part of the strategy helped them become better readers or to better understand the text through the actions incorporated within the strategies. This resulted in the boys expressing their intent on using at least one close reading strategy in their future.

It is important teachers use instructional techniques and culturally relevant text that correlate with students’ backgrounds to help them in building connections with reading (Thomas, 2019). Previous studies about African American boys indicated that this population should engage with interactive strategies for academic success (Kang & Husband, 2020; Tatum, 2014). The intervention of this study was designed to incorporate culturally relevant books to provide engagement and affirmations for African American boys. During the focus group interviews, two boys shared how the reading strategies benefited them.

Ayden: Motivate me to read in another class by reading the text and repeating what the character says.

Keaton: Hmm moment, for science to reread the paragraph.

The students were able to describe how they would use the close reading strategies in their future because of having used the close reading strategies across multiple books. Additionally, two students identified in a focus group interview that they felt a sense of achievement once they mastered the close reading strategies. Christian stated, “Aha moment motivates me to read every day” and Khalil stated, “R.A.P. is easy for me.” This identified how they could describe which close reading strategy they would use as well as how they would use such. According to Kang and Husband (2020) and Tatum (2014),
African American males need reading strategies that are interactive and engaging. This was represented within the data as evident by the students voicing that they liked using close reading strategies that gave them things to do. John shared in a focus group interview “It’s easy. The first step is box the passage, underline details, reread and note the main idea.” John shared his willingness to use the B.U.R.N. strategy in his future. Ayden and Dwight also voiced their opinions in a focus group interview about which close reading strategies they found to be not useful, “R.A.P. strategy” and “B.U.R.N. strategy” respectively. Ayden and Dwight did not favor these two close reading strategies because they did not have enough actions to them, so they would prefer other strategies.

Theme one, Students saw the benefit of using reading strategies in their future, consumed two categories 1) Reading benefits and 2) Using reading strategies consistently (see Figure 4.9). Some of the codes used to create these categories included words like dedication, bigger picture, focused, and reading in other classes. The codes dedication and bigger picture helped me understand how these students could use close reading strategies in their future.

Figure 4.9 Theme one.
**Reading benefits.** Reading benefits was a significant category for understanding how the boys perceived use of close reading strategies to impact their reading comprehension. The boys expressed ideas like determination to understand more in the text, and they began to get the bigger picture as it related to reading. Additionally, if these students see a benefit to reading, they are more likely to be engaged. As I explored the voices of the African American males in this study, there were positive words offered in the focus group interviews about use of the close reading strategies in this research intervention. For example, Keaton and Vincent shared the following:

Keaton: I have to read it one more time

Vincent: It helps me know what I’m doing and it helps me figure things out in reading

The *In Vivo codes* of “one more time”, “figure out things” and “get a hang of it”. revealed the advantages the students expressed after completing the reading intervention. As well in the *Emotion codes* of *perseverance* and *bigger picture or the Process codes* of *striving* and *assessing* demonstrated how using the close reading strategies made them more diligent and gave them successful techniques to better comprehend the text. The true message of the codes that led to the development of this category was that the students saw the benefits of reading. This category, Reading benefits, was created out of 19 codes, including *dedication, future thinking, and determined* (see Figure 4.10).
Using reading strategies consistently. This study exposed my students to four close reading strategies. I heard from students about the close reading strategies they preferred to use as well as their perspective about their continuing use of the close reading strategies in other classes as well as into their future. According to Husband (2012) and Thompson and Shamberger (2015) African American males should be taught direct strategies to analyze various texts, so they can make meaningful connections on a consistent basis. The way the boys of this study demonstrated the need to use reading strategies as a consistent behavior could be found in these focus group interview responses of Christian and Dwight:

Christian: I feel motivated to read a really hard book. I could use this in another class .. if we [are] doing and essay or something.

Dwight: Aha motivates me to read every day.
Christian and Dwight’s responses indicated the close strategies motivated them to read daily and write in other classes on a consistent basis. Additionally, these codes revealed how students were more likely to use a close reading strategy consistently when it was easy, and they found the reading strategy to be helpful. Easy and helpful were also sources of motivation for furthering reading comprehension.

The codes that led to the development of this category, Use reading strategies consistently, I found to be a direct reflection of how the boys felt after working consistently with close reading strategies during the 11-week intervention. This category was created out of 15 codes, including the Emotion codes of engaged, engrossed, focused, the In Vivo codes of “read every day”, “reading in other classes”, and “some important details”, and the Structural code of reading in other classes (see Figure 4.11).

![Figure 4.11. Codes to Using reading strategies consistently.](image)

**Theme two: Reading strategies motivated students to read.** Theme two is important in this study because it showcased how the boys in this study looked at using the close reading strategies as a source of motivation to read; which impacted their reading overall from a positive perspective. Whereas it is not uncommon in the literature that the relationship between reading and African American boys is viewed from a
negative perspective. John offered in his weekly student reflection journal response how using the B.U.R.N. close reading strategy helped him understand content in multiple ways, “get a better understanding, ask questions, read harder paragraphs and use them in different classes.” Reading strategies need to be clear and direct, but most importantly engaging. If we want to help support young African American males who struggle to read, we need to use strategies that allow students to be independent as well as understand the text in multiple ways (Cartwright et al., 2017).

It is also important to analyze how to increase student motivation with students who struggle to read, like those in this study. Christian and Keaton shared the following in their focus group interview,

Christian: I feel motivated to read out loud in front of my classmates.

Keaton: I feel more confident to show my expression [of ideas] to other people instead of hiding them.

From other scholars, African American boys benefitted from stimulating instructional strategies that increased their engagement and motivation (Husband, 2012; Petersen, 2020). This research supports that African American boys’ benefit from reading strategies that are interactive as a means of motivating them to read.

In this study, students were introduced to four close reading strategies that were used in conjunction with a digital book environment. Ayden’s weekly reflection journal response, “reading books or quizzes on i-Ready and Raz kids,” expressed how using the Hmm moment close reading strategy when reading the book Inside your Body helped motivate him. Additionally, Christian shared in a focus group interview that the B.U.R.N. strategy motivated him to read because he was reading with a partner, “because at the
same time we was helping each other, it was helping us both out to learn how to read.”

Therefore, having peer-to-peer interaction furthered his engagement in reading and motivated him to stay on task.

The codes of student comprehension and better understanding showed me that these students wanted to become better readers and they wanted to become good at reading. The code of student comprehension was generated out of Ayden and Matthew’s responses during a focus group interview, “I feel motivated to read the passage two times” and “helps you read better”, respectively. The codes optimism and courage were created from an observation in my researcher journal that the boys seemed to become more confident to read in front of their peers after learning about and using the close reading strategies. Lastly, the code influence motivation was generated when students, like Khalil, expressed in a focus group interview “R.A.P. is easy for me” or when Dareal shared in a weekly student reflection journal response, “I feel more confident to read in other classes.” This revealed how the students were drawn to the ease of the close reading strategies and this gave them the improved self-esteem to read in other classes.

The significance of theme two was understanding the different reasons and purposes that the students identified as their motivations to read. This resulted in them being able to express several factors for motivation such as using easier strategies, helping their peers, and being able to better comprehend the text. This further showcased how students were motivated to read when they used close reading strategies that were interactive, easy, and they could see how the strategy was going to help them.

Theme two, reading strategies motivated students to read, consumed four categories, 1) Improved reading comprehension, 2) Reading strategies influence
motivation, 3) Use independently if easy, and 4) Helping peers read (see Figure 4.12).

Some of the codes in these categories included student comprehension, “better understanding”, “motivated me to read”, optimism, courage, and influence motivation.

![Diagram](image)

**Figure 4.12 Theme two.**

**Improved reading comprehension.** Reading comprehension is an important category that developed through my research. This category relates to my research demonstrating that African American boys feel close reading strategies can improve their reading comprehension skills. While the quantitative outcomes of this study did not demonstrate that the close reading strategies improved the students reading comprehension, the qualitative data does reflect growth in the boy’s reading comprehension. The participants in this study associated close reading with understanding a text and making inferences, which could impact their reading comprehension abilities. How the boys of this study viewed the impact of using the close reading strategies on their reading comprehension was found in the InVivo codes of “better understanding” and “not be confused”. These InVivo codes expressed how the students felt close reading strategies could support their reading skills. For example, two boys shared the following in their focus group interviews:
John: It motivated me to read the passage because I was trying to get a better understanding.

Keaton: I feel more confident to write my own paragraphs and not be confused.

As I reviewed all the codes, I saw a pattern of the students acknowledging that their reading skills could grow. Structural codes like close reading strategy and student comprehension demonstrated the students' beliefs about improved comprehension and how the close reading strategies could help them understand the text. For example, the following was seen in the focus group interview responses of John and Christian:

John: I knew it was teaching me to read.

Christian: Because it motivates you to read all day and all-night so you can get your thinking caps on.

Furthermore, Dwight made the connection from his life to the text, and the need for the reading strategy of rereading. For example, when speaking about the Hmm moment close reading strategy, Dwight shared in his focus group interview response, that the Hmm moment strategy “Helps me think about what happened in my life, and how it connects with my life and it helps me reread.” This type of thinking in all the students could lead to improved reading comprehension.

This category, Improved reading comprehension, was created out of 38 codes, including “easier strategy”, student comprehension, and recalling (see Figure 4.13).
Reading strategies influence motivation. This category supports my research because I wanted to investigate how close reading influences the motivation of my students in other classes. Based on the codes and patterns that derived from the data, I believe I can say usage of close reading strategies motivated them, helped them, and gave them a sense of pride about reading. This is significant because often African American boys demonstrate disinterest or lack of engagement with reading in different subjects (Essien, 2017). It is important for stakeholders to be aware that African American boys feel if they use these strategies there are various feelings of positive emotions associated with motivation. This could be seen through the In Vivo codes of “be more good” and “motivated me to read”. This was found in the focus group interview responses of two boys.

Keaton: I feel motivated to put things in my own words and be more good at making paragraphs

John: Motivated me to read the passage because I was trying to get a better understanding
The students felt that close reading strategies would help them become better at reading and writing, which is how these codes emerged.

When I looked at the Emotion codes of fondness, pride, and empowered, they were telling me that close reading strategies have the power to encourage African American boys to read. How the boys of this study felt motivated during this intervention can be found in Ayden’s focus group interview response, “because when you take a test, you use all the strategies, moments and another thing it’s important when you take a test can help you a lot.” Here, Ayden was expressing how the reading strategy motivated him to use all of the strategies when it was time to read on a test. Regarding the Aha moment close reading strategy, Dwight shared in his focus group interview response, “it motivates me to learn more about the characters in the story for example, I can tell you details about the characters in the story and what they do.” If we can find these types of positive reactions when using the close reading strategies, then it can transfer to improved learning outcomes.

The experiences of the boys in this study further demonstrated there were connections between being motivated and their reading skills and giving African American boys access to close reading strategies is a way to increase their interest in reading. This category, reading strategies influence motivation, was created out of 28 codes, including motivates me, caring, and “get better” (see Figure 4.14).
Use independently if easy. The Use independently if easy category, developed through analyzing the data and connects to my research because it brings insight to which close reading strategies the boys could use independently. By learning which strategies, the boys favored and why, it could help me know which strategies could be introduced in various classroom curriculums. This aligns with the work of Dania and Adha (2021) and Piyanukool (2020) who found students prefer reading strategies that help them comprehend the text in an easy way. Additionally, students also choose strategies that reflected the kind of questions they were used to answering on tests. The boys shared in their weekly student reflection journal responses how easy they found the Hmm moment close reading strategy to be, which was reflected in the Emotion codes of cheerful and intrigued as well as in the In Vivo codes of “good readers”, “pick up a book”, and “it’s fun”. For example, three boys shared the following,
Khalil: I feel confident to use it because it is a good strategy for good readers. (Focus group interview)

Ayden: Because it’s fun. (Weekly student reflection journal)

Dwight: It motivates me to read because I can just pick up a book. (Focus group interview)

The InVivo codes revealed that close reading strategies helped them read well, provided a feeling of leisure, and possibly inspired them to read more.

I learned from this category that some of the strategies gave the students hope, motivation to grab books, and a boost of courage, especially if the close reading strategies were easy, fun, or engaging. These codes demonstrated positive thoughts associated with reading. This category was created out of 13 codes, including optimism, courage, and pleasure (see Figure 4.15).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Codes to Use independently if easy</th>
<th>12</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>optimism</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>intrigued</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pick up a book</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pleasure</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cheerful</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>courage</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>good readers</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>its fun</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 4.15. Codes to Use independently if easy category.*

**Helping peers read.** Helping peers read is a category that supports my research by seeing the benefits of collaborative reading activities. Research shows African American boys perform better when working in collaboration with their peers (Kang & Husband, 2020). The InVivo code “we was helping each other”, which was created from
the focus group interview response by Ayden “we was helping each other when we read in pairs” further supports the benefits of reading with someone else. When asked in the focus group about the impact of using the B.U.R.N. strategy on their motivation to learn, three students expressed using the strategy with a partner “motivated [them] to help each other”. Khalil specifically said in the focus group interview response his preference for working with a partner “because they can help you learn what you don’t know.” I believe Khalil understood the benefits of reading with a peer, and he also understood he still has room for improvement in his own reading skills.

An important factor in this study was the inclusion of collaboration and partner reading. In doing group work as part of the Aha moment close reading strategy, there were opportunities for the boys to also help their peers with their reading. This was captured in the Process codes of recommending, admitting, and preferring as well as in the Emotion code of eagerness and the In Vivo code of “we was helping each other”. For example, two boys shared in the focus group interview:

Khalil: I think you can motivate them when they read by giving them lots of strategies.

Keaton: The R.A.P. strategy makes them understand and helps you get the main idea.

These codes revealed that Khalil and Keaton saw the advantages of working with a partner and this resulted in some excitement with these activities.

Drawing on their experiences of using the close reading strategies and working with a partner, the students were able to recommend which strategies they would use to help fellow readers. All the codes were associated with a positive attitude relating to close reading strategies and further showed that students had the ability to help their peers
read. This category, Helping peers read, was created out of 22 codes, including “will help”, claiming, and “it helps you” (see Figure 4.16).

![Table: Helping peers read](image)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Count</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>recommending</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>preferring</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>it helps you</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>will help</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>anticipating</td>
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<td>eagerness</td>
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<tr>
<td>admitting</td>
<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>claiming</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>we were helping each other</td>
<td>1</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 4.16. Codes to Helping peers read category.*

**Theme three: Students had a voice about their abilities in reading.** The third theme that emerged from the data was that students had the opportunity to give their voice about their reading skills and abilities. There is a gap in the existing literature as it relates to young African American males and their voices being expressed about literacy. As a result of participating in this study, the boys were able to express their opinions about their reading abilities, the text used, and the close reading strategies introduced to them. From the students participating in a focus group interview and through their weekly student reflection journal responses, students were encouraged to share their thoughts that captured both their identities as readers as well their abilities overall as students. For example, four boys shared the following,

**Dwight:** The Aha moment, it helps me read the text, like you have to do, I realize moment and a few more steps. (Focus group interview)

**Keaton:** It allows me to look for details and what I’m confused about and why I want to read this again. (Focus group interview)
John: I disliked the reading strategies with this book (Focus group interview)

Ayden: I feel motivated to put things in my own words and be more good at making paragraphs. (Weekly student reflection journal)

Keaton and Dwight were able to explain the steps of a reading strategy and how it supported their current reading skills. They were also able to pinpoint how the strategy provided a solution to their reading challenges. John stated he did not like the strategies nor the book itself. This could mean neither were not a good fit for his needs. Ayden explained how he felt the motivation to paraphrase and write more. Overall, the students could articulate what they liked about the strategies and ultimately how the strategies helped their reading abilities. These comments furthered the importance of this theme and the students being able to express their beliefs about their reading abilities.

There were also times when a boy’s negative mindset about reading was shared. For example, John stated in a focus group interview, “When doing math, I feel that reading is not that important, you trying to count your money, then you rely on reading to really help you, reading is not really important in our life.” This type of response led to codes like lack of interest and dislike being created, which showed even a student having a negative point of view could still be shared.

A sense of honesty was found in many of the boy’s qualitative data responses. For example, the focus group interview response of John when he said, “It motivates me to read, it helps me understand words better” or when Khalil stated, “It helps me understand better in science class.” The codes of hesitant and shame revealed that students do not often have the opportunity to discuss how they feel about their identities as readers. The code hesitant was generated out of Christian’s focus group interview response, “because
sometimes in the book it tells you the…main idea.. um.” The code of shame was generated out of Khalil’s weekly student reflection journal response of “(aha) Get more than one sentence.” These kinds of comments also affirmed that the material being used to teach this population of boys how to read was important and that we, as educators, really need to incorporate culturally relevant text and teaching materials.

The significance of theme three is that it encompasses a variety of ideas from student perceptions to student preferences, to their motivation to read, and even to impress the teacher. The data revealed information about students having strong opinions about their learning, about themselves, and their perception of others. Theme three, students had a voice about their abilities in reading, consumed the categories, 1) Weakened self-confidence, 2) Negative attitudes on academic performance, 3) Pleasing the teacher, 4) Self-awareness in their reading skills, and 5) Reading strategy preferences (see Figure 4.17). Some of the codes generated from within these categories included I don’t understand, teacher pleasing, non-motivating, reflection, hesitant, shame, and doubt. The emotions within these codes reflected the honesty expressed by the students, showing how they wanted to be successful as well as impress their teacher.

![Figure 4.17 Theme three](image-url)
**Weakened self-confidence.** Weakened self-confidence is an important category that developed through my research. If teachers become aware of the level of confidence some African American boys have about their own reading levels, they can implement cultural consciousness to increase confidence in their abilities (Land et al., 2014). Cultural consciousness is a type of teaching that embeds positive African American figures within the curriculum to support the self-esteem and self-confidence of its audience. This category relates to my study regarding how African American boys feel about their reading skills and further supports why it needs to be investigated.

The work of Kang and Husband (2020) found African American boys can view themselves from the deficit perspective. In this study, the deficit perspective was seen overtly from the boys regarding their lack of self-confidence. How the boys of this study were seen to lack self-confidence was found in the *InVivo* codes of “you might fail” and “you don’t know”. For example, three boys shared in their focus group interviews.

Christian: If you take a school test you will have to read to find all of the answers. You might need to know the answers or you might fail.

Khalil: A partner can help you with something you don’t know.

John: I’m just reading and then you don’t know what you’re doing and then you get to the question and you actually kinda lost because you don’t know what the story was about.

These *InVivo* codes expressed that the students understood that failure was a possibility, and one can see where Khalil acknowledged there are some things he does not know. John admitted to reading an entire story, going to the questions, and being completely
lost. Each of these quotes further supported the need for close reading strategies, so students can build their self-confidence as readers and test takers.

Another pattern that was seen in the data was the boy’s insecurity and attitudes about their reading and learning. When the coding method of *Emotion coding* took place, the codes of *shame* and *doubt* were created. For example, two boys shared the following in their focus group interviews:

Keaton: instead of hiding them [my reading deficits]
Christian: I [should] get more than one sentence

I realized each code was tied to a form of the boy's fear, insecurity, doubt, and their internalized negative feelings about their reading abilities. A weak self-confidence category captured the feelings, thoughts, and perceptions of the boys regarding their own reading and learning potentials. This category was created out of nine codes, including *insecure, struggling,* and *doubt* (see Figure 4.18).

![Figure 4.18. Codes to Weakened self-confidence category.](image)
Negative attitudes on academic performance. Negative attitudes on academic performance was an important category that developed through investigating the qualitative data to answer research question two. This study was conducted to gather information that could hopefully lower the percentage of African American boys who struggled with reading. Negative attitudes could impact students and more importantly their reading skills. Student attitude about learning and performance can also play a large role in student success. This category relates to my research because it was also important to discover what caused disinterest and made students not motivated to read. There were responses that revealed some students did not identify benefits of using close reading strategies, neither within my classroom, during this study, reading in other classes, or reading outside of school. As Vincent was overheard saying in a class conversation (as recorded in my researcher journal) “reading is not important” or as John stated in a focus group interview response, “it’s pointless.” The specific comments from the students demonstrated negative attitudes about the boys’ academics and reading interests.

If African American boys possess negative attitudes or a lack of interest about their reading or their environment this can impact their overall reading abilities and can have an effect on their academic outcomes (Henderson et al., 2020; Thomas, 2019). How the boys of this study felt about reading and the use of the close reading strategies were captured in the Emotion codes of non motivating, pointless, and lazy. As well through the In Vivo codes of “it wasn’t appealing”, “I don’t understand”, and “reading is not important”. Two students shared in the focus group interview,

Christian: Only one boring to me was R.A.P. because it didn’t have no thing where you can mark the paragraph or box it stuff like that.
John: Reading is not really important in our life.

These codes identify that the students find reading to be difficult and some students have negative experiences that contribute to their not valuing reading. When students disconnect from the value of reading this could impact their success as individuals. The Negative attitudes on academic performance category, was created out of 20 codes, including confusing, annoying, and disinterest (see Figure 4.19).

![Figure 4.19. Codes to Negative attitudes on academic performance category.](image)

**Reading strategy preferences.** Reading strategies preferences is a category that supports this study by bringing in student perspectives about the impact close reading strategies had on the African American boy’s comprehension and motivation, specifically, which of the four strategies that the boys preferred using. Part of culturally responsive teaching includes students’ choices (Kang & Husband, 2020). Their motivation and engagement can increase if teachers can connect student choice and participant voice into their curriculums. How the boys of this study felt about having a choice in what close reading strategy to use during the last week of the intervention was
found in the *Emotion code of acceptance*. As shared in the focus group interview responses of two students,

Vincent: It helps me to push myself.

Ayden: Aha moment and B.U.R.N. will help you.

Vincent’s quote about the Hmm strategy, explained that using the strategy motivated him to challenge himself in reading. Ayden’s quote about the Aha moment and the B.U.R.N. strategy explained his preference and his belief that these close reading strategies would help with his reading skills.

The obvious pattern among the codes that led to the development of this category was the close reading strategy preferences of the boys. This kept the communication of my promise to my students that the study was being done with and not to them. The reading strategy preferences categories, was created out of 11 codes, including three *Process codes of justifying, considering, and connecting* (see Figure 4.20).

![Table](image)

*Figure 4.20. Codes to Reading strategy preferences category.*

**Self-awareness in their reading skills.** This category relates to my research because it provides a look at the relationship African American boys have with reading in relation to their self-awareness. In processing what the boys were experiencing from the
codes generated, the students' self-awareness in their reading skills was an unexpected finding. By learning close reading strategies, students can develop their ideas of what strategies work best for them and this can benefit their skills in reading comprehension (Memiş & Kandemir, 2019). Encouraging students to use close reading strategies helps them become independent and to self-regulate their reading skills as well as increase their self-awareness as it relates to reading comprehension.

The codes that led to the development of this category contained elements of reflection, factors relating to a growth mindset, how close reading strategies helped students, and what could happen if students did not use close reading strategies. How the boys of this study viewed themselves as readers was found in the focus group interview responses that led to the Emotion codes of self-conscious and self awareness being created. For example,

Christian: You might need to know the answers you might fail
Vincent: It helps me to ask myself some questions

Christian was aware that not knowing the answers as a reader could result in him failing a test or quiz. Vincent realized when using the close reading strategies, it made him ask himself questions that could result in him having better reading comprehension of the text.

The In Vivo codes of “your own words” and “you might fail” demonstrated students' self-awareness and their identity as readers. As well, they explained that the close reading strategies could support the students’ paraphrasing skills and if they didn’t use the close reading strategies that they might fail a test. The students were mindful about their reading skills and what they needed to be successful, which revealed the
pattern occurring within the codes for this Self-awareness in their reading skills category. This category was created out of the 12 codes, including “we can get smarter”, reflection, and “it helps me” (see Figure 4.21)

![Figure 4.21. Codes to Self-awareness in their reading skills category.](image)

**Pleasing the teacher.** The purpose of this study was to gain insight about my students’ motivation to read when close reading strategies were used with these African American boys. This processing of the codes that led to this category being developed unveiled a unique motive of students wanting to impress their teacher. Students can have an internal desire to please their teacher and be successful (Thomas, 2019). For example, two students shared the following in their in their focus group interview response:

Christian: Because it motivates you read all day and all night.

Ayden: It motivates me to read paragraphs every day.

Christian and Ayden’s quotes revealed that they wanted the teacher to see their positive attitude about reading.

During the intervention, I encouraged the students to spend time rereading our weekly stories. In my research journal I recorded responses like “Alright, Ms.Barrett
I’m a do it” from Dwight and “I don’t have time, I have football practice” from Matthew. Vincent asked me, “Why do we read so much in this class? Is it time to go.” I explained to Vincent that I wanted to support his reading skills, so that reading would become easier, and he could use these skills after he finished the class. I also encouraged students like Dareal and Ayden to use the listen to a book feature on the Raz Kids app at home, so they would be familiar with the words and may have more confidence when we read the text outlook as a class. Ayden and I often had heart to heart talks, and he promised me each week would be different. However, when I reviewed the Raz Kids login information for Ayden, there was no record of activity. These exchanges with my students offered me a new insight and a different perspective that the students may have had about their own motives to read as well as their motives for impressing me, their teacher.

In this category, pleasing the teacher, or evidence of teacher pleasing, could be found in the two Emotion codes of teacher pleasing and people pleasing as well as the In Vivo code of “you talking” or the Process code of embellishing (see Figure 4.22).

Figure 4.22. Codes to Pleasing the teacher category.

Chapter Summary

For this study, quantitative and qualitative data was collected. Quantitative
sources included 1) Reading Comprehension Assessment, 2) Formative Assessments, and 3) Student perception surveys. Qualitative data included 1) Focus group interviews and 2) Weekly student reflection journal responses. From the quantitative data, there was not a significant difference in the mean of questions answered correctly on the pre-assessment when compared to the mean of questions answered correctly on the post-assessment. Of the four reading strategies used in this intervention, the boys identified the Hmm moment and the B.U.R.N. strategies as the most likely to be used when they read. Three themes emerged from the qualitative data: 1) Students saw the benefit of using reading strategies in their future, 2) Reading strategies motivated students to read, and 3) Students had a voice about their abilities in reading. The analysis of this data and the discovery of the themes allowed me to understand the findings within my study and its relevance to young African American boys who are struggling to read.
CHAPTER 5
DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND LIMITATIONS

This action research aimed to investigate the impact of using four different close reading strategies with fifth grade African American boys who were reading below grade level. This led to the researcher’s desire to find which close reading strategies could be used to support struggling readers. This mixed methods study lasted 11 weeks using four data sources to explore the intervention's impact on student’s reading comprehension and motivation. This study explored the following research questions:

1. How does the implementation of close reading strategies impact the reading comprehension skills of fifth grade African American male students at Wisteria Lane Elementary School?

2. How and in what ways does the implementation of close reading strategies influence fifth grade African American male students’ motivation to read in other classes?

This chapter will present a) discussion of the study findings organized around research questions, b) implications, c) limitations, and d) conclusion.
Discussion

African American boys have a history of being mishandled by the United States educational system (Bryan, 2017; Howard, 2013; Kang & Husband, 2020). The impact of mistreatment has led to severe gaps of the educational attainment of African American boys. The overview of the literature and research about African American boys has been written with a deficit perspective which has not aided in combating this national issue (Smith & Hope, 2020). The deficit perspective provides a lens of viewing African American boys as children in severe lack of the basic needs to be successful. When students struggle academically, they are more inclined to lack positive attitudes about learning and possess negative behavior habits (Davis, 2003; Johnson, 2018). This mixed methods study involved evaluating a close reading intervention on the comprehension skills and motivation of fifth-grade African American boys.

African American boys are at the highest risk for underachievement in reading skills, and African American boys are often found to read below their grade level (Kang & Husband, 2020; Russell & Shiffler, 2019; Washington et al., 2019). When students struggle academically, they are more inclined to lack positive attitudes about learning and possess negative behavior habits (Davis, 2003; Johnson, 2018). This researcher found that there was not a significant difference between the Reading Comprehension pre-assessment and post-assessment scores. This researcher concluded that close reading strategies do have an impact on reading motivation for African American boys in the fifth grade.

The research findings and results derived from this mixed methods study as noticed in chapters one through four, encompassed evidence that answered research
questions one and two. The findings of this mixed methods study identified close reading strategies for teaching independent reading skills to African American boys. The findings add to the current body of literature by providing student descriptions of the preferred close reading strategies to increase reading motivation.

If we can collectively increase student comprehension and motivation, we can increase a student’s likelihood to get good jobs and make livable wages. The discussion section also sets up the best location to unravel my personal and professional implications as a researcher (Lewis, Graham, Boland, & Stacey, 2021). There were several limitations of my research such as student responses lacking depth, an action research study not being generalizable, and having a small sample size. The discussion below is organized by the research questions of this study.

**RQ1: How does the implementation of close reading strategies impact the reading comprehension skills of fifth grade students at Wisteria Lane Elementary School?**

Research on the effectiveness of using close reading strategies for reading comprehension improvement is plentiful (e.g., Harris et al., 2018; Kalir et al., 2020; Mariage et al., 2020; Nelson, 2019). However, the quantitative findings of this study found that students did not experience improved reading comprehension after two intervention cycles involving the use of four close reading strategies. What can be gleaned from these findings are the reading objectives where students showed improvement as well as those which continued to have areas of struggle. The students demonstrated reading comprehension growth when assessment questions focused on the objectives of recalling the main idea in the text and when explaining or identifying interesting or confusing events within the text. Students continued to struggle with
reading comprehension when assessment questions focused on the objectives about transitions of a character's behavior and attitude and when identifying important, key details in the text.

It is important to situate this research from a rural area within a larger context for three reasons. The first reason is that based on school standardized test scores, there is a large population of boys at Wisteria Lane Elementary who read below grade level (South Carolina Department of Education, 2018). When students struggle academically, they are more inclined to lack positive attitudes about learning and possess negative behavior habits (Davis, 2003; Johnson, 2018). This study aimed to offset this trend by providing students with tools they can use to succeed academically and in their futures. The second reason is found in research showing when students don’t read at grade level it increases their chances of dropping out of school (Bell, 2014; Colbert, 2017). To address this issue, this study sought to evaluate close reading strategies that could increase student reading comprehension skills and motivation to remain in school. Finally, this research needs to be situated within a larger context so that teachers and school officials can have insight on best practices to support students who struggle with reading and motivation.

At the conclusion of this intervention the students did not demonstrate a gain on the post-assessment scores. This aligns with the research of Li, Chen, Fan, and Huang (2013) who implemented a digital close reading intervention that did not improve reading comprehension. During this close reading intervention, the students demonstrated growth on the questions that related to the main idea and interesting events on the post-assessment. This aligns with the work of Mariage et al. (2020) who conducted a close reading study where students showed growth on the post-assessment items that asked
students to identify the main ideas. Based on the post-assessment results the students struggled with questions involving character’s attitudes and identifying key details. According to the work of Scullin (2020) African American boys have weak connections with text due to the scarcity of text that have African American characters. Between 2016 and 2018 less than 11% of children’s books contained African American boys. Perhaps the absence of African American positive characters in widely used school text and assessments has influenced this disconnect for African American boys to understand characters that are not of similar backgrounds.

Good readers can associate storyline events with their own experiences (Kalir et al., 2020). Identifying events that relate to your life was an element of the Hmm moment close reading strategy. The Hmm moment strategy gave students several opportunities to respond to the text, including marking moments they found interesting or confusing (Petersen, 2020). As found in the research of Peterson (2020), the bridge to make reading meaningful when using the Hmm moment close reading strategy connected with improved reading comprehension. Existing research has found African American males to benefit from reading books relatable to their own life experiences (Essien, 2017; Scullin, 2020). Even though the texts selected in this study included African American characters and characters in the text related to the students age and activities, this form of a connection when looking at the outcomes of the Hmm moment close reading strategy on the boys’ reading comprehension was not found. However, when using the Hmm moment close reading strategy, it afforded the student’s a sense of motivation for re-reading the text.
The innovation of this study was designed using social constructivism as a theoretical framework where students acquire knowledge by making learning a social experience. Or, as stated by Amineh and Asl (2015), “social constructivists state that meaningful learning occurs when individuals are engaged in social activities such as interaction and collaboration” (p.13). Social constructivist theories support that learning requires human interactions, activities, and culture (Ardiansyah & Ujihanti, 2018; Martinez et al., 2017). African American boys are more likely to learn in social environments (Ellis, 2020; Nelson, 2016). An element of the B.U.R.N. close reading strategy was working both independently as well as with a partner. When asked in the focus group interviews of this study about the impact of using the B.U.R.N. strategy on their motivation to learn, students expressed using the strategy with a partner motivated them to help their peers as well as learn from each other. This further aligns with the social constructivist research that black boys are more inclined to do well when learning within a collaborative environment (Amineh & Asl, 2015; Wood & Jocius, 2013).

Additionally, the converged findings of this study showed that students developed new insights about what was read when working in pairs as compared to working alone. Although it was not intentional in the design of this research, the students also worked with a partner more often than anticipated secondary to the frequency that students did not have a functioning laptop of their own to work on in class.

When a time of reflection is incorporated into the reading lesson, students have been found to improve their reading comprehension (Miller, 2015; Teng, 2020). A time for reflection, having students identify an Aha moment captured during their reading of two texts, was an element of the Aha moment reading strategy. The Aha moment strategy
allowed students to make emotional connections and reflections to the text in an interactive exchange (Azmuddin et al., 2020) through use of annotations. Annotating is an interactive task, and Essien (2017) showed that African American boys are likely to be more engaged when annotations are used along with their reading.

While the assessment outcomes of this study did not show evidence of reading comprehension growth having used any of the close reading strategies, when the Aha moment reading strategy was introduced the first time during the intervention, the formative assessment scores were the highest of the four close reading strategies utilized. At the beginning of the study it was easier to encourage students to complete the formative assessments. Students participated more in the beginning because the reading intervention class was a new experience. However in a short time, students demonstrated disengagement and it became more a challenge to get all of the task completed (Balfanz et al., 2007). Nevertheless, caution is offered in incorporating the formative assessment outcomes secondary to the confounding issues identified previously. It is also important to note that not all students liked using the Aha moment reading strategy. As found in the qualitative data of this study, some students did not like the multiple steps involved in using this strategy and found the Aha moment reading strategy to be boring. In contrast, other students found analyzing the character to be helpful in understanding the text being read.

It would be remissive not to identify the inconsistent attendance, the disruptive behaviors, and the poor attitudes of the students who participated in this study and the impact each of these characteristics had on their completing the formative assessments, as well as the impact on the students’ performance in the reading intervention classroom.
Alone, any of these attributes can contribute to poor academic performance (Balfanz et al., 2007; Morris & Perry, 2016; Orellana et al., 2020). Additionally, when combined, the impact of these problematic issues on the students’ reading comprehension skills and abilities are accentuated. While the boys with the lowest reading scores as well as having pre-existing behavioral issues were included in the smaller of the two class sizes in this study, their poor behaviors and attitudes were seen often and identified frequently in my researcher journal comments. The following section describes evidence of attendance issues, behavioral issues, and some of the poor attitudes displayed during the intervention and how these events are found in the existing literature to impact students’ academic performance.

**Inconsistent attendance.** As a result of my data analysis, there was no significance in the pre-assessment and post-assessment scores among the students. One of the possible factors pertaining to these results could be inconsistent attendance. Attendance in regular classrooms and reading intervention classes are very important. Attendance at school aligns “with academic success while lack of attendance is associated with academic failure and dropping out of school” (Gershan, 2016, p. 2). I kept attendance records in my researcher journal, revealing there were many absences during the intervention phase of this study. Morrissey et al. (2014) found that children with more absences and tardies received lower grades than peers with consistent attendance. Absenteeism is associated with academic failure and dropping out of school which could lead to unemployment (Davis, Allen-Milton, & Coats-Boynton, 2019). It was a challenge to have consistent attendance with both groups of students, and there were several causes for the absences. For example, Ayden missed two sessions due to
being suspended for fighting another student. Dwight was absent twice because he left school early. The second group of students missed one class session to take their yearly benchmark exam in homeroom. At the end of September, all the students were 25 minutes late because of a school assembly. Students were even absent due to bus shortages and arriving late to school. Per my school district's Special Services criteria, students could not be pulled from their math and language arts classes for the reading intervention class where this research took place. This resulted in students not attending related arts classes, a subject that many students enjoyed. If not caught, students would take the opportunity to go to their related arts class instead of my reading intervention class. To give yet another reason for their being absent during the intervention phase of this study. All of these absenteeism factors could have contributed to the students’ poor reading comprehension and poor academic performance at the end of this intervention.

**Behavioral issues.** The results of this mixed methods study reveal only a few of the formative assessments were completed and there was not a significant positive increase on the Reading Comprehension post-assessment. These events could be related to behavioral issues that occurred in multiple class sessions during the intervention. There is scholarly work associating African American boys who struggle academically and behavioral issues (Howard, 2013). The counter narrative is African American boys who do not struggle academically display persistence and determination in their academia (Johnson & Larwin, 2020; Vega & Moore, 2018). During this intervention, some students displayed behaviors that inhibited their own learning or the learning of others. Misbehavior was recorded in my researcher journal entries as students excessively talking, being off task, playing loudly with school supplies, sitting in the hallway, and
laughing at other classmates. For example, Dareal’s disruptive behavior was seen in his intentionally turning his laptop’s volume up, and he would not change his actions when I tried to redirect him. In particular when Dareal struggled with reading out loud or with his spelling, he would loudly call the class “stupid.” There could be a multitude of factors that contributed to Dareal’s behavioral issues and negatively influenced his learning, such as living in a low income neighborhood, self-esteem conflicts, and his inability to achieve success in education (Colbert, 2017). Another example of behavioral issues was seen from John who threw down his laptop and Matthew who decided to imitate John. These negative exchanges of behavior continued until I could intervene, which then took the focus away from the reading strategy being deployed. According to Weakland (2013) some frustrated students can act out to gain attention, some isolate themselves, and some shut down rather than engage with their learning. Kessels and Heyder (2020) used multiple data points to show that off-task behavior can be correlated with weak academic performance and specifically poor reading comprehension. There were multiple instances recorded in my researcher journal where Khalil, Vincent, and Matthew talked excessively and played around during the intervention class periods keeping them from using the close reading strategies introduced on those days. As students transition through school, their behavioral issues and their academic achievement continue to be intertwined (Morris & Perry, 2016). To combat the behavioral issues displayed by students, I worked on building a relationship with each student, established routines, communicated expectations, held a virtual meeting with parents, and sometimes simply ignored the boys' behaviors. These events occurred during the close reading intervention and are likely to have had an impact on this study’s findings.
**Poor attitudes.** One additional factor such as poor attitudes displayed during the intervention could have contributed to student’s performance on the post-assessment and the formative assessments. Poor attitudes also impact students’ academic performance. Davis (2003) found that struggling readers usually have negative attitudes about school. According to Husband (2012) there is a relationship between students' poor attitudes about reading and how they choose to engage in reading activities. Using close reading activities can improve reading comprehension which can lead to improved reading attitudes and motivation (Farkas & Jang, 2019). When the African American boys of this study were assigned to my reading intervention classroom, there was a combination of curiosity and resistance in their attitudes. Out of the nine student participants, Keaton, Dwight, Ayden, and Christian presented as compliant and manageable. These boys had also received reading intervention services previously. Compliance was observed as these boys showed a commitment to working hard and neither boasted nor feared attracting attention for receiving reading intervention assistance. In a study conducted by Wang, Bergin, and Bergin (2014) involving fourth to twelfth grade students, compliance was associated with obedience. Bozack (2011) examined compliance in boys, where compliance was defined as students sitting still, staying on task, completing assignments, having manageable behaviors, and following the teachers’ directions; however, this research was not specific with African American boys.

The remaining five boys of this study consistently came to my reading intervention classroom with poor attitudes. Their poor attitudes began when their standardized reading exam scores were below grade level, and they were placed in my remedial reading class. Adhering to my school district's Special Services criteria, students
could not be pulled from math and language arts classes, so they had to be pulled from science, social studies, recess and extracurriculars classes such as Art or Music. The students' extracurricular classes were also perceived as being the more enjoyable classes, and the boys seemed to resent missing those classes to come to my reading intervention classroom. Poor attitudes were observed and recorded in my researcher journal as these boys were unmotivated, lacked interest in the reading intervention time, or had a negative perspective about reading.

Matthew demonstrated a poor attitude towards the reading strategies daily. He would either come in and not participate, or he would skip steps involved with the reading strategies. Instead of following the steps, Matthew would begin typing without having listened to the book assigned, demonstrating a poor attitude and a desire to be finished fast. Dareal also came to class most days with a poor attitude. For example, each day students were assigned sections of a text to read, and Dareal would blurt out each time, “I got to read all this?” Vincent’s poor attitude was displayed in a more defiant way. He would walk extremely slow to class, sit in the hallway, or loudly complain while in my classroom about the reading strategy being used. Finally, Vincent’s poor attitude was seen as him being argumentative with other students who were located across the classroom, or he would repeatedly state, “Man, I’m ready to go.” Students are more likely to engage in academic areas in which they have high expectancy values. Students display motivation in these subject areas because of their perceived value on the content. However, when students do not value subjects like reading, this impacts their motivation to read and participate in reading activities (Cook & Artino, 2016). The comments and
efforts from Dareal, Matthew and Vincent could demonstrate low expectancy value in reading.

Expectancy value and motivation are a result of how well students believe they can be successful in an area. If most of their experiences are negative in a specific academic area this could decrease their motivation and expectancy value (Walgermo, Frijters, & Solheim, 2018). The boy’s poor attitudes were also more pronounced near the end of the intervention as several of the students were observed as being ready to be done with the intervention and done receiving remedial reading assistance. This likely contributed to their poor performance and/or lack of effort on the quantitative and qualitative data collected at the end of the intervention phase. Shaunessy-Dedrick, Evans, Ferron, and Lindo (2015) conducted a correlation study and a relationship between students’ attitude about reading and their reading success. Additionally, finding students who were taught metacognitive strategies showed growth in their attitudes about reading. Lee’s research (2014) also showed students who received reading intervention services improved their attitudes about reading. Unfortunately, these kinds of outcomes were not found in this study. Instead, the findings of this study found students did not have improved reading comprehension after two intervention cycles involved the use of four close reading strategies.

**RQ2: How and in what ways does the implementation of close reading strategies influence fifth grade students’ motivation to read in other classes?**

The choice of close reading strategies used in this study were chosen as research had identified each to be a source of student motivation (Fisher & Frey, 2014; Petersen, 2020; Stevens et al., 2019; Whaley, 2019). Between qualitative data sources and
notations captured in my researcher’s journal, the students were motivated to read more often in their other classes as well as at home. An example of their motivation observed during this intervention was boys letting me know when they finished a section of the text. In order to finish the book, the students would have to go back and reread the text in order to advance to the next step of the reading strategy being used. While there were times this was also a challenge for some of the students, the findings do suggest that use of the close reading strategies helped students become more independent because they were reading the text over several days and they were able to comprehend the text on their own. As found in the research of Sponaugle (2023), students in grades 3-5 who were more independent in their reading, were more motivated and interested in the reading instruction resulting in an increase in student reading proficiency. Additionally, having the close reading strategy objectives posted in the classroom was seen to facilitate students working independently. Since many of the close reading strategies required inference, to help the boys draw independent conclusions about various topics, anchor charts were created to further the boys thinking about the characters, setting, relationships, lessons learned, and their own lives. I recorded in my researcher journal how sometimes the boys would go to these charts, especially Dwight and Ayden, prior to developing their oral or written weekly student reflection journal responses.

Building self-awareness skills through reading is an additional source of motivation for students to read (Farkas & Jang, 2019). Each of the reading strategies included in this study included multiple steps. Following the steps and being mindful of which step they were on was found in the students letting me know that they were progressing. By the students verbally telling me which step of a strategy they had
completed, they were becoming more self-aware. Although it was not often, there were
times when I also saw enjoyment in the students saying “Ms.Barrett I’m done with the
first part.” This aligns with the research of Lotterman (2021) who looked at reading
enjoyment and motivation in students grades 3-5 and found teachers must incorporate
strategies that promote autonomy, competence, and relatedness to encourage students in
reading for both learning as well as pleasure.

As found in the research of Petersen (2020), a benefit of the Aha moment strategy
was how easy it was to use because it had the least number of steps to complete. The ease
of using the Aha moment strategy was also found in Ayden’s focus group response, “It
was an easier strategy to use.” Aligning with the research of Mariage et al. (2020), the
Hmm moment close reading strategy was seen as a supportive technique that could be
used in their other classes. Factors like easy to use and being viewed as helpful
contributed to the students’ attitude and motivation to use the strategies. For example, I
commented upon in my researcher journal that when the boys were using the Hmm
moment strategy, the question mark notation could remind them of something
misunderstood and their needing to return to that part of the text before moving on. I also
journaled when some of the students were using the B.U.R.N strategy, they seemed to
become more confident when longer and more difficult reading passages were offered.
Mariage et al. (2020) also found the B.U.R.N. strategy promoted their third-grade
students' confidence, which they found positively impacted the students’ reading
comprehension scores. Finally, in using the R.A.P. strategy which requires students to
read a paragraph, ask themselves what the main idea is, and paraphrase the text (Leidiget
al., 2018; Stevens et al., 2019), students identified how this reading strategy helped them
find the main ideas in fiction and nonfiction text to best help understand the questions about those texts. John shared in his focus group interview response that when using the R.A.P. strategy in science class. If he found a passage too hard, he said, "You can look back in the paragraph and ask yourself the main idea and it can help you get the question and you can paraphrase it to make it a little shorter.” Having understood the purpose of using the close reading strategies helped some of the students in this study transfer what was learned into their other coursework.

Identifying insecurity, shame, and a sense of failure when analyzing the qualitative data was how the boys’ vulnerabilities were found in this study. The boys’ vulnerabilities and how this aligned with their self-awareness skills was also seen in the results. This aligns with the research of Custer (2014) who also found a relationship between vulnerability and self-awareness, suggesting that emergence of both can lead to transformation. This offers potential for the boys in this study to also transform academically due to their being vulnerable and becoming self-aware of their learning needs. Additionally, in peer debriefing discussions with one of my dissertation chairpersons about what the students of this study were experiencing, it became clearer to this researcher that the boys realize that they have the potential to grow as readers, as students, as well as productive members of society. For example, as found in their focus group interview responses,

Khalil it could help me get a job

Christian I’m either going to fail or get better
This sense of reading self-awareness and its impact on African American boys’ futures is also found in the research of Hunt, Carper, Lasley, and Raisch (2017). Understanding the benefits of reading comprehension on their future is found in the research of Klinger, Vaughn, and Boardman (2007) who studied children with learning and behavior challenges. Alqarni (2016) and Thompson and Shamberger (2015) identified how multiple barriers to a successful future of black boys are reinforced when these boys also struggle to read, such as not taking college prep classes, dropping out of high school, and having low paying jobs as adults. However, finding ways to motivate African American boys to read and to develop their reading comprehension abilities can have a positive impact on their future (Thomas, 2019; Walker & Hutchison, 2021; Wood, 2021).

There were some students who did not identify benefits of using close reading strategies, neither within my classroom, reading in other classes, or reading outside of school. Vincent was overheard saying in a class conversation (as recorded in my researcher journal) “reading is not important” or as Matthew stated in a focus group interview response, “it’s pointless.” These kinds of comments are also found in the existing literature, especially on the impacts of reading inventions on black students (Bolden, 2021; Wood & Jocius, 2013). In analyzing the qualitative data regarding the impact of the reading strategies on motivating the students to read, there were more benefits of using the close reading strategies found compared to negative comments offered. This suggests that many of the students did find their motivation to read to be impacted when using the reading strategies, whether that was just in my classroom or outside of the classroom.
Students having trouble focusing when reading was found throughout the qualitative data. The correlation between a loss of focus and a student being motivated to read is well documented in the research (Al-Ayash, Kane, Smith, Green-Armytage, 2016; Sun & Hsieh, 2018). When students have distractions, they may not complete their work due to weak motivation (Xie et al., 2020). When students are distracted in independent reading, it lowers their motivation to continue to engage with the text (Unrau & Quirk, 2014). Studies have also shown that when students have low motivation, their engagement will reflect in their lack of attention to the text (Klauda & Guthrie, 2015). Students' responses, specifically on the multiple steps of B.U.R.N. strategy, suggest how engaging with the text in multiple steps helped them maintain their focus and was a strategy they could foresee being used in other classes. For example, Matthew stated in a weekly student reflection journal response, “it helped, not be so confused.” The use of paraphrasing the content and drawing a box or underlining the detail or main idea text, were seen as interactive and beneficial in helping the students stay focused and engaged in their reading.

A source of motivation found in the outcomes of this study was acknowledging the importance of student preferences. Students having a choice, a preference, in what they read is found to motivate a struggling reader (Guthrie & Klauda, 2014). Brandt, Sharp, and Gardner (2021) examined principles to increase student motivation and found that student choice in independent assignments as well as group assignments are ways to increase student engagement.

Giving the students in this study the opportunity to express their opinions about the close reading strategies utilized, furthers the existing research on the motivational
benefits of including student perceptions within research (Gilbert, 2017; Kerkhoff & Spires, 2015). The qualitative data of this study showed that the students preferred to use the Hmm moment and the B.U.R.N close reading strategies the most. The students recalled liking the Hmm moment strategy because it was associated with different choices for interacting with the text. The students expressed liking the B.U.R.N. reading strategy because of the drawing on the text, required rereading and writing what they gleamed from the text as a last step. The lack of interactive steps when using the R.A.P. close reading strategy seemed to make it more boring or not as easy to be engaged with the text. Demonstrating both what a student likes as well as what they dislike, or their bidirectional reading strategy preferences, is important to identify when looking at what motivates a student to read.

Building self-awareness skills, finding ways to stay focused when reading, and incorporating student choice are sources of motivation for students to read. The outcomes of the qualitative data revealed some students of this study saw the benefits of using close reading strategies in other classes as well as in their future. Additionally, identifying how each of the close reading strategies became a source of motivation for the students’ reading in other classes was discovered.

**Implications**

This study has several implications for me as a teacher and researcher, for other reading interventionist professionals, and researchers looking to conduct studies, especially using young African American boys as their participants. There are three types of implications shared, (a) personal implications, (b) professional implications, and c) areas for future research.
Personal Implications

Implications from this study allowed me as a teacher to see that students could be honest about their struggles with reading. Research supports that students with reading difficulty often struggle in their early years of schooling (Cervetti et al., 2020). Each week we would practice the close reading strategy introduced as a class. Various students were selected or volunteered to read out loud, and it became obvious when a student struggled with third grade vocabulary how much they also experienced weaknesses in their reading, regarding both decoding and comprehension skills. What I noted in my researcher journal was what students would define reading to be, what they perceived it took to be a good reader, and how they measured themselves as a reader. When a student struggled to read a word, it was encouraging when a peer would tell them the word, but it was equally discouraging when another peer would laugh at the students lack of proficiency, resulting in the struggling reader immediately shutting down. How a peer can benefit a student's reading potential as much as hinder their progress was found in the research of Stevens et al. (2017) when they conducted a systematic review of peer reading intervention on student comprehension. Sinclair, Gesel, and Lemons (2019) also studied the impact of fifth grade students’ interaction with peers in the classroom when using a peer-tutoring program.

This intervention taught me that I needed to be flexible, both as a researcher and a teacher. Initially, my students were to use Flipgrid to record their weekly student reflection journal responses. Flipgrid is a platform where users record videos, and their peers can respond with new videos or comments and can be used with students as young as second grade. Flipgrid was used in the research of Gurjar (2022) to support literacy
skills and communication skills with encouraging outcomes. A study conducted with middle school and high school students demonstrated that the use of Flipgrid increased student engagement and communication skills in the classroom (Johnson & Skarphol, 2018). The students in this study were instructed to read the assigned prompts created in Flipgrid and record a reflection video. Despite modeling, practicing, and vivid instructions, use of Flipgrid became a hindrance in this study. As captured in my research journal, students would not speak quietly while others recorded, students left their laptops and/or headsets at home, and students saw Flipgrid as a time to make silly recordings or to distract others. Therefore, I decided to switch the weekly student reflection journal responses to written responses in the form of an exit ticket. I wrote the prompts on the board and students would offer their written responses on paper. This made the reflection time of the intervention smoother for the students as well as me.

**Professional Implications**

Implications about the use of close reading strategies for other reading interventionist professionals, as well as elementary school educators, center around the impact of close reading strategies on specific areas of reading comprehension. Using a scaffolded learning approach is suggested to impact what the student is comprehending after reading and analyzing a complex text (Cardullo et al., 2017; Fernanders, 2020). The B.U.R.N. close reading strategy, for example, has students perform four steps to comprehend the text by pages or paragraphs (Mariage et al., 2020). When focusing on the character’s behavior and attitude in the text, consideration should be offered to teaching this objective in layers. It is recommended that educators begin by helping students identify the character’s characteristics and behavior at the beginning of the text. Then
develop a process for acknowledging the events or themes that affect the character. Finding the themes of a text helps students to draw conclusions and use this skill for making inferences. Conclude by assessing the character's behavior at the end of the text. Developing lessons that promote the identification of emotional changes among characters while concurrently discussing vocabulary like flat and round characters. Additionally, a two-tiered instructional lesson for helping students explain or identify interesting or confusing events within the text is suggested. The first tier would develop the reader's skill in noticing which events the author has highlighted as the main idea of the text and to be able to identify which details are supporting details. The second tier would involve looking at all events in the text and discussing how those events can relate to the student’s life. It’s important as a reader to be able to compare and contrast multiple experiences and perspectives (Morfidi et al., 2018). Incorporating activities and lessons on how events of the text impact both the characters and the story’s plot in accordance with 4th and 5th grade reading standards would further advance growth in the students reading comprehension.

The deficit framework (Bean-Folkes & Ellison, 2018; Howard, 2013; Smith & Hope, 2020) underpinned the reasoning for conducting this research and is something I want other professionals to become acutely aware of. The deficit framework is the type of narrative often associated with African American boys; that they cannot perform, they often come from poverty, they have academic incompetence, and they are a weak investment in the education system (Boutte & Johnson, 2013; Nelson, 2016; Smith & Hope, 2020). Through this intervention these students were able to combat the deficit narrative about the worthiness of educating African American boys by identifying which
close reading strategies motivated them and which they found to be most beneficial in their learning. A takeaway message from this research that I feel is important for educators to understand more deeply is that African American boys need specific learning environments where their own versions of success are demonstrated and seen through role models. Within the realm of reading, this means having available culturally relevant texts that have an African American person as a successful main character. Black boys are more motivated to read when they have text that mimics their lives (Hicken et al., 2019; Kendeou et al., 2014). Further, to have all students in the classroom reading these kinds of books and invite discussions where students can learn from each other about the struggles and successes of both fictitious and biographical models.

This research further supports a study conducted by Ellis (2020) who suggested three considerations for teachers to increase African American reading motivation, 1) ensure that literacy connects to students' future goals, 2) give assignments that allow students to bring their interest into the classroom, and 3) ensure that all literature is culturally relevant. As teachers, we can take an inventory of students’ future goals including careers and desired income levels. These inventories could collect a picture of our students’ lives outside of the classroom to incorporate culturally responsive text that mimics their daily lives or circumstances. We can find ways to utilize the findings in relation to what texts students are reading and make available for their selection of a text to read. In advanced grades, students could be assigned research projects that are centered around student interests and preferences (e.g., sports, video games, technology, automotive, and music). According to a study by Kang and Husband (2020), culturally
responsive text, student choice, and collaboration are three ways teachers should consider teaching reading.

**Areas for Future Research**

This study suggests close reading strategies can influence students’ motivation to read. According to Walker and Hutchison (2021) using culturally responsive text can influence reading achievement. This study used a balance of fiction and nonfiction text throughout the study. An area for future research could be to combine the genre of poetry with text that mirrors the lives of the students. The research of Guise and Friend (2017) found poetry supports writing and analytical skills. Poetry is also closely related to the genre of rap music which could increase student engagement once students learn the components of building poems and using words (Tabi, 2022). If research is conducted using close reading strategies with poetry and rap lyrics, it could increase motivation and, reading stamina and comprehension, especially with a population of students who enjoy the genre of rap music.

Longitudinal studies are recommended to show the impact of using close reading strategies for a year or more with the same population of elementary school students. Conducting research throughout the academic year, at least, could then evaluate the impact of using close reading strategies on standardized test results. By doing this, data could be collected from multiple data points in August, December, and June. Data collected could measure students’ reading comprehension scores, writing skills, discussion-making skills and their overall opinions of the close reading strategies being used throughout a longer intervention time. Additionally, research supports that core classes generally use nonfiction text to teach content (Kuhn et al., 2017; McConn, 2018).
Future research on the use of close reading strategies embedded into school curriculum of other subjects like Science, Social Studies, and English Language Arts could further the existing research about the benefits of close reading strategies (Mariage et al., 2020; Peterson, 2020).

Limitations

The impact of inconsistent attendance, behavioral issues, and poor attitudes on the outcomes of this research is a limitation of this study. While the students' spoken answers to the weekly student journal prompts when using Flipgrid were more in depth (in comparison to their written weekly student journal responses), the need to remove the distractions that Flipgrid introduced into the study was found to be the right thing to do. However, the lack of depth in the students' written responses could also be considered a limitation of this study. The following sections will identify the use of a) action research and b) a small population size as the two primary limitations of this study.

Action Research

This study used an action research methodology. Because action research is limited in that way its results are not generalizable (Chen, 2013), conducting action research and not being able to generalize the outcomes is a limitation of this study. Although action research seeks to solve an issue in educational practices, the results may not be as helpful to the next practitioner (Stol & Fitzgerald, 2018; Vaughn et al., 2014). Additionally, action research takes place in a limited or central location (Mertler, 2017). This means that the specificity of my classroom location cannot be broadly assumed of
other classrooms. As well, the design of this study should not be universally applied in other reading intervention or elementary school classrooms.

**Small Population Size**

This study included nine participants, making the small population size another limitation to this study. A small sample size is not optimal for the validity of research (Faber & Fonseca, 2014). Therefore, this study should be investigated with a larger sample size to provide more data and strengthen the findings of the study. Future researchers could use this data to gain student’s perceptions about the close reading strategies included in this intervention; however, caution is offered in doing so because of the lack of depth in the students’ responses offered.
Conclusion

The findings of this study provide insight on the impact of four close reading strategies on African American fifth grade boys reading comprehension skills and their motivation to read. This study confirms that there is a need to continue focusing on the reading skills of African American boys as a means of offering them skills for becoming productive members of society. By implementing strategies that support reading comprehension skills, students can become successful independent readers and thinkers. From the findings it can be concluded that African American boys have a strong opinion on which close reading strategies will motivate them to read. They identified the use of the Hmm moment and the B.U.R.N close reading strategies as their most preferred reading strategy to use during this intervention as well as in other classes. Although this study did not conclude the use of close reading strategies improved the students reading comprehension scores, it did reveal the self-awareness skills and vulnerabilities of this population. To change their reading attitudes, educators need to consider what text African American boys prefer to use as well as provide them culturally relevant texts. Future research using a longer intervention using close reading strategies could lead to the transformation of African American boys' perceptions on reading. It is possible using these researched based close reading strategies that we can promote academic success and reading motivation with African American boys who struggle with reading in elementary school. By increasing their reading motivation, students can become more inclined to practice reading.
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APPENDIX A

PARENT CONSENT FORMS

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH CAROLINA

CONSENT FOR A MINOR TO BE A RESEARCH SUBJECT

(Study Title: Reading strategies: Impact on fifth grade African American males’ reading comprehension and motivation to read)

Your student has been invited to take part in a research study conducted by myself, Patrice Barrett. I am a doctoral candidate in the Department of Educational Practice and Innovation, at the University of South Carolina. The University of South Carolina is sponsoring this research study. The purpose of this study is to evaluate the usage of close reading skills with fifth grade African American male students. Your child is asked to take part in this study because he meets the criteria of being an African American male in the fifth grade. This study is being done at [Embedded School] and will have twelve participants. This study is embedded in your students normal reading intervention class sessions and will take place during class.

Below is a short summary to help you decide if you want your child to be in this study.

Procedures:
If you agree to this study your child will:
1. Continue reading intervention classes as normal.
2. Turn in all consent and assent documentation.
3. Students will complete the researcher created Reading Comprehension pre-assessment.
4. Students will begin the weekly close reading instructional strategies.
5. Students will complete weekly reflection journals based on their thoughts about the close reading strategies.
6. At the conclusion of the study students will complete the post researcher created Reading Comprehension assessment, survey, and focus group interview.
Duration:

Being in this study involves attending 36 reading intervention classes over 12 weeks. Each reading intervention session will last forty minutes at three times each week.

Risks/Discomforts:

During the focus group interview, some students can hear their peers’ responses and can possibly tell other students. The study team cannot promise that all of your student’s answers will be kept private, but we will encourage of the students to practice privacy.

Loss of confidentiality.

This study does have a risk of breach of confidentiality. Despite the steps that will be used to protect student’s identity, its possible data, and names or information can be reviewed by district personnel who have total access to computer software. Student identities could be vocally shared by other students. There will be safeguards used to protect student identity through the use of locked file cabinets and password protected computers. The researcher will notify the IRB if an adverse event should occur.

Benefits:

Taking a part in this study may or may not benefit your child. Students may learn new reading strategies. However, the findings from this study will help local school districts know how children feel about the close reading strategies implemented in this study.

Cost: There will be no cost to you or your child for participating in this study.

Payment: Your child will not be receiving rewards, grades or consequences for participating in this study. Your child or family will not be paid for being in this study.

Your student is not required to participate in this study. Being in this study is not related to their regular classwork and will not help or hurt their grades. Your child can also drop out of the study at any time, for any reason, and there will be no consequences.

Please ask any questions you would like to about the study.

My student’s participation has been explained to me, and all my questions have been answered. I give my student consent to participate in this voluntary study.
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UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH CAROLINA

ASSENT TO BE A RESEARCH SUBJECT

[Close Reading Strategies]

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 (age 13-17) 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.

8 – 12 Year Olds
If the minor is not old enough to comprehend the parental consent form but is old enough to realize that (s) he is participating in a research project, use the Assent template below written at a reading level appropriate to the age of the minor.

I am a researcher from the University of South Carolina. I am working on a study about reading comprehension with fifth grade African American boys. I would like your help. I am interested in learning more about how do close reading strategies impact reading scores and reading motivation among fifth grade boys. 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:
• Answer some written questions about how you feel about close reading strategies, how you view yourself as a reader, how you feel about reading for different subjects at school with your peers.
• Meet with me individually and talk about your specific thoughts on how you feel the intervention is going, how you feel about your reading level, how you feel about using close reading strategies outside of school and what else you do to help you learn at school. The talk will take about will take from 30 to 50 minutes during our focus group interview in our current classroom.

Any information you share with me (or study staff) will be private. No one except me (my dissertation chair) will know what your answers to the questions were.

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 and no one will be mad at you.

Please ask any questions you would like to about the study.
*For Minors 13-17 years of age:
My participation has been explained to me, and all my questions have been answered. I am willing to participate.

____________________________  ________________________
Print Name of Minor                  Age of Minor

____________________________  _________________
Signature of Minor                  Date
APPENDIX B

READING COMPREHENSION PRE-POST ASSESSMENT

Panning for Gold

Panning for Gold In 1828, gold had just been discovered in South Carolina. People young and old dreamed of becoming wealthy by finding precious nuggets of gold in the state’s rivers and streams. Sarah bounced excitedly down the narrow trail after her brother Ben. Her eyes gleamed as the warm morning sun shone down upon them. Ben whistled ahead of her, carrying his cloth sack of equipment over his shoulder. “Keep up!” Ben hollered back. “We don’t have much time!” He hoped his sister would not interfere with his work. He wasn’t thrilled about bringing his younger sister along, and they had to be home soon to do chores. Sarah admired her brother. Ben had experience panning for gold. He had helped his father and some other adults look for gold in a spot up the river, but this was the first time Sarah had been allowed to go. Even though Sarah was excited, part of her feared that she may not be cut out for panning.

Holding up her long skirt, Sarah eagerly caught up with Ben. Thoughts of glittering, gleaming gold filled her head. Soon they reached the place where Ben had chosen to start panning. He put down his sack and spread the supplies on the ground. Ben handed Sarah a round pan and a shovel. She gave him a questioning look. With only a hint of impatience, Ben took a deep breath and demonstrated for her.

“First you look for big rocks in the stream. Maybe there will be a place where the water slows down and flows lightly over the rock. That is where small pieces of gold can sometimes be found,” he explained. Sarah found her spot and waited for him to continue. Ben rolled his pants up and took the pan from Sarah. “Use the shovel to scrape some sand and dirt from the stream into the pan like this,” he said. He then handed the pan to Sarah.

“Swirl it with your hand until the sand settles on the bottom and the water is on top,” he instructed, enjoying the role of expert. Sarah listened carefully as he told her to gently pour the water out of the top of the pan, leaving the sand on the bottom. Then, she gently rubbed a small layer of sand off the top of what was left in the pan.
“Make sure you take off each layer slowly. Inspect the sand for small pieces of shimmering rock,” he said. If Sarah were lucky, a piece of gold would be waiting in one of the layers. Ben handed her a container to put the pieces in. “If we find something that looks important, we’ll take it home to ask if it is real or if it is just fool’s gold,” he suggested.

Sarah watched her brother and paid close attention to how he worked. She scooped and scraped, then scooped and scraped some more. At first, she could not find a single shimmering object. Eventually, after gaining more confidence, she decided to move to another spot where the water trickled over a larger rock. After a while, Sarah noticed her brother staring silently at the water. She could tell that he was frustrated that he was not finding anything. But Sarah did not get upset. Instead, she continued to search the sandy stream thoroughly. Sarah was determined to give her brother a reason to be proud of her, not make him annoyed that she came along. Suddenly, her heart skipped a beat. “Ben!” she cried. “They sparkle!”

Covered in mud from head to toe, Sarah held some small shiny rocks in her hand. Ben jumped up and ran to observe her findings. Encouraged, he grabbed his pan and started working alongside her. “I’m glad you are so determined,” he said, trying not to laugh at how dirty she was. “You’re not so bad to have around, you know.” Sarah returned his smile. “Thanks,” she replied as she continued to pan and her head filled with visions of what she would do if her rocks were real gold. What a fascinating possibility!

1. How did Ben’s attitude about his sister change in the story?
   a. Ben was very nice to his sister in the beginning of the story, by the end of the text he was happy she was there.
   b. Ben did not change in the story.
   c. At first Ben was scared to bring his sister with him, by the end of the text he was glad to have her there.
   d. At first Ben was annoyed that he had to bring his sister, by the end of the text he was happy she was there.

2. Which sentence represents how Ben felt at the beginning of the story?
   a. “If we find something that looks important, we’ll take it home to ask if it is real or if it is just fool’s gold,” Ben suggested.
   b. Ben wasn’t thrilled about bringing his younger sister Sarah along, and they had to be home soon to do chores.
   c. Ben handed Sarah a round pan and a shovel.
   d. Encouraged, Ben grabbed his pan and started working alongside Sarah.

3. Which sentence represents how Ben felt at the end of the story?
   a. “Keep up!” Ben hollered back
   b. “First you look for big rocks in the stream. Maybe there will be a place where the water slows down and flows lightly over the rock.
   c. Eventually, after gaining more confidence, Sarah decided to move to another spot where the water trickled over a larger rock.
   d. “You’re not so bad to have around, you know.”

4. How did Sarah’s attitude change from the start to the end of the story?
a. Sarah’s was excited at both the start and end of the story.
b. At the start Sarah was sad and at the end she was happy.
c. Sarah had no changes in her attitude in the story.
d. Sarah knew how to pan for gold right from the start of the story.

Enjoy the Moment

Sam walked barefoot over the warm sand, enjoying the feel of the small grains under his feet. It was very early in the morning. He and his grandmother made their way toward the shore in comfortable silence, each carrying a pole and a tackle box filled with necessary fishing supplies. “I have a good feeling this morning, Sam,” Gran said as her blue eyes twinkled in the young sunlight. “You take this spot, and I’ll walk down a ways. You know I need plenty of elbow room when I’m fishing.” Giving Sam a friendly jab in the side with her arm, Gran continued down the shoreline with her fishing pole and tackle in hand.

Sam quickly set up his pole with one of his favorite lures for catching fish. Holding the lure up to the sunlight, he twisted it gently between his thumb and forefinger, watching as the light danced off of its metallic sides. Wow, oh, wow, Sam thought to himself. This is bound to catch a whopper! Satisfied, Sam waded into the surf in his waterproof fishing boots, shuffling his feet through the cool water to avoid stepping on a stingray. Since it would soon be high tide, it didn’t take long until he was standing just below knee-deep in the ocean. With a well practiced toss, he sent the lure out into the deeper water beyond the waves and let it float back toward shore a bit.

Sam waited a few seconds, giving the line time to sink, then started the slow, rhythmic process of reeling in the line. As he reeled, Sam looked over to the spot Gran had claimed. He smiled when she cast her line out into the ocean. It amazed him that, even when she was having a bad day, Gran could cast her line a good thirty feet farther than Sam could on his best day. During these trips with Gran, Sam’s attention would move from fishing to the beauty of his surroundings. His grandmother often said that the fishing was secondary to the experience. Gazing out into the surf, Sam watched as a school of silver-banded whiting fish cut its way across the waves. Hearing the call of the seagulls and the sounds of the surf, Sam thought he’d have to agree with his best friend, Gran.

Suddenly, a sharp tug on the line sent Sam stumbling. Recovering from his near fall, he gave his pole a mighty jerk. With a hoot of excitement, Sam watched as the tip of his pole bent sharply. He listened to the line whirl as it was carried out into deeper water by an unknown foe. Sam was vaguely aware of Gran appearing next to him, calmly coaching him, whispering words of encouragement in his ear. After what seemed like an hour-long battle, Sam saw a ripple in the water. “There it is!” Sam shouted breathlessly. He slowly walked back toward the shore until he was in ankle-deep water and stared in wonder at the huge redfish on the end of his line. Sam knelt down and gently removed the fish from the line, taking care to hold it under the water as he admired the fish’s size.
“Oh, Sammie, your catch is just magnificent!” Gran whispered next to him. “It’s a red drum! It must weigh a good ten pounds! Take a picture with your mind, and send the fish on its way.”

Sam took a moment to savor his victory. He felt the weight and power of the fish in his hands and watched it shimmer as the light reflected off its silvery-red scales. “You put up a good fight,” Sam said softly. “Maybe we’ll meet again one day.” He loosened his grip, smiling as the fish darted back into the cover of deeper water. Gran patted Sam on the back. “I don’t know about you, but I worked up an appetite. What do you say to some lunch—my treat?” Sam nodded. He and Gran gathered their gear and headed up the dunes from the shore. As they reached the crest, a girl and her father were making their way toward the water, fishing poles in hand. The girl looked at Sam sympathetically. “No luck today, huh?” she asked. With a quick wink to Gran, Sam smiled at the girl and replied, “Actually, it was one of the best days of my life!”

1. Which answer identifies a significant or interesting event in the text.
   a. Sam went fishing with Gran.
   b. Sam walked on the sand.
   c. Sam loosened his grip on the fish.
   d. Sam and grandma packed up their gear.

2. Which describes the process Sam took to bring the fish in?
   a. Sam stayed on the beach, threw his line into the water, caught a fish using no lure, he kept the fish he caught.
   b. Entering the water up to his knees, Sam put a lure on his fishing line, waited, felt a tug on his line, and with a mighty jerk pulled the fish out of the water but then put it back in.
   c. Gran never helped Sam in catching the fish.
   d. In the water, Sam needed Gran to help him put on a lure and catch the fish that he didn’t end up keeping.

3. What is the main idea of this text?
   a. Sam enjoys the afternoon of fishing with Gran.
   b. Sam learns a lesson about fishing.
   c. Sam is better at fishing than Gran.
   d. Gran loves to fish.

4. What event best describes how Gran helped Sam catch a fish?
   a. Gran did not help Sam catch a fish.
   b. Only Gran caught a fish.
   c. Gran put the lure on Sam’s fishing line.
   d. Gran offered encouragement and support when Sam tried to bring the fish in.

Sea Turtles

Sea turtles have lived on Earth for over 100 million years, that means sea turtles have been here way longer than humans. In fact, they existed back when dinosaurs roamed the land. Sea turtles lay eggs. A mother turtle finds a place on land to make a nest. She digs a
hole in the sand or dirt on a beach, lays her eggs, and then buries them. The mother leaves the eggs and returns to the water. It takes around 60 days for baby sea turtles to come out from their sandy nests and make their way to the ocean. Young turtles spend the first few years of life just floating in the ocean. They must avoid predators, such as sea birds. If these newborn turtles make it to the ocean, they start a “swimming frenzy” to move miles away into deeper waters. All it takes is a bright light on a building to distract freshly hatched sea turtles, causing them to go the wrong way, to go away from the ocean. Sea turtles that do make it to the ocean after hatching travel great distances in search of food, sometimes traveling across entire oceans. While they live in the ocean, unlike fish, sea turtles need air to breathe.

1. Select the answer choice that best represents one of the key details from this text.
   
   a. Baby sea turtles need to be in the ocean to hide from sea birds.
   b. Sea turtles can swim.
   c. Sea turtles hatch in the sand.
   d. Sea turtles are small animals.

2. What is the main idea from this text?
   
   a. Sea turtles need to be safe.
   b. Sea turtles can move fast
   c. Baby sea turtles are buried in the sand and stay there for 60 days before floating in the ocean.
   d. Baby sea turtles live like fish.

3. Select the answer that best represents the life of a sea turtle after they hatch?
   
   a. Baby sea turtles live under water.
   b. They spend the first few years of life just floating in the ocean.
   c. The mother stays and feeds the baby sea turtles once a week.
   d. People walking on the sandy beaches kill baby sea turtles.

4. What is important to know about sea turtles surviving?
   
   a. They need humans to feed them.
   b. Predators, like dogs, will dig them up when they are nesting in the sand.
   c. Sea turtles do not need air.
   d. They must make it into the ocean to live.

Wild Kangaroos

Kangaroos are a type of large mammal that lives in Australia. An adult kangaroo weighs close to 200 pounds, is about 6 feet tall, and most kangaroos are left handed. These creatures have large feet that help them jump up to 30 feet in a single leap. Their powerful back legs and a long, strong tail help them to jump. Kangaroos hop because they can’t move their legs independently. Kangaroos don’t sweat, so they lick their paws and then rub them on their chest for cooling. In the wild, kangaroos live in small groups of around
50 animals. Kangaroos are herbivores, meaning they eat mainly grass. These mammals usually live up to 23 years in the wild.

1. Which answer below is correct information about kangaroos?
   a. Kangaroos are mammals that do not hop.
   b. Kangaroos are reptiles that usually live in groups of 50 animals.
   c. Kangaroos use their legs to hop, and adult kangaroos can weigh 200 pounds.
   d. Kangaroos are amphibians and live up to 50 years in the wild.

2. What is the main idea of this text
   a. Kangaroos are mammals.
   b. Kangaroos do not survive alone in the wild.
   c. Kangaroos are large mammals that have strong legs that help them jump high and move at fast speeds.
   d. Kangaroo make loud noises.

3. From the options below, which could be another appropriate title?
   a. Australia
   b. Kangaroo Facts
   c. Kangaroo Diet
   d. Traveling Kangaroo's

4. What was the author’s purpose for writing this text?
   a. To give facts about kangaroos.
   b. To describe what the wild land of Australia looks like.
   c. To teach what kangaroos eat.
   d. To learn how a joey grows up to be a kangaroo.
## APPENDIX C

### FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT PROMPTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Text</th>
<th>Assessment Prompts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 100<sup>th</sup> Day Project | 1. Why did Leticia need 100 things?  
2. Each of Leticia's books was about ________.  
3. What does the word celebrate mean?  
4. Leticia wanted her project to be ________.  
5. After Leticia decided what her project would be, what did she do next?  
6. What does curious mean?  
7. What does Leticia love about books?  
8. Why did Leticia write very small for her project?  
9. Why did Leticia call her project "100 Reasons I Love to Come to School"?  
10. What did Leticia do before she thought of her project idea? |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Text</th>
<th>Assessment Prompts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Jessica Loves Soccer</em></td>
<td>1. Why are the coach and the twins miserable?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. What happens after Jessica lines up to play?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>3. What is a synonym for spectacular?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>4. How does Jessica try to help solve the Red Dragons’ problem?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>5. What lesson do you think the Red Dragons learned?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6. How do you think Jessica felt at half time?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>7. When did Jessica decide to leave the center circle?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>8. Why does the coach tell Jessica not to move from the center circle?</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9. Who ties the game at 2 to 2?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10. Who scores the winning goal?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Text</td>
<td>Assessment Prompts</td>
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<td>---------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inside your Body</td>
<td>1. What is this book mainly about?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. What would happen if your bones weren't connected by joints?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>3. What does your skeleton do for your body?</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4. Which system communicates what to do to the other body systems?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>5. Which of these statements is not true?</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6. Which of the following do you need to think about</td>
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<td></td>
<td>7. Blood circulates through your body. This means that it _________.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8. Which of the following does blood not do?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9. Where does the digestion of food begin?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10. What can you do to keep your body healthy?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Text</td>
<td>Assessment Prompts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
| *Jackie Robinson* | 1. What is the author's main purpose for writing this book?  
2. Which of these events happened first in Jackie Robinson's life?  
3. What is the main idea of this book?  
4. Which word best describes Jackie Robinson?  
5. The word prejudice means _______.  
6. How was Jackie Robinson different from the other baseball players of his time in major league baseball?  
7. What did Jackie Robinson do after he left baseball in 1957?  
8. What caused Jackie Robinson to get arrested?  
9. Which of the following sentences from the book shows Jackie Robinson's influence?  
10. Which word means about the same as segregated? |
APPENDIX D

STUDENT PERCEPTION SURVEY

Face Symbols Chart

|😊   | Yes, happy, fun | I agree with this *all the time*
|跨度| Maybe, okay, alright | I agree with this *sometimes*
|跨度| No, no motivation | I will never agree with this

Please read the following survey questions. Please select the face that represents your feelings based on the questions.

1. Do you get distracted when reading textbooks while you are at school?
   😊 😐 🎨

2. Do you think any of the close reading strategies will help you focus better when reading textbooks for other classes at school?
   😊 😐 🎨

3. How would you rate your motivation to read before we practiced our close reading strategies for 10 weeks?
   😊 😐 🎨

4. How would you rate your motivation to read after we practiced our close reading strategies for 10 weeks?
   😊 😐 🎨

5. Which close reading strategy would you most likely use in Social Studies?
   - a. Aha moment
   - b. B.U.R.N.
   - c. R.A.P.
   - d. Hmm moment
   - e. None
6. Which close reading strategy would you most likely use in Science?
   ○ a. Aha moment
   ○ b. B.U.R.N.
   ○ c. R.A.P.
   ○ d. Hmm moment
   ○ e. None

7. Which close reading strategy would you most likely use in English Language Arts?
   ○ a. Aha moment
   ○ b. B.U.R.N.
   ○ c. R.A.P.
   ○ d. Hmm moment
   ○ e. None

8. If I use close reading strategies this will make me a
   ○ a. ok reader
   ○ b. good reader
   ○ c. very good reader
   ○ d. the same reader

9. If you are reading a nonfiction book which close reading strategy would you most likely use
   ○ a. Aha moment
   ○ b. B.U.R.N.
   ○ c. R.A.P.
   ○ d. Hmm moment
   ○ e. I don’t read nonfiction books

10. If you are reading a fiction book which close reading strategy would you most likely use
    ○ a. Aha moment
    ○ b. B.U.R.N.
    ○ c. R.A.P.
    ○ d. Hmm moment
    ○ e. I don’t read fiction books

11. Explain how using at least one of the close reading strategies would motivate you to read more often?
APPENDIX E
IRB APPROVAL

Office of Research Compliance

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD FOR HUMAN RESEARCH DECLARATION OF NOT RESEARCH

Patrice Barrett

Re: Pro00123000

Dear Patrice Barrett:

This is to certify that research study entitled Reading strategies: Impact on fifth grade African American males’ reading comprehension and motivation to read was reviewed on 8/24/2022 by the Office of Research Compliance, which is an administrative office that supports the University of South Carolina Institutional Review Board (USC IRB). The Office of Research Compliance, on behalf of the Institutional Review Board, has determined that the referenced research study is not subject to the Protection of Human Subject Regulations in accordance with the Code of Federal Regulations 45 CFR 46 et. seq.

No further oversight by the USC IRB is required. However, the investigator should inform the Office of Research Compliance prior to making any substantive changes in the research methods, as this may alter the status of the project and require another review.

If you have questions, contact Lisa M. Johnson at lissall@mailbox.sc.edu or (803) 777-0670.

Sincerely,

Lisa M. Johnson
ORC Associate Director and IRB Manager
APPENDIX F
FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Introduction

Good afternoon fifth grade students. I want to welcome you to our focus group interview today. Thank you for participating in my research study. As we go through this interview, I will ask you a series of questions and you will answer each, out loud. Please be honest and clear with each of your answers as this meeting will be recorded. The goal of this discussion is to see what you learned, what you think, and how using the four close reading strategies these past weeks may have impacted you and your relationship with reading.

Questions

1. Did you know when you were using the close reading strategies you were mostly teaching yourself how to read?
   
   a. (Follow up) Knowing you were teaching yourself how to read, share with me examples how that motivates you to read in other classes or when you are at home?
2. Share with me examples how one or more of the close reading strategies would motivate you to read different genres of books.
   a. Some genres include biographies, comics, historical fiction, realistic fiction, fantasy books, poetry books, or books about space?

3. Pretend you’re talking to a friend who doesn’t like reading the textbook in Science, Social Studies, or English because they thought it was too hard. Which close reading strategy do you think would motivate them to read in which classes?
   a. Which one would you show them how to use and why?

4. Share with me examples how using the Aha moment strategy might motivate you to read in another class.

5. Think about when you were introduced to the B.U.R.N. strategy and one day you shared with others and another day you completed it independently. What are some of your reasons why either sharing or reading alone motivated you the most to read?

6. In thinking about using the R.A.P. strategy, what are some examples for how it might be used in another class?

7. Share with me some examples for how the Hmm moment strategy motivated you to read the text.

8. Tell me any examples or instances when you found any of the close reading strategies to be hard or boring to use and why?

9. Share your thoughts for why, or why not, reading is important?

10. I appreciate you guys helping me with my research. Is there anything you want to share with me about how these close reading strategies have motivated you to read?
Closing Statement

Does anyone have anything additional they want to share about your experience in using these four close reading strategies? Thank you for participating in this focus group interview. Your answers will provide me insight into ways teachers can help support readers in our school district. At this time, you have completed the interview and you may go to your seats. Thank you again.
APPENDIX G
WEEKLY STUDENT REFLECTION JOURNAL PROMPTS

Date________________________ Journal Entry________________

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Innovation Week</th>
<th>Close Reading Strategy</th>
<th>Student Reflection Journal Prompts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Week 2</td>
<td>Aha Moment</td>
<td>a. This week you had the opportunity to use the Aha moment strategy. Thinking about this close reading strategy and your experiences using it this week, please answer the following prompts. Following each statement fill in your response and add examples to help me understand your ideas.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>b. I feel more confident to:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>I feel more motivated to:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 3</td>
<td>Hmm Moment</td>
<td>a. This week you had the opportunity to use the Hmmm moment strategy. Thinking about this close reading strategy and your experiences using it this week, please answer the following prompts. Following each statement fill in your response and add examples to help me understand your ideas.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>b. I feel more confident to:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>I feel more motivated to:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week</td>
<td>Strategy</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>B.U.R.N.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>a. This week you had the opportunity to use the B.U.R.N. strategy. Thinking about this close reading strategy and your experiences using it this week, please answer the following prompts. Following each statement fill in your response and add examples to help me understand your ideas.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b. I feel more confident to:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I feel more motivated to:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>R.A.P.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>a. This week you had the opportunity to use the R.A.P. strategy. Thinking about this close reading strategy and your experiences using it this week, please answer the following prompts. Following each statement fill in your response and add examples to help me understand your ideas.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b. I feel more confident to:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I feel more motivated to:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Aha Moment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>a. This week you had the opportunity again to use the Aha moment strategy. Thinking about this close reading strategy and your experiences using it this week, please answer the following prompts. Following each statement fill in your response and add examples to help me understand your ideas.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b. I feel more confident to:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I feel more motivated to:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Hmm Moment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>a. This week you had the opportunity again to use the Hmm moment strategy. Thinking about this close reading strategy and your experiences using it this week, please answer the following prompts. Following each statement fill in your response and add examples to help me understand your ideas.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b. I feel more confident to:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I feel more motivated to:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>B.U.R.N.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>a. This week you had the opportunity again to use the B.U.R.N. strategy. Thinking about this close reading strategy and your experiences using it this week, please answer the following prompts. Following each statement fill in your response and add examples to help me understand your ideas.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Week 9  R.A.P.

a. This week you had the opportunity again to use the R.A.P. strategy. Thinking about this close reading strategy and your experiences using it this week, please answer the following prompts. Following each statement fill in your response and add examples to help me understand your ideas.

b. I feel more confident to:
   I feel more motivated to:
# MINUTES
## REGULAR MEETING
### 6/7/22

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1.0</th>
<th>CALL TO ORDER –</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Statement of Media Notification</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>In accordance with the S.C. Freedom of Information Act, Section 30-4-80(e), South Carolina Code, 1987, as amended, all local news media have been notified of the date, time, location, and agenda of the meeting to include a posting on Hampton County School District webpage.</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1.0</th>
<th>APPROVAL OF AGENDA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Motion: Foy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Second: Davis</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2.0</th>
<th>APPROVAL OF MINUTES – May 17, 2022 – Regular Board Meeting</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The minutes were approved as prepared.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2.0</th>
<th>MOMENT OF SILENCE</th>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>3.0</th>
<th>PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>4.0</th>
<th>PUBLIC COMMENTS – N/A</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>5.0</th>
<th>GOOD NEWS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>SC Governor’s School for Arts and Humanities Summer Program accepted the following students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>Community Service Recognition</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>6.0</th>
<th>INFORMATION ITEMS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>Budget Draft for 2022-2023</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.2</td>
<td>Tentative Dates for Board Retreat – June 11, 2022, or June 18, 2022</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| 6.2 | The Board Retreat date is scheduled for June 18, 2022, from 12 pm – 5 pm |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>7.0</th>
<th>EXECUTIVE SESSION (1 hour) – A motion was made to enter Executive Session.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Motion: Taylor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Second: Davis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Motion passed. No objections.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>7.0</th>
<th>RETURN TO OPEN SESSION - A motion was made to return to open session</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
8.0 ACTION ITEM

8.6 Approve doctoral candidate research in the district

Dr. Wilcox made the recommendation to approve the proposed doctoral candidate’s research in the district. A motion was made to approve the proposed research.

Motion: Bowers
Second: Taylor

Motion passed. No objections.

ADJOURNMENT (by 8:30 p.m. unless extended by vote) – A motion was made to adjourn. 8:53 pm

Motion: Foy
Second: Hopkins

Motion passed. No objections.