A CASE STUDY OF FIRST GRADE STUDENT USE OF SILENT READING TIME

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First grade students in a suburban elementary school were interviewed to determine whether the strategies taught in the classroom were transferred to their silent reading time. These 18 students were asked a series of questions, prompted by a semi-structured interview guide, regarding their use of decoding, comprehension, and selection strategies during silent reading time.

It was concluded that students did utilize specifically taught strategies when an unknown word was discovered or a book selection needed to take place. Most students used a combination of techniques taught within the classroom setting during silent reading time.
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CHAPTER I. INTRODUCTION

Every morning, first grade students are taught different strategies to aid them while they read stories aloud. They are shown how to decode unfamiliar words, find the beginning, middle, and end of the story, and memorize high frequency sight words. When a student encounters a difficult word, or is having difficulty finding meaning, the teacher is right there to assist him/her in finding a solution. Then, in the afternoons, those first grade students are allotted time to choose books to read silently. It is during this independent reading time that those skills learned earlier during the day should transfer to create a meaningful, skill building experience.

Statement of the Problem

Children in first grade are allotted time in their day to read independently. Their books have been colored coded to display the level of reading ability so that students are able to choose books at the appropriate level. The books are organized into various groupings such as authors or subject matter being studied. The lessons taught each day are geared toward phonics and whole language instruction. Some students use this time wisely and appear to be reading. However, some of the reading may not be comprehended which means the reading level of the children may not be increasing. Some teachers might find this free learning experience to be a waste of time because children can not be monitored. The students are expected to self correct and apply techniques used in the classroom without prompting. Some children may not be utilizing the tools available to them or the strategies they have been taught during this silent reading time.

Research Question

The focus of this study was to discover what happens during silent reading time, and to determine whether the students were utilizing the tools given to them through classroom instruction during this independent reading experience. Specifically, the question to be addressed
was: To what extent do first grade students apply what they have learned in class to silent reading time?

Justification

A typical day in a first grade classroom is filled with math, spelling, phonics, learning reading skills, science, social studies, art class, recesses, and of course, lunch. Included in that busy schedule is silent reading time. This is valuable time set aside to allow children to utilize the skills they have learned and transfer them into this reading experience. The classroom teacher needs to know if this independent reading practice is being used to hone the strategies, skills and techniques learned through more formal instruction.

Limitations

During this investigation, there was no control over the truthfulness of the students’ answers to the interview questions. Another aspect of the study that was out of the researcher’s control was the amount of effort put towards any answers being given during this interview process. A small sample size of first grade students may limit the generalizability of the results.
CHAPTER II. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The purpose of this investigation was to discover whether students were transferring learned strategies from previous lessons to silent reading time. Specifically, this investigation was designed to answer the following research question: Do first grade students apply what they have learned in class to silent reading time? This chapter includes a summary of research which outlines the importance of sustained silent reading, the view of the National Reading Panel on sustained silent reading (National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, 2000), how reading strategies are transferred to this reading experience, the benefits of a sustained silent reading program, and what it takes to have a successful sustained silent reading program.

Importance of Sustained Silent Reading

For over 30 years, the act of silent reading has taken on several names. Kaisen (1987) defines Sustained Silent Reading (SSR) as a “supplemental reading program in which teachers and students alike choose and read books silently for a specified period of time with no reports to hinder the enjoyment of reading” (p. 532). Another silent reading approach, titled Drop Everything and Read (DEAR), is described by Lee-Daniels and Murray (2000), “the teacher provides a regular, fixed time for voluntary reading. During this time, everyone (including the teacher) puts aside all other work and reads” (p. 154). The program begins with five minutes of reading time, and then progresses to a half hour or longer. Both programs follow the same protocol with the hope of giving more students opportunity to be exposed to more print, which makes the silent reading period so important to so many educators and children.

Many teachers or researchers will agree that reading fluency is the key to success as an independent reader. Some students, however, who are not developing fluency have a hard time keeping up as reading expectations and school work increases (Worthy & Broaddus, 2001). The
student who experiences difficulty with fluency then avoids reading because of fear of failure and negative attitudes (Worthy et al.). Worthy and Broaddus add, “students who avoid reading have less exposure to ideas and vocabulary in books and may lose intellectual as well as academic ground” (p. 335).

Osborn and Lehr (2003) refer to this decline in reading growth as “the Matthew effect”. The Matthew effect is the theory that the rich readers get richer and the poor readers get poorer and students who are good readers, probably read more, whereas readers poor in fluency read less. This lack of exposure to text then leads to a delay in the development of word recognition skills and strategies as well as a delay in the development of comprehension skills and strategies (Osborn et al.).

Osborn and Lehr (2003) cite a number of studies that explore the relationship between reading ability and how much a student reads. These studies include Biemiller (1977-78), Juel (1988), and Cunningham and Stanovich (1998).

Biemiller (1977-1978) found significant differences in print exposure among readers with different levels of reading ability and reported substantial ability group differences related to the amount of reading done. In his study, he questioned how reading speed changes with age and how reading speed related to measures of reading achievement (Biemiller). From this six-year study on oral reading rates for letters, words, and texts, Biemiller discovered two important findings:

1. Children who read letters relatively slowly, read words proportionately more slowly.

2. There is no evidence that poor readers use interword structure (context) less effectively than their more able peers. (p. 245)
From these findings, he concluded that there is a possibility that young good and poor readers display a difference in the time they take to process letter features when identification is involved (Biemiller, 1977-1978). Biemiller summarizes his findings by stating the following:

In summary, basic identification speed differences between good and poor readers may involve poor readers processing more features and differences in neurological maturation which affect the speed with which visual patterns are related to verbal responses. The former problem may be the result of relatively less reading experience (and consequently less use of the redundancy in letter features). (p. 248)

One of the explanations that Biemiller (1977-1978) gives for the failure of poor readers to process word structure is that they “read less and consequently are exposed to fewer instances of the various contingencies and units that makeup English speaking” (p. 249). Biemiller explains that children who take longer to identify words may find reading to be more difficult so they would then read less frequently at school and home:

Part of the reduced quantity of reading is directly attributable to the slower rate of poor readers. Part may be due to efforts by teachers to make reading sessions more meaningful (and possibly palatable)-by doing everything except reading. (p. 249)

Juel (1988) found that first grade children with good word recognition skills were exposed to almost twice as many words in their basal readers as were children who had poor recognition skills. In Juel’s study, she researched poor readers and writers and if they remained poor readers and writers year after year. She also investigated some of the reasons for the lack of improvement of these poor readers. Juel discovered that “the poor first grade reader was almost invariably still a poor reader by the end of fourth grade. The good first-grade reader almost
invariably remained a good reader at the end of fourth grade” (p. 444). She attributed the poor readers’ problem to poor phonemic awareness from the beginning of first grade.

Juel (1988) notes that many variables need to be explored to determine how early the practice of reading should begin. She suggests home, preschool, kindergarten, and curriculum should be studied; “Several countries have shown that skill in entering phonemic awareness has a powerful influence on reading and spelling acquisition” (Juel, p. 444). She also found that poor readers entered first grade with little phonemic awareness. While progress was made during the school year, the poor readers were still behind the average or good readers.

According to Juel (1988), “By the end of first grade, the good readers in my study had seen about twice as many words in running text as the poor readers” (p. 445). She also found in her research that the difference in exposure to text only increased with each grade. “Beginning in about third grade, the major determinant of vocabulary growth is amount of free reading” (Juel), (p. 445).

Juel’s 1988 study revealed how poor readers have a tendency to become poor writers. She believes, “Children who do not read much likely do not gain as much in vocabulary as prolific readers, and also they may not develop in knowledge of what constitutes a good story” (p. 445). Juel concludes:

For children who are not learning to decode and who are not reading much, every effort must be made both to keep them motivated to read and to keep up their listening comprehension so they do not fall so far behind in vocabulary concepts, and so on. The age-old technique of reading to children often seems to fit the requirement nicely and should not be forgotten in the elementary grades. (p. 446)
Cunningham and Stanovich (1998) showed strong connections between wide reading, reading achievement, and vocabulary knowledge. Their research deals with examining how reading volume can affect a child’s mind. Cunningham et al. begin by showing that children learn more unique vocabulary in children’s books than in adult language or primetime television. They found that children who read more independently had a far richer vocabulary base than those who hardly read at all. Cunningham et al. state that “reading volume and vocabulary might be linked via their connection to decoding ability: Good decoders read a lot and have the best context available for inferring new words” (p. 12). They also found that:

Early success at reading acquisition is one of the keys that unlocks a lifetime of reading habits. The subsequent exercise of this habit serves to further develop reading comprehension ability in an interlocking positive feedback logic. (p. 14)

Cunningham and Stanovich (2003) found that the amount of print a child is exposed to makes a difference in cognitive development and “that the act of reading itself serves to increase the achievement differences among children” (p. 34). They discuss how building vocabulary and how reading can work for everyone to improve reading ability. Cunningham et al. agrees with Juel (1988) that early success in reading is one of the keys that opens a lifetime of good reading habits. With vocabulary development, they looked at different categories of language: written, spoken on television, and adult speech. For vocabulary growth to occur, there must be a lot of exposure to rare words, and print can offer that exposure more than television (Cunningham et al.). According to Cunningham et al., word exposure is significant in vocabulary growth: “for example, just two days out-of-school reading for a child at the 90th percentile amounts to an entire year’s worth for a child at the 10th percentile” (p. 35).
Cunningham et al. (2003) find it important to note that even students with limited reading and comprehension skills will build vocabulary and thinking skills through reading. With this being said, they also conclude that independent and out-of-school reading improves reading ability (2003).

Lee-Daniels and Murray (2000) agree as they found that the best reading practice is reading. Fluency, new vocabulary, and intelligence can be improved when readers read more often. Lee-Daniels, a second grade teacher, wanted her class to practice this skill of reading with her DEAR (Drop Everything and Read) program. Her program set aside time for everyone to read, including the teacher and students with reading disabilities. After about three weeks, the enthusiasm for reading during DEAR time started to fade (Lee-Daniels et al.). So, she came up with different strategies to get the students excited about reading during this period of time. Lee-Daniels asked them questions about their reading attitude, had them make bookworms to chart their progress, and had them read in same ability pairs. Lee-Daniels and Murray believe, “To become lifelong learners, children need an engaging curriculum; safe, caring communities in which to discover and create; and a significant degree of choice about what, how, and why they are learning. A DEAR program can contribute” (p. 155).

Caldwell and Gaine (2000) found that the best predictor of reading achievement correlated with the amount of time students spend reading independently. If the goal is to have children improve their vocabulary and reading fluency, then they must read many pages of text. Caldwell et al. illustrate how children can be motivated to read more by offering them good books that entice and promote continued reading. They suggest implementing good books such as *The Phantom Tollbooth* into school reading programs. According to Caldwell et al., “Literary-rich books such as this one can provide a plethora of activities that will motivate the children’s
They suggest using plays, vocabulary activities, website activities, and art projects to motivate readers: “We would suggest that both parents and teachers alike always remember to stress the importance of independent reading and make provisions to encourage a positive reading environment” (p. 8).

The challenge is to find additional opportunities for meaningful reading practice for readers who find reading to be a negative experience (Osborn et al., 2003). This challenge is being met by incorporating independent silent reading in the classroom.

The View of the National Reading Panel

The National Reading Panel (National Institute of Child Health and Human Development [NICHHD], 2000) assessed researched-based knowledge on the effectiveness of the procedures used in teaching reading and when they made their year 2000 report, independent silent reading was discussed. In their findings, the panel found that there is much encouragement for children to read silently. They questioned if the best readers read more just because they were better readers or if silent reading made them better (NICHHD). The studies done to answer the question of causation had some flaws. Some of the studies only focused on student’s silent reading with little or no feedback while others did not directly assess fluency (NICHHD).

Due to the lack of experimental research evidence, the National Reading Panel (NICHHD, 2000) did not endorse SSR as a way to build fluency. Osborne et al (2003) argue that the National Reading Panel did not reject SSR, either: “Independent silent reading serves many functions in school programs, including the development of independent reading habits” (p. 17). Osborne et al. add that this research explains that SSR may not lead to increases in reading fluency for the students who need the most intervention: “For these students, silent independent reading can take away time from needed reading instruction” (p. 17).
The Transfer of Learned Reading Strategies to SSR

Teachers spend quite a bit of time teaching various reading strategies to their students in hopes that they will use the techniques during independent activities. Within the last 20 years, Sustained Silent Reading (SSR) has become a component in the school reading program (Moore, Jones, & Miller, 1980). Moore et al. state, “this attention grew out of the realization that, although much time is spent teaching students how to read, few opportunities are afforded them to practice reading” (p. 445).

According to Worthy et al. (2001), a major aim of reading instruction is to provide guided instruction for oral fluency that is meaningful and beneficial. While some students may complete a phonics paper flawlessly, they can not find the words’ meaning within context (Berglund & Johns, 1983). A different concern of teachers is that the students say the words perfectly, but then cannot comprehend the selection (Berglund & Johns). SSR allows students to not have to read every word perfectly, but still remember details of the story as they transfer their comprehension techniques.

Barsema, Harms, and Pogue (2002) suggested giving lessons on what happens during SSR and how students can utilize reading strategies to help them become better readers. They found that “students were more likely to persist in challenging tasks if they know how to use a wide variety of reading strategies” (p. 45).

Moore, et al. (1980) agreed with the fact that students need to apply and transfer isolated reading skills to the process of silent reading to become proficient readers. They also found that students who participated in SSR did significantly better in reading comprehension (Moore et al.).
Caldwell et al. (2000) reported that SSR is a wonderful opportunity to discover and decipher new words. As students delve into a wide variety of books, they come into contact with vocabulary that does not often occur in spoken language. Caldwell et al. state that “SSR builds students’ confidence tackling trouble spots in books and allows them to use their word attack skills to figure out new vocabulary” (p. 5).

Kaisen (1987) observed word attack after a month of SSR in her first grade classroom when she saw her students become increasingly engaged in their books. She noticed fingers moving slowly under words and mouths forming to make the appropriate sounds. Students soon were describing a page from their book with great excitement. Students also wanted to read the books that the teacher had read aloud to the class earlier (Kaisen).

Caldwell et al (2000) also noticed work attack skills being used during silent reading. This transfer of word attack skills was apparent as a student who was bored with reading soon discovered different parts of speech and how poetic they were. The student, Curtis, was excited to learn that words can have more than one meaning and as he read, his practice of using these figures of speech increased dramatically. Reading and books had such an impact on Curtis that he then became an English major.

Gardiner (2001) found that silent reading programs can increase reading speed as well. Students participating in SSR programs that enjoy reading read more often and develop better skills in reading comprehension, spelling, and vocabulary (Gardiner). Gardiner states that “ten minutes of sustained silent reading does not subtract from instructional time; instead, this time offers significant opportunities for students’ language and literacy development” (p. 35).

A relationship has been found between the amount of books read and a student’s reading comprehension and attitude toward reading (Moore et al., 1980). They found that students do not
read much outside of school. According to Moore et al., “Many young people lack a quiet place to read or have no adult role model to foster a desire to read. SSR attempts to provide both” (p. 446). SSR appears to have the potential, according to Moore et al., to improve both attitude and achievement.

There is, however, another point of view when it comes to the transfer of skills to SSR. Compton, Olinghouse, Elleman, Vining, Appleton, Vail, and Summers (2005) state that “effective transfer requires a sufficient degree of original learning and that transfer failures may be the result of inadequate initial learning” (p. 56). They continued to research the transfer of reading skills with children that have reading disabilities and Compton et al. found that children with learning disabilities transferred decoding-skill instruction at a very low rate.

There is not much research related to whether students who engage in independent silent reading improve reading achievement and fluency (Osborne et al., 2003). Osborne et al. believe that most of the findings in support of SSR come from correlational rather than experimental research:

Correlational findings are useful, but they pose a problem. Correlations do not show the direction or the sequence of a cause-effect relationship. They cannot show, for example, whether good readers are good because they read more or whether they simply choose to read more because they are good readers. Experimental research, on the other hand, offers strict controls over variables that can affect an outcome. Of the few experimental studies on the effects of independent reading, most have found small or no gains in reading achievement as a result of such classroom activity. (p. 16)

Researchers offer some explanations for the low gains in reading achievement, one of which is the decision to make the reading time completely independent (Osborne et al., 2003).
With that amount of independence, some students may spend the reading time daydreaming or other off-task activities. Since the students are reading silently, it is difficult to evaluate the rate or accuracy of their reading: there is no opportunity for the teachers to provide constructive feedback. Osborne et al. also point out that when students are allowed to choose their own reading material, they tend to choose material that is easy. This practice leads to children not receiving challenging materials that build vocabulary and comprehension (Osborne, et al).

Benefits of Sustained Silent Reading

One of the benefits of Sustained Silent Reading is that it has a positive effect on students’ reading habits (Moore et al., 1980). Findings from their study on reading attitudes suggest that “even though a student does not perceive a change in his/her attitude, the change may still have occurred” (p. 448) because appropriate tools to measure changes in attitude have not been developed yet, (Moore et al).

Gardiner (2001) also found that daily reading opportunities correlated with improved attitudes, which in turn produced other benefits. Gardiner explains:

Children in kindergarten, primary, and middle grades who have demonstrated a voluntary interest in books were not only rated to have better work habits, social and emotional development, language structure, and overall school performance, but also these children scored significantly higher on standardized reading tests. (p. 33)

Collins (1980) elaborated on two of four studies that identified the effects of sustained silent reading periods on the achievement of elementary-school students:

The first of these studies included two classrooms of students in Grade four. One group was exposed to sustained silent reading. The other group, the control group, was given a comparable amount of teacher-directed instruction on reading skills. The researcher
found that the group exposed to sustained silent reading performed as well as the control group. A second study included three groups of junior high students. In this study, the students who were exposed to sustained silent reading activities had a more positive attitude toward reading than the other group. (p. 110)

Moore et al. (1980) found that SSR increased reading ability when combined with a regular program of reading instruction. They also “determined that students in a class combining systematic skill instruction and free reading achieved better that those in an individualized class with large amounts of free reading or students in a traditional class with no free reading” (p. 448).

Another benefit of SSR is growth in vocabulary. Gardiner (2001) claims, “Readers learn new vocabulary simply by reading books” (p. 34). Gardiner found that the longer period of time during SSR programs, the better those students did on vocabulary and reading comprehension tests. Caldwell et al. (2000) show that independent reading accounts for a third or more of vocabulary growth, provides students with background knowledge, enhances reading comprehension, and promotes reading as a life long activity. Collins (1980) states that some of the benefits of sustained silent reading are sharpened word recognition and comprehension.

Sustained silent reading increases interest in reading for pleasure (Collins, 1980). Throughout a 15-week period, data collected found that the students who participated in silent reading program recorded more interests than the students who did not participate in the program (Collins).

Berglund et al. (1983) share that the student’s independence of selecting his/her own material to read and setting his/her own purpose for reading enables him/her to read for enjoyment. Readers can set their own pace while reading, and even skip sections if they need to
do so. Berglund et al. add, “SSR helps students to develop an interest in and a love of reading that will cause them to choose it as an enjoyable leisure-time activity” (p. 535). Berglund et al. believe that students will experience increased security with text since they are reading at their own pace and the threat of failure is removed. SSR provides the means for students to build power in silent reading (Berglund et al.).

Cunningham et al. (2003) stated that research has found that reading often is effective regardless of the reading ability of the child. “The more children read, the greater their vocabulary and the better their comprehension” (p. 34).

A Successful Sustained Silent Reading Program

Berglund et al. (1983) define the requirements of a successful sustained silent reading program clearly when they state that “what a teacher does during and after silent reading defines silent reading for students” (p. 537). Berglund et al. stressed the importance of modeling good reading behavior during and after SSR, especially at the beginning of the program. They found that if the teacher is engrossed in a book, that then the students would be inspired by this act and read more themselves.

Barsema, Harms, and Pogue (2002) have their own recommendations about successful SSR programs. They believe a successful program starts by making it a priority to set aside time during the day for this worthwhile activity (Barsema, Harms, & Pogue). The teacher’s role during silent reading is also important. Barsema et al. found that the teacher should be required to read during the silent independent reading time and end it with reactions to the story he read. One of the major causes of failure of the sustained silent reading program was that the teacher did not provide a good role model. McCracken and McCracken (1978) agree to the importance of teacher involvement in the SSR program when they found that in most of the unsuccessful
SSR programs, teachers were watching the class or aides were doing clerical work. They reported, “We came to the key notion that all adults in the classroom have to read or SSR does not work” (p. 406).

Gardiner (2001) also identified several key components of a successful SSR program. According to Gardiner, students should choose their own books, have uninterrupted time to read, observe the teacher modeling good reading habits, and not be required to take tests or write book reports on what they read.

Another aspect of a successful silent reading program is the variety and availability of reading materials (Moore et al., 1980). Books need to be organized in a way that allows students to easily locate books of interest. There must be a large selection of books to choose from, also (Moore et al).

Worthy et al (2001) state, “For the greatest benefits to fluency and independent reading development, students should read interesting and manageable texts every day, ideally at their independent or easy reading level” (p. 337). According to Worthy et al., 95% should be read and understood without difficulty to be at these levels. The authors also explain that interesting books that can be read with reasonable accuracy may not be readily available. This can make for a frustrating reading experience, which could lead to avoidance of reading.

A final aspect of the silent reading experience is book sharing. Lee-Daniels et al. (2000) found that SSR works best when children share books, either with his teacher or in literature discussions with peers.

Worthy et al (2001) also wants to give students choices of purposeful response activities rather than busywork. Osborne (2003) succinctly summarizes what teachers can do to make independent reading time more productive:
1. Help students learn how to select books at appropriate reading levels and related to their interests. Make book selection a part of the regular reading group activity.

2. After silent reading, set aside time for students to discuss what they read. Have students recommend books to each other.

3. Involve parents and other family members by giving them tips on how to read with their children (p. 18).

According to Worthy et al. (2001), the techniques to develop reading fluency as listed above, develops over time through modeling and instruction and guided and independent practice in a variety of texts.

Adaptations to the Sustained Silent Reading Program

One motivation for sustained silent reading time is to offer students a few minutes to share the books they are reading with their classmates (Worthy et al., 2001). This serves as a catalyst for book selection as children often choose to read the books discussed by their friends or their teachers.

Barsema et al. (2002) found that student sharing of favorite books helped in self-selection of interesting, motivating reading material and expanded the variety of genres and authors read. Since peers can evoke such a strong sense of motivation, researchers have studied how this could affect silent reading. Barsema et al. found that students who participated in peer-interaction models appeared to make the most gains in reading achievement and motivation. They found it best to form pairs of students who were reading at a similar level. Paired reading may be utilized as a way to increase time spent reading in the classroom and to increase reading achievement. The authors state, “Having the two students read simultaneously or having one student in the pair read orally while the other listened, helped increase the students’ comprehension rate by 2.7
years” (p. 46). Barsema et al. add that students working in a paired reading situation improved in word recognition and higher level thought processes involved in reading.

Lee-Daniels et al. (2000) discovered that some readers were so intrigued by their partner’s book share that they traded with each other, then sat side by side and read aloud familiar passages. They found in their classroom that “children can best learn from being together. Through being together they learn the skills needed for growing together” (p. 155).

Another adaptation to the SSR model is Booktime (Kaisen, 1987). This program was designed for low ability first graders. During this group time with five to seven students, help is given to find the meanings of unfamiliar words and to have them help themselves. Due to the positive setting that Booktime offered, after several weeks of daily reading, “it was not unusual to see children spend an entire session on the first few pages of a single book, attempting to read the text through a combination of context clues and decoding” (Kaisen, p. 533). Kaisen offers several guidelines to follow if one uses Booktime in the classroom which include: (a) having Booktime at the same time everyday, (b) beginning with a small amount of reading time, then gradually increasing it, (c) reading aloud from a large number of picture books, and (d) providing first graders with the option to talk quietly with another student about their book. Quiet talking, according to Kaisen, can be helpful in reviewing a story, exchanging reactions about the book, and figuring out some of the text by using word identification skills. Kasien found one kindergarten teacher who stated “They like to share what they are seeing in their books with their friends. This is not negative, this is good. If they are so thrilled they want to share it, I don’t want to stop them by staying they can’t talk” (p. 534). Kaisen believes another adaptation is to make sure that students have several books with them during silent reading time. Moore et al. (1980)
supports this notion by stating that setting aside a short amount of time earlier in the day for the purpose of selecting material will allow for more reading time when it is allotted.

Summary

Sustained silent reading has been used in classrooms for over 30 years. In that period of time, teachers have noticed a positive change in attitude towards reading, an increase in vocabulary recall, and better comprehension of the reading material. This change for the better was achieved by classrooms that attempted to follow the original plan for a successful silent reading program. That program would consist of having a variety of interesting books available, setting aside time in the day for uninterrupted reading, modeling good reading behavior, and sharing reactions to the books with peers and teachers. Silent reading would not be successful, however, if students are not prepared with word attack and decoding skills or other reading strategies. The transfer of these reading strategies into the SSR program can help to make it successful. Silent reading can also be altered a bit to increase student motivation. Booktime and book selection time are two ways to make the most of the time allotted for silent reading. An overall belief among researchers is that simply reading can improve reading ability and attitude towards reading.
CHAPTER III. METHODS AND PROCEDURES

The purpose of this investigation was to further examine the transfer of reading skills taught to the class to the independent silent reading experience. The following question about transfer of skills was asked: To what extent do first grade students apply what they have learned in class to silent reading time? Chapter III will focus on the methods and procedures used to conduct this study.

Methods

Research Design

This investigation was a qualitative action research study. As the review of the literature revealed, an experimental, quantitative study is not possible for measuring silent reading. In this study, there was only one small group of students and no other group to which they were compared. A semi-structured interview technique was used to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the answers to the research question. Students were pulled aside to participate in a one-on-one interview. They were asked the same set of questions; however, some of the questioning was extended because of the answers that the students give using a semi-structured interview guide.

It should be noted that the observations and interviews were conducted by the students’ own classroom teacher. While action research may contain bias, it can be kept to a minimum by having the researcher remain objective and factual in reporting the data collected. Action research in one classroom was a justifiable technique for this project because randomly selecting first grade students from different schools and school systems would have a negative affect on the data since the students’ background on reading instruction and SSR processes would be different.
Mertler (2006) highlights four important reasons to conduct action research in the classroom: connecting theory to practice, improvement of educational practice, teacher empowerment, and professional growth. Usually, an inservice is provided for teachers to assist them in developing best practices for the classroom. This second party may be presenting a one size fits all program that may not benefit each teacher. Action research by the teacher in their own classroom closes the gap of unrelated information by allowing teachers to collect and analyze data in their own classroom and then connecting theory to best practices (Mertler).

Improvement of educational practice is another reason for action research to be conducted. Mertler states, “The truly successful teachers (i.e., those whom we call experts or “master teachers”) are those who constantly and systematically reflect on their actions and the consequences of those actions” (p. 14). Action research allows for teacher empowerment which encourages decision making and risk taking to make changes in instructional practice (Mertler).

Finally, action research provides teachers with professional growth that assists them in giving them a voice in their own professional development (Mertler).

Participant Demographic Data

Data were collected from 18 students in the first grade at a suburban, Northwest Ohio elementary school. There were approximately 450 students in this preschool through fifth grade school. There were three first grade classrooms with 17-19 students in each room. The students ranged in age from six to seven. There was one Hispanic student and one student was African American. The remaining students were Caucasian. Parents of the children involved in the study would be classified as middle to lower middle socioeconomic class. Only two of the children participated in the free or reduced lunch program. The school counselor met with four of the students, individually, for 15 minutes a week for emotional or behavioral issues.
None of the students to be observed were formally identified as children with special needs. While none of the children have been formally assessed to identify giftedness, four students were supplemented with gifted and talented intervention services once a week for 30 minutes. There were seven students who have received, or are currently receiving, Title I services for reading intervention 30 minutes a day, five days a week. All of the students were together in a regular education classroom. Students had seven months of reading instruction before the interviews take place.

**Student Educational Data**

The school system these children attend has adopted Cunningham’s Four Blocks reading and writing program (Cunningham, Hall, & Sigmon, 1999). Students were taught phonics and whole language at a developmentally appropriate pace to help them to reach, maintain, or exceed the level of achievement in their reading skills. This particular classroom also implemented the Phonics Dance program which teaches children ways to retrieve information on how to decode and spell difficult “hunks and chunks” of words (Dowd, 1999). With these programs, the following were some of the skills taught: fluency, phonics, hunks and chunks, word wall words, sequencing, prediction, characters, main idea, and favorite part of the story.

One part of the Four Blocks program was self-selected reading. In this block, students were encouraged to select books at their independent reading level and then the students read silently for a 20-minute period of time. The books were labeled with reading ability level and students were aware of their own reading levels. The labels consisted of four different sticker colors: blue, yellow, green, and red. Students were encouraged to read at their assigned reading level, but could also choose other levels. This suburban school has an ample supply of books organized according to genre or category and reading ability.
Instrumentation

To answer the question about how reading skills taught in the classroom are transferred to silent reading time, a series of questions on a semi-structured interview guide were asked by the researcher (see Appendix A). As students answered the given questions, other questions were generated. Some of the questions were prompted by the students’ responses. The questions were developed by the researcher. These questions were asked on a one-on-one basis and took place in the child’s classroom.

Procedures

To begin the study, parents and students were notified of the study (see Appendix B). Parents and students were told about the interview process and appropriate consent was obtained by the parents and/or guardians of the students. The interview process took place in the classroom on a one-on-one basis. Students were called over to the teacher’s desk during non-instructional times during the day, recess, lunch, and silent reading time. Each student was questioned for approximately ten minutes or less.

Students were interviewed using the predetermined semi-structured interview guide (see Appendix A) and other questions added as they presented themselves. More questions were asked to help elaborate on answers given by students. These questions were prompted if a child did not seem to understand the question or was not clear in their answer.

As the students responded to the questions, the researcher recorded the students’ responses on paper as well as audiotape. While the questioning was taking place in the classroom, noise was kept to a minimum. This ensured that all of the students’ responses were recorded accurately.
Data Collection

The interview process was conducted in the classroom on a one-on-one basis. Responses were documented on paper and on audiotape. Responses were by the interviewer on the questionnaire.

Data Analysis

The data collected from interviews were analyzed to determine whether students utilize their silent reading time to the best of their ability and make the most of that reading experience. All students remained anonymous and pseudo names were used instead. Data were analyzed using an inductive process (Mertler, 2006), which means that “the researcher begins with specific observations (i.e. data), notes any patterns in those data, formulates one or more tentative hypotheses, and finally develops general conclusions and theories” (p. 124). Findings were grouped according to different themes and patterns. Not only were similarities in student responses be categorized, but also differences. Once they were organized, a description of the students’ responses was developed. Finally, interpretations were made once all the organized data was analyzed.

Summary

The purpose of this case study of silent reading was to determine whether reading instruction and techniques to decode and comprehend text were transferred and utilized by first grade students during independent reading experiences. These first graders were from a suburban school and the researcher was their classroom teacher. Students were questioned (see Appendix A) on how they chose books, if they read them during the allotted time, and what they might do if they came across an unknown word or what they would do if something did not make sense. The children were interviewed one at a time and questioned orally. This information provided
insight to answer the research question: To what extent do first grade students apply what they have learned in class to silent reading time?
CHAPTER IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to discover what strategies first grade students use to decode and comprehend text during independent reading time. The study was designed by the researcher to evaluate 18 first grade students to determine whether the children were transferring strategies learned from previous lessons to silent reading time. A semi-structured interview guide (Appendix A) was designed by the researcher to orally ask students the processes used during SSR. Following the completion of the study, results were recorded and organized in a narrative fashion. All names and quotations from students are recorded as pseudonyms.

Results

Use of Silent Reading Time

Of the 18 first grade students interviewed, 17 of them disclosed that they did, indeed, read during silent reading time. Only one child stated that he only read some of the time. He reported that some of the time was spent looking for books or going to the bathroom.

Student Selection of Books

Book Cover

The 12 children who chose books based on the appearance of the cover believed that they could determine if the book was easy enough for them to read. Emily said, “I look at the cover and see if it’s easy enough sometimes. Because when the cover has easy words sometimes the inside has easy words.” They also decided if the book was interesting simply by looking at the cover. “I look at the front cover and if it looks good then I start reading it,” Anna says as she is describing how she selects a book. The other six children did not use the cover as a way to select a book.

Color Label (Reading Level)
Most of the books in the classroom have a sticker on them which indicates a reading level. Each student was assigned a level at the beginning of the school year with the understanding that the level would probably change as the school year progressed. Only seven children utilized the color-coding level system to determine their book selection. Of that seven, three of them use the system only some of the time. Clint, however, followed the color coding selection process precisely. He only chose books at his level. Clint explained why he chose by the level system when he stated, “So I know I could choose that book when I get into that color. Cause I know when it was really cool I would take that book.” Other children, such as Kimmy and Ragan, did not use the stickers because they liked reading all the other books, too. However Ragan added that, “Sometimes I don’t read the lowest level because they’re too easy for me.” On the other hand, Emily liked to read books from the lower levels. She used the color-coding level system to assess her progress. She said, “Sometimes I like going back to see what I used to read.” The other 11 students did not use the stickers to select books.

Teacher Read-Aloud Books

The books read aloud in the classroom primarily come from the classroom library; otherwise known as the book bins. Once the book was read aloud to the class, it was put back into the bin where the book was originally placed. When students were asked if they chose a book to silent read because their teacher had read it aloud to the class, 10 students replied that they chose a read aloud book for that reason. Some wanted to read it so that they could see the pictures better. Clint wanted to see if he could read the words correctly. Linda liked to choose books that were read to the class. She explained, “Sometimes some books are really hard to read and they have tough words in them. If you read them to the class it makes it easier to read them.”
Kimmy said, “They (read aloud books) are really good after I read them.” The other eight children used various other strategies instead of choosing books that were read aloud to the class.

**Reread Books**

Students had the flexibility to choose whatever book they wanted to read during the self-selected silent reading time. They also had the opportunity to choose the same book over and over again. According to the interview, a majority of the students, 13 out of 18, chose stories that they had already read at home or in school. Isaac said, “If I see a book that looks cool I look through it and see if I like it and if I do, then I keep reading it again and again. If I get tired of others (books) I go back to it.” Emily concurred when she said, “Sometimes it’s fun to read books over again because I really, really like that book.” Kimmy found that “they’re really good once you read them.” Another student found a particular comfort level in selecting the same book to read. “I know what they say and I like the pictures,” said Maggie. Trent selected the same book to read if he did not like the other ones. Ragan said, “It’s fun because if you really like a book and it’s really funny you get to hear the funny parts again.”

Some of the students did not like to reread the same books during silent reading time. The reason they did not want to reread the same book was because they thought it was boring. Anna explained, “I don’t like to read it over anymore. It gets boring.” A few of the children did not select the same book because they wanted to read a variety of books. Travis said, “I wanna read different books because I just like reading different books.” Adison described in detail her reasoning for not reading the same books during silent reading time. When asked if she read the same book over again, she answered, “No, not always. When I was little I liked one of these books and I kept reading it over and over until my Dad bought me this new book, then I started liking new books and I read it and then I read different books now. Now I read different books
because I have a lot of fun books. I do sometimes (reread books during silent reading at school) but I don’t because sometimes when I read them over and over, like, they are short and some are long and they get boring when I read them over. But I sometimes read them over because some are interesting and some of them are the only ones in there (book bin), some I really like and I don’t get bored of them because some of them that I like are interesting and I like to read them.”

**Strategies Used When Encountering an Unknown Word**

Students were taught several strategies throughout the school year to use if they came across a word that was unfamiliar to them. One of the questions asked in the interview was about what reading strategy was used when they came across unfamiliar words; 15 of the students answered that they sounded out the word if it was too challenging for them. This was their primary line of defense. Isaac explained how he tackles a difficult word; “I keep on trying it until I get it. If I don’t get it I go on to the next word and see if that helps. I just start out with the first sound, then the next, then the next, and then the next until the whole word is finished. And then when I get all the sounds together I put it all together if I can’t get it I keep on trying to make it make sense,” said Isaac.

Another popular strategy was for children to skip the word, read the rest of the sentence and then go back and see what makes sense. There were three students who used this strategy for their first attempt at an unknown word. “I skip it, read all the words then go back and see what makes sense,” explained Becky. Ben said, “I skip it. At the end of the sentence, I come back to it.”

Looking for “hunks and chunks” was used by 14 of the students. Asking a friend or teacher for help was utilized by six people. Anna said, “I sound it out. If I think I didn’t get it right I ask Seth ‘cause he’s good at reading. If I see a hunk and chunk, I say the hunk and chunk
and look at the word to see if it’s spelled the same as the word wall words.” Trent explained, “I sound it (unknown word) out. In case I don’t know it, I just skip it. (When I sound it out) I look at word wall words and hunk and chunks in case it’s in there, and then I’ll hunk and chunk it out.” Emily used a combination of strategies. According to Emily, “Sometimes I sound it out and sometimes I ask friends next to me. ‘Cause sometimes it helps or sometimes it just makes it a little bit easier for you. I do hunk and chunks.” Only one student used the picture as a reference. No one said that he/she just stopped reading an unknown word was encountered.

What Students Think About During Silent Reading

Students were asked what they think about during silent reading time. There were nine students who said that they were thinking about what was happening in the story. Linda said, “I think about how the story is going to go and how it’s going to end.” Isaac explained, “I’m thinking about what’s going to be on the next page. And thinking of all the pages I’ve seen and seeing if I can remember the book. Like, if I have read it a long time ago.”

There was a group of four students who imagined being “in the story” as they read their books. Ragan imagined, “What it is like if you were in the book.” Trent explained, “I’m thinking about what it would really be like to be whatever it’s talking about. Because I really much want to see how it feels, and how it’s like.”

Family members were primarily on the minds of four of the students while they read silently. Ben said, “I think about my dad. I never get to see him anymore. I think about the story then my dad.” Donna said, “Sometimes I think about my brothers being mean to me.” And Becky sometimes thought of her grandparents.
Clint thought about what he could do at home with the information he learned from the book. Maggie thought about the words. Tiffany stated that she thought of nothing during silent reading time.

*Choosing a Book Bin*

At the start of silent reading time, one student from each table was responsible for selecting among the 12 bins of books. The bins were organized by author or subject matter. Each bin had approximately 20 books in it at various reading levels. Most of the books were labeled with a sticker indicating the reading level. Once a bin was selected, they could not trade it for another bin for the duration of the silent reading period.

Of the 18 students interviewed, 9 chose a book bin that they enjoyed the most. Katie said, “I look at the book bins and get the one that I want. Some have my favorite books in them.” Trent explained how he selected a bin when he said, “Sometimes I look at the books to see what has the books I like. And in case I see it, I’ll take that book bin if no one else wants it.”

Selecting a bin because of the author or author series was the first choice of four of the students in this first grade class. Ben explained, “If I like a book or we like all the books in the book bin we can get it, like the Henry and Mudge bin. Everybody loves the Henry and Mudge bin!” Ragan also liked to choose book bins based on authors or authors series. “I choose the one I like a lot. Now I like Henry and Mudge. I like the author bins. I like the Laura Numeroff bin a lot,” said Ragan. Clint described how he selected a bin. “I choose it by looking at the names and then I decide which one I want. If it has a cool book inside,” said Clint.

Some of the children, three out of 18, chose as many different book bins as they could. “I just pick the ones that I haven’t really read a lot of books out of. I like the Ezra Jack Keats books, silent reading book bins, and Laura Numeroff bin,” explained Kimmy. Linda said that she liked
to choose the new ones to see how they are. Adison said, “The first of the school year I started
doing all the book bins. And then when we started getting new book bins I just looked through
the books and names of the book bins that sound interesting.” Only two of the children selected
book bins based on what they thought the people at their table would enjoy.

Selecting Books That Do Not Have the Reading Level Stickers

The books in the book bins were labeled with colored stickers that represented the
different reading levels. Students knew which sticker color they were reading from and were
familiar with the order of the colors of stickers. Blue was the lowest, then yellow, then green,
with red being the highest level. Students were encouraged to read from their assigned color, but
may explore other books for practice or review. The children were also taught the five-finger
test. The test consisted of them reading the first page of the book. If they encountered at least
five words that they could not decode or understand, the book was too challenging for them to
read independently and they should choose something else. Some of the books in the book bins
were not labeled with a color-coded sticker. They were books from the library or borrowed from
other teachers.

When children encountered a book without a colored sticker to indicate the level, seven
out of 18 checked the words inside the book first to see if they were able to read it. Lauren said,
“Usually I go to the first page. If it is too easy or too hard, I don’t pick it. If it’s not, I’ll just pick
that one.”

There were other students, five of them, who tried to read it no matter how difficult it
might be for them. Kimmy explained, “If I really like it, I get it, even if it’s a long book.” Trent
said, “I see how hard it is. I read it to see how hard it is. I just don’t care sometimes. So I just
read it. Cause I want try books out to see how good my reading is.”
Of the 18 children interviewed, 4 of them picked the unlabeled book because they had heard it read before or and read it before themselves. Becky stated that she chose them because, “sometimes we read them up front”. Ragan said, “I just pick which one is interesting. If I’ve read it before and it’s funny, I just take it.”

By just looking at the cover of a book, three of the students decided if the book was at their reading level. Only one child did not know the method she used to select a book that did not have a sticker on it.

Discussion of Results

The focus of this study was to discover what happens during silent reading time, and to determine whether the students were utilizing the tools given to them through classroom instruction during this independent reading experience. Specifically, the question that was addressed was: To what extent do first grade students apply what they have learned in class to silent reading time? After interviewing 18 first graders it was encouraging to find that the children used a variety of strategies instead of relying on simply one technique to make their way through a successful silent reading experience.

Use of Silent Reading Time

Every day for approximately 20 minutes, students in the classroom get comfortable, choose a couple of books from a particular book bin and read silently. The time is supposed to be used by the children to practice their reading strategies while reading books that are at their reading level. They have the freedom to try any book, but the main goal of the session is to have the students reading. During reading lessons in class, the students are told to look at the words as they read. They may use the pictures to help and even point to the words in the beginning of the
year. While almost all students confessed that they did indeed read during silent reading time, it was interesting to uncover exactly what was being done during this “silent” experience.

Student Selection of Books

Book Cover

A strategy to selecting a book that a child will read is by looking at the cover to find if it might be interesting for him or her. The picture on the cover is also used to help predict what might happen in the story. This is one of the techniques the class is taught to do before we read a new book.

As someone once said, you can never judge a book by its cover. That person never met a first grader. Over half of the class disregarded the color coded reading level labels to select books solely based on the cover alone. In fact, some of the students stated that they could tell how difficult a book would be simply by reading the title. However, later in the interviews, it was uncovered that by looking at the first page of an unlabeled book to see if the words were too difficult was the most popular strategy. So as the advertisement of a cover may lure a first grader into to choosing a particular book, their better judgment on what’s inside eventually wins out.

Color Label (Reading Level)

At the beginning of the year, every child is assessed to determine on which level he or she is reading. Once that level was determined, the children were told what sticker color to look for when selecting a book from the classroom library. This level of book was comfortable for them, not too easy, not too difficult. The children were told that they may select books with other sticker colors on them, but they should try to read at their level for most of the time. Since it was a “self-selected” reading time, they were given the freedom to select any book, but were encouraged to choose at their level.
The research question asked if the students were transferring strategies learned in class to silent reading time. It was revealed that less than half of the children were actually using the color coding system to choose their books. This could be because most of the class was reading at the top level, so they could successfully manage most of the books. The other possible reason that they were disregarding the labels was that they were willing to struggle through a book that was too difficult simply because they were very interested in that book.

Teacher Read-Aloud Books

A way to inspire reading is by reading aloud to children. Each day before silent reading time, the teacher brought the children up front on the floor while she read them a story. The book was typically chosen from one of the book bins and was usually on a topic currently being studied in social studies or science or was written by an author that the class was reading from during guided reading time. Some of the children read the book already or looked at it during silent reading. Some have not even noticed it in the book bin. Once it was read aloud to the class however, it became the hot item of the day! In fact, it could be weeks later and a student will report that she just read the book that I read to the class. This enthusiasm could explain why when selecting silent reading books, over half of the children chose a book on the simple fact that it had been read aloud to the class. Rereading books was one of the strategies that was used during guided reading lessons to improve fluency and comprehension. Reading a book that was read aloud promotes this strategy.

Reread Books

During a guided reading session in class, students read and reread the same story sometimes two times a day for at least two days. This practice helped the children to become exposed over and over again to vocabulary and build fluency. It also helped the children to
develop comprehension skills as they see how the story is laid out once the decoding is mastered. It was no wonder that the children who typically chose a book because it was read aloud to the class were the same children who liked to reread books. The students who did not like rereading were quite straightforward on the issue of not rereading books that they or the teacher has read to the class.

*Strategies Used When Encountering an Unknown Word*

Students did not use a single strategy to decode unfamiliar words. In fact, they all used two or more techniques to assist them while reading. While the top choice for most children was to sound out the words, those same children also used the hunk and chunks strategy from The Phonics Dance (Dowd, 1999). Another strategy taught to the children was skipping the word, reading on, and then coming back to it to see if they could submit a word that makes sense. The three children who chose that technique as their first strategy also combined it with sounding out the word.

Most children were confident enough in their reading ability and the strategies learned that they did not believe they needed to rely on someone to simply tell them the unknown word. Either they figured out the word, gained enough information from context clues to comprehend the book, or they did not realize they did not understand the story.

*What Students Think About During Silent Reading*

One of the more revealing questions in the interview was what the children were thinking about while they read their book. This question related to the main question of transfer of strategies to independent reading in sense that the children are taught comprehension and sequencing techniques throughout the year. As the children read the story, the teacher prompted them to predict what was going to happen and revisited what already occurred. Some common
Post reading activities were sequencing the major events or finding the main idea. Students were encouraged to really dive into the story and try to retell it with accuracy.

Over half of the class seemed to be aware of what story was being told. Most of the students reported that they think about what is happening in the story or how it would feel to be a part of the story. Most of the other students, however, were quite distracted by family issues, just trying to decode all of the words, or just simply distracted by her surroundings.

Choosing a Book Bin

The classroom library books were organized in clear plastic containers. There were 12 book bins labeled on the outside with the category listed. Some of the book bins contained author or book series collections. They were also organized by subject matter being studied. Students were given the option to choose whatever bin they would like for a silent reading period. This allowed them to reread certain favorites or discover a new genre or author that they had never read from.

With over half of the students choosing books that they had read previously, most of those same students chose book bins that they enjoyed time and time again. What was interesting was the students who did not reread books were the students who always wanted to try the new book bin or the book bins with more of a variety of subjects. The students who picked book bins because only they thought their table would enjoy it were some of the same children who spent silent reading time distracted by outside issues.

Selecting Books That Do Not Have the Reading Level Stickers

A strategy given to students was to choose books at their reading level using the color coded stickers on the books. These sticker colors were given to them at the beginning of the year after a reading inventory is given. The level and sticker color changed as they progressed.
throughout the year. If children were reading books that were too easy or too difficult, they may not progress as quickly into higher level books. For this reason, it was a good idea to practice reading strategies at the child’s reading ability level. The question proposed to the children was what if the sticker was not present? How would you know which book you could select? Only half of the children stated that they open the book and read the first page to conclude if they can read that story. The other children chose it no matter what because they have heard it read before or they thought it looked interesting. These children may or may not be reading at their independent level which could impede their decoding ability.

There was one student who really concluded the interview process with the reason why he chose any book he wanted. Ben said, “We just get the one (book) we want…because every book in the world is good.”

Summary

Throughout this study on first grade students’ use of silent reading time, the main question that had been addressed was: To what extent do first grade students apply what they have learned in class to silent reading time? As children were asked several different questions located on the semi-structured interview guide (Appendix A), their answers disclosed some interesting information about what goes on during the silent reading period.

Overall, most students did actually read during silent reading time. Of those children, they used multiple reading strategies in hopes of being successful during that reading time. Some of the strategies taught in class that were used by the students to select books were choosing a book by interest level, reading level, or because the teacher had already read it to them. Students also really enjoyed rereading books.
Over half of the class stated that they sounded out the words using the hunks and chunks method. A few of the children skipped the word, read the rest of the sentence, then returned to the word to see what would make sense. About a third of the class would ask a friend or the teacher if they could not decode the word.

Most of the students in the class processed the story as they read along by imagining that they were in the story or predicting what would happen next. What was quite interesting to find was that there were some students who would think about their family during the silent reading time instead of the story that they were reading.

When selecting a book bin to read from during silent reading time, a majority of the students would choose a bin that they had previously enjoyed. Only a few of the children chose a bin that they thought the rest of the table would rather have. Once the book bin was at the table, students have the freedom to choose any book that they wanted to read, but were encouraged to read from their set level. If a book was not labeled with its level, most students believed that they could try reading it no matter what the real level was. They were willing to try the book because it interested them that much.

The data collected from the interview questions revealed that most of the students for a majority of the silent reading time did utilize the reading strategies taught in class. By utilizing the reading strategies, most students could make it through the reading period with success. The children used a variety of strategies to help them through.
CHAPTER V. SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this investigation was to answer the question, “To what extent do first grade students apply what they have learned in class to silent reading time? Chapter V presents a summary of the study, followed by conclusions drawn from the study. Finally, recommendations are provided that emanate from this investigation.

Summary of the Study

Students in a first grade classroom were interviewed to discover whether the strategies and techniques taught in daily reading lessons transferred to their silent reading experience. The 18 children in this study were asked a series of open ended questions (see Appendix A) by the classroom teacher. The interviews were conducted on a one-on-one basis with other children in the room during a non-instructional period of the day. The questioning explored how students decode unfamiliar words, select books, and what they think about as they read a story in an independent setting. Each interview took about five minutes and was audio taped for accuracy.

Conclusions

One of the first major conclusions from this study of silent reading was that students were transferring skills learned in class to their independent reading experience. Overall, students seemed to utilize the decoding strategies that they learned in class, such as looking for hunk and chunks, breaking up the word to sound it out, skipping the word and coming back to it to see what makes sense, and paying attention to what major events are happening in the story. Caldwell and Gaine (2000) also found this practice of word attack common in children when they were silent reading, “SSR builds students’ confidence tackling trouble spots in books and allows them to use their word attack skills to figure out new vocabulary” (p. 5).
The second conclusion made from the study was that students seemed to be using multiple strategies learned in class during silent reading time. The children typically used a combination of strategies until they believed they had read the word correctly or got the main idea of the sentence. While most started with sounding out the word, they then reread sentences or looked at the pictures if they were still struggling with a word. This behavior was similar to that which was demonstrated to the students by the teacher in one-on-one situations or when someone was reading aloud in a small group. During guided reading lessons, the teacher also modeled how to decode words using multiple strategies; however, the teacher did not provide a specific order of decoding techniques to follow. The students naturally favored one strategy over another and selected additional strategies they had learned. These findings are reiterated when Barsema, Harms, and Pogue (2002) suggested giving lessons on what happens during SSR and how students can utilize reading strategies to help them become better readers. They found that “students were more likely to persist in challenging tasks if they know how to use a variety of reading strategies” (p. 45).

Another conclusion which came about from the interviews conducted with these first graders was that a majority of the children spent silent reading time comprehending what was being read. Only a small fraction of the children were distracted by outside stimuli most of the reading time. Moore, Jones, Miller (1980) promoted independent reading when they found that students who participated in SSR did significantly better in reading comprehension. However Osborne and Lehr (2003) thought that with an extended amount of independence during silent reading, some students may spend the reading time daydreaming or other off-task activities.

The final conclusion drawn from this study was how the children actually selected their books. The students did not necessarily find the color coding system something that they used to
select a book. When choosing any book or book bin, students were most drawn to an attractive cover or a book that was read aloud to them in class rather than looking for a particular level of reading. This practice of rereading text was described by Kaisen (1987) when she found that students wanted to read the books that the teacher had read aloud to the class earlier.

Recommendations

After completing this case study on silent reading in the first grade classroom and reviewing the literature on independent reading, there were some positive outcomes and certain areas where improvement is needed. One area that should be addressed is the teacher role during the silent reading period. In the classroom studied, the teacher was not reading during silent reading time. It would be beneficial for the children to see that modeling to understand silent reading behavior and be motivated by seeing their teacher reading also.

The children overwhelmingly utilized the phonics program, The Phonics Dance (Dowd, 1999), when they stated that they used the hunks and chunks to sound out words. Continuing this practice and making it a priority in the reading and writing lessons each day appears to be a good recommendation for classroom teachers given the success students had with using the strategies. The other strategies used by the students, skipping the word and coming back to it, looking at the first letter, using the picture and word wall words are all techniques that should be integrated into classroom instruction. After a teacher explicitly teaches these strategies, the strategies should then be modeled in different combinations to offer children a variety from which to choose. Since all children learn in different ways, different combinations of reading strategies need to be demonstrated for students to feel successful as they encounter difficult words.

Additional research on the topic of silent reading could focus on why and how students move from one strategy to the next as they read. The research might also include studies that
question children on why they make the choices that they do as they facilitate themselves through an independent reading experience. Researchers may want to look at why some students select books based on the book cover while others choose them based on a previous read aloud experience.

The fact that the children were not primarily choosing books at their particular reading level is something that still needs to be further researched. Children appear to be attracted to books read aloud by the teacher or books by the same author which was introduced during a guided reading lesson. Students did not seem to mind if those read aloud books were too challenging for them. It would be interesting to discover if children progress to higher reading levels if they are reading text that is either too easy or too difficult for them.

Overall, it seems that a good balance of phonics and whole language instruction along with organization of classroom books has lead to a class of children who lose themselves in a story and enjoy diving into books day after day. Silent reading during the school day is strongly recommended as it offers children the opportunity to practice what they have been explicitly taught during reading lessons. For most students, time set aside at home for reading or other homework is short or non-existent; therefore, it is strongly recommended that classroom teachers provide their students with daily opportunities to engage in self-selected silent reading.

Summary

After completing 18 interviews questioning children on how they transfer what they have learned in class to silent reading opportunities, four major conclusions were drawn. It was found that the students did utilize the strategies that they learned in class and they used a variety of the skills until they were satisfied with the meaning of the word. The students comprehended the text as they read, although some took advantage of the independent time to think about family and
home life situations. The children did not show much interest in the color coding system put into place to assist children in finding text that they would be comfortable reading.

The recommendations for teachers included, reading silently with classroom children, using an easy to follow and prompt phonics program, and teaching children how to select their books based on reading level. These recommendations should help to promote a well rounded classroom and an enjoyable reading experience for all children.
REFERENCES


Caldwell, K., & Gaine, T. (2000). “*The Phantom Tollbooth*” and how the independent reading of good books improves student’s reading performances. San Rafael, CA: Dominican University of California School of Education.


APPENDICES
APPENDIX A

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW GUIDE

1. Do you read during silent reading time?
   a. If no or sort of, why not?
   b. What do you do during silent reading time if you do not read or sort of read?

2. How do you pick books?

   The following may be used to prompt ideas:
   cover    color (level)    buddies    background knowledge
   interest    teacher read it    author    reread    easy

3. Why do you use this method for selection books?

4. Do you read the same books over and over or do you pick new ones? Why?

5. When you come to a word you don’t know during silent reading, what do you do?

   The following may be used to prompt ideas:
   hunk and chunks    word wall words    guess the covered word
   skip, reread and come back    use the picture    look and the first letter
   stretch out the word    ask a friend    ask the teacher    nothing

6. Why do you do this?
7. While you are reading a book, what are you thinking about?

8. Why do you think about these things?

9. When you are “in charge” of getting the book bin during silent reading, how do you decide what book bin to choose?

10. If books are not labeled with stickers, how do you choose which book to read?

11. How did you learn to do this?
Bowling Green State University, Department of Education Curriculum and Instruction
A Case Study of First Grade Student Use of Silent Reading Time

I am a graduate student working on my master’s thesis. I am researching the use of silent reading time by students. I want to discover if the skills taught in the classroom are being used during silent reading time by my first grade students. I will be asking your child a series of questions about what he or she does during silent reading time. The interview will be approximately 10 minutes long and will take place during a non-instructional time during the school day. I will be audio taping the interview. The cassette tape will be secured in my home after use, and then destroyed once the study is complete in June, 2006. By allowing me to interview your child, you will be helping me and other researchers understand how to better instruct students in reading.

I will not use your child’s name or school name in order to make certain that your child’s identity will be kept confidential. By signing at the bottom of this letter, you agree to let me use your child’s responses in my research study. Your child’s participation in this study is voluntary. You may withdraw your consent to the research at any time without prejudice or penalty. Whether or not your child chooses to participate will not impact any grades, class standing, or relationship with the school.

If you wish to contact me, please call me (Stephanie Pawlaczyk) at (419) 824-8614 ext. 2538. My advisor, Cindy Hendricks, is also available for questions at (419) 372-7341. You may also contact the Chair, Human Subjects Review Board, Bowling Green State University, (419) 372-7716, if questions or problems arise during the course of the study.

Thank you for considering my request to interview your child. If you give permission for your child to participate in my project, please write your child’s name below and sign this form. Once your permission is granted, I will ask the student if they would like to answer some questions about silent reading. If they agree, I will proceed with the questioning. If they do not want to answer the questions, I will stop the interview immediately.

Name of child: _____________________________________________________

Legal Guardian Signature: ____________________ Date: __________