AN EVALUATION OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CRITERION-REFERENCED COMPETENCY TEST READING COMPREHENSION AND LEXILE SCORES AND FOUNTAS AND PINNELL'S GUIDED READING LEVELS IN A GEORGIA PUBLIC SCHOOL DISTRICT

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An Evaluation of the Relationship between Criterion-Referenced Competency Test Reading Comprehension and Lexile Scores and Fountas and Pinnell's Guided Reading Levels in a Georgia Public School District

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ABSTRACT

Lynnda G. Higgins. AN EVALUATION OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CRITERION-REFERENCED COMPETENCY TEST READING COMPREHENSION AND LEXILE SCORES AND FOUNTAS AND PINNELL'S GUIDED READING LEVELS IN A GEORGIA PUBLIC SCHOOL DISTRICT. (Under the direction of Dr. Kathie Morgan) School of Education, June, 2009. The purpose of the current study was to compare Irene C. Fountas and Gay Su Pinnell's guided reading levels to the reading comprehension and Lexile scores on the Criterion-Referenced Competency Test (CRCT). The researcher designed a correlational study to answer the following question: How do the Fountas and Pinnell guided reading levels among third grade students who were instructed in guided reading correlate with the reading comprehension and Lexile scores which were generated by the CRCT? The purpose was also to determine whether guided reading levels, gender, and ethnicity had a correlation to reading comprehension and Lexile scores on the CRCT. The participants in the study consisted of 546 third grade students who were instructed in guided reading for eight months during the 2007-2008 school year. The Pearson r and multiple regression analysis were used to analyze the data. The findings from the study showed that there was a positive linear relationship between guided reading levels and reading comprehension and Lexile scores on the CRCT. The findings also indicated that there was a positive linear relationship between gender, guided reading levels, and reading comprehension and Lexile scores. Furthermore, the findings indicated that there was a positive linear relationship between ethnicity, guided reading levels, and reading comprehension and Lexile scores.

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my family. To my husband, Mark, you have always supported me in all my educational endeavors and had faith in me when I needed it the most. You never doubted my abilities and have encouraged me to pursue my dreams. You never gave up on me and challenged me to push myself.

To my children, Meghan, Erin, and Mark, I love you so much. I am proud of each one of you and want you to know that you can achieve your dreams in life, no matter what they are. Your sacrifices during this time are appreciated and will not be forgotten.

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction to the Study

The world in which we live today often judges people's success or failure by their ability to read. Being a competent reader is a necessary skill in many aspects of life. It is critical to be able to read in order to improve one's social and academic standing (Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998). In order to completely contribute in a knowledgeable way to a democratic society people need to be able to read and comprehend (Campbell, Donahue, Reese, & Phillips, 1996). For many students in a literate society learning to read and write begins early in life as parents read to children and set in motion a lifelong progression of reading experiences (Strickland & Morrow, 1989). However, students who are brought up in poverty, have limited English proficiency, or come from an environment where the parents' reading ability is minimal, experience reading failure at a much higher rate. Educators have a responsibility to help all students, regardless of their background, learn to read in today's literacy-driven world. If students do not learn to read, their chances of a rewarding and fruitful life lessen (Lyon, 1998).

General Background

The ability to read affects one's daily activities. For example, understanding current events, training in the workplace, comprehending written publications, and reading for pleasure all shape an individual's actions and thoughts (Campbell et al., 1996). The objective of reading instruction is to assist students in learning to read and write so they develop into life-long readers and writers. As students learn to read and write, they begin to understand that these important skills are not simply necessary in

order to get through school but can also enhance life. Literacy skills not only assist in earning income, but they also help students appreciate the more artistic facets in life (Rasinski & Padak, 2004).

Reading is difficult and includes a variety of processes that affect each other. Reading involves building meaning from text using deliberate strategies (Schellings, Aarnoutse, & van Leeuwe, 2006). The purpose of reading is for students to comprehend and create meaning from text (Snow et al., 1998). Comprehension occurs when students develop phonemic awareness, concepts about print, and grasp an understanding about the alphabetic principle, decoding strategies, reading fluency, and comprehension strategies (Snow et al.; Schellings et al.).

Guided Reading

One method used to support students as they embark on their quest to become life-long readers is guided reading. Guided reading, developed by Irene C. Fountas and Gay Su Pinnell, is a technique for all readers: those who are proficient and those who are struggling (Iaquinta, 2006). It encourages students to become independent (Baumann, Hoffman, Duffy-Hester, & Ro, 2000; Fawson & Reutzel, 2000; Fountas & Pinnell, 1996; Guastello & Lenz, 2005) and fluent readers (Fawson & Reutzel). Students are taught at their own instructional level, which provides the support for each student's reading progress. In guided reading a teacher assists students as they learn strategies to discern unknown words and to understand new concepts (Iaquinta). A benefit of guided reading is the constant support by both teachers and peers as students grow in their reading abilities (Guastello & Lenz).

Fountas and Pinnell's guided reading program uses a leveling system. The texts

are arranged on a continuum correlated to the level of reinforcement and challenge readers experience. In order to establish a leveled collection of books, teachers examine features of texts and compare them to the characteristics of each level. The guided reading gradient has 16 levels for kindergarten through third grade including nine levels for kindergarten and first grade, four for second grade, and three for third grade. Each level contains a wide array of book choices (Fountas & Pinnell, 2006) arranged by level of difficulty ranging from easy books for beginning readers to more difficult books for advanced readers (Fountas & Pinnell, 1999). Each level contains descriptions to aid teachers as they consider the next step for students. By using the descriptions, teachers can better prepare to meet students' needs. The descriptions give explanations of how students should generally be thinking within the text, beyond the text, and about the text (Pinnell & Fountas, 2007).

The needs of students vary as they progress through the levels. Students beginning to read need texts with simple language that contain high frequency words, recognizable content, and natural language. However, as the levels increase there is more complexity and students read longer material. When students move up a level it means they comprehend and are fluent at the previous level (Fountas & Pinnell, 1999).

Each student in a guided reading group reads the same text and receives instruction to assist in the reading process (Fountas & Pinnell, 2006b). Students read a story individually, while the teacher listens to them, providing support where needed (Pinnell, 1999; Smith & Ellis, 2003). The text read within the group is on each student's level but presents a slight challenge in order to help students progress (Fountas & Pinnell). As students read the teacher notes which strategies students use to read the text

(Smith & Ellis) and at the end of the reading conducts a minilesson. Instruction is based on students' progress at a given time and the skills or strategies they need to progress in their reading (Pinnell).

The Problem Statement

One challenge faced by educators is to select a reading program that meets the needs of students so they have opportunities to experience reading success. Guided reading, a leveled reading program, is one option available to educators. The current dissertation presented a nonexperimental study based on Irene C. Fountas and Gay Su Pinnell's guided reading levels. The researcher compared the Fountas and Pinnell guided reading levels to the reading comprehension and Lexile scores on the Criterion-Referenced Competency Test (CRCT) in order to determine if a statistically significant relationship existed. The researcher attempted to determine if guided reading levels, gender, and ethnicity had a correlation to reading comprehension and Lexile scores on the CRCT. The study was based on third grade students receiving instruction in guided reading for a period of eight months. The researcher designed the study to answer the following question:

How do the Fountas and Pinnell guided reading levels among third grade students in Mountain Laurel Public School District (all names are pseudonyms) who were instructed in guided reading correlate with the reading comprehension and Lexile scores which were generated by the CRCT?

Research Questions and Null Hypotheses

In examining Fountas and Pinnell's guided reading levels and reading comprehension and Lexile scores on the CRCT, the study attempted to answer the

following questions:

Research Question #1: Is there a relationship between the Fountas and Pinnell guided reading levels and reading comprehension scores on the CRCT among third grade students who received guided reading instruction for eight months?

Null Hypothesis (H_{O1}): There is no statistically significant relationship between guided reading levels and reading comprehension scores on the CRCT among third grade students who received guided reading instruction.

Research Questions #2: Is there a relationship between gender and reading comprehension scores on the CRCT in students who are on the same Fountas and Pinnell guided reading level?

Null Hypothesis (H_{O2}): There is no statistically significant relationship between gender, Fountas and Pinnell's guided reading levels, and reading comprehension scores on the CRCT among third grade students who received guided reading instruction.

Research Question #3: Is there a relationship between ethnicity and reading comprehension scores on the CRCT in students who are on the same Fountas and Pinnell guided reading level?

Null Hypothesis (H_{O3}): There is no statistically significant relationship between ethnicity, Fountas and Pinnell's guided reading levels, and reading comprehension scores on the CRCT among third grade students who received guided reading instruction.

Research Question #4: Is there a relationship between the Fountas and Pinnell guided reading levels and Lexile scores on the CRCT among third grade students who

received guided reading instruction for eight months?

Null Hypothesis (H_{O4}): There is no statistically significant relationship between guided reading levels and Lexile scores obtained from the CRCT among third grade students who received guided reading instruction.

Research Questions #5: Is there a relationship between gender and Lexile scores on the CRCT in students who are on the same Fountas and Pinnell guided reading level?

Null Hypothesis (H_{O5}): There is no statistically significant relationship between gender, Fountas and Pinnell's guided reading levels and Lexile scores obtained from the CRCT among third grade students who received guided reading instruction.

Research Question #6: Is there a relationship between ethnicity and Lexile scores on the CRCT in students who are on the same Fountas and Pinnell guided reading level?

Null Hypothesis (H_{O6}): There is no statistically significant relationship between ethnicity, Fountas and Pinnell's guided reading levels, and Lexile scores on the CRCT among third grade students who received guided reading instruction.

Professional Significance of the Study

Learning to read is a crucial skill for students to acquire in elementary school, as it is required for all future work that they will do. From the middle elementary years until their schooling is complete, students read and process concepts in print (Stevens, Slavin, & Farnish, 1991). The significance of learning to read in the primary grades was demonstrated by the results of a longitudinal study conducted on kindergarten through ninth grade students that dealt with the long-term development of reading skills. On

average, students who were poor readers in third grade did not catch up to their peers, and 74% of the students continued to be poor readers in ninth grade (Francis, Shaywitz, Stuebing, Shaywitz, & Fletcher, 1996). Students who were not relatively proficient in their reading by the end of third grade were not as likely to graduate from high school (Snow et al., 1998).

The Nation's Report Card was a report relaying the findings of the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). The NAEP reading framework presented an extensive definition of reading that consisted of acquiring a general comprehension of written material, explaining texts, and utilizing texts for various reasons. It also described reading as interactive because of the relationship of the reader with the text and others. In 2007, more than 350,000 students in fourth and eighth grades participated in the reading assessment. The reading assessment portion of the report measured reading capabilities in the context of literary experience, acquiring information, and performing a task (Lee, Grigg, & Donahue, 2007).

The results of the Nation's Report Card from 2007 showed improvement from previous years. Fourth grade students scored higher in 2007 than any previous year. The average reading score rose by 2 points from 2005 and 4 points from 1992, when the first assessment was administered. Also, more students performed at or above *Basic* and *Proficient* levels than in earlier years. Eighth grade students increased their reading score by 1 point since 2005 and 3 points since 1992. However, the scores did not increase steadily over all assessment years (Lee et al., 2007).

The NAEP also produced a report about the long-term trend assessments in reading. The assessment was intended to measure students' abilities to find information

in texts, make inferences, and recognize the main idea. The latest assessment was administered to twenty-six thousand 6, 13, and 17-year-old students during the 2007-2008 school year in both public and private schools. The long-term trend assessments have been given every 4 years since 1971. When comparing the 2008 results to the 2004 results there was an increase in reading scores. The average scores for 9-year-olds rose by 4 points, for 13-year-olds by 3 points, and for 17-year-olds by 3 points (Rampey, Dion, & Donahue, 2009).

Early childhood education teachers are generally responsible for introducing reading in a structured environment to students. They have the overwhelming responsibility of launching students' reading careers. According to the Nation's Report Card, there was a slight improvement in reading scores over the last five years; however, the number of students who achieved at the *Proficient* level, which denoted solid academic performance progress, had not changed much. Georgia students only improved in fourth grade but not in eighth. Additionally, Georgia students in eighth grade had not shown continual improvement (Lee et al., 2007).

The results of the Nation's Report Card can be disheartening. However, instead of dwelling on the negative aspects, teachers can use the report as a springboard to rejuvenate their teaching and focus on areas needing improvement. A skill area teachers can concentrate on is comprehension of text, which is vital in order for students to progress in understanding and in all of their educational endeavors. Comprehension of text refers to thinking that occurs before, during, and after reading (Fountas & Pinnell, 2006b). Students also must learn and employ strategies in order to more fully comprehend text (National Reading Panel, 2000). By analyzing techniques that teach

students how to both read and comprehend text, educators have opportunities to search for programs to enhance students' reading abilities and reach them at their point of need. The study focused on an existing guided reading program in order to examine how guided reading has addressed the individual needs of students.

If a statistically significant relationship between Fountas and Pinnell's guided reading levels and reading comprehension scores on the CRCT was found, the results would provide useful information to the administration and faculty in the Mountain Laurel Public School System and other school systems in the state of Georgia. School systems in Georgia are required to make adequate yearly progress. The study may offer needed information on one program to improve reading comprehension. The findings of the study may also be beneficial to schools in other states as they seek to attain their individual state requirements. Examining the relationship between guided reading levels and CRCT scores may enable teachers to better understand what students need to achieve in guided reading in order to meet the standards set by the Georgia Department of Education.

Additionally, if a statistically significant relationship between Fountas and Pinnell's guided reading levels and Lexile scores on the CRCT was found, the results would offer teachers and parents valuable information to assist students as they learn to read. Lexile scores do not promote an instructional program but are helpful in managing programs. Using the Lexile measure parents and teachers choose texts matching students' abilities in order for students to learn grade level content by reading texts at their individual ability level. When students constantly read material that is too difficult, many become frustrated and unmotivated. If teachers find material that students can

comprehend at a rate of 75%, more learning occurs. Examining the relationship between guided reading levels and Lexile scores may allow teachers to set goals for instruction and to ascertain if the texts they present to students are appropriate. Looking at the relationship between guided reading levels and Lexile scores may assist teachers and parents in providing reading materials that promote growth.

Previous studies have been conducted demonstrating the effectiveness of guided reading. However, to date, there are no studies that have gathered and analyzed the relationship between guided reading levels and reading comprehension and Lexile scores on the CRCT. The purpose of the current study is to fill a gap in previous research.

Overview of Methodology

All third grade students in a public school district in north Georgia who were involved in guided reading instruction from August 13, 2007 to April 4, 2008 were the research participants for the study. The students received guided reading on a daily basis. The students' guided reading levels were reported and recorded by their classroom teachers in April 2008. As required by the Georgia Department of Education students were given the CRCT in the spring of 2008. The researcher obtained and examined only the reading comprehension scores and Lexile scores generated from the CRCT of the research students. All students were tested according to the guidelines set forth by the Georgia Department of Education. The research was then compared and the data analyzed. The findings will be presented later in the document.

Definitions of Key Terms

Guided Reading: a technique that can be used with all readers. The goals of guided reading are to teach students on their instructional level so that each student's reading

abilities improve, to instruct students so they are able to read and understand material that is increasingly difficult, and to use problem-solving strategies to discern unknown words and grasp new concepts (Iaquinta, 2006).

Fountas and Pinnell's leveling system: a system of sorting books based on the support needed and the challenges faced by readers. Books are put into levels according to characteristics. Teachers utilize the levels when choosing texts for instruction (Fountas & Pinnell, 2006a).

Criterion-Referenced Competency Test (CRCT): assessment given annually to students in the state of Georgia designed to assess student acquisition of knowledge and skills which are set forth in the state's curriculum (Georgia Department of Education Testing Division, 2006).

Lexile Score: a standard score that correlates students' reading abilities with difficulty of texts. The Lexile translates into the level of books students can read with 75% comprehension (Georgia Department of Education Testing Division, 2006).

CHAPTER TWO

Review of the Literature

Teaching students how to read effectively and comprehend is an important task for teachers. Students utilize their reading skills in all academic areas and it provides for future growth in education. Students who read well have a better opportunity for success in school due to the amount of information obtained through written texts. There are various approaches available to assist students in learning to read. Fountas and Pinnell's guided reading program is one method teachers may utilize with students and was the basis for the present study.

Review of Theories

Teachers want students to comprehend texts. How to best accomplish the goal is a concern shared by most teachers (Connell, 2008). Educators often look for theories to assist them. Theories help educators by presenting situations and contexts promoting the progression toward becoming a proficient reader. Theories should help educators avoid methods that only work for a short time (Karolides, 1999). Two theories, the zone of proximal development and the transactional theory, have both impacted guided reading.

Zone of proximal development.

Lev Vygotsky, a Russian psychologist, believed that education acted as a support for students as they developed cognitive and learning skills. Education helped students construct the psychological functions necessary to move to the next step (Kozulin, 2004). As students interacted and received support, they began to master literacy concepts. The teacher's role was to give support based on a student's developmental level enabling

them to internalize and master difficult concepts (Justice & Ezell, 2004).

Vygotsky believed learning was social (Bodrova & Leong, 2007) and that students grew through social experiences (Karpov & Bransford, 1995). In other words, students developed more quickly when they worked with someone who was more proficient than themselves. The individual who was more knowledgeable assisted students in accomplishing tasks they could not do alone (Gray & Feldman, 2004).

Vygotsky developed the idea of "tools of the mind". He believed tools were used to help resolve problems. People created mental tools, or "tools of the mind", to broaden their mental abilities, which assisted people as they thought, concentrated, and recalled (Bodrova & Leong, 2007). When interacting with adults or peers, students were given tools which they used externally before internalizing them. Once internalized, the tools changed the way students thought or acted (Karpov & Bransford, 1995). As children expanded their knowledge, they used these tools independently and created new tools when needed. Therefore, students needed to interact with teachers in order to grow since teachers had a direct impact on what students learned (Bodrova & Leong).

Students develop at different rates. Instead of looking at development as a hindrance, teachers should use the opportunity to personalize instruction to each student's needs (McGill-Franzen, 1992). Teachers should connect the knowledge students have with the knowledge they need to have. Vygotsky's zone of proximal development defines the gap in knowledge (Bacon, 2005). The zone refers to a continuum of behaviors not as a certain point on a scale (Bodrova & Leong, 2007). The zone is the difference between the mental age of students, also referred to as the actual developmental level, and the level that can be attained with assistance (Vygotsky, 1986). It is the level of development

of a student's intellectual function that has been determined using various tests which students complete independently (Vygotsky, 1978). Proximal refers to the fact that the zone is limited to the behaviors that will arise in the near future and to behaviors that will appear at any point but have not yet surfaced (Bodrova & Leong).

Assume two students had a mental age of eight years old and an effort was made to find out how these students would solve problems meant for older students. When given difficult problems to solve, a small amount of assistance was provided through demonstrating, asking leading questions, and presenting initial components of answers to the tasks. With assistance, one student could solve problems meant for a twelve-year old and the other student could only solve problems for nine-year olds. The zone was four for the first child and one for the second. Even though both students had a mental age of eight, they were not at the same mental development. The discrepancy between these students was more accurately reflected using the zone of proximal development and not mental age (Vygotsky, 1987).

Vygotsky's zone of proximal development discusses the relationship between learning and development (Bodrova & Leong, 2007). It refers to the tasks that have not developed but are in the process of developing (Vygotsky, 1978). Instructions should be built on development. Imitation can be seen as instruction's impact on development. When students are in school, teachers strive to instruct them in tasks they cannot do, not in tasks they can already perform. Teachers assist students in learning material within their reach, which is a basic premise of instruction. The zone of proximal development, which focuses on what students can achieve, is a significant link between instruction and development (Vygotsky, 1987).

According to Vygotsky, the zone of proximal development changes as students achieve higher levels of thinking. Students' development continually adjusts zones so students are able to learn more difficult concepts and skills. The boundaries of the zone of proximal development are on two levels, are active, and are continually transforming (Bodrova & Leong, 2007). It is necessary to determine students' upper and lower thresholds of instruction so optimal learning takes place (Vygotsky, 1987). The lower level consists of the independent performance and the higher level is referred to as the assisted performance. The level of assisted performance contains actions students complete with assistance from an adult or peer (Bodrova & Leong). The activities students complete with assistance today will be the activities they can do independently in the future (Bodrova & Leong; McGill-Fran, 1992). Therefore, the assisted level is continually changing (Bodrova & Leong).

Teachers should instruct students between the two thresholds. It is essential not to focus on what was accomplished previously but to look ahead to what can be achieved in the future (Vygotsky, 1987). Teachers need to continually be on the lookout for what students can do without assistance (Anderson & Armbruster, 1990). When students are given problems they can complete without assistance, teachers are instructing to students' weaknesses. Instead of using the zone of proximal development to direct students to new skills, teachers hold students' learning back (Vygotsky, 1986).

Students can perform tasks beyond their current abilities when they receive assistance from teachers (Vygotsky, 1978). Scaffolding occurs as teachers support students. By carefully observing and working with students, teachers offer the exact amount of support students need to be successful at a task. Teachers provide just the right

amount of challenge, not too much or too little, so students' abilities are enhanced (Anderson & Armbruster, 1990). Scaffolding involves teachers giving a great deal of support to students in the beginning and then eventually lessening the support as students move towards independence. Ultimately, the scaffold fades away and a new one is put in place to assist in the next phase of learning (Harland, 2003).

In a study of nine first grade teachers from four districts, one characteristic of distinguished high achieving teachers was the use of scaffolding. Teachers had the ability to observe students' thought processes, and then they provided just enough assistance to make learning possible. The scaffolding technique teachers frequently used was questioning. The three teachers who used scaffolding took students to a new level of knowledge that would not have been possible without teacher intervention. The six teachers who were not as skilled in scaffolding techniques did not delineate from the lesson as much and were not as tuned in to students' learning techniques (Wharton-McDonald, Pressley, & Hampston, 1998).

Guided reading permits teachers to assist students as they progress in their reading development. By selecting appropriate texts and then supporting students in their learning, teachers are able to help students read more effectively. During guided reading lessons, teachers have the opportunity to present detailed material in small groups that address students' needs (Fountas & Pinnell, 2001). In guided reading teachers would like for students to think about the meaning of the whole text and not simply one skill. Teachers work to assist students in thinking beyond the text. They want students to think beyond surface level questions and delve more deeply into the meaning. Teachers also intend for students to think about the text so they question what they are reading (Fountas

& Pinnell, 2006b).

Transactional theory.

The transactional theory introduced by Louise M. Rosenblatt describes how students comprehend text. The transactional theory states that meaning is derived as readers interact with text. The personal experiences readers have influence their first interpretation. In the transactional perspective, readers' personal reactions to text are the beginning of a literary encounter and the creation of meaning. As readers discuss the text with others, they gain additional insights, may adjust their analyses, examine the text more critically, and hear differing points of view (Connell, 2008).

The transactional view of reading is similar to the transactions people have with each other. When people converse face to face, the listener must pay attention to both verbal and nonverbal cues. However, writers have to find words to express nonverbal cues because the characters cannot be observed. The reader, instead of the listener, has to create the voices, tones, rhythms, and inflections in their minds. A transaction occurs between the reader and the text. A transaction is an on-going process where each component is formed by the other. The reader relies on the text, and the text is set in motion by the reader (Rosenblatt, 1994). There is a back and forth relationship that develops and changes as the text is read (Karolides, 1999). The transactional part of the reading process contends that both the reader and text are significant (Karolides; Rosenblatt).

The transactional approach emphasizes active processes from readers as well as the roles books have in causing readers to self-evaluate, develop goals, or discover other cultures (Rosenblatt, 1976). Reading is a selecting, organizing, and synthesizing activity

(Karolides, 1999). As readers interact with text their viewpoints may shift slightly or dramatically because of transactions that occur as more information is presented. Readers have to examine characters and language when reading (Karolides, 2005). While interacting, meaning continually changes as readers predict and modify their thinking based on information acquired while reading (Karolides, 1999).

Readers are active, relying on previous experiences with life and language to make meaning from text and may change their thoughts and actions based on interactions with the text (Rosenblatt, 1976, 1994). Each reader's interpretation of text is unique because each person's past and current life experiences are different. While reading, readers utilize their memories, thoughts, experiences, and the text to contemplate meaning (Rosenblatt, 1994). Since all readers carry diverse experiences and beliefs about the world, their responses to the text can be quite varied (Karolides, 1999). As readers interact with text, past emotions, images, ideas, and relationships play a factor in how the text is understood (Rosenblatt, 1994). The same text may take on different meanings to the same person depending on the time and events occurring (Rosenblatt, 1976).

It is vital for teachers to move students' thinking beyond their initial responses to the text (Connell, 2008). Teachers must help students have profitable transactions with texts (Rosenblatt, 1976) and create meaning based on encounters they have with texts. How students generate meaning and comprehend texts concerns teachers. Students need to contemplate the material they read. Since the transactional approach centers around personal responses, teachers should carefully choose the texts to be read by students. Teachers must think about their students' backgrounds, interests, strengths, and weaknesses (Connell). As students discuss the text with their peers, teachers assist them

in reassessing, enhancing, increasing, and investigating their initial responses in order to process text on a deeper level (Connell; Karolides, 2005; Rosenblatt). In order for students to think deeper, they must reexamine their beliefs and concerns (Rosenblatt).

Guided reading builds upon the work of Rosenblatt. When selecting texts, teachers contemplate their students' strengths and weaknesses in order to help them progress. When discussing texts, teachers encourage students to make personal connections. They want students to examine the texts to confirm their thinking. As students discuss, they have opportunities to profit from other students' analyses. They may use these conversations as a springboard to reinforce or even modify their thinking (Fountas & Pinnell, 2001).

The Importance of Reading

Reading is highly valued because of the key role it plays in everyday life (Campbell et al., 1996). The primary years of school create the foundation facilitating all prospective literacy accomplishments. Once students reach the intermediate grades they use the foundation from elementary school to build literacy skills which should last a lifetime (Fountas & Pinnell, 2001).

Reading means that one immediately processes text in order to understand it (Lyons & Pinnell, 2001). Reading is not a passive activity. Students read to learn, to obtain new information, or just for enjoyment. Readers utilize their knowledge of print to understand text and then relay the information to others (National Reading Panel, 2000). Consequently, the goal of reading is understanding text, not simply calling isolated words (Nation & Angell, 2006). When students read, they acquire additional knowledge which aids them in learning to comprehend. The more students know, the more they

comprehend. The more they comprehend, the more they discover further knowledge (Fielding & Pearson, 1994).

Many students today struggle as they learn to read. When students are not able to read, self-esteem, motivation, and both current and future schooling situations are affected (Armbruster et al., 2003). A group of 56 first grade students were administered reading tests and then evaluated again in eleventh grade. Of the 56 students only 27 were available in the eleventh grade, and these students were given a test to measure reading comprehension, vocabulary, general knowledge, and exposure to print. Based on the study, first grade reading ability was a good predictor of students' performance in eleventh grade. The study pointed out that the acquisition of reading skills at an early age was a predictor of literacy experiences throughout life (Cunningham & Stanovich, 1997).

The Report of the National Reading Panel.

In 1997, Congress requested the Director of the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development together with the Secretary of Education to review the value of different methods used to teach students to read. From Congress' request the National Reading Panel was formed and eventually *The Report of the National Reading Panel: Reports of the Subgroups* was composed (National Reading Panel, 2000). Some of the findings regarding reading comprehension follow.

As students learn to read, comprehension of text is vital in order for them to progress in education. When students are instructed in comprehension strategies, there is improvement in their knowledge of text. Comprehension strategies are explicit processes students go through as they consciously determine if they understand what they read (Clay, 2002; National Reading Panel, 2000). As students are exposed to more print, the

strategies they use to understand texts grow (Clay; Cunningham & Stanovich, 1997). Readers who comprehend well have the ability to pose questions, which enhances their understanding (Lyon, 1998). Good readers use comprehension strategies to assist them in acquiring meaning from text: they make connections, infer, question, visualize, synthesize, monitor, and determine importance (Pressley et al., 2001; Harvey & Goudvis, 2000). Eventually, students use these strategies to read text without assistance from the teacher (National Reading Panel).

To promote reading comprehension, strategies emphasizing active understanding and engagement with meaning are useful. Especially beneficial are strategies encompassing comprehension monitoring, cooperative learning, question answering, question generating, the utilization of semantic organizers, and summarization. When students learn comprehension monitoring, they scrutinize texts. Cooperative learning is beneficial because students learn to interact with others. As students assist each other, acquisition of comprehension strategies and reading comprehension improves. Many students do not know how to ask or answer questions so teachers should use both inferential and explicit questions. When students use graphic organizers they recall information more effectively. Summarization aids students in identifying the main idea and supporting details (National Reading Panel, 2000).

Oral vocabulary is important as students read. If printed words are in students' oral vocabularies it is easier for them to decode and understand the words (Clay, 2002; National Reading Panel, 2000). However, when students encounter words not in their oral vocabulary, comprehension of those words is generally not present (National Reading Panel). Knowledge of vocabulary is significant as students learn to read (Lyon,

1998; National Reading Panel). The direct instruction of vocabulary is essential because many vocabulary words are not acquired indirectly (National Reading Panel).

Students who read more frequently also have better vocabularies than students who read less. The more students read the more vocabulary they encounter (Cunningham & Stanovich, 1998). Teachers can instruct students in vocabulary using explicit and implicit methods, through multimedia, repetition, and by connecting unknown words to known words (National Reading Panel, 2000). Acquisition of vocabulary is important because students who have a narrow vocabulary in fourth grade generally struggle in comprehending grade level texts throughout the rest of their schooling (Chall & Jacobs, 2003).

Various avenues are available to instruct students in vocabulary words. Explicit instruction of vocabulary occurs when teachers give students definitions or pre-teach vocabulary words. Pre-teaching vocabulary words before reading assists in acquiring and comprehending vocabulary. Generally, as students read texts they encounter unfamiliar words. When they are able to infer the meaning of those words using context, vocabulary is acquired implicitly. Multimedia techniques like semantic mapping and graphic representations might be used to increase vocabulary. Using the capacity method, students practice words until they instinctively know them so that their minds are ready to learn additional vocabulary. Students might also use words they know and relate them to unknown words (National Reading Panel, 2000).

Teachers need substantial training to accomplish the goals of effectively teaching reading comprehension and comprehension strategies. When instructing students, teachers should model their thinking, have students ask questions and discuss answers

with their peers, and promote active involvement with text. As students learn to ask and answer questions about texts, comprehension improves. Educators have to observe students in order to find opportunities to assist them in acquiring additional strategies (National Reading Panel, 2000). Instead of waiting until students take standardized tests at the end of the year to see how they are progressing, teachers should be conscious of how each student develops throughout the year by evaluating students to ensure they make continual progress (Clay, 2002).

The Early Reading Panel in Ontario.

The Early Reading Panel in Ontario consisting of teachers, principals, school board administrators, academia, and researchers agreed on four main beliefs in regard to reading. Reading instruction should center on research that has been authenticated by classroom practice. The ability to read at an early age is crucial since reading establishes a foundation for all other subjects students experience. Students who continue to struggle with reading in third grade rarely attain grade level reading as they advance through the grades. Teachers play a vital role in the success of students as they learn to read (Laveault, McEachern, Alton, Bergeron, Bourdages, Champagne-Muzar et al., 2003).

The information age necessitates that students become proficient readers and writers in order to successfully integrate into society. Students who learn to read in the early primary years are more equipped to do well in school and read for enjoyment as they grow older. However, students in first, second, or third grade who struggle with reading are at a disadvantage because they typically are not able to keep up with their peers academically. When students are behind in reading, they tend to get behind in other subjects as well (Laveault et al., 2003). Students who have difficulty reading usually

work at a slower pace and do not have as many strategies to assist them in understanding text (Clay, 2002). These students are at an increased risk of experiencing low self-esteem and dropping out of school (Laveault et al.).

Reading is seen as the way to obtain meaning from print. Readers use oral language as well as the written alphabet to assist with comprehension (Snow et al., 1998). Students who read for meaning well have the ability to bring together information from a variety of sources (Clay, 2002). Reading entails decoding words and deliberating over those words to make meaning (Harvey & Goudvis, 2000). Oral language is the foundation for literacy development, especially in the early primary years. It is important for students to discuss what they are reading because oral language is the building block for reading and writing (Laveault et al., 2003).

People read to comprehend information (Laveault et al., 2003; Lyons & Pinnell, 2001). To become a reader one must be able to identify words and comprehend text (Nation & Angell, 2006). If students are able to identify the words but not comprehend them, then they have not realized the skill of reading. To acquire knowledge about text students must have a firm base grounded in the skills of oral language, prior knowledge, concepts about print, phonemic awareness, letter-sound relationships, vocabulary, semantics, and syntax. In order for students to read to learn they have to make use of reading strategies to monitor their comprehension. These comprehension strategies are the cognizant tactics readers utilize to understand text. Proficient readers have the ability to draw on known strategies to improve their understanding of text (Laveault et al.).

Literacy processing occurs when the writing on a page is linked to language paths in the brain. As students are exposed to print, their brains become better at linking words

on the page to meaningful phrases and sentences. The more students practice, the more they develop meaning for entire texts (Clay, 2005). Teachers then guide the students as they work on developing fluency in order to enable them to move from learning to read to reading to learn.

Fluency is the capability to read words and text correctly with expression (Laveault et al., 2003). Fluency requires time and much practice to develop (Samuels & Flor, 1997). In order to develop fluency, students should read easy books about well-known topics containing recognizable, high-frequency words (Laveault et al.). Once students become fluent readers they do not have to devote as much cognitive energy to decoding words (Samuels & Flor) which enables them to become more independent readers (Laveault et al.).

Fluency does not ensure comprehension. Reading to learn takes a great deal of practice and does not happen automatically (Armbruster, Lehr, Osborn, 2003). Comprehension occurs when students have the skill to understand, contemplate, and discover new information from reading materials (Laveault et al., 2003). Students who comprehend well can generally summarize, predict, clarify, and produce questions (Lyon, 1998). Comprehension is cultivated by teachers who utilize students' prior knowledge and experiences, continue to foster language skills, and promote higher-level thinking (Laveault et al.).

An additional finding of the Early Reading Panel was that students should read texts on their instructional level (Laveault et al., 2003). For students who have difficulty learning, being taught on their instructional level is crucial (Foorman & Torgesen, 2001). As a student's reading ability improves, the leveled texts read should increase in

difficulty. If students are instructed in small groups, the composition of these groups should vary throughout the year as students' needs and abilities change (Laveault et al.). By closely observing students during reading, all students should be able to make adequate progress (Clay, 2002).

Various strategies should be used before, during, and after reading. Before reading, teachers and students determine the purpose for reading by looking at the genre, topic, title, headings, table of contents, and tricky vocabulary. During reading, students have opportunities to predict and confirm predictions, establish the main idea, and use known reading strategies (Laveault et al., 2003). In order to assist students in decoding and comprehending written material teachers should make use of students' prior knowledge (Laveault et al.; Lyon, 1998). Using prior knowledge makes it easier for students to decode and grasp the meaning. When students do not have the background knowledge to understand texts, teachers should present them with the necessary information to assist comprehension (Laveault et al.).

After reading, students should discuss what they learned in order to help them apply their new knowledge to future situations. They may summarize, retell, or use graphic organizers to assist them (Laveault et al., 2003). When effective readers think beyond the text they are able to relate experiences they read about to their own lives, predict events, make inferences, and visualize characters' feelings (Scharer, Pinnell, Lyons, & Fountas, 2005). Each of these strategies is important and teachers need to ensure the utilization of each of them in order to develop students' reading abilities (Laveault et al.).

It is imperative for teachers to encourage development of higher-order thinking

skills in students. As students read to learn, teachers should ask questions that go beyond simple recall. They must have students analyze, apply, synthesize, and evaluate text so they become more active in their reading and begin to form opinions and question texts at deeper levels. Teachers should use Bloom's taxonomy to assist in the development of higher-order thinking skills, all of which are crucial for reading (Laveault et al., 2003).

Teachers play a crucial role in developing a positive outlook about learning and literacy in students. It is vital for students to be motivated to read so that they will want to learn more about the reading process, make use of more strategies, and become better readers. Therefore, it is essential for teachers to provide a literacy-rich environment thus encouraging students to read for both information and enjoyment. Understanding how students view themselves as readers is also important in order for teachers to support them at their points of need (Laveault et al., 2003).

Reading Comprehension

Readers are literate people with the capacity to comprehend text and thus reap the benefits and pleasures of the written word (Scharer et al., 2005). Skilled readers are methodical and deliberate when reading. They utilize background knowledge and cues from text to generate meaning, employ strategies, monitor comprehension, try to solve problems, and assess understanding (Brown, Van Meter, Pressley, & Schuder, 1996). Literate individuals constantly create meaning from text, before, during, and after reading (Fountas & Pinnell, 2006b; Scharer et al.).

Reading comprehension is a complicated process (Nation & Angell, 2006), and many factors play a role. One such factor is the background knowledge students bring with them about the world, language, and print (Fielding & Pearson, 1994; Snow et al.,

1998; Nation & Angell). Vocabulary knowledge plays a vital role in comprehension. When readers do not know meanings of the words they are reading, comprehension is reduced (Snow et al; Nation & Angell.). Also, the type of genre read and difficulty of the material affect comprehension (Fletcher, 2006). Readers need to be aware of strategies that can be used when comprehension breaks down (Nation & Angell). Students need formal instruction on specific comprehension and metacomprehension strategies in order to expand their reading abilities (Stevens, Slavin, & Farnish, 1991). During guided reading teachers have opportunities to assist students in developing strategies. Teachers should emphasize one or two processing strategies during each lesson. The instruction, which should be short and specific, occurs immediately after the reading of text so it assists students in their problem solving (Fountas & Pinnell, 2001).

Reading occurs when messages are acquired from text (Clay, 1991a). To be effective readers, students need to take the language concepts in their minds and connect them to various types of print (Clay, 2002; Schellings et al., 2006). As students practice reading they improve in their abilities to understand the conventions of print and thus increase their understanding of the written word (Clay, 1991a). If a student cannot identify printed words they will not succeed in reading (Nation & Angell, 2006). Reading involves two things happening at once, word identification and comprehension. In order to comprehend there must be word identification, but word identification does not assure comprehension (Cunningham, Hall, & Cunningham, 2000).

Readers continually think about information they have read in order to process new concepts (Lyons & Pinnell, 2001). Proficient readers question text in order to explain meaning, predict, find answers, and think about rhetorical questions. Using

evidence from the text, personal experience, and knowledge are crucial when making decisions about themes and ideas (Keene & Zimmerman, 1997). After students read a text in guided reading, teachers discuss the meaning of the text. During the discussions, students may summarize, convey their ideas, increase their understanding, or connect the text to other texts they have read (Fountas & Pinnell, 2001).

Students need to understand when they comprehend and when they do not in order to be taught strategies that can be used to assist them in comprehending more deeply (Clay, 2002). Effective teachers realize the cognitive processes good readers use and then instruct students in these strategies (Keene & Zimmerman, 1997). As students acquire strategies, they are able to interact with text without aid from the teacher (National Reading Panel, 2000).

Proficient readers have the ability to comprehend text literally, to infer, monitor, and utilize strategies (Fielding & Pearson, 1994; Snow et al., 1998). As students comprehend, they constantly make implications in their minds: their brains are thinking cognitively, linguistically, emotionally, and creatively as processing of text occurs. The processes readers employ to grasp meaning cannot be seen (Fountas & Pinnell, 2006b). Therefore, reading comprehension is difficult to observe (Fletcher, 2006). However, teachers can look for indicators when students are in small groups during guided reading (Fountas & Pinnell). Teachers must monitor the outcomes of the processes and then make conclusions regarding the quality of comprehension (Fletcher).

Learning to comprehend text requires practice which occurs through independent reading, being read to, and by reading in small groups. To improve comprehension teachers must focus on strategies such as summarizing, predicting, and monitoring. Since

fluency and accuracy effect comprehension, they should be assessed on a regular basis for students in second grade and above (Snow et al., 1998). However, teachers must stress comprehension from the beginning instead of delaying until students are skilled in the basics of reading. Students at every level need to recognize an objective of reading is comprehension (Armbruster et al., 2003).

Developing strategic processes is crucial in the acquisition of reading comprehension (National Reading Panel, 2000). Since students differ in their abilities and needs, teachers must offer many opportunities for students to read in order for them to mature in their reading and comprehending of text (Kimbell-Lopez, 2003). By making use of high quality literature that challenges students to progress, teachers assist students in becoming proficient readers (Keene & Zimmerman, 1997). Students need to read daily in order to practice the skills and strategies necessary to become skillful readers. Teachers should instruct students in comprehension strategies (Fielding & Pearson, 1994). Guided reading meets these objectives as teachers assemble almost on a daily basis with small homogenous groups of students. Teachers design lessons to meet the needs of each group so that reading comprehension and skills progress (Fountas & Pinnell, 2001).

Leveling Systems

In general, students in the same grade and even the same classroom have different abilities and read on numerous levels (August House, n.d.). In order for students to be taught on their instructional level, teachers have the option of using leveled texts to maximize their teaching and reach all learners (August House; Williams, 1998). Leveled book collections are sets of books arranged by difficulty from easy books for beginning readers to more difficult selections used by students in intermediate grades (Brabham &

Villaumer, 2002; Mesmer, 2008; Peterson, 2001; Pinnell, 1999).

Text gradient is another name for qualitative leveling systems (Mesmer, 2008). A text gradient consists of books that become progressively harder (Mesmer; Peterson, 2001). The qualitative leveling system denotes the complexity of the texts. Text levels can be communicated in various ways: grade levels are conveyed in grades, guided reading levels are conveyed in letters, and Lexiles are conveyed in Lexile units (Mesmer).

Qualitative leveling systems focus on three aspects: language, content, and format. The language of a book influences how students manage the text. The difficulty of the sentences, the type of language, the organization of text, and predictability are factors that shape how students approach texts (Mesmer, 2008; Peterson, 2001). Also, the content affects how students interact with texts. When students are more familiar with the themes, the texts are easier to comprehend (Mesmer; Peterson, 1988; 2001). The genre and vocabulary impact difficulty as well. Format refers to text layout. Length of books, size and type of print, and illustrations play a role in the complexity of texts. When arranging texts in qualitative leveling systems, the text as a whole is examined. Various text characteristics are considered, the text is given a level, and then the book is tested on readers (Mesmer; Peterson, 1998; 2001).

Texts in the same level are comparable in difficulty and text features. Each level concentrates on certain features, and the features vary as the levels go up so students' needs are addressed (Mesmer, 2008). A study by Peterson (1988) found it more beneficial to look at the characteristics of the continuum as a whole instead of examining differences between levels. Each level may focus on a variety of features but that does

not prevent the features from appearing again. There were distinctions between levels but the variations were more noticeable when looking at the entire piece.

Since leveled books are categorized along a continuum from easiest to hardest, the processing needs of each level are arranged from simple to difficult as well. The level of a text describes the amount of processing students need in order to comprehend and use specific strategies (Fountas & Pinnell, 2006b). Within each level of books, students' needs vary. Some students require supplemental materials or additional assistance if they are reading below grade level expectations (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996). Since students' zones of proximal development develop at different rates, some students may need a great deal of assistance to advance, while others may move forward rapidly with less teacher guidance (Bodrova & Leong, 2007). Texts within each level provide varying quantities of support to scaffold students' learning and present differing degrees of problem solving opportunities (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996).

Students vary in their reading levels, attention spans, and memory. Students' reading skills continually change during elementary school; thus, it is valuable to determine their reading levels (Mesmer, 2008). Leveled texts support teachers as they choose appropriate materials for students (Brabham & Villaumer, 2002). Not all readers require the same material. Texts may be more suited for one group of students than for another group because of students' developmental needs (Mesmer; Peterson, 2001). In order for students below grade level to move forward in their reading, they need appropriate texts to avoid constant frustration. Also, students who are expert readers need challenges to continue to grow and develop (Brabham & Villaumer). Teachers can utilize evaluations such as standardized tests, running records, observations, and basal assessments to help

establish students' levels (Mesmer).

Vygotsky believed that to instruct students, teachers needed to begin with students' current knowledge and skills (Harland, 2003). Text scaffolds support readers when they first learn to read but are eventually removed when readers no longer require as much assistance. By teaching students in the zone of proximal development, the books that were once unreachable become attainable (Mesmer, 2008). Leveled texts allow teachers to meet the needs of all students in their class by instructing in the zone of proximal development (Brabham & Villaumer, 2002).

There are numerous approaches to assess texts (Peterson, 1988). Book leveling, a system of evaluating texts, is a guide to assist educators and parents in finding suitable books for each child (August House, n.d.; Peterson, 2001). Placing a text in a particular level is simply an estimation of difficulty (Mesmer, 2008; Peterson, 1988; 2001) and not all text analysis tools concentrate on the same facets (Mesmer). Leveled reading systems utilize a variety of assessments to establish how students read. Students are matched with texts that present some challenges but are not so difficult that students become discouraged. Books are arranged by level of difficulty so that students can be matched to appropriate materials (Williams, 1998). A few of the leveling systems available for teachers are discussed below (See Appendix A).

Accelerated reader.

Accelerated Reader is a literature-based reading program for students in kindergarten through twelfth grade (Institute for Academic Excellence, Inc., 1998; Paul, VanderZee, Rue, & Swanson, 1996). It was created in 1984 and is a computerized program allowing students to take quizzes on books they read (Institute of Education

Sciences, 2007). The Accelerated Reader program assists teachers in stimulating students to read more and allows teachers to track student progress (Paul et al.). One theory behind the Accelerated Reader program is that when students read large quantities of literature-based text within their zone of proximal development, they will begin to love reading, thrive as readers, and increase their critical thinking skills. As they experience success, they will hopefully want to read more (Institute for Academic).

The Accelerated Reader program contains more than 12,000 books, which are leveled using the Flesch-Kincaid reading index. Each book is given a maximum point value, obtained from its length and reading level. The program gives students points equal to the percentage test score times the book's Accelerated Reader point value, as long as the student scores at least 60% on the test. Teachers can examine test scores and points to look at students' accomplishments and determine when intervention is necessary (Paul et al., 1996). Students and teachers can establish goals using the point system for students to meet in their reading (Institute of Education, 2007).

The general idea behind Accelerated Reader is that students choose a book, read it, and then take a multiple choice test on the computer about the book (Paul et al., 1996). Accelerated Reader allows all students in a classroom to read texts on their reading level before taking a quiz assessing their comprehension (Institute for Academic, 1998; Institute of Education, 2007). The quizzes pull together the following information: the title, reading level, length of the book, and number of questions answered correctly. The quizzes are generally literal questions about important facts and events in the story to determine if students comprehend the book (Institute for Academic). Accelerated Reader claims to motivate students to want to read more by providing immediate feedback

(Institute for Academic; Institute of Education). The results help teachers see how students are progressing (Institute of Education) and assist in the identification of problem areas (Institute for Academic).

Developmental reading assessment.

The Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA) was developed by Joetta Beaver and the Upper Arlington City School District. Development began in 1988 as a response to the need for an assessment that would meet the requirements set forth by the state of Ohio to identify students at-risk of failing in reading. It was field tested between 1988 and 1996 in the Upper Arlington School District in Ohio. It was intended to determine how well students read, to examine their reading progress, and to give teachers information so they could adapt instruction for each student (Pearson Education, Inc., 2009). The DRA was meant to be used for students in kindergarten through third grade (Kealakehe Elementary, n.d.). However, the DRA eventually merged with the *DRA, 4-8* and the *DRA Bridge Pack* to become *DRA2, 4-8*. Because of the merger, students in kindergarten through eighth grade could now be assessed (Pearson Education, Inc.).

The DRA is administered by classroom teachers during a one-on-one reading conference. During the conference the teacher has the student listen to a portion of a book at or near the student's level and then the student reads the rest of the book. As the student reads aloud, the teacher records the oral reading and asks the student to retell the story. Once a student reaches a certain reading level, the teacher also asks comprehension questions. Finally, the student is questioned about reading preferences. Each question is based on the reading level of the student (Pearson Education, Inc., 2009).

The DRA can be utilized to assess a student's independent reading level and

identify a student's strengths and weaknesses in connection to accuracy, fluency, and comprehension (Pearson Education, Inc., 2009). Students are evaluated on all of their reading abilities, not simply isolated skills. Using all of the information teachers decide what students need to progress and plan instruction in order to support students (Kealakehe Elementary, n.d.).

The DRA assists teachers by providing a complete representation of the students' reading achievements as well as independent reading levels. It is simple to use (Kealakehe Elementary, n.d.) and can be utilized once or twice a year to analyze a student's reading growth (Pearson Education, Inc., 2009). Using the DRA, teachers can form homogeneous groups of students for reading instruction (Kealakehe Elementary).

Lexile framework.

The Lexile Framework for Reading is a scientifically proven method of reading and text measurement that allows students, parents, and teachers to choose books on a suitable reading level. Tens of thousands of books, tens of millions of newspaper and magazine articles, and more than 450 publishers have Lexile measures (Lennon & Burdick, 2004). The Lexile Framework for Reading began with a grant awarded to MetaMetrics, Inc. from the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development and is the result of more than 20 years of ongoing research (Lennon & Burdick; MetaMetrics, Inc., n.d.).

The Lexile Framework calculates student ability and text difficulty on the same scale, in the same units, which are called Lexiles. The Lexile Framework is utilized to establish a Lexile measure for each student and compare it to the Lexile measure of the texts students want to read. Students then choose books, using their Lexile measure as a

guide, to find engaging but challenging texts (Lennon & Burdick, 2004).

The Lexile Framework includes two parts, a Lexile measure and the Lexile scale. A Lexile measure consists of the numeric symbol of a reader's ability or a text's complexity and contains an "L" (for Lexile) after the number. The Lexile scale is a progressive scale that extends from 200L to 1,700L according to text difficulty. The Lexile measure and scale are used to classify Lexile levels of students and texts. When texts are selected that match students' Lexile levels, the result is an expected 75% comprehension rate. Students who read a text with a 75% comprehension rate are not frustrated but have just the right amount of challenges to promote growth in abilities and enthusiasm for reading (Lennon & Burdick, 2004).

The Lexile scale gives a range of readability levels for students. Students' instructional levels range from 50L above and 100L below Lexile levels. Texts with lower Lexile levels are recommended for independent reading. When students read texts that are more than 50L above their Lexile scale, the material is likely to be too hard and comprehension suffers. At the same time, when students read texts more than 100L below their Lexile scale, they are not offered many challenges (Lennon & Burdick, 2004).

The Lexile Framework is beneficial for teachers because it offers a way to ascertain which texts students comprehend on their own, as well as which students require assistance. Teachers can utilize the Lexile measure to help struggling readers identify texts at the lower end of the spectrum, while more proficient readers can be directed toward the higher end. Teachers can also use the Lexile measure in their teaching as they select books to use with students. The Lexile measure assists teachers in

identifying books students can read independently so their reading improves (Lennon & Burdick, 2004).

Reading recovery.

Reading Recovery is a program intended to increase literacy achievement in the lowest 20% of students after one year of schooling (Clay, 2005). The objective of Reading Recovery is to lower the number of students in first grade who have tremendous difficulty learning to read and write and to lower the cost of these students to educational systems. Reading Recovery was developed in New Zealand 30 years ago by Marie M. Clay. In 1984 teachers in North America began using the program (Reading Recovery Council of North America, n.d.).

Reading Recovery supports students whose progress in class has been slow. It is intense, consistent, provides immediate feedback, and quality instruction. Students receive one-on-one instruction for 30 minutes a day. For students who have the most trouble learning to read, one-on-one instruction is beneficial in improving their reading skills. Because teachers work with one student at a time, they have the opportunity to provide exactly what each student needs to progress through immediate feedback. Since teachers are aware of each student's history, they should know how to respond to move students forward in their learning (Clay, 2005).

During Reading Recovery lessons, teachers accelerate learning so that students catch up to their peers. Teachers plan a sequenced program based on a student's performance. The teacher makes skilled judgments about how to best instruct each student throughout the lesson. Reading Recovery teachers base their instruction on in-depth observations of what students can do. They instruct from the student's strengths

and do not teach what student already knows. Teachers must find the right balance between helping students succeed with familiar material and challenging them with new material. Throughout the lessons, students learn various methods to use when dealing with literacy problems, which increases their rate and complexity of problem solving (Clay, 2005).

When students show they can achieve grade level work, their lessons are stopped, and another student receives instruction (Reading Recovery Council of North America, n.d.). About 75% of students in the United States who have been in Reading Recovery for the full 12 to 20 weeks are now on grade level in reading and writing (Reading Recovery Council of North America; Clay, 2005). After leaving the program, the majority of students perform on grade level during the next three years and do not need additional services (Clay). If students continue to have trouble, they are recommended for additional support (Reading Recovery Council of North America).

Fountas and Pinnell.

Guided reading, which was developed by Irene C. Fountas and Gay Su Pinnell, is a technique that can be utilized with readers who are struggling as well as those who are independent readers (Iaquinta, 2006). It supports students in their quest to become independent (Baumann, Hoffman, Duffy-Hester, & Ro, 2000; Fawson & Reutzel, 2000; Fountas & Pinnell, 1996; Guastello & Lenz, 2005) and fluent readers by providing instruction in effective reading strategies (Fawson & Reutzel). Teachers support a small group of students as they talk, read, and think their way through a text (Laveault et al., 2003). Guidance from teachers results in significantly improved performance scores (Smith & Ellis, 2003).

Guided reading involves small group instruction of students with comparable needs (Fountas & Pinnell, 2006b; Laveault et al., 2003). Homogenous groups are instructed using leveled texts (Fountas & Pinnell, 2006b). The group composition is fluid and changes according to the teacher's observations and assessments (Laveault et al.). At least 90 minutes a day should be set aside for guided reading and independent work (Fountas & Pinnell, 1999). During that time, teachers meet with three to four groups for 20 to 30 minutes while the rest of the class is involved in independent reading, writing, and listening activities (Fountas & Pinnell, 1999, 2006a). Guided reading groups ideally meet three to five times a week enabling students to make steady gains in reading (Fountas & Pinnell, 2006a).

While in small groups, teachers have opportunities to match the difficulty of text to the level of students. As a result, students are not forced to read material that is too difficult or too easy for them. The framework for guided reading provides for different types of learners and enables teachers to establish a base from which comprehension can be built. When teachers work with an entire classroom at once, the material is generally not appropriate for all students. By teaching in small groups, optimal learning takes place as students are challenged at appropriate levels (Fountas & Pinnell, 2001).

Fountas and Pinnell's Leveling System

Fountas and Pinnell's leveling system contains a gradient of text, which is a large assortment of books sorted by level of difficulty and defined by a set of characteristics (Pinnell & Fountas, 2006a). Leveled books have been scrutinized to determine how they support and challenge students as they learn to read (Fountas & Pinnell, 1999). The intention of the gradient is to support the effectiveness of the reading program and to act

as a tool for teachers (Pinnell & Fountas, 2002). There is not a substantial difference in the demands of texts within two or three levels. However, if the levels within the gradient are compared as a whole, it is possible to see the development students make (Pinnell & Fountas, 2007).

A leveled collection of books contains an extensive variety of fiction and nonfiction texts organized along a gradient of difficulty. When determining which level to place a text in, the attributes that act as a foundation and challenge readers are scrutinized (Lyons & Pinnell, 2001). Each level along the gradient categorizes books according to difficulty making it simpler to match readers with appropriate books (Lyons & Pinnell, 2001; Peterson, 2001). The leveling of books takes into account content, illustrations, length, curriculum, language structure, judgment, and format (Fry, 2002). Additionally, the appearance and quantity of print on each page impacts readability (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996; Peterson).

Schools are arranged by grade levels; however, students are continually learning. Guided reading allows students, who are ready, to move up to the next level of text by providing teachers resources to advance them in their learning. As students progress, the topics increase in difficulty even though the length of texts may decrease. It is critical for teachers to assist students by offering many opportunities to think, talk, and write about reading (Fountas & Pinnell, 2006a). According to the transactional theory, discussion of text allows students opportunities to analyze and modify their thinking as different viewpoints are presented (Connell, 2008).

A fourth grade inclusion class in a Midwestern rural community was below grade level in reading as evidenced by scores on the Stanford test, standardized achievement

test scores, developmental reading assessments, and teacher assessments. After looking at the results from various assessments, it was determined students needed additional reading instruction. The instruction would be accomplished by reading books on students' levels, working on reading skills, teacher read alouds, sustained silent reading, and word attack strategies. Some of the causes linked to students' difficulties were not enough instructional time, limited utilization of reading strategies, and unsuitable reading materials (Conklin & Wilkins, 2002).

For a period of 18 weeks 23 students were instructed using the four-block framework which included instruction in guided reading for 30 minutes each day. At the conclusion of the action research project it was found that students improved their overall reading skills. The gain was documented using the developmental reading assessment. On average, students' scores improved by 71%. Additionally, students became more engaged as they read books on their instructional level, and their self-confidence and enthusiasm for reading improved (Conklin & Wilkins, 2002).

Description of Fountas and Pinnell's text levels.

The gradient of difficulty refers to levels that are labeled using letters. Each level is an estimate of the complexity within each text because students react to books in different manners. Each letter of the alphabet denotes increasing difficulty and each level is harder than the level preceding it. The steps in difficulty are less noticeable at the lower levels than at the higher levels. Beginning readers need to take little steps as they progress, since simply adding more lines of print can have an effect on readers. As students become more experienced, they do not notice as much when the layout changes. Also, as students become more competent in their reading there is more variety in genre

and format (Fountas & Pinnell, 1999).

Students in kindergarten through first grade are generally in levels A and B and are considered emergent readers (Lyons & Pinnell, 2001). Texts at these levels contain easy stories with one or two lines (Lyons & Pinnell; Peterson, 2001). Texts relate to the illustrations and allow students to connect topics with their experiences. The print is in the same location on every page. Teachers assist students in learning how to locate words, examine illustrations, manage books, and move from left to right on the page (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996; Peterson).

Levels B through H are usually appropriate for first and second grade students. Texts gradually become longer as students progress through levels, and illustrations continue to support what is read. Students in levels B through H are considered early readers and need to practice reading fluently. They also should think about their reading to ensure that it makes sense. Students continue to read orally but begin reading silently in the higher levels (Lyons & Pinnell, 2001).

Second and third grade students generally are in levels H through M or what are known as transitional readers (Lyons & Pinnell, 2001). Many fourth grade students are at a transitional point as well. For the most part, students in levels J through M are able to read silently (Fountas & Pinnell, 2006a). They process texts easily, read continuous text, and begin to note the graphics found in informational texts (Fountas & Pinnell; Peterson, 2001). Texts have multiple lines of print, are arranged into chapters, and contain more genres. Students must use many resources in order to understand texts. They can no longer expect the illustrations to provide all of the information needed to understand the text. Instead, the illustrations support the reading (Lyons & Pinnell).

Intermediate students need to move from transitional to advanced readers. Moving students to the next stage is a challenge teachers must be willing to undertake (Fountas & Pinnell, 2001). When students in the intermediate grades are still considered transitional readers, they need to read a significant amount of continuous text daily and be exposed to a variety of genres, especially informational texts (Fountas & Pinnell, 2006a). Teachers must recognize where students are in their reading abilities so they can aid students in progressing to the next level (Fountas & Pinnell, 2001). Vygotsky alleged that learning preceded development. Therefore, instruction should be managed to cultivate strategies and ideas that have not entirely materialized in students (Karpov & Bransford, 1995). Students' previous knowledge can be used to figure out problems and form additional knowledge (Harland, 2003). Teachers should continue to present material on students' instructional levels while enhancing their abilities to use strategies with more difficult texts (Fountas & Pinnell 2006a). In order for students to progress consistently, they need explicit teaching, materials, and time. Appropriate books are necessary to both challenge and support students (Fountas & Pinnell, 2001).

Levels N through S are suitable for most third through fourth grade students. The majority of reading is silent; however, teachers still must ensure students are reading fluently as texts become more complex. Students in levels N through S are considered self-extending readers (Fountas & Pinnell, 2006a) because they have acquired many strategies through their work with a variety of texts and challenges. Self-extending readers read longer texts over a longer time frame. While these students are able to read more complex texts, instruction is still necessary (Fountas & Pinnell; Peterson, 2001).

Length does not play as important a factor in levels N to S. Students begin to

encounter genres they have not seen before, as well as topics, themes, and settings that may not be in line with their personal experiences. There are many more informational books which force readers to utilize more background knowledge (Fountas & Pinnell, 2006a). How readers interact with text depends on what they bring to the reading, including previous experiences, beliefs about the world, and individual concerns (Karolides, 1999). The text triggers readers' prior experiences by directing their attention to particular areas (Rosenblatt, 1994). Self-extending readers are challenged to think about text differently as they investigate characters, plot, and theme. Texts have more depth and allow more chances for discussion (Fountas & Pinnell). As readers interact with text to accept, reject, or change their thinking, the text assists in regulating their reflections (Rosenblatt). Therefore, self-extending readers should spend significant time reading diverse texts (Fountas & Pinnell).

Levels T to Z are generally reserved for students in fifth through eighth grade. At these levels, the variety of material continues to increase as does the length of text. Themes are more mature and students' background knowledge continues to play a large factor in understanding text. Students read texts over the course of days or weeks and mature in their reading as they work to understand figurative language and symbolism. Informational texts continue to be important and assist students in their knowledge of content-area subjects. Teachers should instruct students in the organization of informational texts and how to use the tools provided to understand texts more thoroughly. Many of the topics in levels X to Z are not suitable for elementary students but should be reserved for students in middle school (Fountas & Pinnell, 2006a).

Selecting and using leveled texts in guided reading.

The guided reading continuum contains text levels instead of grade levels in the hope that there will be continual progress through the levels. In the continuum there is a chart suggesting a range of levels for each grade (see Appendix B). The chart acts as a guide because teachers need to have knowledge of what levels students at each grade should be on in order to aid in formulating instructional conclusions and identifying students who need intervention (Pinnell & Fountas, 2007). It is important to match texts to students instead of basing text decisions on grade levels because there may be variations depending on the school district or geographic location. As students progress in their reading they may have the capability to read ahead of their grade level as long as comprehension does not suffer. On the other hand, students may need to remain on a level in order to improve fluency even if they can accurately read the words (Fountas & Pinnell, 1999).

Teachers use leveled books during guided reading. Leveled books should be appealing to students, contain various genres, be multicultural, have worthwhile illustrations, and vary in length, language, format, and story structure. Leveled books act as a guide for teachers as they move students along in the reading process. They provide a foundation for teachers to use as they support students' reading. When choosing books for students to read during guided reading, teachers should carefully examine them to ensure the texts benefit the students. Teachers cannot simply move through each level because not all books benefit all students (Fountas & Pinnell, 1999).

Students should not read to advance to the next level of text. Instead, they should read a variety of books which challenge them to a small degree which enables them to

progress at the appropriate pace to the next level of text (Fountas & Pinnell, 2006b). Each text students read should reinforce strategies and provide new experiences (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996). The interactions readers have with print changes as their knowledge of text grows. As readers make changes, teachers need to adapt their teaching to reflect the varying needs of students in order to ensure they are progressing. Thus, it is imperative for the texts students read to support and challenge them at all levels (Brown, 1999-2000).

A vital part of an effective guided reading program is having a large number of books at various levels and in various genres (Fawson & Reutzel, 2000) because texts are chosen based on assessments of students' needs (Villaume & Brabham, 2001). By utilizing different types of texts with students, teachers are able to form bridges between what students already know and what they still have to learn (Brown, 1999-2000). When students interact with more knowledgeable adults, they are able to build meaning for tasks they could not complete without assistance (McGill-Franzen, 1992). With collaboration or guidance, students continually accomplish more and solve harder assignments than they do alone (McGill-Franzen; Vygotsky, 1987). It is important to remember that students may not reach all expectations each time. Sometimes students may progress rapidly and other times they may require additional time. The continuum exists to act as a guide for teachers as they intervene with student learning (Pinnell & Fountas, 2007).

When choosing books to add to a guided reading collection, educators should consider if the books will be enjoyable, are multicultural, contain a variety of styles and genres, have interesting illustrations, and vary in length. Additionally, the books need to

contain a variety of topics and formats (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996). It is important to have students read a variety of genres because each genre requires readers to use different strategies and skills in order to comprehend. Also, by exposing students to many types of literature their background knowledge, vocabulary, and oral language develops further (Cunningham et al., 2000).

Matching students to books according to reading levels, makes it easier to choose books that can be read without frustration (Dzaldov & Peterson, 2005). In order to effectively match books to readers, teachers must know the readers and texts and understand the reading process. It is crucial to match students first learning the reading process to appropriate texts. Likewise, more advanced readers need support and challenge in order to increase their reading abilities (Fountas & Pinnell, 2006a). Upper elementary students need an assortment of fiction and nonfiction texts of varying lengths in order for students to be exposed to many genres of literature (Pinnell & Fountas, 2002).

As text levels increase, the requirements of the reader increases as well (Pinnell & Fountas, 2007). Students do not have to progress through each level. Some students may skip levels because of the progress they are making. The goal of guided reading is to choose texts on students' instructional levels in order for them to learn something new about processing text. Some students may need to stay on one level a longer time in order to build fluency and strategies. When the books on one level become too easy for students, it is time to advance to another level. Teachers should present sound teaching at each level so students mature in their reading (Fountas & Pinnell, 1999).

A key to selecting appropriate books to use during guided reading is matching

books to students. When selecting books teachers need to think about students' interests, strengths, and needs. Teachers play a crucial role in students' reading success as they determine how to introduce books and support students in their reading (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996). As teachers choose texts for students to read, they must ensure the texts both challenge students and present opportunities to succeed (Avalos et al., 2007). Texts within levels offer different challenges to readers. One text may be more demanding because of technical language while another may be challenging because of lengthy sentences or old-fashioned language (Fountas & Pinnell, 2006a).

As students become competent in their reading, guided reading aids them in learning to manage content and structure in more complex material. Challenges often surface in math, science, and social studies. Therefore, teachers should choose books reflecting the range of students (Mooney, 1995a). Skillful readers use comprehension and word-analysis strategies in order to interpret text and are able to read a variety of genres (Villaume & Brabham, 2001). When questioning students, teachers should challenge students to think beyond the text. Not all questions need to be answered directly but instead can cause students to question material they read (Mooney).

Guided reading offers teachers opportunities to expose students to a variety of books. When students lack specific strategies, teachers should select books to improve skills in those areas. Students tend to gravitate towards certain genres and topics, but it is important for students to be exposed to many genres. Teachers should consider areas that students are interested in, but they also need to use guided reading as a chance to expose students to books they would not read on their own (Fountas & Pinnell, 1999).

Importance of knowing student reading levels.

Guided reading provides the flexibility and scaffolding students need as they learn to read. By receiving instruction using leveled readers students are challenged. Texts are recognizable enough that students should not have to struggle but are able to use strategies they obtained from prior instruction (Fawson & Reutzel, 2000). Teachers can use the text gradient to scrutinize text, as a reference when choosing books to use during guided reading, and as a guide to consider below, on, or above grade level reading (Fountas & Pinnell, 2006b).

To match books to readers teachers need to know the readers, know the texts, and understand the reading process (Fountas & Pinnell, 1999). Matching books to readers allows students to develop their processing systems. Teachers must look at texts from two angles. First, teachers look at what students must do in order to process text. Secondly, teachers determine what the students already know how to do with text. When teachers effectively match books to students, they are able to develop a self-extending system, which means students learn more about the reading process while reading (Fountas & Pinnell, 2006a).

Students learning to read should be successful in both their independent and instructional reading (Burns, 2006). Text that is easy for students is at their independent level and more difficult text is considered at students' frustration level. When students can read 90-95% of the words in a text, then it is at their instructional level (Rasinski, 2003; Rog & Burton, 2002). Teachers need to know the independent and instructional reading levels of all students and from that knowledge choose books on students' instructional levels to use during guided reading (Fawson & Reutzel, 2000; Guastello &

Lenz, 2005). Vygotsky believed in order for students to develop, teachers should present them with tasks beyond their present independent level. For students to move forward, teachers must assist with tasks until students are able to execute them independently (Justice & Ezell, 2004). Effective teachers give students activities matching their abilities by providing some challenge without overwhelming them (Bohn, Roehrig, & Pressley, 2004). Guided reading identifies students' instructional levels so that real learning occurs (Villaume & Brabham, 2001).

When students are asked to read material that is too difficult for them, they often shut down which produces a lack of learning (Villaume & Brabham, 2001) because they are not able to use the knowledge they have in effective ways. Students are not able to comprehend text because they expend their energy decoding. They may begin to read words in isolation so reading is no longer a fluid process. Eventually students may stay away from reading because it is so laborious (Fountas & Pinnell, 2006a). When choosing texts to use during guided reading teachers should try to find material students can read with at least 90% accuracy. By doing so, students utilize visual, meaning, and structure prompts. When students word call because the text is too hard, they are not capable of comprehension or self-monitoring (Kimbell-Lopez, 2003).

In a study conducted on three struggling third grade students, they were found to be on task more when texts were on their instructional level. For all three students, time on task was slightly less at the independent level when compared to the frustration level. Time on task was a little higher for two of the students when comparing instructional levels to independent levels with some overlap between the two for one of the students. Additionally, comprehension scores were higher at the instructional and independent

levels with some overlap within the data. However, comprehension was highest at the independent level. The study suggested students spend more time on task when carrying out tasks at the instructional level. The findings of the study point to the fact that teachers need to use different materials to instruct students in reading so all students succeed. If teachers identify students' instructional levels and teach students from that point, it is likely that time on task and reading comprehension will increase (Treptow, Burns, McComas, 2007).

Six primary teachers from five schools were studied at the beginning of the school year and then at various times throughout the year. During the study two teachers were found to be the most effective. One of these teachers presented students with reading material that was at or just above their reading level. Students in effective teachers' classes were more motivated to read and try challenging books. When students in another class were given material that was too easy they became bored. The students in the effective teachers' classrooms were self-motivated to attempt reading strategies and help their peers. Successful primary grade classrooms contain engaged students which generally results in higher achievement and higher standardized test scores (Bohn et al., 2004).

Gickling & Armstrong (1978) conducted a study on four first grade students and four second grade students at a Title 1 rural school. These students were identified out of 47 first and second grade students because they constantly functioned at the frustrational level, which was below 60%. During the study, these students were given tasks at their frustrational, instructional, and independent level to determine task-completion, task-comprehension, and on-task behaviors. When students were given work at their

frustrational level the percentages of task-completion, task-comprehension, and on-task behaviors were low. However, when students worked on their independent level and both task-completion and task-comprehension were easy, they had a great deal of off-task behavior. When the assignments were on students' instructional level, the percentages of task-completion, task-comprehension, and on-task behaviors were high. The study reiterated that students who were given work at their instructional level were presented with just the right amount of challenge and comprehension to maintain on-task behavior. Students who worked on a frustrational or independent level displayed large amounts of off-task behavior.

Students must be allowed to work on their instructional level because that is the point where students will make the most progress and discover more about the reading process (Askew & Fountas, 1998; Peterson, 2001). When texts are too difficult for students, they are less active in their reading and need more guidance from teachers (Askew & Fountas). When a text is just right it enables readers to improve their processing and be successful in their reading (Fountas & Pinnell, 1999).

Balanced Literacy

A balanced approach to literacy blends features from different theoretical frameworks (Rasinski & Padak, 2004). Balanced reading programs vary in their content because they are based on students' needs and how teachers choose to address them. Balanced reading instruction includes developmentally appropriate literacy skills using leveled texts (Reutzel & Cooter, 1999). As students progress through school the amount of time spent on particular skills may vary. For example, in the early primary years more time may be given to decoding and less time to guided reading. However, when students

reach the intermediate grades, they may require less time on decoding and more time in guided reading (Rasinski & Padak).

Literacy education strives for every student to become literate. Teachers support students in becoming life-long readers using self-selected reading, by reading quality literature to the class, discussing books, and sharing personal stories related to books they have read. Also, in balanced literacy programs teachers have students read a variety of books and genres (Rasinski & Padak, 2004). Students are taught skills within the content of the text (Reutzel & Cooter, 1999).

Pressley et al. (2001) conducted a study of literacy instruction in 30 first grade classrooms in five locations across the United States. The study concluded that successful primary grade teachers presented a balanced literacy approach to learning. They instructed students in skills, had a significant amount of reading and writing in their classrooms, and encouraged students to monitor their reading by modeling, scaffolding, and offering information to students as they used strategies. Teachers who were most effective had students read slightly challenging books. Consequently, students improved steadily over time. Exceptional first grade instruction calls for teachers who recognize students' instructional needs and then develop lessons around those needs.

Students who have difficulty reading need more time and attention than proficient readers. Students who do not struggle with reading are likely to advance by reading independently and by participating in guided reading. A balanced and comprehensive literacy program gives more time to students who are not able to progress without significant teacher interaction (Rasinski & Padak, 2004). In studies conducted by Juel (1988) and Pressley et al. (2001) the number of words poor readers read was considerably

less than the number of words read by proficient readers, and the number increased with each grade level. When poor readers were given the same amount of instructional time as good readers, the poor readers actually read fewer words. Because of the discrepancy, struggling readers never caught up to their peers but continued to fall farther behind. Therefore, in a balanced approach to literacy students may not receive the same amount of small group instructional time (Rasinski & Padak).

Literacy Collaborative

Literacy Collaborative is a comprehensive school wide reform model for students in kindergarten through eighth grade. It is a collaboration between Lesley University, The Ohio State University, and public elementary schools. Literacy Collaborative affects how all teachers in the school deliver instruction as well as the organization of the school (Lesley University, 2004). Each school has a literacy team composed of the principal, literacy coordinator, and teachers from each grade level (Scharer, Desai, Williams, & Pinnell, 2003). The goal of the program is profitable literacy instruction and success for everyone. To help in reaching the goal teachers receive assistance and support (Lesley University). Reading Recovery is offered for first grade students who require additional assistance. A parent outreach program contains books for students to take home to encourage parental involvement (Scharer et al.).

Within Literacy Collaborative there are four frameworks: primary (K-2), transitional (late grade 2), intermediate (3-6), and middle (6-8). The elementary level is divided into three parts: reading workshop, writing workshop, and language/phonics/word study. It is optimal for the framework to be taught in a 2½ to 3 hour time frame (Lesley University, 2004). There is one hour of continuous time set aside

for reading and one hour for writing (Scharer et al., 2003).

The Literacy Collaborative began because teachers wanted a reading and writing model that supplied continual support. In 1986 The Ohio State University, Reading Recovery, and teachers from Columbus Public Schools began working together to develop a literacy framework. The theories behind Literacy Collaborative (formally known as the Early Literacy Learning Initiative) came from the research of Lev Vygotsky, Jerome Bruner, and Marie Clay. All three theories identify teachers as the ones helping students accomplish independence. Teachers monitor students and then utilize that information to guide instruction (Williams, 1998).

The Literacy Collaborative primary level model started in 1986 at the Ohio State University as study groups before formal training began in 1993, when primary literacy coordinators from nine schools were trained (Scharer et al., 2003). In 1994 Lesley University joined the primary level program and started training literacy coordinators in 1996. Then in 1998 Georgia State University began training primary literacy coordinators (LiteracyCollaborative, n.d.).

The Literacy Collaborative intermediate model began as study groups in 1995 at the Ohio State University and Lesley University (Scharer et al., 2003). Lesley University came up with the intermediate model and began formal training in 1999 with The Ohio State University following in 2000. In 2002 Georgia State University began training of intermediate literacy coordinators (LiteracyCollaborative, n.d.).

The school literacy coordinator has an important responsibility as Literacy Collaborative is implemented. During the training year, the literacy coordinator attends eight weeks of training by a district trainer followed by meetings twice a month locally.

The literacy coordinator should hold a master's degree and have a minimum of three years of teaching experience at the level where training occurs. Since Literacy Collaborative takes years to execute, it is better if there is a five year commitment from the literacy coordinator. The literacy coordinator teaches in one classroom every year for 2½-3 hours each day during the language and literacy block. The literacy coordinator continues to receive professional development in the years that follow as well as train and support classroom teachers 30-50% of the day (Lesley University, 2004).

Classroom teachers in their first year of using the Literacy Collaborative model receive training from the literacy coordinator. The literacy coordinator usually coaches six to ten teachers each year. Depending on the size of the school, it may take several years for all teachers to be trained. The teachers are involved in 40 hours of instructional time throughout the year which usually occurs in two hour blocks twice a month. As teachers attend the training, they learn the language and literacy framework, the theories behind it, and how to apply their learning in the classroom. Teachers are taught how to monitor students using assessments, collection of data, and analysis. There are also coaching sessions, which play a key factor in Literacy Collaborative, at least twice a month. The coaching sessions consist of a pre-conference, an observation of the teacher as they teach literacy, and a post-conference. The goal of coaching is for teachers to reflect and evaluate their teaching as it relates to the impact on students (Lesley University, 2004).

After the initial year of training teachers continue to receive support. They are involved in 20 hours of training and receive at least one coaching session a month. The additional training is valuable because teachers have opportunities to deepen their

understanding of the framework. Teachers are able to evaluate their teaching to see where improvements can be made. Additional teachers are also trained in the Literacy Collaborative framework each year. The goal is full implementation school wide by the fifth year (Lesley University, 2004).

Literacy Collaborative brings together the features of effective schools to assist schools in being successful. First of all, Literacy Collaborative offers a research-based instructional model. It also produces and supports leaders within the school and district via training. There is long-term professional development for all personnel involved in Literacy Collaborative. Finally, it assists schools in examining data (Lesley University, 2004).

Guided Reading

Guided reading, developed by Irene C. Fountas and Gay Su Pinnell, is a method intended to assist students in learning to process and comprehend texts as they gradually become more demanding (Fountas & Pinnell, 2001). The goals of guided reading are to teach all students on their instructional level in order to improve everyone's reading abilities (Iaquinta, 2006; Laveault et al., 2003), to instruct students so they are able to read and understand material that is increasingly difficult, and to use problem-solving strategies to discern unknown words and grasp new concepts (Iaquinta).

How teachers teach is just as important as what teachers teach (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996). The text students read, comprehension strategies taught, and text levels influence teachers as they prepare for guided reading (Cunningham et al., 2000). Expert teachers use their knowledge of the literacy process to determine where to go next with students, when to intervene, when to bring students' attention to certain aspects of the text, and to

model strategies (Fountas & Pinnell). Through teacher and peer support students grow in their reading abilities (Guastello & Lenz, 2005).

Learning is a process that continues to develop over time (Pinnell & Fountas, 2007). Guided reading provides opportunities to integrate students' growing knowledge of the conventions of print, of letter-sound relationships, and of other foundational skills in context. Through modeling and instruction, guided reading enables teachers to extend students' vocabulary development and their knowledge and use of appropriate comprehension strategies (Laveault et al., 2003).

The number of books students read in guided reading throughout the year varies depending on the grade and text level. Generally students in kindergarten through the middle of second grade will read one new book a day which means students read about 100 to 125 books a year. Older students, who read longer books, spend about three to five days on a book: reading 50 to 75 books a year. However, students should not simply be reading books. Teachers need to work hard to ensure that comprehension and the learning of new strategies occurs. Learning transpires as teachers introduce the book, question students about their reading, and teach specific strategies (Fountas & Pinnell, 1999).

When selecting texts to use during guided reading lessons, teachers consider students' abilities and needs at that particular time (Fountas & Pinnell, 2006b). The cognitive actions readers use when processing print is basically the same in each grade. The difference lies in the difficulty of text. All readers have to decipher words while utilizing strategies, self-monitor their reading, and self-correct when necessary. At each level, students work on fluency, proper phrasing, and regulate reading rates in order to comprehend text. They make predictions, synthesize new information, and make

connections (Pinnell & Fountas, 2007). Teachers select texts to complement students' abilities, which helps promote a love of reading (Harris, 2005).

Within the guided reading lesson, teachers assist students in thinking within, beyond, and about text. Teachers strive to construct valuable processing systems in their students (Cunningham et al., 2000; Fountas & Pinnell, 2006b; Guastello & Lenz, 2005). Before reading teachers help students make connections (Cunningham et al.; Fountas & Pinnell), introduce difficult vocabulary, predict, and set a rationale for reading (Cunningham et al.). When students think within the text they grasp meaning through monitoring, self correcting, summarizing, and deciphering words. They become fluent readers who have the ability to modify their reading based on genre and author's purpose. Thinking beyond the text involves predicting, making text to self connections, inferring, and synthesizing. As students think about text they analyze and question the material (Cunningham et al.; Pinnell & Fountas, 2007) which enables students to progressively read more challenging text as they are presented with various literacy strategies (Guastello & Lenz).

During guided reading teachers have opportunities to observe reading behaviors, identify areas of need, and allow students to develop more independence and confidence as they practice and consolidate reading behaviors and skills. Guided reading provides a bridge to independent reading and can help students develop higher-order thinking skills (Laveault et al., 2003).

Components of guided reading.

During guided reading, students who are on approximately the same reading level meet in small groups to receive instruction and assistance (Pinnell, 1999). Groups contain

five to eight students, are based on students' needs (Fawson & Reutzel, 2000), and have at least 15 minutes of uninterrupted time (Calkins, 2001; Mooney, 1995b). Since students are in small groups, teachers focus on skills and strategies that each group of students needs in order to advance (Iaquinta, 2006). Group dynamics change on a continual basis as the needs and abilities of students change (Iaquinta, 2006; Pinnell). By having flexible groups, the traditional way of grouping students by ability is no longer a concern because the composition of the groups varies to meet students' needs throughout the year. It is important for teachers to carefully observe students during small groups in order to place them in the most effective group at a particular time (Iaquinta, 2003).

In the guided reading lesson, students read a text that presents a small amount of new learning. Teachers are available to support students as needed (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996). Each lesson is unique because the needs of students differ (Fountas & Pinnell, 2001). Therefore, it is important for teachers to know the reading process as well as the abilities of students to maximize learning (Lanning & LaMere, 2000).

The organization of guided reading lessons is consistent: teachers introduce the text, students read the text silently, the meaning of the text is discussed, processing strategies are taught, the meaning of the text may be extended, and word work may occur (Pinnell & Fountas, 2002). Teachers use their knowledge of students' reading abilities to select texts that are just right for advancing students in the reading process. In the primary grades, teachers think about layout, language structure, and pattern. In the intermediate grades, teachers consider concepts, linguistic difficulty, genre, and theme. Teachers also take into account vocabulary when choosing texts. They have to think about students' comprehension before, during, and after reading (Lyons & Pinnell, 2001).

It is imperative for teachers to plan their guided reading lessons and have numerous books available to choose from for the lessons. Three crucial aspects of books are readability, interest, and genre (Lanning & LaMere, 2000). Throughout the lessons students are exposed to many types of literature across several subject areas. They acquire numerous comprehension strategies while reading books that progressively become more difficult (Popplewell & Doty, 2001). For that reason, in addition to an extensive variety of books at various levels, teachers need to know the difficulty level of the books as well (Lanning & LaMere).

Benefits of guided reading.

Because all readers have various strengths and needs, each guided reading lesson is unique with regards to the concepts on which teachers concentrate (Simpson, Spencer, Button, & Rendon, 2007). Each student in a class brings various skills and life experiences to the table. Thus, students' abilities vary significantly within one classroom. Therefore, it is important for teachers to accept the challenge of meeting students at their points of need so they can progress. One area in school where differences abound is reading. By matching books to readers, teachers assist students in moving forward and offer opportunities for students to acquire valuable reading processes (Fountas & Pinnell, 1999). The benefits of using guided reading include individualized instruction, utilizing texts on students' reading levels, having opportunities to produce and sustain meaning, exposure to language that is surrounded with content, a structured format, and regular evaluation of progress (Fountas & Pinnell, 2006a).

Teachers want students to be thriving readers. In order for students' to succeed instruction must form the foundation for the reading process and there must be access to

high-quality texts on students' instructional levels (Fountas & Pinnell, 1999). Students benefit from guided reading because they receive instruction on their level and have more individual attention (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996). Vygotsky (1987) believed instruction and development were connected just as the zone of proximal development and the level of actual development were connected. Instruction was beneficial when it went ahead of development. It was achievable only where there was the possibility of imitation. In order for students to progress instruction had to be geared toward the lower end of the spectrum with what had not matured. The potentials for instruction were established by the zone of proximal development.

Students who are at risk for reading failure need instruction that is explicit, comprehensive, intensive, and supportive (Forrman & Torgesen, 2001). By using guided reading, teachers select leveled books on the basis of students' instructional needs (Avalos et al., 2007). When students are matched to texts they can actually read, they are able to utilize a variety of sources in the text in an efficient manner. For example, students might make predictions, observe language patterns, or decode unfamiliar words (Fountas & Pinnell, 1999).

In the 2001 to 2004 longitudinal study by Dowdell (2007), guided reading was examined to determine if it had an impact on reading comprehension. The study looked at 175 first through fifth grade students at a suburban elementary school in Georgia. Students' reading comprehension performance two years before and two years after the implementation of guided reading was examined. Dowdell utilized information from the Criterion-Referenced Competency Test (CRCT), Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS), and Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA). After implementing guided reading,

students showed no significant differences in their test scores on the ITBS. However, there were significant differences in the pretest and posttest scores on the CRCT and the DRA. In fact, the CRCT mean score increased 48 points in the years after guided reading was implemented. The study concluded that guided reading appeared to be effective and provided a positive impact on students in the study.

Teachers should set high goals and envision what their intermediate students can accomplish in order to build self-confidence, promote achievement, and help them attain goals. Students have varying needs at each grade level. As students progress through school, the range of reading abilities grows wider because of the experiences students have. It is important for teachers to embrace the diversity in their classrooms and use it as a springboard to improve the literacy environment. Guided reading gives teachers the flexibility to reach all learners at their level of instruction (Fountas & Pinnell, 2001).

Reading texts that are too difficult cause frustration and can have negative consequences. When students cannot comprehend text, they may begin to think that reading does not always have meaning. If texts are too difficult, students may have trouble distinguishing phrases and words. Ultimately, students may become discouraged and steer clear of reading when possible (Fountas & Pinnell, 1999). Guided reading is meant to alleviate frustration by instructing students in comprehension skills and strategies, teaching them how to read numerous genres, and offering texts on students' instructional level (Cunningham et al., 2000).

An action research project on primary students in a large city in the Midwest was conducted in order to improve reading comprehension skills through the use of guided reading. Students were receiving low reading comprehension scores on the Gates-

MacGinitie Reading Tests and end of selection tests. Some causes of the low scores may have been that teachers were inconsistent in their use of guided reading and there was an increase in the number of second language learners (Anderson, O'Leary, Schuler, & Wright, 2002).

For a period of five months, guided reading was consistently implemented on a daily basis for 20-30 minutes. Even though students improved in their decoding skills, comprehension, and reading behaviors, they did not always consistently apply reading skills. Also, students with lower reading levels improved more than students reading at higher levels. The end of selection tests showed an improvement in reading comprehension skills. Before the intervention students scored between 33%-75% in total comprehension. After the intervention students scores ranged from 50%-100% correct. The research concluded that guided reading was successful at each grade level (Anderson et al., 2002).

A vital element in successful teaching is how well teachers know the strengths and needs of each student. From that knowledge, teachers plan their teaching (Lesley University, 2004). The guided reading approach allows teachers the chance to meet with small groups of students and give them explicit instruction in skills and comprehension strategies needed. The instruction assists students in acquiring reading proficiency (Avalos et al., 2007). The progress students make is a direct result of teachers' knowledge of students and the reading process. Through observations and conferences teachers recognize what students know, what they still need to learn, and are able to record what students accomplish during the year (Lesley University).

In the beginning, teachers concentrate on having students learn to read. As

students mature, the focus changes as students read to learn. In order for students to read to learn they need assistance in developing into purposeful and reflective readers. Becoming a thoughtful reader occurs through instruction in comprehension and thinking strategies, as well as using prior knowledge while reading text to expand understanding (Laveault et al., 2003). Guided reading gives teachers an open-ended framework allowing students' needs to be evaluated so teachers can build new knowledge based on students' strengths (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996). Teachers can then instruct students in skills and comprehension strategies that assist them in gaining reading proficiency (Avalos et al., 2007).

Learning is social and occurs when people interact. When students interact with each other, teachers, and parents, the social aspect of learning takes place. Accordingly, classrooms need to present multiple opportunities for students to meet in groups with other students (Fisher & Frey, 2007). During guided reading, students are actively involved as they read and discuss the story, ask questions, and are given support from teachers and peers. Students use reading, writing, speaking, and listening skills as they have conversations before and after reading (Avalos et al., 2007). Conversations between students and teachers are crucial because oral language aids in building students' understanding of print (Fisher & Frey).

In a study of reading growth in high-poverty classrooms, reading was categorized as either passive or active. When reading was passive, students read by taking turns and listening to the teacher. However, active reading included reading and talking about ideas with peers or recording written responses to higher-level questions. In the study passive responses by students were negatively linked to reading comprehension growth, while

active responses were positively related. Also, when teachers coached students and engaged them in active reading, the students in second through fifth grade improved their fluency. The conclusion was that effective literacy teachers actively involved students and frequently presented opportunities for them to discuss texts (Taylor, Pearson, Peterson & Rodriguez, 2003). During guided reading, students actively participate and read texts on their instructional level so they may continue reading even when the teacher is focused on an individual student. Students are not sitting idly by doing nothing but instead are constantly reading (Lyons & Pinnell, 2001).

Good readers are confidant and frequently read on their own initiative. They read a variety of books to gain knowledge, better themselves, escape to other worlds, and grasp facts about events that took place in another time. They recall what they read and relate texts to other texts. As they read, good readers think analytically. Cultivating these qualities in the upper elementary grades is the objective of the literacy program. In order to develop students who are good readers, teachers must assist students in developing their reading skills while simultaneously fostering a love for books. Becoming a good reader necessitates hours of engaged reading (Pinnell & Fountas, 2002). Engaged reading is important because engaged readers comprehend texts and achieve more in reading than disengaged readers (Cunningham & Stanovich, 1997).

A Rationale for Grouping

Becoming a successful reader is vital to function effectively in the world today. It is important for all students to read fluently by the end of third grade and have the skills necessary to thrive in every subject. Leveled reading groups were developed to assist teachers (Galloway-Bell, 2003). Ability grouping allows teachers to individualize

instruction to small groups of students based on their needs. Grouping ensures the instruction is not too hard or too easy and should improve student achievement (Hollifield, 1987). In a meta-analyses conducted by Marzano, Pickering, and Pollock (as cited in Rasinski & Padak, 2004) small group instruction, whole group, and individual instruction were examined. The results showed that students accomplished more when placed in small groups.

Students are placed in groups because they exhibit similar behaviors. However, as students learn and change the groups should be modified (Calkins, 2001; Fountas & Pinnell, 1999; Simpson et al., 2007). When students receive instruction on their ability level they have a better chance of succeeding. Their academic achievement, self-confidence, and self-esteem increases when leveled reading groups are utilized. The higher functioning students are able to interact and challenge each other while the lower functioning students do not have to compete or struggle with material that is too difficult (Galloway-Bell, 2003). When students, especially those who are at risk, are instructed in small groups they learn quicker because of the individualized attention and intense instruction (Forrman & Torgesen, 2001). Ability grouping permits teachers to intensify instruction for high achieving students and give more attention and repetition to lower functioning students (Hollifield, 1987).

Teachers' Roles in Guided Reading

The roles of teachers are essential in guided reading. Teachers must understand how to prompt and guide students as they develop a self-extending system of reading. Teachers' prompts assist students as they build a system of strategies to use with progressively complex texts. Learning to read is a progression requiring good teaching

and an interaction of text. Guided reading meets that objective (Iaquinta, 2006).

Teachers serve as guides and build on the skills, strategies, and knowledge students have (Avalos et al., 2007). The zone of proximal development is seen as the difference in students' present skill levels and the skill levels they can reach when directed by individuals who are more experienced (Bacon, 2005). During guided reading, teachers strive to teach students in their zone of proximal development, which allows teachers to present new material that is difficult when introduced but permits students to develop without being overwhelmed (Harris, 2005). If all students are given the same tasks, teachers are not challenging each child's zone of proximal development (Clay, 1991a).

Students can only imitate tasks that fall within their zone of proximal development. If students are to copy someone there has to be the likelihood of going from what can be done to what cannot (Vygotsky, 1987). Guided reading offers teachers opportunities to instruct students in the zone of proximal development. As teachers choose and introduce texts, support and converse with students as they read, and teach skills after reading, they generate questions and tasks in the zone of proximal development. Therefore, most students can read and comprehend harder texts. Teachers allow students to problem solve on their own but support is available (Fountas & Pinnell, 2001).

Teachers choose texts daily based on knowledge of students' needs. By selecting texts daily for each group, teachers are able to choose material that provides the appropriate amount of challenge (Pinnell, 1999). During the guided reading lesson, teachers introduce texts by providing the appropriate amount of background knowledge

(Smith & Ellis, 2003). The introduction is a time to activate strategies students may need as they read and attempt to comprehend texts. Teachers can also exhibit enthusiasm for reading as they assist students in developing goals for reading the story. They should help students understand that even though each of them is reading the same text, different meanings may be generated by each individual based on previous experiences (Mooney, 1995b).

It is vital for teachers to scrutinize texts ahead of time in order to predict difficulties students may encounter as they read. Doing so enables them to more effectively instruct students during the introduction (Calkins, 2001). Readers usually connect what they read to situations in their own lives. Since connecting is such a crucial factor in reading comprehension, teachers should be prepared to guide readers in making these crucial connections (Cunningham et al., 2000).

The act of reading involves comprehending text and generating meaning from what is read. Teachers' roles during guided reading are to act as a support for students and to aid them in comprehension (Mooney, 1995b). Comprehension is a complex process that occurs in one's brain and is difficult to explain. Because comprehension is understanding text, teachers should have some knowledge of strategies the brain uses (Cunningham et al., 2000). Through observations, teachers know when students are struggling and can then provide strategies at particular points in time to assist students in regaining meaning. Questioning what they read causes students to examine the text and themselves. Teachers do not always intervene immediately when students struggle but realize that learning takes place during the struggle for meaning (Mooney).

The Process of Guided Reading Groups

When instructing students, it is necessary to think about how skills are taught, not just what is taught. In order for students to be stimulated, teachers should present motivating lessons to engage students (Powell, McIntyre, & Rightmyer, 2006). Guided reading presents teachers with opportunities to do just that. Because students are instructed in small groups, teachers have a greater chance of being able to adapt lessons to individual students in order to increase motivation. Even though guided reading lessons are comprised of necessary components, there is flexibility allowing for student motivation. A guided reading lesson includes these fundamental parts: an introduction applicable to the group of students and the book characteristics, supported reading with assistance from the teacher, teaching particular skills or strategies, and a follow-up activity (Lanning & LaMere, 2000).

Before guided reading.

One aspect of guided reading vital to students' success occurs before the guided reading lesson when teachers choose texts for students to read. Texts should be on students' instructional level which means that students can read the text with 90-95% accuracy (Fountas & Pinnell, 1999; Simpson et al., 2007). The texts teachers use during guided reading groups offer the right amount of challenge (Fountas & Pinnell) for students to move forward in their reading development and have ample opportunities for success (Avalos et al., 2007). Because the texts are at an appropriate level students can read them with proper phrasing, process the text, and read for meaning (Fountas & Pinnell).

Teachers want to help students learn to read and move beyond their current skill levels (Fountas & Pinnell, 1999). When choosing texts teachers consider the needs of

students and think about strategies students already have, ones that may be missing, or ones that need to be strengthened (Kimbell-Lopez, 2003). Quality texts, that give students chances to use multiple strategies, should be selected (Fountas & Pinnell, 2001). Teachers then assist students in utilizing their strengths to increase their processing skills and strategies (Fountas & Pinnell, 1999). Strengths can be used as a foundation for weaknesses (Kimbell-Lopez).

As teachers choose books to use during guided reading, they think about students' interests, genres, and chances for learning that can take place. When choosing texts for guided reading groups, teachers consider text gradient in order to increase students' reading abilities and then select enjoyable texts that provide increased chances for learning. The texts should not be more than one or two years above grade level or age of the students. They should allow students to utilize what they already know about reading as well as offer a small challenge (Fountas & Pinnell, 2006b).

Introducing the text.

Text introductions assist students in understanding various aspects of texts by allowing them to access their thinking and develop into analytical readers (Fountas & Pinnell, 2001). Book introductions occur when students are expected to read a new text for the first time and have a high degree of success (Calkins, 2001; Clay, 1991b). The introduction assists students in recognizing text structure, introduces challenging words and their meanings, and facilitates usage of prior strategies learned (Fountas & Pinnell, 2006b). The text presents some challenges, but teachers present scaffolds to make it possible for readers to fully understand the text independently (Calkins; Clay; Fountas & Pinnell, 2006b).

Book introductions must be succinct. The zone of proximal development allows teachers to outline what is to be taught (Vygotsky, 1978), highlights difficult parts of the text, and provides an overview. When introducing a book, teachers need to be aware of how much detail and background information students need to comprehend the story (Anderson & Armbruster, 1990; Calkins, 2001). Connecting the text to students' prior knowledge is important (Clay, 1991b). Students spend significant effort learning new concepts. Learning is easier if the new concepts are connected to something known (Askew & Fountas, 1998). By providing just the right amount of scaffolding, students are challenged by the text but not overwhelmed (Anderson & Armbruster). To improve comprehension, teachers should present students with strategies to activate their prior knowledge or help students develop a base if the prior knowledge is not present (Armbruster et al., 2003; Christen & Murphy, 1991; Clay, 1991a).

When introducing the text, teachers present just the right amount of information to allow students to process effectively (Fountas & Pinnell, 2006b). When students are introduced to a concept a great deal of assistance is given (Justice & Ezell, 2004) through modeling, demonstrating, and explaining. Before students apply new skills or strategies independently, they receive teacher support (Lanning & LaMere, 2000). As students begin to master concepts, assistance is slowly taken away (Justice & Ezell). Teachers' roles are to make the text reachable for students while still allowing them opportunities to problem solve on their own (Fountas & Pinnell).

The introduction should not provide students with solutions to all questions in the story, allowing students to use problem solving skills while reading (Anderson & Armbruster, 1990; Fountas & Pinnell, 1996). However, when introducing books, teachers

have to predict difficulties students may have such as print layout or unusual language (Simpson & Smith, 2002). By anticipating unfamiliar words in texts, teachers can focus students' attention on these words ahead of time (Clay, 1991b; Cunningham, Hall & Defee, 1998). If students are taught vocabulary words before reading, they are better equipped to learn the new words and comprehend. Even though students acquire a great deal of vocabulary indirectly, some vocabulary must be taught directly. Direct teaching demonstrates a strategy and offers students detailed word instruction which can improve comprehension (Armbruster et al., 2003).

Teachers use various strategies when introducing a book. If the language in the story is unusual or unfamiliar, teachers should discuss those aspects (Clay, 1991b). Students may take a picture walk through the book, pointing out and discussing things in the illustrations (Cunningham et al., 1998). Also, teachers might examine plot, characters, language, or difficult concepts before students read (Calkins, 2001; Clay, 1991a). Students may examine the illustrations and connect them with other books they have read. Teachers might assist students in relating experiences they have had to what they are about to read (Clay, 1991b). When reading longer texts, teachers may choose to introduce the entire book or they may introduce one part a day and discuss each part over several days (Pinnell & Fountas, 2002). The introduction establishes the context of the text but does not give a summary of every page (Calkins; Clay, 1991b).

Early literacy learning involves making connections. When children begin making connections they want to search for more chances to involve themselves in literacy activities (Clay, 2005). Before having students read, teachers might utilize the strategies of connecting and predicting. Using illustrations is one avenue teachers utilize to assist

students in recalling prior knowledge and connecting it with what they read. When teachers allow students to make predictions, students become the ones setting the reason for reading. Using prediction is important because real readers set purposes, and students must learn how to make predictions that make sense (Cunningham et al., 2000). In order to progress, children should learn the rules so they can focus their oral language and visual observations on discovering how to find meaning from text (Clay).

During guided reading.

After the introduction, students read the text to themselves as teachers observe and direct students (Fountas & Pinnell, 2006b). Teachers and students interact continually throughout the lesson, which aids in improving students' thinking and language development (Lanning & LaMere, 2000). As students read, teachers monitor the strategies they use and make anecdotal notes to help with planning and assessment (Avalos et al., 2007; Fountas & Pinnell). Additionally, teachers intervene when necessary to assist students with difficult words or concepts (Avalos et al.).

All students read the whole text at their own pace. If students finish early, they begin to read the story again or reread a favorite part (Calkins, 2001). Generally, in kindergarten and first grade, students read aloud quietly, and in second grade and beyond, students read silently. Teachers listen in as students read or ask older students to read out loud to them (Fountas & Pinnell, 2006b). Students benefit from reading orally because they use multiple sensory modes which increases learning. As students read text, they see, pronounce, and hear what they are reading which causes the material to be more deeply ingrained in their minds (Rasinski, 2003).

Teachers cannot listen to all students read every word from the text each day.

Since books are on students' reading levels, teachers need not focus on hearing students read every day but rather be prepared to intercede when difficulties arise (Simpson & Smith, 2002). During guided reading, teachers instruct students by building on the strategies, knowledge, and skills students have already acquired (Avalos et al., 2007). Emergent readers generally read and develop skills related to one text during one guided reading lesson. However, as the length of the text grows, readings and strategy development may expand to several lessons (Simpson & Smith).

Observing students as they read provides teachers with vital information (Peterson, 2001; Pinnell & Fountas, 1998). As students read silently or in a quiet voice, teachers listen in order to check students' processing (Pinnell & Fountas, 2002), to see how students decode, and if they read accurately. By examining oral reading errors, teachers diagnosis weak areas (Rasinski, 2003). Even though all students are on the same level, they still have individual needs (Pinnell & Fountas, 1998). Since reading occurs in the head, it is difficult to see what transpires as students read. When students read orally teachers catch glimpses of what students are thinking (Rasinski). Teachers have chances to provide immediate feedback to individual students when they read (Schwartz, 2005) and utilize these short interactions to improve students' reading skills (Pinnell & Fountas, 1998). Feedback is important, especially for struggling readers since students beginning to read are not as likely to modify the strategies they use without outside support (Schwartz).

Reading is an active process, and teachers should watch students closely to determine if they look, check, recheck, attempt strategies, or make connections with previous knowledge (Clay, 1991a). It is the teacher's responsibility to figure out how to

assist each student (Fountas & Pinnell, 1999). As teachers observe students to determine which mental strategies they use, they are able to support and expand students' current strategies (Schwartz, 1997). Teachers use their knowledge of students' histories in order to determine which avenue to take when developing literacy (Schwartz, 2005). The amount and type of support will vary from student to student until they have the ability to use strategies on their own (Schwartz, 1997).

When individual students have difficulty with certain aspects of the text, teachers have opportunities to assist as needed in order to facilitate comprehension (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996). Teachers may need to instruct students as they read to help them understand difficult sections of the text. This instruction may involve looking at the illustrations or rereading tricky sentences (Fountas & Pinnell, 2006b). Teachers may need to build on prior knowledge, offer challenges and reinforcement, and provide strategies so students mature in their reading. Students read for meaning as they problem solve the text (Harris, 2005).

Students need to be able to do more than simply read words on the page. They process text using their language knowledge, background knowledge, and literary experiences (Fountas & Pinnell, 1999). As teachers monitor students, they note particular strategies used by readers in the group (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996). By monitoring students' knowledge and progress, teachers can tailor their book introductions, communication with students, and teaching points to meet students' needs on a continual basis. Also, teachers determine if the text level is appropriate for students and decide whether the next text should be harder, easier, or about the same (Pinnell & Fountas, 2007).

Strategies.

To improve reading comprehension, students must learn strategies that proficient readers utilize (Dymock, 2005; Keene & Zimmerman, 1997). However, research shows the teaching of comprehension strategies is not widespread (Dymock). If students are instructed in strategies throughout the year, their comprehension will improve (Keene & Zimmerman). A crucial part of the guided reading lesson is effective teaching that aids students in acquiring strategies necessary for independent readers (Iaquinta, 2006). During guided reading, teachers have opportunities to model strategies and assess students' acquisition of these strategies (Short, Kane, & Peeling, 2000) which include activating prior knowledge, determining the most important idea, making inferences, retelling, and creating visual images (Keene & Zimmerman).

Teachers can instruct students in how to utilize comprehension strategies (Armbruster et al., 2003). Essential strategies include self-monitoring, cross-checking, self-correcting, searching, predicting, and confirming (Iaquinta, 2006). Self-monitoring strategies allow students to assess their reading to determine if additional searching for meaning is warranted (Schwartz, 1997). When cross-checking, readers associate two different pieces of information. Self-correcting allows readers to determine on their own whether what they are reading makes sense. While searching readers seek information to help them solve problems (Iaquinta). They look for clues as they attempt to read text for the first time, try to read hard words, and self-correct (Schwartz). Predicting involves forecasting what is to come. Confirming occurs when readers expect consistency with predictions and inferences made in the past (Iaquinta).

Monitoring strategies entail testing one's efforts to manage cues in texts (Clay,

1991a). Monitoring strategies develop over time but are key in learning to read (Clay; Snow et al., 1998). Self-monitoring enables readers to verify the story is being read correctly (Iaquinta, 2006; Schwartz, 1997). When students effectively monitor their comprehension, they are able to determine when they understand what they read and when they do not. They are then able to resolve comprehension problems when they appear (Armbruster et al., 2003). Monitoring may take the form of reading all or part of a sentence over when a mistake is made, trying to pronounce a word several times, exhibiting displeasure, or asking for help. Teachers should study students' mistakes in order to deduce the types of monitoring being done (Clay).

Mental strategies are essential for readers to have in order to read effectively (Schwartz, 1997). When readers monitor their comprehension, they are able to determine which strategies to use to assist them in understanding text (Harvey & Goudvis, 2000). Good readers continually think about text as they read. In order to understand the text, they engage in a complex procedure. Good readers utilize prior knowledge, understanding of language and vocabulary, and reading strategies to productively read text. They realize when they have difficulty with comprehension and understand strategies to use to solve problems (Armbruster et al., 2003).

Instructing students in strategies is crucial when developing literacy both in the primary grades and when assisting older students having difficulty with reading (Schwartz, 1997). To increase text comprehension, teachers should instruct students in comprehension strategies, which are processes readers use to aid them in understanding text (Armbruster et al., 2003). Understanding should grow as teachers coach, model, and offer feedback. During guided reading, teachers may have to model using specific

comprehension strategies and then provide feedback as students make an effort to utilize those strategies. When asking higher-level questions, it may be necessary to scaffold students as they attempt to answer questions. In a study of 14 schools across the United States, Taylor, Pearson, Clark, and Walpole (2000) found that effective schools and teachers asked more high-level questions, instructed students in strategies, and gave more independent reading time. Effective teachers offered more coaching and had more on-task behavior.

Strategies should be taught during the year by drawing on many texts. One text has the potential for students to learn numerous strategies, but teachers should determine what students need (Fountas & Pinnell, 2001). As teachers work with students throughout the year, the strategies they seek to develop change. Students preview texts with teachers before reading, but the manner in which the preview is done differs depending on the level of the reader. When younger readers engage in picture walks, they are able to discuss illustrations before reading the print which enables them to activate prior knowledge before reading. Likewise, older readers can examine titles, illustrations, chapter headings, and bold print to stimulate prior knowledge. By interacting with peers within the group, students are able to learn from each other and build upon concepts of others (Villaume & Brabham, 2001).

Throughout the year as students are instructed in guided reading they are presented with a large variety of literature, taught comprehension strategies, and taught how to read text that becomes more difficult (Cunningham et al., 1998). However, teachers do not preteach every difficult word to students but instead look for patterns in the text. Teachers help students learn strategies for reading unfamiliar words which

enables them to introduce fewer words prior to reading and allows students to take ownership of their learning (Villaume & Brabham, 2001).

As students work with text, they acquire strategies enabling them to focus on information from various sources. The information is the foundation for reading in a smooth and fluent manner (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996). During guided reading lessons, teachers have opportunities to view students' reading behaviors to ascertain whether students are using suitable strategies to identify words, attain meaning, and engage in problem solving. Teachers observe whether students can self-monitor, decode unknown words, check predictions, decide if words make sense, self-correct, read with expression, use intonation, proper phrasing, and fluency (Guastello & Lenz, 2005).

During the school year, the dynamics of the guided reading group shift as students become more proficient readers. Teachers no longer spend as much time introducing texts. As the number of illustrations decreases, students make more inferences and make predictions using their background knowledge (Short et al., 2000). Teachers provide support for each student's development of successful literacy strategies for sorting out text of increasing difficulty (Fountas & Pinnell, 2001). Teachers may use graphic organizers to assist students in understanding expository text. Reading expository texts helps students in their content area readings where they will encounter charts, graphs, and section headings. Guided reading is still important to students in intermediate grades because it gives them opportunities to communicate their ideas with peers and show their ability to use strategies independently (Short et al.).

Each level in the gradient makes additional requirements of students as they read. Students should utilize the strategies they learn at each level with a variety of genres

before moving forward to higher levels. Students need to come in contact with many types of books that vary in content, author, and format. Most students in the intermediate grades are able to process texts in their heads using strategies such as predicting, gathering, self-correcting, and fluency. Processing is simpler for lower level texts but gets more difficult as students read more challenging books. Readers begin to think beyond the text by inferring, summarizing, synthesizing, analyzing, and critiquing. Even though students think beyond the text when reading easier books, it is harder for them as texts become less familiar and topics more complex (Fountas & Pinnell, 2006a).

After guided reading.

Guided reading lessons cannot entirely be planned beforehand. Teachers must observe students while they read and glean from conversations which direction to take in order to challenge students (Avery, 2002). Teachers should include teaching points based on reading behaviors students exhibit to help improve their reading abilities (Pinnell & Fountas, 2002). Therefore, each guided reading lesson is different because of student-teacher interaction (Fountas & Pinnell, 2006b).

After reading, students talk about the text with each other and the teacher. Teachers encourage students to communicate their thoughts or questions (Fountas & Pinnell, 2006b) since students' emergent literacy increases through social interaction. These interactions occur when a more competent individual assists students by scaffolding their knowledge, concepts, skills, and interests in print (Justice & Ezell, 2004). It is important for students to be involved in discussions about text by asking and answering questions (Avalos et al., 2007), engaging in conversations about text with peers, or discussing what the text meant to them personally (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996).

Through these discussions teachers gain insights about how much students understand (Fountas & Pinnell, 2006b).

Students' levels of assisted performance encompass any activity in which improvement occurs as a consequence of social interaction (Bodrova & Leong, 2007). Many people believe assistance can only come from teachers; however, peers can be resources as well (Bacon, 2005). While reading, students connect with the text and then have opportunities to listen to other readers discuss what the text meant to them (Connell, 2008; Karolides, 2005; Rosenblatt, 1976). As students discuss the text with peers and teachers, they come to the realization that each person may have a different interpretation of the same text (Karolides; King, 2001; Rosenblatt). Students begin to recognize some analyses are more justifiable than others when looking at the whole text (Rosenblatt). Through discussions, students think more deeply about their opinions which may cause them to strengthen, alter, or completely change their thinking (Karolides). At the same time students realize more than one explanation is possible (Rosenblatt).

These types of interactions do not happen in all guided reading classrooms as evidenced by Skidmore, Perez-Parent, and Arnfield (2003) when they conducted a study in England on teacher-pupil dialogue during guided reading. Five primary schools were visited three times over a six month period. On each visit the same group of six students was recorded during the guided reading session. The types of questions teachers asked were broken into three categories: questions that had one correct answer, questions with limited answers, and questions with multiple answers. The majority of the questions asked by teachers contained only one correct answer. It was unusual for teachers to ask questions requiring students to interact with each other. Even when students had some

freedom in regards to their answers, the teacher generally had the last word. It appeared that teachers thought they had the one correct answer, and it was their job to assist students in finding the answer. The teacher remained in control of the entire lesson by doing most of the talking and managing when and if students talked.

Teacher questioning during guided reading is important because it helps students move forward in their learning. By questioning students, teachers provide reasons for reading, direction in what students learn, assistance in thinking actively, promote comprehension monitoring, and facilitate text to student connections (Armbruster et al., 2003). Critical thinking is essential to problem solving and hypothesis forming skills. Open-ended questions yield more information about students' understanding of text than multiple choice questions. Open-ended questions center on students' understanding and their reasoning capabilities. They force students to utilize complex thinking that may have more than one explanation (Badger & Thomas, 1992).

After discussing the text, teachers make one or two teaching points based on observations of students. The goal is to assist students acquire reading strategies (Fountas & Pinnell, 1999; Lyons & Pinnell, 2001). Teaching points are based on portions of the text where teachers noticed students struggled or had difficulty as they read. Teachers may extend the meaning of the text through group work which may involve phonics or word work (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996). Word work is a short lesson at the end of the guided reading lesson designed to direct students' attention to words and how they work. The objective of word work is to develop students' fluency and flexibility in taking words apart (Pinnell & Fountas, 2007). Teachers may use individual marker boards, magnetic letters, word cards, or word webs to facilitate the process (Lyons & Pinnell; Pinnell &

Fountas, 2007) and then have students reread the problem area in context (Calkins, 2001). Teachers may also want to concentrate on one or more features of the processing system. However, they should not teach too many concepts at once but add to students' knowledge each time they read, which allows students to mature in their reading abilities over time (Fountas & Pinnell, 2006b).

Using Assessment to Inform Guided Reading Practices

Assessment involves gathering data about students to increase performance (Fountas & Pinnell, 2006b). In order to enhance instruction, teachers should look for strengths and weaknesses, capability and uncertainty, indications of processing and strategic activities, and signs of what students can already accomplish (Clay, 2002). It is important to assess students' reading in order to provide optimal instruction and to identify strengths and weaknesses. By tracking students' progress teachers can determine if their instruction is beneficial (Rasinski, 2003). Teachers need to examine students' progress daily in order to provide instruction that will move students forward (Fountas & Pinnell). The objective of guided reading is for students to become independent, fluent, silent readers (Fawson & Reutzel, 2000). To achieve this goal, teachers have to utilize multiple opportunities during guided reading lessons to observe students and evaluate their reading progress (Lanning & LaMere, 2000).

Teachers use a variety of methods to assess students. They listen carefully to students' conversations in order to better understand their thinking (Lanning & LaMere, 2000). By observing students at work and recording those observations, teachers can reflect on how instruction affects students. Teachers use anecdotal notes to customize their instruction to meet the needs of each learner (Clay, 2002). As students discuss and

write in response to what they read, teachers note students' development (Fountas & Pinnell, 2006b). They meet with one or two students daily to take a running record or an informal reading inventory (Lanning & LaMere). By completing running records teachers are able to identify challenge levels for students, as well as better understand each student's reading strategies (Fawson & Reutzel, 2000), which is crucial because it allows teachers to discover students' strengths and weaknesses (Lanning & LaMere).

Running records are an assessment obtained as students read orally from text (Clay, 2002). They allow teachers to obtain records of what students say and do as they read (Clay, 2000). Running records provide teachers with indicators of student progress and how they utilize their knowledge of letters, sounds, and words to comprehend text (Clay, 2002). They help teachers monitor students' reading levels, select appropriate texts, examine reading strategies, and group similar students together (Lyons & Pinnell, 2001). Many times students are only assessed after they read a passage through oral questions or written responses. By listening to students read orally teachers have opportunities to view the reading process. Examining students' oral readings allows teachers to look at word recognition, fluency, strategies used, and to some extent comprehension (Rasinski, 2003).

Running records are taken on a book students have been introduced to and read only once, usually the day before (Fountas & Pinnell, 1999). After taking a running record, teachers use the mistakes and self-corrections students made to determine what students can do with the current strategies they have (Clay, 2002). By examining running records teachers gain insights into students' reading behaviors, which serves as a tool for teachers as they decide how to move forward with students (Fountas & Pinnell). While

running records do not assess comprehension, teachers can check understanding by asking questions and recording responses. Teachers use students' responses along with reading errors and self-corrections to determine how well students read for meaning (Clay).

Running records allow teachers to determine if students can read text accurately (Clay, 2000; 2002). They can also be used to ascertain if students are reading text that presents an appropriate level of challenge (Clay, 2002). Running records serve as tools for teachers because they examine what students can do without teacher assistance. Running records are invaluable because they assist teachers in determining whether to move students to another group or change levels of instruction (Fountas & Pinnell, 1999). When running records are taken at selected intervals, teachers can plot students' progress over time and across various text levels to determine if students are making progress in more difficult texts (Clay, 2002).

Determining whether to move students to the next text level is based on continually observing students through informal or formal means. When one student or an entire group is processing well on a level and has had ample practice, then it is time to move up a level. Teachers then choose a book from the next level, introduce it, and watch students' reading behaviors. After several days of observations and running records, teachers determine if students are equipped to progress to a higher level. If not, the teacher simply moves back to the previous level (Fountas & Pinnell, 1999).

English Language Learners

Many students in schools today are learning English as a second language which causes them to have a greater risk of reading failure (Lyon, 1998). Hispanic students

comprise the largest group of limited English proficiency students in the United States and generally come from low socioeconomic backgrounds. They are at great risk for experiencing reading difficulties and are about twice as likely as non-Hispanic whites to be reading below grade level (Snow et al., 1998). Even though these students are considered at risk, they also need to learn the same skills as other students in order to become successful readers (Foorman & Torgesen, 2001).

Some students do not come to school with strong oral language skills. Since oral language is the foundation for reading, these students need teaching that boosts their oral language and reading skills. Students acquire most of their oral language by listening and having conversations with others. These encounters with oral language act as a foundation for reading and writing (Laveault et al., 2003). English Language Learner (ELL) students often begin school with little or no experience in the English language. Students whose first language is English have a four to five year advantage in English oral language encounters (Hutchinson, Whiteley, Smith, & Connors, 2003).

Students strong orally in their first language, even if it is not English, have a stronger foundation for reading. Even though students have a limited English vocabulary, they may have a solid educational background in their first language. Teachers can use students' knowledge as a bridge to develop fluency and comprehension in English. As ELL students learn to read, they require additional assistance in developing oral language (Laveault et al., 2003). When ELL students enter school they must learn to speak and read English at the same time, often in a setting that is not arranged around language learning. Students increase their English language skills as they interact with teachers and English speaking peers. The interactions are often abridged to make understanding

possible (Hutchinson et al., 2003).

Many ELL students who were born in the United States or immigrated to the United States before kindergarten have basic interpersonal conversation skills (BICS) in English by fourth grade. They may be able to converse with teachers and other students but are deficient in the academic language necessary to understand material in the content areas (Kieffer & Lesaux, 2007). In order to increase students' cognitive academic language proficiency (CALP), teachers should think about their students' language needs when planning (Avalos, Plasencia, Chavez, & Rascón, 2007). It is essential for teachers to provide these students with specific instruction in academic English vocabulary (Kieffer & Lesaux).

In order to read for meaning one must understand the words being read. It is important for students to be able to speak English so they can become fluent readers in the future (Snow et al., 1998). Before students answer comprehension questions, they must be able to understand the question and then create and express an answer in English. ELL students may not have the vocabulary necessary to answer questions so an accurate assessment of their comprehension is not possible (Hutchinson et al., 2003). One reason for the struggles that Hispanic students have is the fact that they are tested and taught in English. Even though these students may understand and can perform in their first language, they are not able to perform adequately in English (Snow et al.).

English language learners must have a challenging curriculum so they can reach their potential. However, teachers must understand that students' limited English skills make it harder to learn. When teachers instruct ELL students they have to make the content meaningful which enables students to understand difficult concepts while

learning the academic English they need to be successful in school (Freeman & Freeman, 2000). Teachers should try to use culturally relevant texts with ELL students to help their comprehension. When students understand material, they become more engaged and want to read more. However, ELL students also need to read books that do not relate to their culture in order to comprehend different types of texts and have exposure to a variety of material (Freeman & Freeman, 2004).

It is important for teachers to connect what is known in the first language to what is unknown in the second language (Laveault et al., 2003). Since most curriculums presume students have had similar events in their lives, English language learners might have trouble connecting what they are learning in school to their previous experiences. Teachers should carefully choose reading texts that make use of students' background knowledge and interests (Freeman & Freeman, 2000). When ELL students read material related to their previous experiences and culture, it is easier for them to comprehend the text because their background knowledge enables them to make predictions and inferences (Freeman & Freeman, 2004).

Second language learners acquire language by reading, writing, speaking, and listening. Students should participate in each of these activities as soon as they begin learning English (Freeman & Freeman, 2000). Teachers can facilitate the acquisition of English during guided reading. For instance, the introductions during guided reading lessons are generally short, but when concepts are difficult for ELL students the teachers should increase the time spent on introductions in order to scaffold the text. It is important to review the text so ELL students have the background knowledge necessary to comprehend. Visual aids, when used appropriately, can be important tools for learning.

Word work is vital for ELL students because it aids them in developing language proficiency (Avalos et al., 2007).

Understanding how to effectively teach ELL students was relevant to the current study because of the number of ELL students in the Mountain Laurel Public School District. Of the 6,300 students in the system, 12.4% were identified as ELL during the 2007-2008 school year. The percentage of ELL students at each of the elementary schools involved in the study was: 28.7%, 13%, 13.6%, 17.5%, 24.4%, and 6.1%.

Socioeconomic Status

The socioeconomic status of students is determined by their parents' educational level and household income. In educational settings the socioeconomic level of schools may be based on the percentage of students qualifying for federal lunch subsidies. Being aware of a students' socioeconomic background is relative because students coming from low socioeconomic backgrounds have a greater chance of being poor readers than students from more affluent families (Snow et al., 1998). Students from higher socioeconomic families score considerably higher than students from low socioeconomic backgrounds at every age (Chall & Jacobs, 2003). However, if students from low socioeconomic backgrounds attend a middle to upper class school, they have less of a chance of developing into poor readers. If students from low socioeconomic backgrounds attend school with a majority of low status students, the probability of them becoming poor readers greatly increases (Snow et al.).

Jeanne S. Chall developed six stages of reading development. Stage 0 is considered the prereading stage. During Stages 1 and 2 students are learning to read. Students read easy, familiar texts as they work on decoding and becoming fluent. In

Stages 3 to 5 students are reading to learn. The material is more difficult and demanding as students encounter new vocabulary, concepts, and ideas. In Chall's stages of reading development, reading is not seen as a method that is identical for all students as they progress from beginning to proficient readers, instead, reading changes as the skills and abilities of students' increase (Chall & Jacobs, 2003).

Using Chall's six stages of reading as a guide, Chall and Jacobs (2003) conducted a study on 30 students in second, fourth, and sixth grades to examine the transition period from Stage 2 to Stage 3. Stage 2 consisted of students in first through third grade and was described as a time of learning to read. Stage 3 encompassed fourth through eighth grade students who were reading to learn. In the study, approximately 10 students in each grade were monitored for two years. Students were given tests to assess word recognition, word analysis, oral reading, word meaning, reading comprehension, and spelling (Chall & Jacobs, 2003).

The results of the study showed that low-income students in second and third grades scored as well as other students on all of the subtests. However, some of the low-income students' scores began to decrease in fourth grade with word meaning being the first section to decline. In fourth grade, students were about a year below grade level, but by seventh grade they were more than two years behind. Word recognition and spelling began to diminish along with oral reading and reading comprehension decreasing in sixth and seventh grades. In summary, low-income students achieved as well as other students in the study through the third grade (Chall & Jacobs, 2003).

Once these students entered fourth grade they began what has been called the fourth grade slump. One reason students may have trouble with word meanings upon

entering fourth grade is because the words are no longer as familiar. They become more abstract and technical and are not used daily for communication. When these students were examined five years after the study, their scores had declined with each grade. Once students reached eleventh grade their reading scores were in the 25th percentile (Chall & Jacobs, 2003).

A study by Juel (1988) also looked at literacy development in an elementary school comprised of a large minority, low socioeconomic population. The study was comprised of 31 girls and 23 boys with 26% Anglo, 31% Black, and 43% Hispanic Americans. The reading and writing development of the 54 students was monitored as they moved from first through fourth grade. The results of the study showed that if students were poor readers at the end of first grade, the probability that they would continue to be poor readers at the end of fourth grade was .88. However, if students were average readers at the end of first grade, the probability that they would be poor readers at the end of fourth grade went down to .12. Students who were average readers at the end of first grade had a .87 probability of remaining average readers at the end of fourth grade. The probability that poor readers in first grade would turn into average readers in fourth grade was .13. The conclusions of the study showed that students who were poor readers in first grade generally continued to be poor readers in fourth grade (Juel). Therefore, quality classroom teaching in kindergarten and first grade is a vital tool in the acquisition of literacy (Snow et al., 1998).

A student's ability to learn should not be measured only by their background. Since students who come from a low socioeconomic background have a higher rate of reading failure, they need teachers and resources to support them through quality

classroom instruction and intervention. All students can learn to read. It is the responsibility of the schools to determine the needs of all students and offer various programs in order for each student to reach their potential (Laveault et al., 2003).

Summary

Being a proficient reader makes it possible for students to achieve more in school and life. Even though teaching children how to read is challenging, teachers must meet the challenge head on. Elementary teachers play key roles in students' educational futures. By the end of first grade, weak readers of all ethnicities have a lower self-esteem, self-concept, and less of a drive to learn to read (Hudson & Smith, 2001). Teachers must assist students in learning how to read and process text so they will have a greater chance of success.

Guided reading allows teachers the flexibility to engage in effective reading instruction. Two theories that support guided reading are based on the works of Vygotsky and Rosenblatt. According to Vygotsky, teachers create scaffolds to take students from where they are to where they need to be. Using the zone of proximal development as a guide, teachers determine what students can do independently and then instruct them in tasks slightly beyond their independent level. As teachers assist students in moving forward in their learning, the tasks students need help with today become the tasks they can do independently tomorrow (McGill-Franzen, 1992). By challenging students to go beyond their current abilities, teachers assist students in becoming literate for a lifetime (Clay, 2005).

Rosenblatt's transactional theory emphasizes the interactions readers have with text. Readers use previous knowledge and experience to create meaning as they read. As

students talk about the meaning of the text with their peers and teachers, their interpretation may change. Teachers encourage students to move beyond their preliminary reactions to the text so that processing of text occurs on a deeper level (Rosenblatt, 1976).

As previously stated, Fountas and Pinnell's guided reading program is one method that can be used with all students to meet them where they are in their learning. The guided reading continuum is based on text levels and not grade levels. Students are instructed using leveled texts, which allows teachers to choose appropriate materials. When students read texts on their instructional level, they make progress without feeling overwhelmed. The goal is for students to continually progress through the levels. Teachers can utilize the text gradient chart as a guide to determine if students are advancing at an appropriate pace. Because students meet in small groups, teachers can individualize learning. They have opportunities to closely observe students and adapt instruction to students' needs. Students demonstrate their thinking through oral reading, conversation, and writing (Pinnell & Fountas, 2007).

As students read texts, they are instructed in the utilization of strategies. Utilizing strategies is important for all students, those who are struggling and those who are proficient, because as students acquire strategies their reading comprehension progresses. Teachers do not have the ability to see the thinking that occurs in students' heads. However, as reading behaviors are observed, teachers have opportunities to determine strategies students are using (Askew & Fountas, 1998). Teachers may utilize the same text to instruct students in a variety of strategies. The objective of guided reading is to assist students in developing the strategies they have as well as equipping them with

additional processing strategies (Fountas & Pinnell, 2001).

CHAPTER THREE

Methodology

Chapter 3 explains the methods used to carry out the study. It includes a description of the nature and research design of the study, the research context, the research participants, the instruments used in the collection of data, the procedures utilized to carry out the design, and how the data were analyzed to answer the research questions.

The General Perspective

As a correlational study, the research contained here sought to determine the relationship among variables in a single group of subjects. The study took place in a pre-existing educational setting. Guided reading levels and reading comprehension and Lexile scores on the Criterion-Referenced Competency Test (CRCT) were measured. Guided reading levels for each student were recorded by the teacher in April 2008 and were acquired by the researcher. Students' reading comprehension and Lexile scores were obtained from the CRCT assessment taken by students in April 2008. The scores examined were of all third grade students in a Georgia school district who received instruction in guided reading for eight months. The scores were then statistically analyzed to establish the strength of the relationship.

Research Questions

In examining Fountas and Pinnell's guided reading levels and reading comprehension and Lexile scores on the CRCT, the current study attempted to answer the following questions:

Research Question #1: Is there a relationship between the Fountas and Pinnell guided reading levels and reading comprehension scores on the CRCT among third grade students who received guided reading instruction for eight months?

Research Questions #2: Is there a relationship between gender and reading comprehension scores on the CRCT in students who are on the same Fountas and Pinnell guided reading level?

Research Question #3: Is there a relationship between ethnicity and reading comprehension scores on the CRCT in students who are on the same Fountas and Pinnell guided reading level?

Research Question #4: Is there a relationship between the Fountas and Pinnell guided reading levels and Lexile scores on the CRCT among third grade students who received guided reading instruction for eight months?

Research Questions #5: Is there a relationship between gender and Lexile scores on the CRCT in students who are on the same Fountas and Pinnell guided reading level?

Research Question #6: Is there a relationship between ethnicity and Lexile scores on the CRCT in students who are on the same Fountas and Pinnell guided reading level?

The Research Context

The study took place in a public school district in north Georgia that contained approximately 6,300 students. Mountain Laurel Public School District consisted of six elementary schools, a middle school that served sixth through eighth grades, and a high school for ninth through twelfth grades. The population of 6,300 students consisted of 2% Asian, 6% Black, 65% Hispanic, 3% Multiracial, and 24% White. In the population of students in the district, 72% were eligible for free/reduced meals, 7.9% had disabilities,

12.4% were English Language Learners, and 26.4% were in the Early Intervention Program (The Governor's Office of Student Achievement, n.d.). The school district was located in a small industrial city of approximately 30,000 people. All third grade students in the district who received guided reading from August 13, 2007 to April 4, 2008 were involved in the study. For confidentiality purposes, the elementary schools that were the focus of the study will be referred to with fictitious names.

The schools were similar in the following areas. All of the schools in the study were Title 1 schools. Generally, the students represented families from the lower socio-economic status, based on the Title 1 status of the schools. Title 1 schools have a large number of poor students and receive federal funds to assist them in giving these students a quality education. Also, all of the schools were accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools. Each school had met adequate yearly progress (AYP) for the 2007-2008 school year. AYP was an accountability measure the state of Georgia used for every public school and school system to ascertain if they met the standards. It is a requirement under the Federal No Child Left Behind Act. Meeting AYP indicated that the school had shown growth in academic achievement as measured by statewide assessments (The Governor's Office of Student Achievement, n.d.).

Cloudland Canyon Elementary School had a student enrollment of 453 students (grades prekindergarten through fifth grade) during the 2007-2008 school year. For the 2007-2008 school year Cloudland Canyon Elementary School had 83.15% of its third and fifth grade students meeting or exceeding standards in reading and English language arts. The population of 453 students consisted of 1% Asian, 8% Black, 83% Hispanic, 3% Multiracial, and 6% White. In the population of students, 87% were eligible for

free/reduced meals, 28.7% were English Language Learners, 6.4% had disabilities, and 28.3% were in the Early Intervention Program (The Governor's Office of Student Achievement, n.d.).

Vogel Elementary School had a student enrollment of 422 students (grades prekindergarten through fifth grade) during the 2007-2008 school year. For the 2007-2008 school year Vogel Elementary School had 95.4% of its third and fifth grade students meeting or exceeding standards in reading and English language arts. The population of 422 students consisted of 3% Asian, 3% Black, 46% Hispanic, 4% Multiracial, and 44% White. In the population of students, 52% were eligible for free/reduced meals, 13% were English Language Learners, 7.8% had disabilities, and 15.2% were in the Early Intervention Program (The Governor's Office of Student Achievement, n.d.).

Fort Mountain Elementary School had a student enrollment of 847 students (grades kindergarten through fifth grade) during the 2007-2008 school year. For the 2007-2008 school year Fort Mountain Elementary School had 89.6% of its third and fifth grade students meeting or exceeding standards in reading and English language arts. The population of 847 students consisted of 5% Asian, 7% Black, 66% Hispanic, 6% Multiracial, and 17% White. In the population of 847 students, 83% were eligible for free/reduced meals, 13.6% were English Language Learners, 9.3% had disabilities, and 18.9% were in the Early Intervention Program (The Governor's Office of Student Achievement, n.d.).

Black Rock Elementary School had a student enrollment of 566 students (grades prekindergarten through fifth grade) during the 2007-2008 school year. For the 2007-

2008 school year Black Rock Elementary School had 87.1% of its third and fifth grade students meeting or exceeding standards in reading and English language arts. The population of 566 students consisted of 2% Black, 88% Hispanic, 2% Multiracial, and 7% White. In the population of students, 89% were eligible for free/reduced meals, 17.5% were English Language Learners, 10.2% had disabilities, and 49.1% were in the Early Intervention Program (The Governor's Office of Student Achievement, n.d.).

Unicoi Elementary School had a student enrollment of 594 students (grades kindergarten through fifth grade) during the 2007-2008 school year. For the 2007-2008 school year Unicoi Elementary School had 83.2% of its third and fifth grade students meeting or exceeding standards in reading and English language arts. The population of 594 students consisted of 1% Asian, 3% Black, 88% Hispanic, 3% Multiracial, and 5% White. In the population of students, 88% were eligible for free/reduced meals, 24.4% were English Language Learners, 7.1% had disabilities, and 29.5% were in the Early Intervention Program (The Governor's Office of Student Achievement, n.d.).

Tallulah Gorge Elementary School had a student enrollment of 527 students (grades prekindergarten through fifth grade) during the 2007-2008 school year. For the 2007-2008 school year Tallulah Gorge Elementary School had 93.2% of its third and fifth grade students meeting or exceeding standards in reading and English language arts. The population of 527 students consisted of 2% Asian, 6% Black, 33% Hispanic, 5% Multiracial, and 54% White. In the population of students, 50% were eligible for free/reduced meals, 6.1% were English Language Learners, 9.1% had disabilities, and 17.8% were in the Early Intervention Program (The Governor's Office of Student Achievement, n.d.).

The Research Participants

The research study took place with all third grade students in the Mountain Laurel Public School District who received instruction in guided reading. The research activities comprised a period of eight months from August 13, 2007 to April 4, 2008. The research participants consisted of 35 intact groups of 546 third grade students instructed in guided reading during the 2007-2008 school year. There were 271 girls and 275 boys. The ethnicity of the research participants consisted of 24 Black, 373 Hispanic, 17 Multiracial, 13 Asian, and 119 White students. The population of 546 students consisted of 98 English Language Learners.

A total of 98 students attended third grade at Cloudland Canyon Elementary School during the 2007-2008 school year. Even though 98 students attended Cloudland Canyon Elementary School during their third grade year, 28 were removed from the sample because they withdrew during the school year or entered after the study began. The research participants from Cloudland Canyon Elementary School consisted of five intact groups of 70 third grade students. There were 38 girls and 32 boys. The ethnicity of the research participants consisted of 5 Black, 62 Hispanic, and 3 White students. The population of 70 students consisted of 24 English Language Learners.

A total of 84 students attended third grade at Vogel Elementary School during the 2007-2008 school year. Even though 84 students attended Vogel Elementary School during their third grade year, 14 were removed from the sample because they withdrew during the school year or entered after the study began. The research participants from Vogel Elementary School consisted of four intact groups of 70 third grade students. There were 32 girls and 38 boys. The ethnicity of the research participants consisted of 6

Black, 32 Hispanic, 1 Multiracial, 5 Asian, and 26 White students. The population of 70 students consisted of 13 English Language Learners.

A total of 179 students attended third grade at Fort Mountain Elementary School during the 2007-2008 school year. Even though 179 students attended Fort Mountain Elementary School during their third grade year, 59 were removed from the sample because they withdrew during the school year or entered after the study began. The research participants from Fort Mountain Elementary School consisted of eight intact classes of 120 third grade students. There were 65 girls and 55 boys. The ethnicity of the research participants consisted of 5 Black, 89 Hispanic, 5 Multiracial, 3 Asian, and 18 White students. The population of 120 students consisted of 21 English Language Learners.

A total of 135 students attended third grade at Black Rock Elementary School during the 2007-2008 school year. Even though 135 students attended Black Rock Elementary School during their third grade year, 31 were removed from the sample because they withdrew during the school year or entered after the study began. The research participants from Black Rock Elementary School consisted of six intact groups of 104 third grade students. There were 49 girls and 55 boys. The ethnicity of the research participants consisted of 2 Black, 93 Hispanic, 1 Multiracial, 1 Asian, and 7 White students. The population of 104 students consisted of 17 English Language Learners.

A total of 120 students attended third grade at Unicoi Elementary School during the 2007-2008 school year. Even though 120 students attended Unicoi Elementary School during their third grade year, 37 were removed from the sample because they withdrew

during the school year or entered after the study began, 1 student did not receive guided reading instruction, and 8 students came into contact with the researcher. The research participants from Unicoi Elementary School consisted of six intact classes of 83 third grade students. There were 40 girls and 43 boys. The ethnicity of the research participants consisted of 1 Black, 74 Hispanic, 5 Multiracial, 1 Asian, and 2 White students. The population of 83 students consisted of 21 English Language Learners.

A total of 129 students attended third grade at Tallulah Gorge Elementary School during the 2007-2008 school year. Even though 129 students attended Tallulah Gorge Elementary School during their third grade year, 30 were removed from the sample because they withdrew during the school year or entered after the study began. The research participants from Tallulah Gorge Elementary School consisted of six intact groups of 99 third grade students. There were 47 girls and 52 boys. The ethnicity of the research participants consisted of 5 Black, 23 Hispanic, 5 Multiracial, 3 Asian, and 63 White students. The population of 99 students consisted of 2 English Language Learners.

Instruments Used in Data Collection

Demographic profile of teachers.

Demographic information was collected about each teacher who returned the questionnaire (see Appendix C) and included: (a) number of years teaching, (b) gender, (c) highest degree earned, (d) number of years teaching guided reading, and (e) ethnicity. The demographic responses created a profile of the teachers who instructed the students involved in the study. There were 35 third grade teachers in the Mountain Laurel Public School System during the 2007-2008 school year.

The number of years teaching was the first item addressed in the questionnaire.

The answers showed that of the 25 teachers who replied: nine (36%) had been teaching for one to four years, five (20%) for three to five years, five (20%) for six to nine years, two (8%) for ten to fourteen years, two (8%) for fifteen to twenty years, and two (8%) for twenty-one to twenty-seven years. The data is presented in Table 1. The mean number of years teaching was 6.92.

Table 1

Frequency Distribution of Years Teaching

Years Teaching	Frequency	Percent
1 to 2 years	9	36%
3 to 5 years	5	20%
6 to 9 years	5	20%
10 to 14 years	2	8%
15 to 20 years	2	8%
21 to 27 years	2	8%

The gender of the teachers was the second item in the questionnaire. The answers revealed that of the 25 teachers who replied, all twenty-five (100%) were female. The data is presented in Table 2.

The highest degree earned was the third item addressed in the questionnaire. The answers showed that of the 25 teachers who replied, ten (40%) had their bachelors degree, ten (40%) had their masters degree, and five (20%) had their educational specialist degree. The data is presented in Table 3.

Table 2

Frequency Distribution of the Gender of the Teachers

Gender	Frequency	Percent
Male	0	0%
Female	25	100%

Table 3

Frequency Distribution of Highest Degree Earned

Highest Degree	Frequency	Percent
Bachelor	10	40%
Master	10	40%
Specialist	5	20%

The number of years the educators had been teaching Fountas and Pinnell's guided reading program was the fourth item in the questionnaire. The answers revealed that of the 25 teachers who responded, ten (40%) had been teaching for one year, seven (28%) for two years, seven (28%) for three years, and one (4.17%) for four years. The data is presented in Table 4.

The ethnicity of the educators was the fifth item in the questionnaire. The answers showed that of the 25 teachers who replied, twenty-four (96%) were Caucasian and one (4.17%) was African American. The data is presented in Table 5.

Table 4

Frequency Distribution for Number of Years Teaching Guided Reading

Years Teaching Guided Reading	Frequency	Percent
1 year	10	40%
2 years	7	28%
3 years	7	28%
4 years	1	4.17%

Table 5

Frequency Distribution for Ethnicity of Teachers

Ethnicity	Frequency	Percent
Caucasian	24	96%
African American	1	4.17%

Collection of guided reading levels.

During the 2007-2008 school year the teachers received literacy collaborative training, which included guided reading training, by a literacy collaborative coach. Teachers who were in their first year of training received 40 hours of training, which usually occurred in two hour blocks twice a month. They were taught how to monitor students using assessments, collection of data, and analysis. They also had coaching sessions twice a month. Teachers who were in their second year of training received 20

hours of training and at least one coaching session a month.

During the school year, teachers kept track of the participants' running records and reading levels, which enabled the teachers to document students' progress. On April 4, 2008 the teachers recorded and reported the current guided reading levels of the participants to the literacy coach at each school. The literacy coach compiled the information and sent it to the system literacy coordinator. In March of 2009, the researcher acquired the guided reading scores, reading comprehension, and Lexile scores of the participants from personnel in the school system.

CRCT.

The assessment used to assess reading comprehension was the Criterion-Referenced Competency Test (CRCT). The scores for the study were measured using the CRCT, an assessment mandated by the Georgia Department of Education. The CRCT was an achievement test comprising the areas of reading, English/language arts, math, science, and social studies that students in grades 1-8 took each year (Georgia Department of Education, 2008a). Beginning in the spring of 2006, the reading section of the CRCT was linked to the Lexile scale, a national reading measure allowing students, parents, and teachers to choose books on suitable reading levels (Georgia Department of Education, 2008a).

The CRCT had several objectives. One objective of the test was to provide a valid measure of the educational services provided by educators across the state of Georgia (Georgia Department of Education Testing Division, 2006). Another purpose of the CRCT was to gauge if students had attained the knowledge and skills in the state curriculum. The results of the CRCT offered information about the achievement of

students, classes, schools, school systems, and the state. The results could be utilized to detect where students' strengths and weaknesses lie as well as assist in determining the condition of education in Georgia. Additionally, the test functioned as an accountability tool when determining if schools had made AYP which was a requirement of the No Child Left Behind Act (Georgia Department of Education, 2008a).

The CRCT was aligned to meet the Georgia Performance Standards (GPS), which were the state's recently adopted curriculum. They established the academic standards for every student enrolled in a public school in Georgia. The intent of the CRCT was to gauge how well students attained the information and skills at their grade level. Students were not evaluated against other students but were assessed on their ability to meet the standards. Students received a score of "does not meet expectations", "meets expectations", or "exceeds expectations" based on their performance level. Third grade students had to score at the meets expectations level or higher on the reading portion of the CRCT to be considered for promotion (Georgia Department of Education, 2008a).

All students enrolled in a Georgia public school in grades 1-8 on the day testing began were tested at the grade level listed on the Full-Time Equivalent (FTE) report. Students with disabilities were tested following the guidelines in their Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) or their Individual Accommodation Plans (IAPs). English Language Learner (ELL) students were also tested (Georgia Department of Education, 2008c).

The CRCT was a secure instrument and certain guidelines were followed in order to attain valid and reliable results. The test materials were kept in locked storage except during the administration. The CRCT was given by a certified teacher. During testing the

room was arranged in a manner that reduced the possibility of cheating. The test examiner always oversaw test administration. For every 20 students in a class it was suggested that a proctor be utilized. When there were more than 30 students in a class, a proctor was required (Georgia Department of Education, 2008c).

The CRCT was given during the state testing window which fell from April 2, 2008 through May 2, 2008. Each school system selected nine consecutive school days to give the test and any makeup tests. Students completed the makeup test if they were absent for any portion of the testing unless they missed all nine days of the testing window (Georgia Department of Education, 2008c). About one week after the test materials were received by the test contractor most school systems received a report in Portable Document Form of students who did not meet the standard in third grade reading and fifth and eighth grade reading and math. Approximately two weeks later, districts received printed copies of class rosters and individual student reports. During the first part of July, districts received the summary level reports as well as class, school, and system performance summaries (Georgia Department of Education Assessment, 2008).

Each content area of the CRCT was given at one time. The content area tests could not be divided over several days. The CRCT had to be given in the following order: Reading, English/Language Arts, Mathematics, Science (grades 3-8 only), and Social Studies (grades 3-8 only) (Georgia Department of Education, 2008c). Students were tested on one subject each day with each subject having two sections (Georgia Department of Education, 2008a). Students were provided with a minimum of 45 minutes to complete each section of the test. If students were still working, then testing could continue for 60 minutes. After 60 minutes if some students were still working, then an

additional 10 minutes was provided (Georgia Department of Education, 2008c).

Validity is defined as the degree that an instrument measures what it purports to measure. Validation refers to the collection of data to support an explanation of test scores. One method used to establish validity is evidence based on test content, which includes the test's content and its connection to the construct it proposed to measure. Finding proof to ensure that the test embodies an unbiased and sufficient sampling of all the significant knowledge, skills, and elements that make up the content domain is vital in achievement tests. When validating an achievement test, the information covered, the wording of the questions, and the adequacy of the sample items to assess the achievement in question are important to examine (Ary, Jacobs, Razavieh, & Sorensen, 2006). The validity of the CRCT had to be determined in regards to its main intents which were to match the curriculum and notify students, parents, and educators about students' performances (Assessment Research, 2008).

The CRCT was a test created and implemented in four stages. In Stage 1 the test purpose was determined. Then the Georgia Department of Education staff and committees of Georgia educators reexamined the curriculum and ascertained how the concepts, knowledge, and skills were evaluated. The reexamination resulted in a test blueprint and specifications that designated the standards to be measured and how they would be represented on the assessment (Georgia Department of Education Assessment, 2008).

During Stage 2 further specifications were constructed before item writing started. There was a review of the state curriculum and content domain specifications were generated. These showed how particular standards or components of the curriculum were

to be grouped into domains or strands. The test item specifications provided more information about what kinds of questions were to be written. The item format, content scope and limits, and cognitive complexity were identified as well. The process was organized by the Georgia Department of Education and the assessment coordinator with a great deal of participation by curricular specialists and Georgia educators (Georgia Department of Education Assessment, 2008).

Stage 3 consisted of the test items being written by qualified writers with knowledge in the specific content area. The academic history, classroom teaching knowledge, and capability of generating high quality test items was examined for all item writers (Georgia Department of Education, 2006). The test items were written exclusively for students in the state of Georgia. Committees of Georgia educators examined the test items for alignment with the curriculum, appropriateness, and possible bias. They had the option to accept, reject, or revise items (Georgia Department of Education Assessment, 2008).

In Stage 4 the accepted test items were put on field tests, which were trial runs of the test items and were intended to make sure that the test items operated correctly and were not confusing. Inserting field test items in the operational test guaranteed that the field test items were taken by a representative group of motivated students under standard conditions. Once the items were field tested, a different committee of Georgia educators was established to evaluate the items with the data from the field test. The committee looked at how many students chose the correct answer and how many chose each incorrect answer. They also examined how various groups of students did to identify possible bias (Georgia Department of Education Assessment, 2008).

Looking at item bias was one avenue used to increase the validity of test score analyses (Georgia Department of Education, 2006). The review committees had the option of accepting, rejecting, or revising items for re-field testing. Accepted items were banked for inclusion in future operational test forms. Revised items were field tested again. Items did not appear on a test form unless they had been field tested and approved by Georgia educators (Georgia Department of Education Assessment, 2008).

During the next phase of development the actual test form students took was made. Test items were chosen on the basis of the blueprint created by Georgia educators which necessitated consideration of content and statistical data. The range of content and the statistical attributes had to be uniform in all test forms. When several test forms were utilized in the same year or year after year, they had to be equated. Equating refers to the statistical procedure that ensures different forms are the same difficulty level (Georgia Department of Education Assessment, 2008).

The first time a test was given, standards had to be set for the test. The standard setting process consisted of the ways educators determined the number of test items students must answer correctly in order to meet or exceed expectations. Committees of Georgia educators put together the preliminary recommendations. The recommendations were reviewed by system and state leaders before they were finally approved by the State Board of Education (Georgia Department of Education Assessment, 2008).

In the final stage of test development, the scores were generated and the results dispersed. Scores were reported as scale scores and performance levels. Scale scores were established from the raw score, or the number of correct items (Georgia Department of Education Assessment, 2008). These scores were obtained by converting the number of

correct answers on the test to the CRCT scale. Students with matching scores had the same level of performance on the Georgia GPS. The scaling scores were created independently for each grade level and content area. However the scale score values were the same. The mean score, standard deviation, and standard error of measurement were exclusive to each content area and grade level (Georgia Department of Education, 2008b).

Performance levels, which described students' performances, were labeled as: does not meet the standard (below 800), meets the standard (800-849), or exceeds the standard (850 and above) (Georgia Department of Education Assessment, 2008). The performance level descriptors for third grade reading follow. Students who received the "does not meet" standard had trouble comprehending grade-level texts. They had difficulty inferring, drawing conclusions, and making judgments. Even though students may have made personal connections with texts, they had a hard time making connections outside of their own experiences. Additionally, students might not have comprehended or acquired vocabulary easily. Students who received the "meets" standard had an acceptable knowledge of grade-level texts. They typically were able to give a simple summary, comprehend new vocabulary, acquire meaning through literal and some inferential passages, and connect main ideas and details. Students could also draw conclusions and make judgments about informational and literary texts. Students who received the "exceeds" standard displayed excellent comprehension of grade level texts. They could identify the author's purpose, attain new vocabulary and use it accurately. Students inferred, drew conclusions, and made sound judgments about literary and informational texts. They also had the ability to link ideas and expand their

comprehension (Georgia Department of Education, 2008b).

Reliability refers to the degree of consistency that a test measures what it is supposed to measure. Reliability is essential when using measurements (Ary et al., 2006). In 2008 the reliability coefficient for the third grade reading portion of the CRCT was 0.89 (Assessment Research, 2008).

The Lexile framework.

The ability to understand text relies on the purpose for reading, the reader's ability, and the text being read. Students read for entertainment, to acquire information, and to complete a task. Reading is affected by students' prior knowledge, reading ability, interest level, and developmental appropriateness. The readability of text is linked to text difficulty, support provided, and quality. The Lexile Framework concentrates on reader ability and text difficulty (MetaMetrics, Inc., 2007).

Lexile measures were the most commonly used reading measures at the time of the study. Lexile measures were centered around semantic difficulty, or word frequency, and syntactic complexity, or sentence length. Decades of research revealed these two features were good indicators of text difficulty. The relationship of these two features was important in developing a single Lexile measure for each text. The Lexile Framework combined the measurements of word frequency and sentence length into an algebraic equation. The equation, otherwise known as the Lexile equation, indicated the semantic and syntactic complexity of the passage. The equation could be applied to reading comprehension test items so texts and reading test scores could be reported in Lexiles (Lennon & Burdick, 2004).

The Lexile Analyzer was a software program that calculated the readability of

books and test items. The procedure was known as measuring, and the outcome was a text measure denoting the difficulty of the text. The Lexile Analyzer examined the entire text and analyzed traits such as word frequency and sentence length. The examination resulted in the readability of the text, stated as a Lexile, as well as information about the word count, average sentence length, and average log frequency. Texts with longer sentences containing lower frequency words had higher Lexile measures, while texts with shorter sentences and higher frequency words had lower Lexile measures. Lists, recipes, poetry, and song lyrics were not considered because they did not have traditional punctuation (Lennon & Burdick, 2004).

The Lexile Analyzer took out slices from the text during the calibration process and compared these slices to the nearly 600 million word Lexile body. A slice was part of the text with a minimum of 125 words. If the 125th word was in the middle of a sentence, the Lexile Analyzer continued until the punctuation mark. A slice was utilized to evaluate books, periodicals, textbooks, and other larger texts. After analyzing each slice of the text, all of the slices were averaged. By looking at the text in slices a more accurate Lexile measure was possible (Lennon & Burdick, 2004).

Students take various assessments in school that offer valuable information related to their proficiency in content areas. However, the information cannot be utilized to guide instruction or assist educators and parents in choosing suitable reading material for each child. The Lexile Framework for Reading alters how assessments can be used to guide instruction. Teachers can use Lexiles to link students to instructional resources that correspond to their reading abilities. Providing resources on students' reading levels is especially beneficial to lower performing students. Students are still exposed to the state

standards, but they are able to read and comprehend the material because it is at a lower readability level (MetaMetrics, Inc., n.d.).

Since today's students are so transient, educators should find a common way to measure student achievement. If not, then states may label students the same (advanced, proficient, basic, and below basic) even though they differ in the achievement levels implied by the labels (Smith, 2004). The scale on the Lexile Framework never changes (MetaMetrics, Inc., n.d.). Because a majority of states are giving tests connected to the Lexile Framework, students' test scores can move with them allowing schools to examine students' progress over time using the same measurement system (MetaMetrics, Inc.; Smith). Even if students move to a new school or state or take a different assessment, the Lexile remains the same (MetaMetrics, Inc.).

Validity refers to the degree that an instrument measures what it states to measure (Ary et al., 2006). The Lexile Framework evaluates a skill; therefore, construct validity is the most significant piece of validity. The construct validity for the Lexile Framework is assessed by looking at how well Lexile measures compare to other measures of reading comprehension and text difficulty. The Lexile Framework for Reading has been connected to the CRCT. For the 16,363 students in first through sixth grades the correlation between the CRCT and Lexile Measure was 0.72 to 0.88 (MetaMetrics, Inc., 2007).

Procedures

To carry out the research design, a specific course of action was followed. Permission was obtained from the superintendent of the school system to complete the research study. Participants were not randomly assigned and consisted of all third grade

students in the Mountain Laurel Public School District who had been instructed in guided reading for a period of eight months. The Institutional Review Board of Liberty University approved the use of human subjects in the study. Finally, the researcher acquired the guided reading levels and reading comprehension and Lexile scores from the CRCT for the participants and analyzed the data.

On August 13, 2007, third grade students began receiving reading instruction using Fountas and Pinnell's guided reading program. Also in August 2007, teachers participated in guided reading training that continued throughout the remainder of the study. Students received eight months of guided reading instruction. In April 2008 students took the CRCT. During the school year, teachers kept track of the participants' running records and reading levels, which enabled the teachers to document students' progress. On April 4, 2008 the teachers reported the current guided reading levels of the participants to the literacy coach at each school. The literacy coach compiled the information and sent it to the system literacy coordinator. In March of 2009, the researcher acquired the guided reading scores, reading comprehension, and Lexile scores of the participants. Participants who withdrew during the year, entered after the study began, did not receive guided reading instruction, or came in contact with the researcher were removed from the study. The researcher analyzed the data to determine if there was a relationship between guided reading levels, gender, ethnicity, reading comprehension, and Lexile scores on the CRCT.

Research Questions and Null Hypotheses

The research questions and analyses were carried out using the following approach:

1. Is there a relationship between the Fountas and Pinnell guided reading levels and

reading comprehension scores on the CRCT among third grade students who received guided reading instruction for eight months?

Null Hypothesis (H_{O1}): There is no statistically significant relationship between guided reading levels and reading comprehension scores on the CRCT among third grade students who received guided reading instruction.

2. Is there a relationship between gender and reading comprehension scores on the CRCT in students who are on the same Fountas and Pinnell guided reading level?

   Null Hypothesis (H_{O2}): There is no statistically significant relationship between gender, Fountas and Pinnell's guided reading levels, and reading comprehension scores on the CRCT among third grade students who received guided reading instruction.

3. Is there a relationship between ethnicity and reading comprehension scores on the CRCT in students who are on the same Fountas and Pinnell guided reading level?

   Null Hypothesis (H_{O3}): There is no statistically significant relationship between ethnicity, Fountas and Pinnell's guided reading levels, and reading comprehension scores on the CRCT among third grade students who received guided reading instruction.

4. Is there a relationship between the Fountas and Pinnell guided reading levels and Lexile scores on the CRCT among third grade students who received guided reading instruction for eight months?

   Null Hypothesis (H_{O4}): There is no statistically significant relationship between guided reading levels and Lexile scores obtained from the CRCT among third grade students who received guided reading instruction.

5. Is there a relationship between gender and Lexile scores on the CRCT in students who are on the same Fountas and Pinnell guided reading level?

   Null Hypothesis (H_{O5}): There is no statistically significant relationship between gender, Fountas and Pinnell's guided reading levels and Lexile scores obtained from the CRCT among third grade students who received guided reading instruction.

6. Is there a relationship between ethnicity and Lexile scores on the CRCT in students who are on the same Fountas and Pinnell guided reading level?

   Null Hypothesis (H_{O6}): There is no statistically significant relationship between ethnicity, Fountas and Pinnell's guided reading levels, and Lexile scores on the CRCT among third grade students who received guided reading instruction.

Data Analysis

The data were generated and obtained from the guided reading levels and reading comprehension and Lexile scores on the CRCT of the participants. The goal of the study was to determine if guided reading levels, gender, and ethnicity correlate with reading comprehension and Lexile scores on the CRCT. Determining if a statistical relationship existed between guided reading levels, gender, ethnicity, and reading comprehension and Lexile scores on the CRCT was ascertained using statistical analysis.

The data were supplied by school personnel and consisted of each student's guided reading level on April 4, 2008 and the reading comprehension and Lexile score on the CRCT. The data, which were used to track individual students, were coded with a distinct identification number for each student. The results were placed into a data table.

The guided reading levels were converted from letters to numbers to aid in the analysis. Level A was changed to the number 1, Level B to the number 2, Level C to the number 3. The pattern continued throughout the alphabet. The researcher utilized Minitab to assist in the statistical analysis of the data. The Pearson r and multiple regression analysis generated information to determine if a correlation existed between guided reading levels, gender, ethnicity, and reading comprehension and Lexile scores on the CRCT. Each of the research questions were analyzed using the format discussed above. The relationships between the variables were examined using the guided reading levels, gender, ethnicity, and reading comprehension and Lexile scores on the CRCT. It was concluded that a correlation existed if the Pearson r or the multiple regression analysis yielded a confidence level of .05 utilizing a critical value table.

The research questions and analyses were carried out using the following approach:

1. To answer the first research question: Is there a relationship between the Fountas and Pinnell guided reading levels and reading comprehension scores on the CRCT among third grade students who received guided reading instruction for eight months?, the following analysis was performed:

    To evaluate the first research question, Fountas and Pinnell's guided reading levels were used as the dependent variable and reading comprehension scores on the CRCT were used as the independent variable. The strength of the relationship between guided reading levels and reading comprehension scores on the CRCT among third grade students who received guided reading instruction was determined using a Pearson's correlation coefficient (r). The

null hypothesis H_{O1} was rejected if the resulting p value was less than .05.

2. To answer the second research question: Is there a relationship between gender and reading comprehension scores on the CRCT in students who are on the same Fountas and Pinnell guided reading level?, the following analysis was performed:

   To evaluate the second research question, gender and reading comprehension scores on the CRCT were used as the predictor variables. Fountas and Pinnell's guided reading levels were used as the criterion variable. A multiple regression analysis was performed to determine if there was a relationship between gender, Fountas and Pinnell's guided reading levels, and reading comprehension scores on the CRCT among third grade students who received guided reading instruction. The null hypothesis H_{O2} was rejected if the resulting p value was less than .05. To study the relationship between multiple variables on a single response, multiple regression was used to determine which variables, if any, had an impact on the response. Multiple regression also helped determine which variables were statistically significant and gave a regression model to help predict future results. Multiple regression was the best tool to look at multiple variables on one response.

3. To answer the third research question: Is there a relationship between ethnicity and reading comprehension scores on the CRCT in students who are on the same Fountas and Pinnell guided reading level?, the following analysis was performed:

   To evaluate the third research question, ethnicity and reading comprehension scores on the CRCT were used as the predictor variables. Fountas and Pinnell's guided reading levels were used as the criterion variable. A multiple

regression analysis was performed to determine if there was a relationship between ethnicity, Fountas and Pinnell's guided reading levels, and reading comprehension scores on the CRCT among third grade students who received guided reading instruction. The null hypothesis H_{O3} was rejected the resulting p value was less than .05. To study the relationship between multiple variables on a single response, multiple regression was used to determine which variables, if any, had an impact on the response. Multiple regression also helped determine which variables were statistically significant and gave a regression model to help predict future results. Multiple regression was the best tool to look at multiple variables on one response.

4. To answer the fourth research question: Is there a relationship between the Fountas and Pinnell guided reading levels and Lexile scores on the CRCT among third grade students who received guided reading instruction for eight months?, the following analysis was performed:

   To evaluate the fourth research question, Fountas and Pinnell's guided reading levels were used as the dependent variable and Lexile scores on the CRCT were used as the independent variable. The strength of the relationship between guided reading levels and Lexile scores on the CRCT among third grade students who received guided reading instruction was determined using a Pearson's correlation coefficient (r). The null hypothesis H_{O4} was rejected if the resulting p value was less than .05. To study the relationship between multiple variable on a single response, multiple regression was used to determine which variables, if any, had an impact on the response. Multiple

regression also helped determine which variables were statistically significant and gave a regression model to help predict future results. Multiple regression was the best tool to look at multiple variables on one response.

5. To answer the fifth research question: Is there a relationship between gender and Lexile scores on the CRCT in students who are on the same Fountas and Pinnell guided reading level?, the following analysis was performed:

   To evaluate the fifth research question, gender and Lexile scores on the CRCT were used as the predictor variables. Fountas and Pinnell's guided reading levels were used as the criterion variable. A multiple regression analysis was performed to determine if there was a relationship between gender, Fountas and Pinnell's guided reading levels, and Lexile scores on the CRCT among third grade students who received guided reading instruction. The null hypothesis H_{O5} was rejected if the resulting p value was less than .05. To study the relationship between multiple variables on a single response, multiple regression was used to determine which variables, if any, had an impact on the response. Multiple regression also helped determine which variables were statistically significant and gave a regression model to help predict future results. Multiple regression was the best tool to look at multiple variables on one response.

6. To answer the sixth research question: Is there a relationship between ethnicity and Lexile scores on the CRCT in students who are on the same Fountas and Pinnell guided reading level?, the following analysis was performed:

   To evaluate the sixth research question, ethnicity and Lexile scores on the

CRCT were used as the predictor variables. Fountas and Pinnell's guided reading levels were used as the criterion variable. A multiple regression analysis was performed to determine if there was a relationship between ethnicity, Fountas and Pinnell's guided reading levels, and Lexile scores on the CRCT among third grade students who received guided reading instruction. The null hypothesis H_{O6} was rejected if the resulting p value was less than .05. To study the relationship between multiple variables on a single response, multiple regression was used to determine which variables, if any, had an impact on the response. Multiple regression also helped determine which variables were statistically significant and gave a regression model to help predict future results. Multiple regression was the best tool to look at multiple variables on one response.

Ex Post Facto Research

Research is one avenue available to obtain answers to questions and to assess educational programs. Ex post facto research was conducted in the current study. Ex post facto research is used to examine cause and effect relationships when the researcher is not able to randomly assign subjects or control the independent variable. Ex post facto research is useful when examining human subjects in real-world situations (Ary et al., 2006). The results of the study are beneficial as they investigated the effectiveness of Fountas and Pinnell's guided reading program in one Georgia school district. Since school districts frequently search for programs to improve students' reading abilities, examining the results of a program after it has been implemented is valuable at any point in the process. It is crucial for school systems to analyze reading programs at various

intervals to determine if students are making adequate progress. If students are not progressing, then the implementation of the programs used must be evaluated for possible weaknesses. Therefore, ex post facto research was beneficial in the current study because it investigated possible relationships between guided reading and reading comprehension and Lexile scores on the CRCT and assisted school districts as they searched for effective reading programs.

Ethical Considerations

During the study, the researcher continued to teach in one of the school buildings with the teachers and students involved in the study. Although the researcher was in close proximity to the teachers and students, the researcher did not, in any way, deliberately modify or influence the teachers' classroom practices during the study. In addition, the researcher did not converse with the teachers or students regarding any issue related to the study. In compliance with the school district's policies the participants' identities were kept confidential.

Summary of the Methodology

Chapter 3 explained the methods that were used in the current quantitative study of guided reading levels for the Mountain Laurel Public School District. The relationship between guided reading levels, gender, and ethnicity, and reading comprehension and Lexile scores on the CRCT will be determined utilizing statistical analysis. Chapter 4 contains the results and analysis of these comparisons using tables and narrative text.

CHAPTER FOUR

Findings

The purpose of the study was to compare the Fountas and Pinnell guided reading levels to the reading comprehension and Lexile scores on the Criterion-Referenced Competency Test (CRCT) to determine if a statistically significant relationship existed. In addition, guided reading levels, gender, and ethnicity were examined to determine if there was a correlation to reading comprehension and Lexile scores on the CRCT. The study was based on 546 third grade students who received instruction in guided reading for a period of eight months.

Chapter 4 is organized in terms of the six research questions posed in Chapter 1. It presents the statistical analyses conducted and the statistical results obtained from the data. The results are presented in text and figures. A summary of the findings concludes the chapter.

Research Question One

Research Question 1. Is there a relationship between the Fountas and Pinnell guided reading levels and reading comprehension scores on the CRCT among third grade students who received guided reading instruction for eight months?

> Null Hypothesis (H_{O1}): There is no statistically significant relationship between guided reading levels and reading comprehension scores on the CRCT among third grade students who received guided reading instruction.

A Pearson's correlation coefficient (r) was calculated to test the null hypothesis that there is no statistically significant relationship between guided reading levels and

reading comprehension scores on the CRCT among third grade students who received guided reading instruction. The correlation between guided reading levels and reading comprehension scores showed a relationship of .696, which produced a p value of .000 (see Table 6). Since the p value was less than .05, the null hypothesis (H_{O1}) was rejected.

Table 6

Pearson Correlation Coefficient of Guided Reading Levels and Reading Comprehension Scores

Variable	N	Pearson Correlation Coefficient (r)	p value
Correlation of guided reading levels and reading comprehension scores	545	0.696	0.000

Figure 1 shows the scatter plot for the guided reading levels and reading comprehension scores on the CRCT. The regression equation is $\hat{Y} = 702 + 8.52(X)$ and may be used for further research.

Research Question Two

Research Question 2. Is there a relationship between gender and reading comprehension scores on the CRCT in students who are on the same Fountas and Pinnell guided reading level?

Null Hypothesis (H_{O2}): There is no statistically significant relationship between gender, Fountas and Pinnell's guided reading levels, and reading comprehension scores on the CRCT among third grade students who received

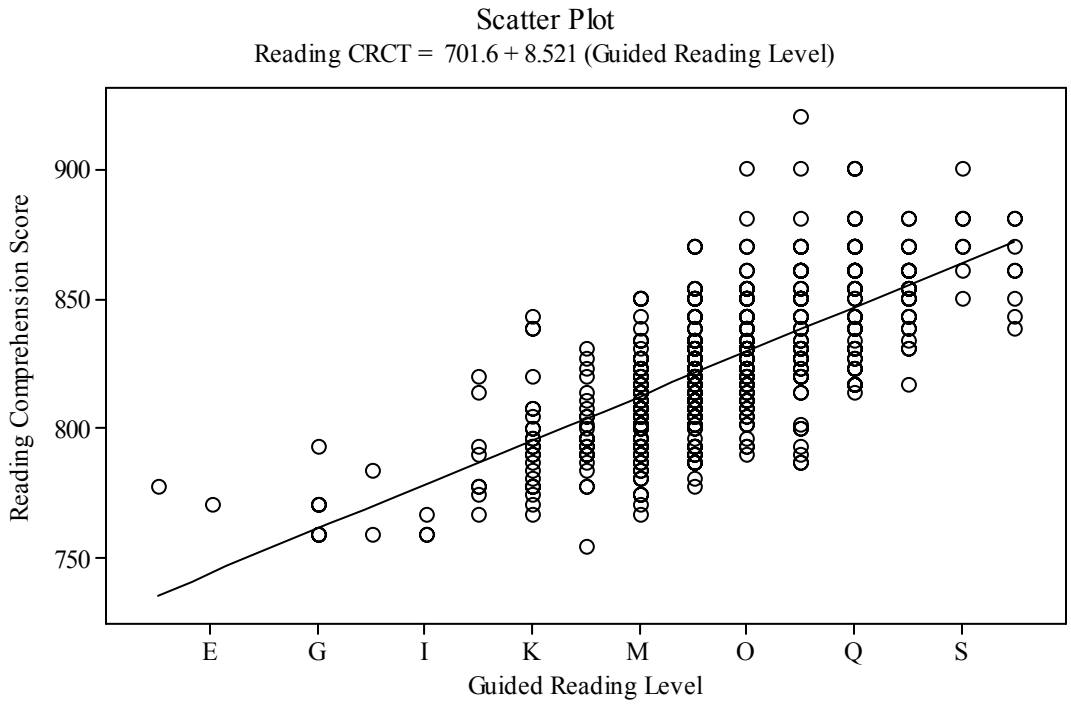

Figure 1. Scatter plot for guided reading levels and reading comprehension scores on the CRCT for all third grade students.

guided reading instruction.

A multiple regression analysis was calculated to test the null hypothesis that there is no statistically significant relationship between gender, Fountas and Pinnell's guided reading levels, and reading comprehension scores on the CRCT among third grade students who received guided reading instruction. A p value of .044 was produced for gender and .000 for guided reading levels (see Table 7). The p value was less than .05; therefore, the null hypothesis (H_{O2}) was rejected.

Research Question Three

Research Question 3. Is there a relationship between ethnicity and reading comprehension scores on the CRCT in students who are on the same Fountas and Pinnell guided reading level?

Table 7

Regression Analysis of Reading Comprehension Score, Gender, and Guided Reading Level (N = 542)

Predictor	df	R^2	Coef	SE Coef	t	p
Constant		49.3%	700.703	5.477	127.93	0.000
Gender	2		3.446	1.704	2.02	0.044
Guided Reading Level	2		8.4550	0.3707	22.81	0.000

Null Hypothesis (H_{O3}): There is no statistically significant relationship between ethnicity, Fountas and Pinnell's guided reading levels, and reading comprehension scores on the CRCT among third grade students who received guided reading instruction.

A multiple regression analysis was calculated to test the null hypothesis that there is no statistically significant relationship between ethnicity, Fountas and Pinnell's guided reading levels, and reading comprehension scores on the CRCT among third grade students who received guided reading instruction. A p value of .000 was produced for both ethnicity and for guided reading levels (see Table 8). The p value was less than .05; therefore, the null hypothesis (H_{O3}) was rejected.

The regression equation is $\hat{Y}$ = 701 + 3.45(gender) + 8.46 (guided reading level) and may be used for further research.

Figure 2 shows the boxplot for the ethnicity, guided reading levels, and reading comprehension scores on the CRCT. The regression equation is $\hat{Y}$ = 716 – 8.67(race) +

Table 8

Regression Analysis of Reading Comprehension Score, Ethnicity, and Guided Reading Level (N = 542)

Predictor	df	R^2	Coef	SE Coef	t	p
Constant		50.8%	715.871	6.139	116.60	0.000
Ethnicity	2		-8.668	1.892	-4.58	0.000
Guided Reading Level	2		7.9335	0.3838	20.67	0.000

7.93 (guided reading level) and may be used for further research.

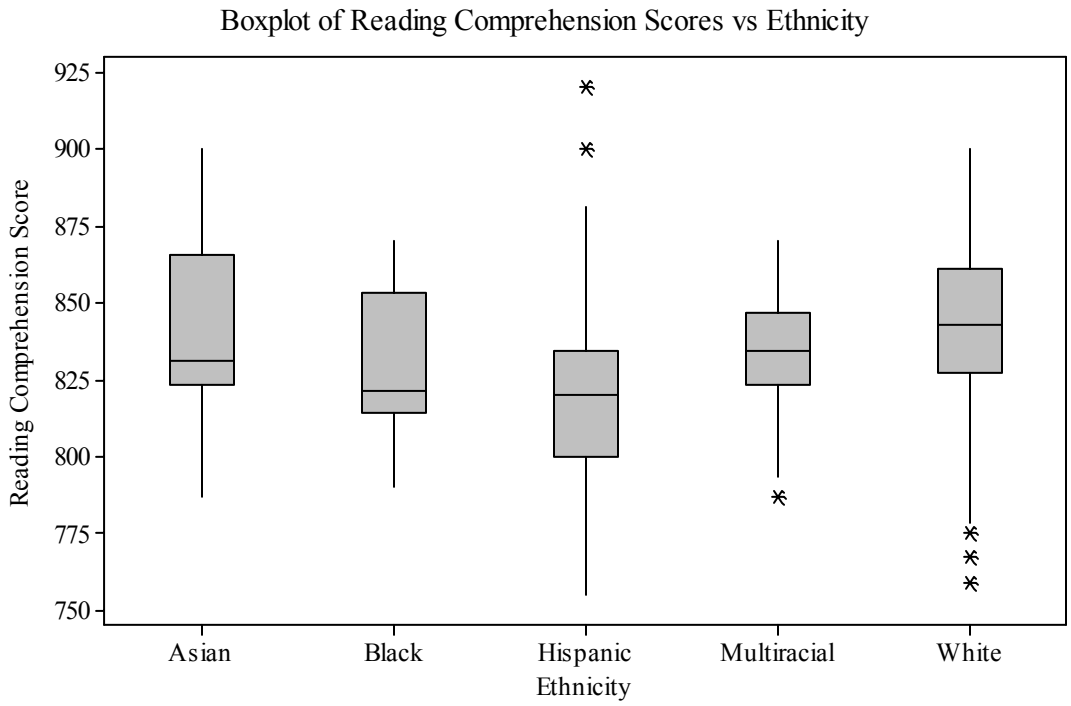

Figure 2. Boxplot for the ethnicity guided reading levels, and reading comprehension scores on the CRCT for all third grade students.

Research Question Four

Research Question Four. Is there a relationship between the Fountas and Pinnell guided reading levels and Lexile scores on the CRCT among third grade students who received guided reading instruction for eight months?

> Null Hypothesis (H_{O4}): There is no statistically significant relationship between guided reading levels and Lexile scores obtained from the CRCT among third grade students who received guided reading instruction.

A Pearson's correlation coefficient (r) was calculated to test the null hypothesis that there is no statistically significant relationship between guided reading levels and Lexile scores on the CRCT among third grade students who received guided reading instruction. The correlation between guided reading levels and Lexile scores showed a relationship of .706, which produced a p value of .000 (see Table 9). Since the p value was less than .05, the null hypothesis (H_{O4}) was rejected.

Table 9

Pearson Correlation Coefficient of Guided Reading Levels and Lexile Scores

Variable	N	Pearson Correlation Coefficient (r)	p value
Correlation of guided reading levels and reading comprehension scores	545	0.706	0.000

Figure 3 shows the scatter plot for the guided reading levels and reading comprehension scores on the CRCT. The regression equation is $\hat{Y} = -291 + 60.9(X)$ and

may be used for further research.

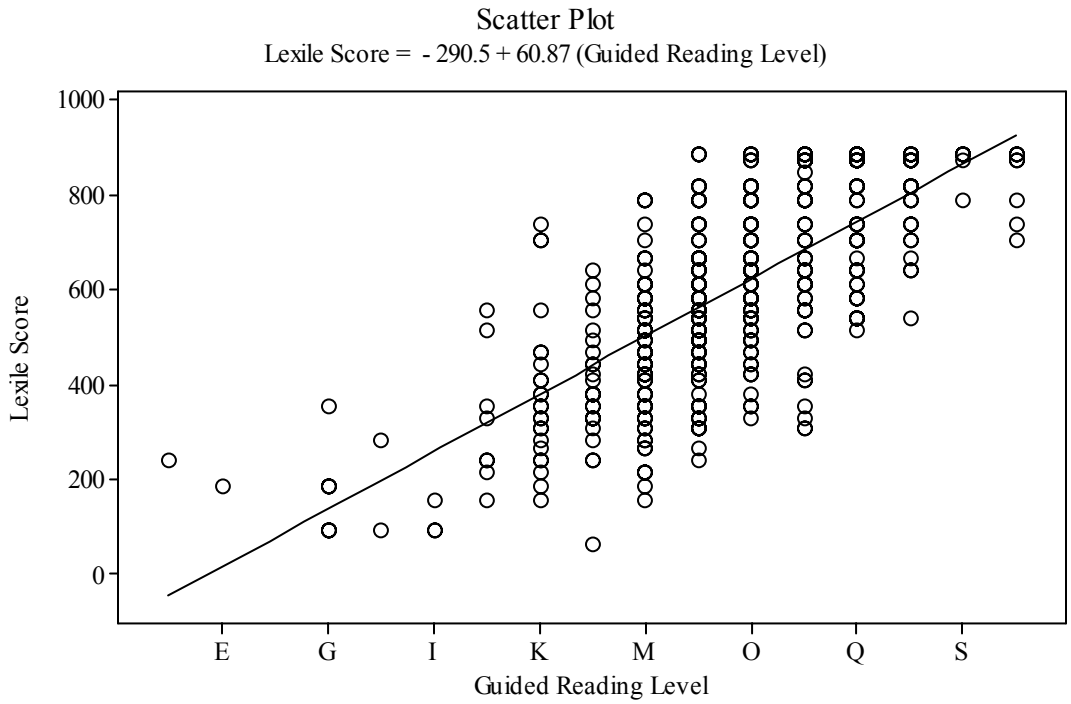

Figure 3. Scatter plot for guided reading levels and Lexile scores on the CRCT for all third grade students.

Research Question Five

Research Question 5. Is there a relationship between gender and Lexile scores on the CRCT in students who are on the same Fountas and Pinnell guided reading level?

> Null Hypothesis (H_{O5}): There is no statistically significant relationship between gender, Fountas and Pinnell's guided reading levels and Lexile scores obtained from the CRCT among third grade students who received guided reading instruction.

A multiple regression analysis was calculated to test the null hypothesis that there is no statistically significant relationship between gender, Fountas and Pinnell's guided reading levels, and Lexile scores on the CRCT among third grade students who received

guided reading instruction. A p value of .032 was produced for gender and 0.000 for guided reading levels (see Table 10). The p value was less than .05; therefore, the null hypothesis (H_{O5}) was rejected.

Table 10

Regression Analysis of Lexile Score, Gender, and Guided Reading Level (N = 543)

Predictor	df	R^2	Coef	SE Coef	t	p
Constant		50.3%	-326.80	41.79	-7.82	0.000
Gender	2		25.80	11.99	2.15	0.032
Guided Reading Level	2		60.710	2.608	23.27	0.000

The regression equation is $\hat{Y} = -327 + 60.7(\text{gender}) + 25.8(\text{guided reading level})$ and may be used for further research.

Research Question Six

Research Question 6. Is there a relationship between ethnicity and Lexile scores on the CRCT in students who are on the same Fountas and Pinnell guided reading level?

> Null Hypothesis (H_{O6}): There is no statistically significant relationship between ethnicity, Fountas and Pinnell's guided reading levels, and Lexile scores on the CRCT among third grade students who received guided reading instruction.

A multiple regression analysis was calculated to test the null hypothesis that there is no statistically significant relationship between ethnicity, Fountas and Pinnell's guided reading levels, and Lexile scores on the CRCT among third grade students who received

guided reading instruction. A p value of .000 was produced for both ethnicity and for guided reading levels (see Table 11). The p value was less than .05; therefore, the null hypothesis (H_{O6}) was rejected.

Table 11

Regression Analysis of Lexile Score, Ethnicity, and Guided Reading Level (N = 542)

Predictor	df	R^2	Coef	SE Coef	t	p
Constant		51.5%	-198.20	43.29	-4.58	0.000
Ethnicity	2		-57.33	13.34	-4.30	0.000
Guided Reading Level	2		57.165	2.706	21.12	0.000

Figure 4 shows the boxplot for the ethnicity, guided reading levels, and Lexile scores on the CRCT. The regression equation is $\hat{Y} = -198 - 57.3(\text{race}) + 57.2$ (guided reading level) and may be used for further research.

The results shown above suggest that there is a relationship between guided reading levels and reading comprehension and Lexile scores on the CRCT. In addition, the results presented suggest a relationship between guided reading levels, gender, and ethnicity to reading comprehension and Lexile scores on the CRCT. Chapter five presents a summary, conclusions, and recommendations.

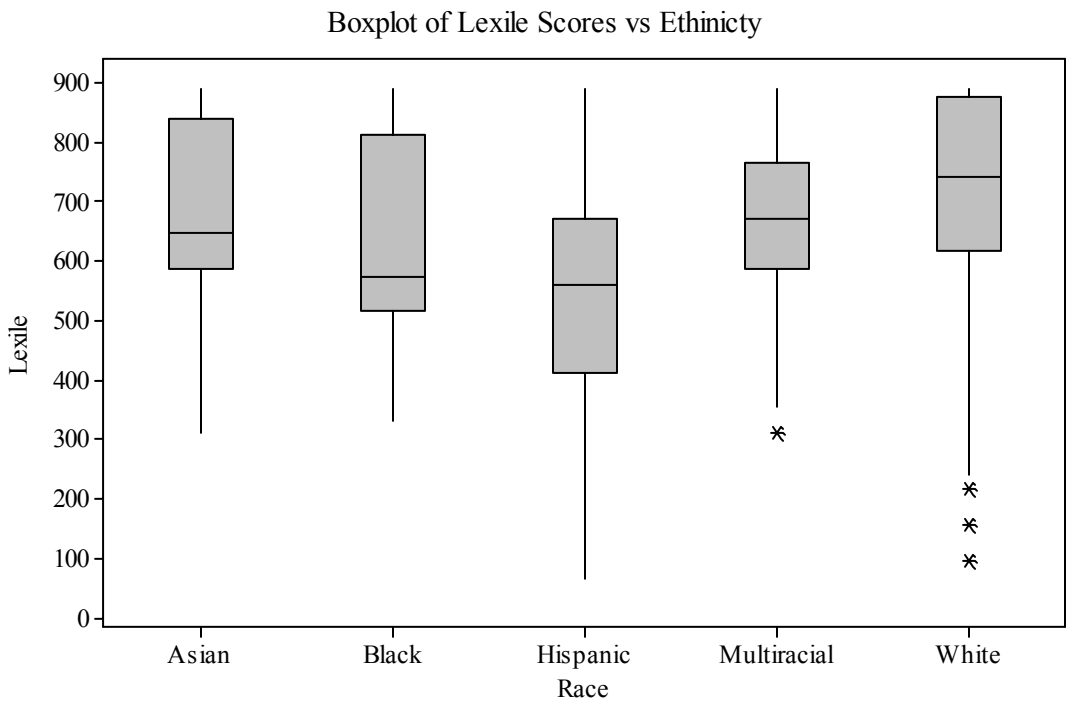

Figure 4. Boxplot for the ethnicity, guided reading levels, and Lexile scores on the CRCT for all third grade students.

CHAPTER FIVE

Summary and Discussion

The relationship of guided reading levels to reading comprehension and Lexile scores on the Criterion-Referenced Competency Test (CRCT) have been examined in the current study. The final chapter of the dissertation restates the problem and reviews the methodology. The chapter also reviews the research findings and interprets the findings. Finally, implications, limitations, and recommendations for further research are presented.

Statement of the Problem

The purpose of the study was to compare Irene C. Fountas and Gay Su Pinnell's guided reading levels to the reading comprehension and Lexile scores on the CRCT in order to determine if a statistically significant relationship existed. The researcher designed the study to answer the following question:

How do the Fountas and Pinnell guided reading levels among third grade students in Mountain Laurel Public School District who were instructed in guided reading correlate with the reading comprehension and Lexile scores which were generated by the CRCT?

The study was guided by the following research questions:

1. Is there a relationship between the Fountas and Pinnell guided reading levels and reading comprehension scores on the CRCT among third grade students who received guided reading instruction for eight months?
2. Is there a relationship between gender and reading comprehension scores on

the CRCT in students who are on the same Fountas and Pinnell guided reading level?

3. Is there a relationship between ethnicity and reading comprehension scores on the CRCT in students who are on the same Fountas and Pinnell guided reading level?
4. Is there a relationship between the Fountas and Pinnell guided reading levels and Lexile scores on the CRCT among third grade students who received guided reading instruction for eight months?
5. Is there a relationship between gender and Lexile scores on the CRCT in students who are on the same Fountas and Pinnell guided reading level?
6. Is there a relationship between ethnicity and Lexile scores on the CRCT in students who are on the same Fountas and Pinnell guided reading level?

Review of the Methodology

As stated in chapter one, the current study presented a nonexperimental study based on Fountas and Pinnell's guided reading levels. The researcher compared the Fountas and Pinnell guided reading levels to the reading comprehension and Lexile scores on the CRCT in order to determine if a statistically significant relationship existed. The researcher attempted to determine if guided reading levels, gender, and ethnicity had a correlation to reading comprehension and Lexile scores on the CRCT.

The correlational study was based on 546 third grade students enrolled in a Georgia public school district who received instruction in guided reading from August 13, 2007 to April 4, 2008. The students' guided reading levels were reported and recorded by their teachers on April 4, 2008. Students were administered the CRCT in the

spring of 2008. The reading comprehension and Lexile scores of the participants were generated from the CRCT and obtained by the researcher.

The researcher utilized the Pearson r and multiple regression analysis to determine if there was a relationship between guided reading levels, gender, ethnicity, reading comprehension, and Lexile scores on the CRCT. The data were analyzed using Microsoft Excel and Minitab. Each of the research questions were analyzed using either the Pearson r or multiple regression analysis. It was concluded that a correlation existed if the Pearson r or p value yielded a confidence level of .05 utilizing a critical value table.

Summary of the Research Findings

The following summarizes the findings from the statistical analysis carried out in chapter four. It is divided into the six research questions presented in chapter one.

1. Is there a relationship between the Fountas and Pinnell guided reading levels and reading comprehension scores on the CRCT among third grade students who received guided reading instruction for eight months?

In order to answer research question one, a Pearson's correlation coefficient (r) was calculated to test the null hypothesis that there is no statistically significant relationship between guided reading levels and reading comprehension scores on the CRCT among third grade students who received guided reading instruction. The correlation between guided reading levels and reading comprehension scores showed a relationship of .696, which produced a p value of .000. Since the p value was less than .05, the null hypothesis (H_{O1}) was rejected.

2. Is there a relationship between gender and reading comprehension scores on the CRCT in students who are on the same Fountas and Pinnell guided reading level?

In order to answer research question two, a multiple regression analysis was calculated to test the null hypothesis that there is no statistically significant relationship between gender, Fountas and Pinnell's guided reading levels, and reading comprehension scores on the CRCT among third grade students who received guided reading instruction. A p value of .044 was produced for gender and .000 for guided reading levels. The p value was less than .05; therefore, the null hypothesis (H_{O2}) was rejected.

3. Is there a relationship between ethnicity and reading comprehension scores on the CRCT in students who are on the same Fountas and Pinnell guided reading level?

In order to answer research question three, a multiple regression analysis was calculated to test the null hypothesis that there is no statistically significant relationship between ethnicity, Fountas and Pinnell's guided reading levels, and reading comprehension scores on the CRCT among third grade students who received guided reading instruction. A p value of .000 was produced for both ethnicity and guided reading levels. The p value was less than .05; therefore, the null hypothesis (H_{O3}) was rejected.

4. Is there a relationship between the Fountas and Pinnell guided reading levels and Lexile scores on the CRCT among third grade students who received guided reading instruction for eight months?

In order to answer research question four, a Pearson's correlation coefficient (r) was calculated to test the null hypothesis that there is no statistically significant relationship between guided reading levels and Lexile scores on the CRCT among third grade students who received guided reading instruction. The correlation between guided reading levels and Lexile scores showed a relationship of .706, which produced a p value of .000. Since the p value was less than .05, the null hypothesis (H_{O4}) was rejected.

5. Is there a relationship between gender and Lexile scores on the CRCT in students who are on the same Fountas and Pinnell guided reading level?

In order to answer research question five, a multiple regression analysis was calculated to test the null hypothesis that there is no statistically significant relationship between gender, Fountas and Pinnell's guided reading levels, and Lexile scores on the CRCT among third grade students who received guided reading instruction. A p value of .032 was produced for gender and .000 for guided reading levels. The p value was less than .05; therefore, the null hypothesis (H_{O5}) was rejected.

6. Is there a relationship between ethnicity and Lexile scores on the CRCT in students who are on the same Fountas and Pinnell guided reading level?

In order to answer research question six, a multiple regression analysis was calculated to test the null hypothesis that there is no statistically significant relationship between ethnicity, Fountas and Pinnell's guided reading levels, and Lexile scores on the CRCT among third grade students who received guided reading instruction. A p value of .000 was produced for both ethnicity and guided reading levels. The p value was less than .05; therefore, the null hypothesis (H_{O6}) was rejected.

Interpretation of the Findings

The research findings suggested that students' guided reading levels, gender, and ethnicity had an effect on students' reading comprehension and Lexile scores which were generated from the CRCT. In the study, guided reading levels had a strong correlation with both reading comprehension (.696) and Lexile scores (.706) on the CRCT. Generally, the relationship between guided reading levels and reading comprehension scores showed that as students' guided reading levels increased, the reading

comprehension scores they obtained increased as well. Likewise, the relationship between guided reading levels and Lexile scores showed that as students' guided reading levels increased, the Lexile scores they obtained increased.

As previously stated one objective of the CRCT was to provide a valid measure of the educational services provided by educators across the state of Georgia (Georgia Department of Education Testing Division, 2006). Another purpose of the CRCT was to gauge whether students had attained the knowledge and skills in the state curriculum (Georgia Department of Education, 2008a). Students' scores were reported using the following scale scores and performance levels: "does not meet the standard" (below 800), "meets the standard" (800-849), or "exceeds the standard" (850 and above) (Georgia Department of Education Assessment, 2008). The research findings shown in Figure 1 suggested that in order for students to reach the "meets the standard" performance level, they needed to be on level N or above in Fountas and Pinnell's guided reading leveling system.

In addition, MetaMetrics, the creators of the Lexile Framework, composed a chart showing the Lexile ranges of students at each grade level. To be considered on grade level, students in third grade should have a Lexile between 410 (meets) and 790 (exceeds) (Georgia Department of Education Assessment, 2008). The research findings shown in Figure 3 suggested that in order for students to reach the "meets" score on the Lexile they needed to be on level N or above in Fountas and Pinnell's guided reading leveling system.

Additionally, a relationship was found between gender, guided reading levels, and reading comprehension and Lexile scores. Gender produced a p value of .044 for reading

comprehension, .032 for Lexile scores, and .000 for guided reading levels. The results indicated by the regression equation $\hat{Y} = 701 + 3.45(\text{gender}) + 8.46$ (guided reading level), showed that female students performed 3.45 points better than male students on the reading comprehension section of the CRCT. The regression equation $\hat{Y} = -327 + 60.7(\text{gender}) + 25.8(\text{guided reading level})$, showed that female students performed 60.7 points better than male students on the Lexile scores generated by the CRCT. The results of the study were consistent with the findings of *The Nation's Report Card: Trends in Academic Progress in Reading and Mathematics 2008* (Rampey et al., 2009) which found that female students on average had higher reading proficiencies than male students.

Furthermore, a relationship was found between ethnicity, guided reading levels, and reading comprehension and Lexile scores. Ethnicity produced a p value of .000 for reading comprehension, Lexile scores, and guided reading levels. The results indicated by the regression equation $\hat{Y} = 716 - 8.67(\text{race}) + 7.93$ (guided reading level), showed that Hispanic students scored 8.67 points lower than other ethnic groups on the reading comprehension section of the CRCT. The regression equation $\hat{Y} = -198 - 57.3(\text{race}) + 57.2$ (guided reading level), showed that Hispanic students performed 57.3 points lower than other ethnic groups on the Lexile scores generated by the CRCT. The results of the study were consistent with the *The Nation's Report Card: Trends in Academic Progress in Reading and Mathematics 2008* (Rampey et al., 2009) which found a variation in reading proficiency among 9, 13, and 17 year old students of different ethnicities. In the report the average proficiency of White students was higher than Black and Hispanic students. Snow et al. (1998) also found that Hispanic students were twice as likely as

non-Hispanic Whites to be reading below grade level.

Conclusions

Students who reach level N in Fountas and Pinnell's guided reading program are more likely to score "meets the standard" on the CRCT and "meets" on the Lexile. Students reading on level N are considered self-extending readers because of the many strategies they acquired while working with a variety of texts (Fountas & Pinnell, 2006a). They can read various genres as well as utilize strategies to problem solve (Pinnell & Fountas, 2007). According to the text gradient chart (see Appendix B), it is optimal for students to be on level P by the end of third grade. However, students who enter fourth grade on level O are considered on grade level (Fountas & Pinnell, 2006a). Since the CRCT was administered at the beginning of April, there is a possibility that these students will reach level P by the end of the year. By the same token, it may be difficult for students to advance two reading levels in seven weeks. Understanding what reading level students should obtain to reach the goal set forth by the Georgia Department of Education, may be beneficial to educators because it gives them an additional factor to consider when instructing students.

If students enter third grade with a guided reading level of K or lower, teachers may want to spend additional time developing reading skills and strategies with these students. Since students who are reading on or below level K are reading below grade level, simply meeting with these students during guided reading will not assist them in catching up to their peers. Teachers may want to meet with lower level students on a more frequent basis so they have the opportunity to practice and reinforce the skills that are lacking. A support teacher could work with students during the day to boost fluency,

word recognition, comprehension skills, or reading strategies.

During the year it may become evident that some students will not reach level N at the time the CRCT is administered. When it becomes apparent that students are struggling, educators should intervene. Students should work on their instructional level because that is the point where they will make the most progress (Askew & Fountas, 1998), improve their processing, and be successful in their reading (Fountas & Pinnell, 1999). Since students are grouped by ability, teachers can individualize instruction based on students' needs which allows teachers to give more attention and repetition to lower functioning students (Hollifield, 1987). In order to help students progress at a faster rate, the attention and repetition may need to occur during an additional guided reading group.

If educators want to assist students in learning to read, it is crucial for them to explore the reading programs available. Once a reading program is chosen, educators should examine the components of the program to determine how to make it suitable for students. For instance, 68% of the students in the current study were Hispanic. Even though Hispanic students are at a great risk for experiencing reading difficulties (Snow et al., 1998), they still need to learn the same skills as other students in order to become successful readers (Foorman & Torgesen, 2001). When teachers encounter second language learners, they must think about the language needs of these students and make the content meaningful (Freeman & Freeman, 2000). Teachers may want to increase the time spent on introductions, complete a more in-depth review of the text, and use visual aids to assist with comprehension (Avalos et al., 2007). During guided reading, teachers must understand how to prompt and guide all of their students as they build a system of strategies to use with progressively complex texts (Iaquinta, 2006).

Implications

School systems continually search for reading programs to meet the needs of their students. By examining some of the variables that may impact students' reading achievement, educators may gain insights regarding factors influencing students' reading success. The realization of these variables may affect how educators present material to their students.

The findings of the study revealed that there was a relationship between guided reading levels and reading comprehension and Lexile scores on the CRCT. Students who were reading on at least level N in Fountas and Pinnell's guided reading leveling system were more likely to score "meets the standard" on the CRCT and "meets" on the Lexile.

The results of the study showed that male students did not score as well as female students based on the reading comprehension and Lexile scores generated from the CRCT. The findings alert teachers to be more conscious of male students' achievements in reading. Teachers should take notice of how male students read texts and interact with the group. Male students should be encouraged to participate during discussions. When male students do not eagerly contribute, teachers should find ways to question them and draw them into the dialogue. Teachers should act as a moderator when students talk about texts to ensure that female students do not control the conversation. When male students struggle with reading, teachers should work with them individually or in small groups to improve their weaknesses.

The findings of the study showed that Hispanic students were more likely to have lower reading comprehension and Lexile scores than groups of other ethnicities. Teachers of Hispanic students should reflect on these findings in order to determine how to

effectively meet the needs of their students. One option is to preview the text with students the day before it is introduced to the rest of the group. Teachers can introduce difficult vocabulary and concepts ahead of time to increase students' background knowledge so that students have a better chance of processing the text when it is introduced to the guided reading group. By presenting a solid introduction using realia, students can focus more on comprehension and fluency. Instead of spending one to two days on one text during guided reading, Avalos et al. (2007) recommends spending three or more days on one text to support second language learners. An additional option may be to have students work with another teacher at some point during the school day to supplement instruction to strengthen weak areas.

While the findings of the current study cannot be generalized to all students, the results do suggest that there is a relationship between guided reading levels, gender, and ethnicity to reading comprehension and Lexile scores on the CRCT.

Limitations

The study was limited in the following ways. The study was conducted during one school year, and only one reading technique was examined. The following threats to the internal validity may have occurred:

1. History may have played a factor.
2. Some students obtained additional services in reading, which included small group instruction by a certified teacher, so their scores had the potential of being affected by the extra support they received.
3. Each student in the study received guided reading instruction for the duration of the study. However, all students in the study did not receive guided reading

instruction for the same period of time. Some students had received guided reading services in previous years.

4. Maturation of the students was likely to transpire during the research as the participants aged and changed throughout the course of the study.
5. Transient students who moved during the study were not included in the analysis.
6. Students who entered after the study began or who had contact with the researcher were not included in the study.
7. Instrumentation was a validity threat in that each of the teachers was likely to adapt the guided reading program in ways that affected students in a different manner.
8. Each of the third grade teachers involved in the study had not completed three years of training which gave them varying degrees of expertise when instructing students during guided reading.

Recommendations for Further Research

Based on the findings from the study, the following recommendations are suggested for areas of future research:

1. The study revealed that ethnicity and guided reading levels were related to reading comprehension and Lexile scores. Replicating the current study using a population with a larger number of Black, Multiracial, Asian, and White students could prove beneficial in verifying the results.
2. The study was limited to all students in third grade in one school system. Replication of the current study to additional grades and school systems could prove beneficial in verifying the results.
3. All of the schools in the study were Title 1 schools, meaning the students

represented families from the lower-socioeconomic status. Further research should be conducted to determine if the findings can be replicated in other schools who are Title 1 and those who are not.

4. The study took place during one school year. A longitudinal study could be completed to examine how students progressed and performed over time.
5. The teachers involved in the study had not completed three years of guided reading training. Further research should be conducted to determine if the number of years a teacher had been teaching guided reading would impact the findings.

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Appendix A

Reading Level Correlation Chart

Grade Level	Reading Recovery	Fountas-Pinnell Guided Reading	DRA	Lexile Levels	AR Grade Level
Kindergarten	A,B	A	A		
	1		1		
	2	B	2		
	3	C	3		
Grade 1	4		4		
	5	D	6		
	6				
	7	E	8		
	8				
	9	F	10		
	10				
	11	G	12		
	12				
	13	H	14	200-299	1.5-1.7
	14				
	15	I	16		
	16				
Grade 2	18	J,K	20	300-399	1.8-2.1
	20	L,M	28	400-499	2.2-2.6
Grade 3	22	N	30	500-599	2.7 3.2
			34		
	24	O, P	38	600-699	3.3-4.0
Grade 4	26	Q, R, S	40	700-799	4.1-4.9
Grade 5	28	T, U, V	44	800-899	5.0-5.9
Grade 6	30	W, X, Y		900-999	6.0-7.3
Grade 7	32	Z		1000-1100	7.4-8.9
Grade 8	34				

From Garofalo, M. P. (2005). *Accelerated reader level and lexile level conversion chart*. Retrieved September 20, 2008, from www.cuesd.tehama.k12.ca.us/maywood/ staff/ garofalo/LevelConversion1.doc

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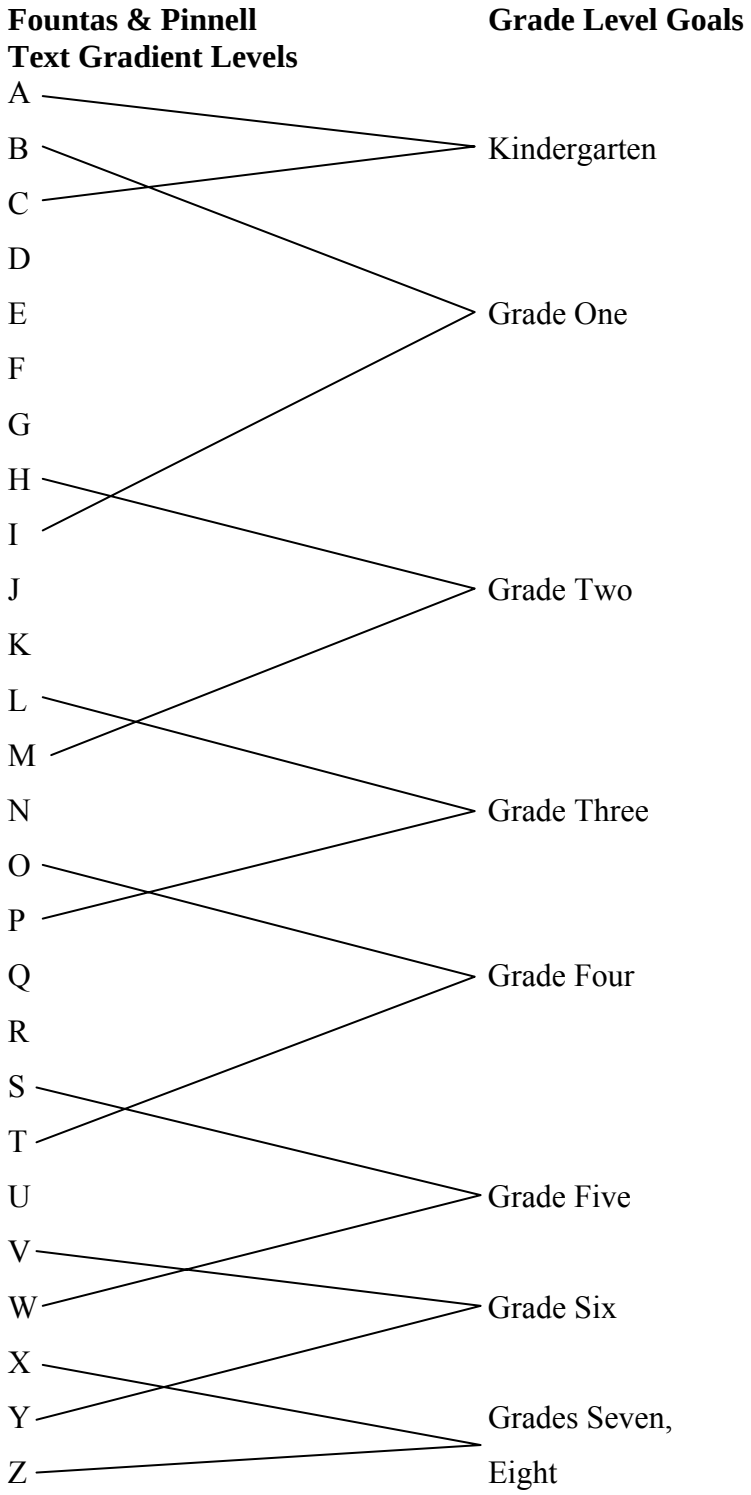
Appendix B

Text Gradient



From Fountas, I.C. & Pinnell, G. S. (2006a). *Leveled books (K-8): Matching texts to readers for effective teaching*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Appendix C

Teacher Demographic Questionnaire

Please complete the following demographic information. Base your responses on the 2007-2008 school year.

1. Number of years teaching experience: _____
2. Gender: _____
3. Highest degree held: _____
4. Number of years teaching guided reading: _____
5. Ethnicity: _____
6. Current school: _____