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The Effect of Guided Reading Instruction  
on Reading Achievement

by

Vanda Lea Underwood

May 2010

A Dissertation submitted to the Education Faculty of Lindenwood University

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

Doctor of Education

School of Education

Declaration of Originality

I do hereby declare and attest to the fact that this is an original study based solely upon my own scholarly work here at Lindenwood University and that I have not submitted it for any other college or university course or degree here or elsewhere.

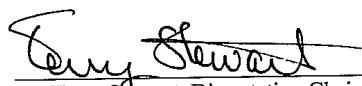
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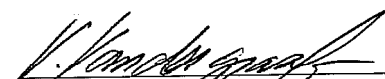
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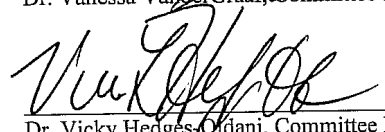
This Dissertation has been approved as partial fulfillment of  
the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Education  
at Lindenwood University by the School of Education

  
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## Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge the professors at Lindenwood University who have shared their knowledge and expertise throughout this process. I especially wish to thank the members of my committee, Dr. Terry Stewart, chair, Dr. Vanessa VanderGraaf, and Dr. Vicky Hedges-Oldani. A special thanks to Dr. Susan Isenberg for guiding me through the editing process. My gratitude to the administration and colleagues in District B; without them this study would not have been possible. My deepest thanks and gratitude goes to my best friend and soul mate of 30 years, my husband Dennis, for allowing me the freedom to pursue my passions and always being the wind beneath my wings. I also wish to acknowledge my son, Barry, and daughter, Tara, for their constant love and encouragement. Finally, I am grateful for the countless friends and family members who have bolstered and supported me, especially Gary Anderson, my computer technician.

## Abstract

Although reading achievement correlates highly with a student's ability to do well in school, not all children achieve in reading. The purpose of this mixed-method study was to investigate whether reading instruction provided in small groups at the child's own reading level, known as *guided reading instruction*, would result in significant improvement in the reading achievement of fourth- and fifth-grade students. Teachers' commitment to and perception of guided reading instruction were also examined in the study district. The hypothesis was: Have student reading scores improved on the Illinois Standards Achievement Test (ISAT) in 2007 and 2008, after implementing guided reading instruction in the 2006–2007 school year? There were three research questions: *Do teachers believe guided reading instruction is an effective instructional approach to improve ISAT scores? How does teacher commitment to the instructional approach affect the success of guided reading instruction? What instructional skills and strategies are required to develop an effective reading program?* Chi-square goodness-of-fit and paired-samples *t* tests were statistical tests employed in the quantitative portion of the study. Surveys and focus groups were used to investigate teacher commitment and perception of guided reading instruction in the qualitative portion of the study. Quantitative results indicated there is a significant correlation between guided reading instruction and improvement on ISAT scores, when students are examined over time. Qualitative results indicated teachers were committed to guided reading instruction, and perceived guided reading instruction benefitted students. Further, teachers recommended additional training in guided reading instruction, coupled with additional staff to provide guided reading instruction, would help maximize results. Preliminary results did not

show significant improvement after 1 year of guided reading instruction. However, when the scores of the same students were followed over a 2-year period, significant results were noted. The most salient finding of this research reinforced the notion that the validity of any new program is onerous to judge in its inception year. Practitioners may benefit from future research that tracks the same students over an expanded period of time as well as the establishment of quality assurance measures to ensure the program continues to be administered with fidelity.

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## Key to Abbreviations

AYP	Adequate Yearly Progress
DRA2	Developmental Reading Assessment
FCRR	Florida Center for Reading Research
ISAT	Illinois Standards Achievement Test
ISBE	Illinois State Board of Education
NAEP	National Assessment of Educational Progress
NCLB	No Child Left Behind
NICHD	National Institute of Child Health and Human Development
NRC	Nation's Report Card
NRP	National Reading Panel
USDE	U.S. Department of Education

## Chapter I – Introduction

*Background of Study*

In the field of education, what crucial element helps ensure the future success of a child in his or her educational journey? A publication from the 1980s provides an explicit answer to that question. In 1985 the Report of the Commission on Reading, *Becoming a Nation of Readers*, stated, “Reading is a basic life skill. It is a cornerstone for a child’s success in school and, indeed, throughout life” (Anderson, Hiebert, Scott, & Wilkinson, 1985, p. 1). Snow, Burns, and Griffin (1998) discovered that children who read well in the early grades are far more successful in later years, and those who fall behind often stay behind when it comes to academic achievement. In 2003 the U.S. Department of Education’s (USDE) report, *No Child Left Behind: A Toolkit for Teachers*, stated,

Reading opens the door to learning about math, history, science, literature, geography, and much more. Thus, young capable readers can take advantage of other opportunities (such as reading for pleasure) and develop confidence in their own abilities. On the other hand, those students who cannot read well are much more likely to drop out of school and be limited to low-paying jobs throughout their lives. Reading is undeniably critical to success in today’s society. (p. 28)

Further validation of the vital role that reading plays in a child’s overall success in school was also cited by the USDE’s report in 2005: “Basic proficiency in reading and mathematics is a foundation for later success in schooling” (USDE, 2005, ¶ 1).

For over a half of a century, researchers, educators, and stakeholders of public education have debated the achievement crisis in America’s public schools. Reading achievement, or lack thereof, has been widely scrutinized. In 1955 Rudolf Flesch sparked

a major controversy with the publication *Why Johnny Can't Read*. In 1967 Jeanne Chall further fanned the flames with *Learning to Read: The Great Debate*. Initially, Chall (1967) desired to “conduct a critical analysis of existing research comparing different approaches to beginning reading. . . . to salvage what we already knew. . . . and to help point up specific gaps in our knowledge” (p. 5). However, the backlash that ensued became widely known as the reading wars, igniting a national debate over the role of phonics versus whole language as the pathway to literacy attainment. Phonics proponents believe children learn to read by sounding out words, whereas whole-language proponents believe in immersing readers in texts rather than focusing on individual words.

In the early seventies the National Commission on Excellence in Education (1983) began analyzing the educational condition in our country. In 1983 after more than a decade of research, *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform* was published. This document declared “23 million adults are functionally illiterate by the simplest tests of everyday reading, writing, and comprehension” (“Indicators at Risk” section). The Commission further concluded, “about 13 percent of all 17-year-olds in the United States can be considered functionally illiterate . . . and among minority youth it may run as high as 40 percent” (p. 3). In essence, a large majority of students were exiting school without having attained reading and writing skills necessary to function in life.

Twenty years later the Koret Task Force launched a study to determine if our nation was still at risk. The findings of this task force were also rather bleak. Peterson (Ed.) (2003) reported the findings of the Koret Task Force in *Our Schools and Our*

*Future . . . are we still at risk?* The report claimed, “test scores were at basically the same level as in 1970” (p. 7). It further stated,

Very scant attention had paid to the K-8 years, seeing them as providing a reasonably successful level of basic skills, when in fact many children were failing to gain the fundamental knowledge they would need to continue learning in subsequent years. (pp. 8–9)

The Koret Task Force’s (2003) research validated the necessity of acquiring a strong foundation in reading in the primary years of schooling if a student is to meet the rigorous challenges of the upper grades.

The culmination of these arguments gave birth to a number of governmentally funded committees and panels over the next several years, such as The National Commission on Excellence in Education, The Committee on the Prevention of Reading Difficulties in Young Children (Snow et al., 1998), The National Academy of Education, and The Center for the Study of Reading. Each of these panels and committees were charged with the mission of studying all facets of reading. The findings of these panels subsequently defined the state of reading education in the United States over the next several years.

As education in the United States continued to garner criticism from several sources, reading as a public health concern also became a national issue. As a result, Congress asked the Director of the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD), in conjunction with the Secretary of Education, to convene a national panel. Thus the National Reading Panel (NRP) was born. The mission of the panel was twofold: assessing the existing level of knowledge in reading instruction and

examining the effectiveness of the various approaches to teaching reading. The NICHD along with the NRP (NICHD, 2000) examined the issue of illiteracy. They deemed illiteracy a major public health concern because of the profound impact it has on the quality of life. Kaminski and Good (1996) had previously discovered a connection between poor readers and a number of social problems including increased high school dropout rates, delinquency, teenage pregnancy, and unemployment. Good, Simmons, and Smith (1998) also noted that there was a correlation between low reading achievement and many behavioral issues that were often manifested in the form of aggressiveness, hyperactivity, hopelessness, and low self-esteem on the part of students.

The findings of the NRP (NICHD, 2000) were published in a report revealing the importance of acquiring literacy skills early in students' primary school years. If students do not develop literacy skills by third grade, it is highly unlikely they will ever close the achievement gap with their peers (Grigg, Daane, Jin, & Campbell, 2003). In response to these findings, President George W. Bush signed into law The No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2003 (NCLB Act, 2003). NCLB allowed schools to begin immediate implementation of the panel's recommendations, setting a clear standard for American education. McKenzie (2002) stated, "with the advent of NCLB, balanced literacy is the USDE's prescription for bringing together the best of reading research from both philosophies [whole-language and phonics]" (p. 2). One of the major provisions of this law was the requirement that every child in every school would be performing at grade level in the basic subjects of reading and math by the year 2014 (NCLB Act, 2003). As cited in *Opposing Viewpoints* (Williams, 2005), in a televised address to the nation on June 10, 2003, President George W. Bush, stated,



Fads came and fads went while students were passed from grade to grade, no matter what they did or did not learn. And as a result, national tests showed that fewer than 1 in 3 fourth graders were reading well and that only 4 in 10 high school seniors were skilled at reading. Under the NCLB, every student in this country will be held to high standards, and every school will be held accountable for results. Every child in America will learn and no child will be left behind. . . . (p. 156)

In 2008 the USDE published *A Nation Accountable: Twenty-five Years After A Nation at Risk*, which stated, “If we were ‘at risk’ in 1983, we are at even greater risk now. . . . our education system is not keeping pace with growing demands” (USDE, 2008, Executive Summary section). It further stated, “We remain a nation at risk but are also now a nation informed, a nation accountable, and a nation that recognizes there is much work to be done” (Executive Summary section). Researchers are asking if NCLB (NCLB Act, 2003) has been successful in ushering in the changes that are desperately needed in education.

In summary, research has widely documented that reading achievement is the most influential determinant of a child’s educational success; yet, large gaps still remain for many children in the United States. With the adoption of NCLB (NCLB Act, 2003), reading achievement has once again been brought to the forefront, capturing the attention of all educators, students, parents, and stakeholders in public education.

### *Problem Statement*

In elementary school the major focus of primary level (k–3) instruction is teaching children to read. As students transition to the intermediate grades, in particular

fourth- and fifth-grades, the focus shifts from students learning to read to students reading for the purpose of learning or gaining new information. In 1999 the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) reported that 38% of all fourth-grade students in the nation were unable to read or write at their current grade level. In 2002, according to the NAEP, only 31% of the nation's fourth graders performed at or above the proficient level (Allen, McClellan, & Stoeckel, 2005).

Prior to these findings, in 1985 the NAEP conducted the Young Adult Literacy Assessment. The results of this assessment were published in a report, *Literacy: Profiles of America's Young Adults* (Kirsch and Jungeblut, 1986). According to the report, there are 25 million Americans who cannot read or write at all and approximately 45 million Americans who are functional illiterates. Adults who are functionally illiterate read words adequately, but they do not comprehend meaning, synthesize the information contained, or use the information to make decisions.

In 1992 a follow-up survey, the National Adult Literacy Survey was conducted. In 2003 yet another survey, the National Assessment of Adult Literacy (NAAL), was completed. Compiled results from the latter two surveys showed little improvement on the issue of illiteracy (Donahue, Daane, & Grigg, 2003). These results confirm the findings of Shaywitz et al. (1999), who concluded that students who are behind in elementary stay behind. It also confirmed the research of the USDE (Grigg et al., 2003), who determined that students who are not reading at grade level by the end of third grade never catch up to their peers.

In summary, research has documented that intermediate students are often at-risk in their literacy development; therefore, it is imperative that students begin receiving

quality instruction in the primary years. Without research-based instructional methods and/or interventions in the primary years of schooling, intermediate students who have not mastered the basic concepts of reading attainment may be doomed to a lifetime of functional illiteracy.

### *Purpose of the Study*

The purpose of this study was to determine whether the implementation of guided reading instruction for students in fourth and fifth grade, was successful for improving reading achievement in a school district referred to in this study as District B. Much like the nationwide trend of low test scores in fourth grade (Grigg et al., 2003), the administration in District B observed a similar achievement gap. With the inception of the Illinois Standards Achievement Test (ISAT) in the spring of 2000, students were originally tested in reading in the third-, fifth-, and eighth-grades only. As students transitioned from third-grade to intermediate grades, a decline in reading scores traditionally occurred. As shown in Table 1, there has been a decline in the percentage of students whose reading scores were classified as either “meeting” or “exceeding” state expectations on the ISAT. Beginning in 2003, this is particularly evident when examining third-grade scores compared to fifth-grade scores. It is important to note that ISAT reading tests were not administered to fourth-grade students prior to 2006, resulting in no data to compare from third-grade to fourth-grade until 2006, when a decline is then noted.

Table 1

*Illinois Standards Achievement Test Scores for Reading in District B*

Percentage of Students Meeting or Exceeding	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
3 <sup>rd</sup> Grade	61%	66%	65.8%	72.3%	79%
4 <sup>th</sup> Grade	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	70.7%
5 <sup>th</sup> Grade	61%	61.8%	58.4%	59.7%	68.8%

As previously stated, the reading scores of intermediate students nationwide have received much attention. Research documented that a child who was not reading at grade level by the end of third grade had a jeopardized chance of continued success in school (Grigg et al., 2003). Tovani (2004) stated, “learning to read doesn’t end in the elementary grades. Reading becomes more complex as students move into middle grades . . . and teachers need to help students understand difficult text” (p. 5). In addition to the subject matter being more complex, another daunting task intermediate and middle school teachers face is the necessity of covering this increased subject matter all within a very limited amount of time in the school day. Students have a limited amount of time to actually digest the information they are taking in (Tovani, 2004).

Further evidence of declining scores in intermediate grades was documented by The Nation’s Report Card (NRC) (2007). The NRC informs the public about the academic achievement of elementary and secondary students in the United States. Report Cards communicate the findings of the NAEP, a continuing and nationally representative

measure of achievement in reading over time. According to the NRC (2007), 33% of fourth graders were below basic levels, while 67% of fourth graders were below proficient levels in reading scores.

According to the American Federation of Teachers (2004), there is no other skill taught in school that is more important than reading. Therefore, teaching children to read by the end of third grade must be the foremost task of all elementary school teachers. The achievement gap in intermediate grades will then be eliminated.

### *Rationale for Study*

District B is a small urban district with a total population of approximately 2,800 students. Housed in six school buildings, the district is comprised of two elementary schools, two intermediate schools, one middle school, and one high school. The ethnic makeup of the district is approximately 95% White, with the other 5% of the student body comprised of Black, Hispanic, Asian, and multiracial ethnicities. The Village of Bethalto has approximately 9,500 residents and has typically been classified as a bedroom community. The village is largely comprised of single-family homes. There are no large industries or manufacturing plants housed within the city limits; therefore, property taxes are the major source of funding for the school. District B encompasses not only the children of the Bethalto residents, but the unincorporated area to the east, known as Cottage Hills, and the unincorporated areas to the west, commonly known as Moro and Meadowbrook, as well. These unincorporated areas are largely comprised of rental homes and apartments. Combined with an aging population of village residents, this factor has added a more mobile and transient factor to the existing population of students in District B over the last 5 years.

With the recent completion of an interstate extension, coupled with a large amount of undeveloped farmland to the north and west of the city, Bethalto may soon experience an increase in their school population. City officials have been working to develop a long-range plan for future growth. Part of this plan includes looking at the impact that rapid growth would have on the existing schools.

For the last several years the reputation of District B has been exemplary. Since the inception of NCLB (NCLB Act, 2003), District B has successfully achieved adequate yearly progress (AYP) each year. This rich heritage of achievement can be attributed to a board and administration who have local control and are committed to excellence in every area of academics. However, as the board, administration, and teachers began to observe the shift in population and demographics over the last several years, every area of academics had to be scrutinized. They intended to adopt a proactive stance, in order to ward off any future problems and maintain the sterling reputation of the school district.

After careful review of ISAT scores over the past 5 years, it was evident a discrepancy existed in reading achievement from third-grade to the intermediate grades of fourth and fifth, as previously demonstrated in Table 1. ISAT reading scores, as students transitioned from third- grade to fourth- and fifth-grades, continued to be lower than administration and district expectations. Therefore, in an ongoing effort to meet the needs of all learners, guided reading instruction was instituted at the beginning of the 2005–2006 school year. The implementation of guided reading instruction supplemented the traditional basal reading program in the fourth- and fifth-grades. The goal was to give students additional instruction in reading, at their instructional reading level, in an effort to raise reading scores. To accomplish this task, teachers were given on-site, professional

development in the form of a book study. All teachers at both intermediate schools were provided copies of *Strategies That Work* (Harvey & Goudvis, 2000) and asked to read a chapter per month. Biweekly meetings were held to discuss the strategies presented in the book. The first meeting of the month focused on the content of the chapter, while the second meeting shared implementation ideas. All fourth- and fifth-grade teachers also received on-site training by the reading coach to assess students. The *Developmental Reading Assessment* (DRA2) was the assessment administered to all students at the beginning of the school year by either the classroom teacher or the reading coach. The assessments were scored and used to determine the instructional reading levels of each student. From the results of the assessments, students were placed in a guided reading group consisting of three to five students. Each group received a daily 25-minute block of extra reading instruction, at their instructional reading level, for the remainder of the school year.

The institution of guided reading instruction met a twofold purpose. Addressing the achievement gap from third-grade to fourth- and fifth-grades became the foremost concern. Secondly, the escalating demands of the NCLB Act, with regard to AYP in reading achievement, incited another. After implementation of guided reading instruction, effective monitoring of the new method also became necessary. Monitoring allowed necessary adjustments to occur, ensuring a more optimal learning environment. With these considerations in mind, the purpose of this study was to determine whether the implementation of guided reading instruction was successful for improving reading achievement for fourth and fifth grade in District B. Guided reading instruction was implemented at the commencement of the 2005–2006 school year. The participants in

this study included all fourth- and fifth-grade intermediate students in District B. The instrument used to measure success, or lack thereof, was the ISAT.

### *Independent Variable*

Guided reading instruction is an instructional approach to teaching reading.

Reading experts Fountas and Pinnell (2001) stated,

The purpose of guided reading is to meet the varying instructional needs of all the students in your class, enabling them to greatly expand their reading powers.

During guided reading, they read a book you have specifically selected to provide a moderate amount of challenge, and you support them in tackling the necessary problem solving to overcome the difficulties they may encounter. (p. 191)

In this study guided reading instruction was implemented in conjunction with the basal reading series at both the fourth-and fifth-grade level. The purpose was to provide differentiated reading instruction to a group of approximately three to five students at the readers' instructional level, based on students' needs. This causal-comparative study employed guided reading instruction, as the independent variable. Its effectiveness for improving reading achievement on the ISAT, in fourth and fifth grades was examined. Three control groups were established: The first comprised reading scores of third-grade students in 2005-2006, the second comprised reading scores of fourth-grade students in 2005-2006, and the third comprised reading scores of fifth-grade students in 2005-2006. Control group scores were then compared with the reading scores of the same students who were now in a fourth-grade treatment group in 2006-2007 and fourth-grade students who were now in a fifth-grade treatment group in 2006-2007. A further comparison was made between the fourth-grade treatment group in 2007-2008 and the fifth-grade



treatment group in 2007–2008. If guided reading instruction proved successful as an instructional teaching method, it would result in a statistically significant increase in reading scores, as measured by the ISAT.

#### *Dependent Variable*

The dependent variable measured student achievement. The Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) recognizes student achievement as meeting or exceeding the learning standards established by NCLB (NCLB Act, 2003) with regard to AYP (ISBE, n. d.). If successful, students from the treatment groups would demonstrate statistically significant improvement in reading achievement, as the result of having participated in guided reading instruction. The ISAT was the instrument used to measure student achievement in this study.

#### *Hypothesis*

H<sub>1</sub>: The implementation of guided reading instruction will result in a statistically significant improvement in reading achievement in fourth and fifth grades in District B, as measured by the ISAT.

H<sub>0</sub>: The implementation of guided reading instruction will not result in a statistically significant improvement in reading achievement in fourth- and fifth-grades in District B, as measured by the ISAT.

#### *Research Questions*

The three research questions were as follows:

*Do teachers believe guided reading instruction is an effective instructional approach to improve ISAT scores?*

*Does teacher commitment to the instructional approach affect the success of guided reading instruction?*

*What instructional skills and strategies are required to develop an effective reading program for intermediate grades, particularly fourth- and fifth-grade?*

#### *Limitations of the Study*

This study contained certain threats to internal validity that must be noted. Fraenkel and Wallen (2003) defined internal validity as “the degree to which observed differences on the dependent variable are directly related to the independent variable, not to some other (uncontrolled) variable” (p. G-4). Threats unique to this study will be detailed and explained.

*Participant characteristics.* According to Fraenkel and Wallen’s definition, the first threat to internal validity was participant characteristics. This may result from the way “individuals or groups differ from one another in unintended ways that are related to the variables to be studied” (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2003, p. 179). In this study participants in the groups being compared differed in terms of age, gender, socioeconomic background, ethnicity, vocabulary, fluency, reading ability, and attitude. With regard to gender, research has reported that males struggle more in the area of reading achievement (Pressley, 2006). Additionally, the background or socioeconomic status of the child may also have an effect on student achievement, due to a lack of exposure to reading materials in the home and/or lack of ability or importance placed on reading activities by caregivers. Since the researcher had no part in the selection or composition of the groups studied and compared, there is the likelihood that the groups are not equal. The same

intermediate grade levels of students studied, however, remains consistent throughout the study.

ISAT scores from 2005 to 2006 were used to form three control groups using the scores of third-, fourth-, and fifth-grade students in District B. These scores were then compared with the treatment group of fourth- and fifth-grade students in 2006–2007. The treatment groups in 2006–2007 had all received guided reading instruction for the first time and were compared to the control groups from 2005 to 2006. In 2007–2008 the group of fifth-graders had received 2 years of guided reading instruction, compared to the fourth-grade group having received only 1 year of guided reading instruction. Therefore, students in the fifth-grade treatment group had the benefit of an extra year of guided reading instruction.

*Mortality.* Another limitation to this study was mortality or loss of participants. Fraenkel and Wallen (2003) stated that “for one reason or another . . . illness, family relocation, or the requirements of other activities, some individuals may drop out of the study. This is especially true in intervention studies, since they take place over time” (p. 179). With the data in this study spanning a period of 2 years, there may have been students who had moved out of the district or were absent on the day of ISAT testing, resulting in a loss of overall participants.

In the qualitative portion of this study, loss of participants was also evidenced in the collection of data. A survey with five open-ended questions was used to poll teachers’ opinions on guided reading instruction. Fraenkel and Wallen (2003) state “it is not uncommon to find that 20 percent or more of the subjects involved do not return their forms” (p. 179). In this study, 20 surveys were distributed with an 80% return rate. This

rate exactly mirrored the statistics cited by Fraenkel and Wallen (2003) with regard to survey return. A margin of error also exists with survey questions, as they may have been interpreted differently by the various teachers, affecting the manner in which they responded. All teachers were also invited to participate in a focus group to share their views on guided reading instruction. Since the request to respond to the survey and participate in the focus group was optional, teachers may have elected not to participate for personal reasons. Additionally, the interpretation of the results and comments provided through both the survey and the focus group were subject to the biases and interpretation of the researcher. Finally, loss of subjects not only limits generalizability, but also has the potential to introduce bias. This occurs because the participants who were lost may have responded differently than those from whom the data was obtained, creating a different outcome.

*Location.* Another threat to internal validity was location. The particular location or classrooms in which data were collected, or in which interventions occurred, all have the potential to impact results (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2003). Because this study was conducted using the scores of only third-, fourth-, and fifth-grade students in District B, it was limited by the particular locations and testing conditions. Testing occurred in various classrooms at four separate school buildings within the district. Instruction varied within each group as well as the instructional methods employed by the various teachers throughout the district. In addition to each teacher administering daily instruction in their own individualistic style, tests may have been administered in different ways. Finally, the replication of the testing environment may have been dissimilar at each site. Lighting, temperature, sound varied at each location, making it impossible to control for all

extraneous variables. Therefore, generalizability to other student populations was a limitation of this study.

*Instrumentation decay.* Instrumentation threats to internal validity may be attributed to instrument decay or the way in which instruments were used (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2003). The instrumentation used in this study was the ISAT. According to the Independent Assessment of the Technical Characteristics of the Illinois Standards Achievement Test (ISBE, 2002), the ISAT was deemed valid and reliable. It was also found to equate well, and considered appropriate for, all levels of student performance. This report compared ISAT with the Stanford Achievement Test, 9th Edition, and found the ISAT matched or exceeded the validity and reliability of this test (ISBE, 2002). As a result of these findings, instrumentation decay was not perceived as a threat in this study.

*Testing.* Testing is another threat to internal validity, “particularly in intervention studies when data are collected over a period of time” (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2003, p. 183). The testing threat often occurs when pre-tests and post-tests are employed to monitor student progress. It may be difficult to determine if increased results are due to the intervention used or due to student familiarity with the test. The ISATs were administered annually each spring, and were newly written tests each year, eliminating familiarity. Therefore, the testing threat with regard to pre-test and post-test instruments was not a factor in this study.

*History.* History can be a threat to internal validity if “one or more unanticipated and unplanned events occur during the course of the study, affecting the responses of participants” (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2003, p. 184). Researchers are limited in their knowledge about the background of the participants in the groups. It is difficult to predict

if one group of participants has encountered experiences that differ from other groups; however, no known history threats were present in this study.

*Maturation.* Maturation may be a threat to internal validity because of the natural course of life and the passage of time. Students change in many ways simply because of aging and experience. In this study the exposure of students to the dependent variable *guided reading instruction* may have increased the intellectual experiences of each child. According to Fraenkel and Wallen (2003), “Maturation is a serious threat only in studies using pre-post data for the intervention group, or in studies that span a number of years” (p. 185). Since this study does employ pre-post data for participants before and after they received guided reading instruction, maturation was identified as a threat to internal validity in this study. Fraenkel and Wallen (2003) stated, “the best way to control maturation is to include a well-selected comparison group in the study” (p. 185). Therefore, the ISAT scores of students in 2005–2006, before the implementation of guided reading instruction, were used as the well-selected comparison group in this study.

*Attitude of participants.* The attitude of participants was another threat to internal validity. Fraenkel and Wallen (2003) defined it as “the way in which participants view a study and their participation in it” (p. 185). Although students were not aware they were part of a study, their attitude toward guided reading instruction may have impacted results. When students were given reading instruction on their level, frustration lessened, and the attitude of participants was positive. According to Fraenkel and Wallen (2003), “this positive effect resulting from increased attention and recognition of subjects has subsequently been referred to as the Hawthorne effect” (p. 186). Therefore, since the attitude of participants was out of the researcher’s realm of control, the Hawthorne effect,

or increased positive feelings of satisfaction and success, may have occurred for some participants in this study.

Bluman (2008) defined the Hawthorne effect as “an effect on an outcome variable caused by the fact that subjects of the study know that they are participating in the study” (p. 653). Although students were unaware of their participation in this study, teacher participants in this study were cognizant of their participation. The addition of guided reading instruction to each teacher’s daily teaching schedule may have impacted their attitude either positively or negatively. Teaching behaviors may have also changed in ways that affected the results of this study. Finally, knowledge of participation in the study may have influenced responses on the teacher survey.

*Regression.* According to Fraenkel and Wallen (2003), “A regression threat may be present whenever change is studied in a group that is extremely low or high in its pre-intervention performance. Like maturation, the use of an equivalent comparison group handles this threat” (p. 187). Consequently, the establishment of a control group of ISAT scores before the implementation of guided reading instruction reduced this threat.

*Implementation.* Finally, implementation threats may occur when the experimental groups are treated in ways that are unintended, thus creating advantages for the group (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2003). The implementation threat in this study was controlled by administering professional development in guided reading instruction to all fourth- and fifth-grade teachers at the same time. By training teachers simultaneously, all received the same information and instructions for implementation, thus eliminating duplicity and confusion.

Two additional threats to internal validity, often identified in causal–comparative studies, include a lack of randomization and an inability to manipulate an independent variable (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2003). Random assignment to groups was not possible since the groups were already formed. The participants in this study were grouped according to grade level, eliminating the random assignment option. Furthermore, manipulation of the independent variable was not possible, as the groups had already been exposed to the independent variable of guided reading instruction. It would also be unethical to withhold an intervention that could benefit students for the purpose of the study.

#### *Definition of Terms*

*Adequate yearly progress (AYP).* According to the mandates of NCLB, the equal increment parameters established by each state, in which states must continue to meet or exceed expectations for all subgroups, in order to achieve 100% proficiency in reading and math by the year 2014 (NCLB Act, 2003).

*Balanced Literacy.* The approach to teaching reading that combines the use of both phonics instruction and whole-language instruction (Wren, 2001).

*Comprehension.* The ability to actively make meaning, using in-the-head processes, which enable the reader to pick up all kinds of information from the text and construct the author’s intended meaning (Fountas & Pinnel, 2006).

*Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA2).* A classroom-based reading assessment designed for on-level and struggling fourth- through eighth-grade students. The primary purposes are to help teachers identify students’ skills and plan for instruction in reading engagement, fluency, and comprehension (Beaver & Carter, 2006, p. 4).



*Fidelity.* “Exact correspondence with fact or with a given quality, condition, or event; accuracy” (The American Heritage Dictionary, n.d., ¶ 1).

*Fluency.* The ability of readers to “read orally with speed, accuracy, and proper expression. Fluency is one several critical factors necessary for reading comprehension” (NICHD, 2000, p. 11).

*Guided Reading.* A method of reading instruction where:

The teacher pulls together small temporary groups to explicitly teach effective reading strategies for processing a variety of fiction and informational texts. The teacher introduces the text and readers read it independently. The teacher selects teaching points based on readers’ needs and sometimes assigns oral and/or written response tasks. Word work may follow. (Fountas & Pinnel, 2001, p. 46)

*Illinois Standards Achievement Test (ISAT).* Annual state assessments in reading/language arts and mathematics for all public school students in grades 3 through 8 and at least once in grades 10 through 12 (ISBE, 2002).

*Instructional reading level.* The level at which a reader can read text with 90% accuracy (i.e., no more than one error per 10 words read). Instructional reading level engages the student in challenging, but manageable text (Torgesen, Houston, Rissman, & Kosanovich, 2007).

*Intermediate grades.* For the purpose of this study, fourth- and fifth-grade students in District B.

*National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP).* The NAEP is the only nationally representative and continuing assessment of what America's students know and can do in various subject areas. Assessments are conducted periodically in

mathematics, reading, science, writing, the arts, civics, economics, etc. NAEP results serve as a common metric for all states and selected urban districts (NRC, n.d.,¶ 1).

*National Reading Panel (NRP).* The panel convened in 1997, by direction from Congress and the Director of NICHD, along with the Secretary of Education, to study the research on the various approaches to teaching reading and make recommendations for additional research needed in early reading development (NRP, 2000).

*No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB).* The federal law signed by George W. Bush in 2001 designed to close the achievement gap with accountability, flexibility, and choice so that no child is left behind. All students in third through eighth grades will be proficient in reading and math by 2014 (NCLB Act, 2003).

*Phonemic Awareness.* The ability to hear and produce the separate sounds in a word and to blend separate sounds into words (Cooper, Chard, & Kiger, 2006).

*Phonics.* The NRP (2000) states that “phonics instruction is a way of teaching reading that stresses the acquisition of letter-sound correspondences and their use in reading and spelling” (NRP, 2000, p. 8).

*Student achievement.* Student progress in meeting or exceeding the learning standards established by the NCLB Act with regard to AYP (ISBE, 2002).

*Vocabulary.* The words a reader is able to recognize in print or use in speech (Beck, McKeown, & Kucan, 2008).

### *Summary*

Throughout educational history, extensive research has been conducted on educational theories and best-practice instructional techniques that provide a child with the skills necessary to become a proficient reader. Reading controversies and national

debates have kept literacy instruction in the public interest for over half a century. In the 21st century, the NCLB Act (2003) has been instrumental in keeping reading achievement a primary concern of administrators and educators throughout the United States. Nevertheless, for all of the attention literacy skills have garnered, a substantial achievement gap in reading currently remains. Prior history has documented that there is no single panacea to cure the literacy problems in the United States.

On the opposing side, many supporters of NCLB (NCLB Act, 2003) now argue that recent results from standardized testing prove NCLB has been beneficial in narrowing the achievement gap in reading. Part of this proclaimed success has been attributed to a provision of this law requiring any interventions instituted in individual reading programs be scientifically research based. Furthermore, instruction must also be delivered with fidelity in order to achieve optimal results (NCLB Act, 2003). In keeping with these statutes, this study measured the effects of guided reading instruction, a research-based instructional approach delivered with fidelity, on student achievement. Chapter II will review the historical underpinnings of the phonics versus whole language debate as a basis for understanding modern literacy practices. Current research with regard to the vital role of literacy instruction in the 21st century will also be reviewed.

## Chapter II – Review of Literature

The ability to read on grade level is of prime importance to the overall success of a child throughout the educational journey. The Florida Center for Reading Research (FCRR) (2007a) cites a large number of students in the U.S. struggle to become competent readers by fourth grade. The NAEP, administered to fourth- and eighth-grade students since 1971, reports that student performance in reading has been extremely stable during an almost 30-year period. Unfortunately this is not a positive finding. On the 2003 assessment, 37% of all fourth graders performed below the basic level, which indicates they do not possess sufficient reading skills to adequately support grade-level work that involves reading (Torgesen, 2005). The FCRR (2007a) states if students are to become proficient readers, it is important for teachers to offer quality instruction in the following manner:

- Provide explicit, differentiated reading instruction for all students.
- Offer engaging opportunities for all students to practice reading.
- Facilitate an organized classroom. (4–5 Student Center Activities: Teacher Resource Guide, p. 1)

A heightened awareness of these facts was the impetus behind President George W. Bush's authorization and signing into law the NCLB Act of 2001. The requirements of NCLB established incremental goals, raising the bar each year, with the mandate that all school children shall be reading at grade level by 2014 (NCLB Act, 2003). School districts all over the United States have reported the institution of aggressive programs and interventions to ensure that students are making adequate yearly progress toward these goals (USDE, 2003).

District B discovered that students who transitioned from primary grades k-3 to the intermediate grades 4–5 needed reading improvement. To combat declining test scores in fourth and fifth grades, guided reading instruction was added to the daily repertoire of intermediate reading instruction, at the start of the 2006–2007 school year. Delivered with fidelity, the addition of guided reading provided instruction in the five critical components of reading—phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension—prescribed by the NRP in 2000. In their report the panel identified these five components as key to any successful reading program (NRP, 2000). Additionally, small-group instruction has been found to benefit student learning, especially those who struggle to learn to read (Foorman & Torgeson, 2001).

The delivery of guided reading instruction occurring in small groups allowed teachers to focus on specific skills and scaffold instruction based on individual needs. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to determine whether the implementation of guided reading instruction for all students in fourth and fifth grades was successful for improving reading achievement in District B. The instrument used to quantify the effectiveness of guided reading instruction was the ISAT. Consequently, the hypothesis for this study was that the implementation of guided reading instruction will result in a statistically significant improvement in reading achievement in fourth and fifth grades in District B, as measured by the ISAT.

The null hypothesis was that the implementation of guided reading instruction will not result in a statistically significant improvement in reading achievement in fourth and fifth grades in District B, as measured by the ISAT.

### *Historical Underpinnings in Reading Research*

For a number of years researchers have contemplated the issue of literacy attainment as well as the specific components of reading instruction, which aid students in their ultimate goal of reading: reading for meaning or comprehension. In 1955 Rudolf Flesch took the reading and educational world by storm with his publication of *Why Johnny Can't Read* (Flesch, 1955). In this book, Flesch claimed that phonics instruction must be an integral part of a child's early literacy instruction if that child is going to be successful in learning how to read.

A decade later, funded by a grant from the Carnegie Corporation, Jeanne Chall (1967) engaged in a 3-year study to either confirm or refute the earlier claims made by Flesch. The publication of *Learning to Read: The Great Debate* was a synthesis of her findings. During this time Chall analyzed 67 research studies, in which she evaluated the various approaches to teaching children to read. She also examined many basal reading programs used by schools. By conducting a critical analysis of the various approaches to beginning reading, Chall believed the outcome would achieve a twofold purpose: First, it would help solidify what researchers already knew about beginning reading. An additional benefit would be the discovery of any gaps in knowledge that remained. In the end, she concluded that both phonics and whole language have their respective roles in any emergent reading program. Chall (1967) stated,

Most school children in the United States are taught to read by what I have termed a meaning-emphasis method. Yet the research from 1912 to 1965 indicates that a code-emphasis method – i.e., one that views beginning reading as essentially different from mature reading and emphasized learning of the printed code for the

spoken language--produces better results, at least up to the point where sufficient evidence seems to be available, the end of third grade. (p. 307)

Chall (1967) further concluded that “the evidence does not endorse any one code emphasis over another” (p. 307), and that the code emphasis should be employed “only as a beginning reading method – a method to start the child on . . . and do not recommend ignoring the reading-for-meaning practice” (p. 307). Chall prefaced her conclusions with the realization that her research findings and recommendations were influenced by the philosophical underpinnings and assumptions of her time. In the end, she believed the most pressing need confronting the reading and teaching community was a reformation in beginning reading instructional methods (Chall, 1967).

In 1983 another publication that cast a negative spotlight on American education and once again focused attention on the reading crisis was the release of a document titled, *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform*. This report by the National Commission on Excellence in Education was addressed to the nation and the Secretary of Education. It made the following claims about the state of education in our country at that time:

- Some 23 million American adults are functionally illiterate by the simplest tests of everyday reading, writing, and comprehension. About 13 percent of all 17-year-olds in the United States can be considered functionally illiterate. Functional illiteracy among minority youth may run as high as 40 percent. Average achievement of high school students on most

standardized tests is now lower than 26 years ago when Sputnik was launched.

- Over half the population of gifted students do not match their tested ability with comparable achievement in school. The College Board's Scholastic Aptitude Tests (SAT) demonstrate a virtually unbroken decline from 1963 to 1980. Average verbal scores fell over 50 points and average mathematics scores dropped nearly 40 points. . . .
- Many 17-year-olds do not possess the "higher order" intellectual skills we should expect of them. Nearly 40 percent cannot draw inferences from written material; only one-fifth can write a persuasive essay; and only one-third can solve a mathematics problem requiring several steps.
- Average tested achievement of students graduating from college is also lower.
- Business and military leaders complain that they are required to spend millions of dollars on costly remedial education and training programs in such basic skills as reading, writing, spelling, and computation. (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983, pp. 2–3)

*A Nation at Risk* garnered much criticism. Opponents claimed the focus was too narrow and restricted. While much attention was devoted to the high school years, it virtually ignored the primary and intermediate grades. However, due to the magnitude of ineptness that this report claimed, the study of reading achievement, mathematics, and other subjects continued to be topics of ongoing discussion and examination amongst academic researchers.



In response to the illiteracy claims, and the rising demands for higher levels of literacy in a technologically advanced society, the USDE and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services asked the National Academy of Sciences to establish a committee to examine how to prevent reading difficulties. The goals of the project were to comprehend the current research base, translate the findings into advice for all stakeholders—i.e. parents, educators, publishers, etc.—and to convey their findings through publications, conferences, workshops, or other outreach activities (Snow et al., 1998). *Preventing Reading Difficulties in Young Children* (Snow et al.) was a synopsis from this research. The publication contained recommendations for identifying children at risk in their literacy learning, and for outlining effective programs and instruction aimed at preschoolers and primary-grade children. In addition, the report presented ideas for fostering higher order reading and thinking skills in all children.

In each subsequent decade educators continued to contribute to the body of research that existed regarding the reading wars, instructional methods, and barriers to learning. However, the pathway to increased literacy in the U.S. remained elusive. Therefore, in 1997 Congress commissioned the NICHD, through the Child Development and Behavior Branch, to work with the USDE in establishing a NRP. Their mission was to assess the amount of research available for teaching children to read and to examine any research-based strategies found to be highly effective. In a major undertaking, the 14-member panel considered some 100,000 reading studies published since 1966, and another 10,000 published before that time. From this pool of studies the panel selected several hundred studies for review and analysis (NRP, 2000). After a number of regional hearings, the NRP (2000) selected the following five topics for intensive study: (a)

phonemic awareness instruction, (b) phonics instruction, (c) fluency, (d) vocabulary, and (e) comprehension (NRP, 2000). The panel's findings, released in April 2000, along with previous research conducted on the reading crisis, provided the impetus for the No Child Left Behind Act signed by President George W. Bush in December 2001. NCLB required states to establish basic reading standards for local school districts and a system of accountability, referred to as *adequate yearly progress* (AYP). This would assure that each of the standards was met on an annual basis (NICHD, 2000).

In 2003 the Koret Task Force conveyed that "Twenty years after the landmark report, *A Nation at Risk*, American k-12 education remains mired in mediocrity and will require enormous changes at its core in order to become more effective" (Peterson, Ed., 2003, p. 21). In the 1983 report, the panel concluded there was a "rising tide of mediocrity," (USDE, *A Nation at Risk* section, p. 1) and although it provided the nation with a much-needed wake-up call, its recommendations did little to improve the educational performance of the masses. Regretfully, the Koret Task Force report stated public education had not risen to the challenges *A Nation at Risk* had outlined, and "the time had come to institute a new system based on the principles of accountability, transparency, and choice" (Peterson, Ed., 2003, p. 15). This report echoed the sentiments of NCLB (2003) and served as additional evidence that public education was in need of standards and accountability based reform.

#### *National Reading Panel Recommendations*

The controversies surrounding the pathway to literacy, as well as the reading achievement gap documented in history, serve as the impetus for current research in literacy attainment. This review literature will further examine the five critical areas of

reading identified by the NRP: phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. Current research in each of these five areas, as well as the practical application of each area in the intermediate grades, will be explored. Additionally, teacher education regarding reading instruction, professional development for teachers, teacher perception and commitment to change, and guided reading instruction are other topics reviewed in this study.

*Phonemic awareness instruction.* The NRP (2000) selected phonemic awareness instruction for review and analysis because “correlation studies have identified phonemic awareness and letter knowledge as the two best school-entry predictors of how well children will learn to read during the first two years of instruction” (p. 7). The panel also found that “children who learned to read through specific instruction in phonemic awareness improved their reading skills more than those who learned without attention to phonemic awareness” (NRP, 2000, p. 2).

Pressley (2006) defined phonemic awareness as “an awareness that words are composed of separate sounds (i.e. phonemes) that are blended to produce words” (pp. 111–112). When children are exposed to language early in their lives and taught to focus on the phonemes in spoken words, one result is a well-developed vocabulary. Children with impoverished language experiences know fewer words and are less phonemically aware (Dickinson, McCabe, Anastasopoulos, Peisner-Feinberg, & Poe, 2003; Juel, 1988). Furthermore, Torgesen (2004), in his research on phonemic awareness, discovered the following information:

Children who are delayed in the development of phonemic awareness have a very difficult time making sense out of “phonics” instruction; they certainly have little

chance to notice the phonemic patterns in written words on their own. A simple way to say this is that for individual children, phonemic awareness is what makes phonics instruction meaningful. If a child has little awareness that even simple words like cat and car are composed of small “chunks” that are combined in different ways to make words, our alphabetic way of writing makes no sense.

(p. 5)

Cooper et al (2006) contributed to the phonemic awareness research by offering the following explanation:

Frequently, phonemic awareness is confused with phonics. They are not the same, though phonemic awareness is a precursor to using phonics. To become literate, a child must grasp the alphabetic principle, which means that the sounds we hear in words in English can be represented by written symbols. Decoding, which is required for reading, involves looking at a print symbol and associating it with a sound. Encoding, which is required for writing, involves learning a sound and knowing what symbol, or letter(s) to write for that sound. Phonemic awareness is critical then for both encoding and decoding. (p. 34)

The researchers suggested that children use both phonemic awareness and the alphabetic principle when they are beginning to write and spell words. Therefore, if there has been a lack of exposure to phonemic awareness, it may be difficult for those children to associate sounds with symbols and blend them into words. Stanovich (1986) and Cooper et al.(2006) believed 90% of students who were identified as having learning disabilities lack phonemic awareness.

Realizing the role of phonemic awareness in early literacy attainment, Juel (1988) conducted a longitudinal study to determine if reading research in the late 1990s supported the developmental lag theory. In other words, did struggling readers ever catch up to their grade-level peers? Her research in phonemic awareness revealed,

Poor readers lacked a critical skill: phonemic awareness. The poor readers entered first grade with little phonemic awareness and they did not approach the ceiling on the phonemic awareness test until the end of third grade. In contrast, average and good readers approached the ceiling on that test two years earlier, at the end of first grade. It was trouble with decoding, rooted in poor phonemic awareness, that appeared to keep the readers from improving. (pp. 2–3)

The NRP's (2000) final report revealed that “phonemic awareness training produced the most benefits for young students, with diminished results for older students” (p. 10). Ivey and Baker (2004) discovered that after students have gained a certain degree of competence with word recognition, working with phonemic awareness is a waste of instructional time. They posed two questions: Does phonemic awareness help students read better? Does phonemic awareness make students want to read more? In the upper grades, researchers believed the answer to both questions was clearly that phonemic awareness instruction does not benefit the learner. (p. 36). Pressley (2006) concurred with the findings of Crain-Thoreson and Dale (1992): that phonemic awareness instruction is highly valued for primary level students, but that instruction should occur before students reach intermediate grades. They stated,

The one emergent literacy experience that is predictive of phonemic awareness is parental teaching of letters and their sounds. Many parents, however, do not

engage in such teaching, so that education that impacts phonemic awareness typically must occur in school. Thus, there is a need to provide phonemic awareness instruction to kindergarten and grade -1 children if they are to develop it. (p. 114)

Overall, recent research supports phonemic awareness instruction in the primary grades as a critical component of beginning reading. Once students have achieved the alphabetic principle, however, instruction in phonemic awareness is of little benefit. Therefore, phonemic awareness instruction is not recommended for students in the intermediate grades, as most students in intermediate grades have achieved the alphabetic principle.

*Phonics.* Phonics instruction focuses on letter–sound relationships as children are taught to read or spell, unlike phonemic awareness, where the focus is on the smallest units of sound. Due to the complexity of the English language, phonics instruction, as it relates to the development of early reading skills, historically has been a topic of controversy and heated debate (Chall, 1967). In the 1980s, whole-language activists presented a strong challenge to educators who endorsed the phonics instruction method as the sole pathway to literacy. Whole-language theorists promoted identifying words using the context of the story with very little emphasis on the sounds. Phoneticists, on the other hand, continued to place strong emphasis on individual sound and symbol correspondences, thus creating more friction between the two schools of thought. In subsequent years the intensity of the debate provided the stimulus for a number of governmentally funded panels and commissions, established for the exclusive purpose of reviewing the state of reading instruction in the United States (Pressley, 2006).

In 1985 the Report of the Commission on Reading (Anderson et al.) published *Becoming a Nation of Readers*. This report included the following information on phonics:

The goal of phonics is not that children be able to state the “rules governing letter-sound relationships. Rather, the purpose is to get across the alphabetic principle, the principle that there are systematic relationships between letters and sounds. Classroom research shows that on average, children who are taught phonics get off to a better start in learning to read than children who are not taught phonics. The picture that emerges from the research then is that phonics facilitates word identification and that fast, accurate word identification is a necessary but not sufficient condition for comprehension. (pp. 37–38)

In 1990 the role of phonics in literacy attainment continued to produce confusion and debate. Congress asked the USDE, under the direction of Dr. Marilyn J. Adams, to compile a report addressing the issue of phonics. The report stated,

1. Existing scientific research supports phonics as an effective method of teaching children to read at the word level. Phonics is an excellent way to teach students the alphabetic code, thus building their skills in decoding unknown words.
2. When students learn the alphabetic code early, they free up mental energy previously used for word analysis. Since they are able to devote the mental effort to meaning, their comprehension is increased.
3. Overall, phonics is a necessary component of reading instruction, but not a sole determinant in teaching children to read. (Adams, 1990, p. 173)

Snow et al. (1998), through their work with the National Research Council, concurred with Adams that phonics was an effective way to teach children beginning reading at the word level. They believed this was more effective than an imbedded approach to phonics, which is often used by whole-language theorists. In addition, they strongly supported phonics instruction that was systematic and followed increasingly challenging phonics patterns. The instruction must be explicit, meaning students must be taught how the patterns and sounds blend together to form words:

A decade later the findings of the NRP (2000) with regard to phonics instruction made the following statements:

Systematic phonics instruction produces significant benefits for students in kindergarten through 6th grade and for children having difficulty learning to read. The ability to read and spell words was enhanced in kindergarteners who received systematic beginning phonics instruction. First graders who were taught phonics systematically were better able to decode and spell, and they showed significant improvement in their ability to comprehend text. Older children receiving phonics instruction were better able to decode and spell words and to read text orally, but their comprehension of text was not significantly improved. (p. 9)

Adding to the increasingly heated phonics debate, Allington (2002) stated, “there is a glaring lack of scientific evidence to show that students who do well with phonics in the primary grades transition to become fluent readers in the upper elementary grades with good reading comprehension” (p. 5). In contrast, Shanahan (2005), in his work with students, concluded,



The teaching of phonics is most important in grades K-2, the year when phonics instruction was found to improve all aspects of reading and spelling ability. In the upper grades, phonics can still help students with word recognition skills.

However, effective phonics instruction should be systematic; that means it should be based on a well-planned, sequential phonics curriculum that supports daily teaching. (p. 2)

Fisher (2008) believed that the debate most educators currently have with phonics instruction is not a debate of phonics versus no phonics, but rather the type of phonics instruction provided. Additionally, there is also the question of how much phonics and when it should be provided. He identified synthetic phonics as a type of phonics instruction where children learn the individual sounds for a word and then synthesize them to form the complete word. Analytic phonics, on the other hand, presents the word to the student and then breaks the word down into its representative sounds by matching them to the corresponding letters and symbols. He believed that most teachers use some form of combined analytic and synthetic phonics.

A summarization of the literature reviewed on the topic of phonics supported phonics instruction in the early stages of literacy attainment. Older students who have not mastered phonics and decoding of words will have greater difficulty reading fluently and ultimately comprehending text. For intermediate students who struggle in this area, it may be necessary to go back and re-teach phonics skills as an intervention, in order to achieve success in the subsequent skill of comprehension.

*Fluency.* The NRP (2000) defined fluent readers as those readers who are able to “read orally with speed, accuracy, and proper expression” (p. 11). It is often considered to

be one of the most important factors impacting a student in their overall comprehension. Research has documented that when readers expend too much of their energy decoding text, fluency is impaired. A further complication of such laborious decoding creates an inability to remember what has been read at the end of a line of text. Rasinski (2003) stated,

Fluent readers chunk text into syntactically appropriate units, which is important because meaning lies in a text's phrases and not individual words. The ability to separate a text into phrases aids comprehension. One of the most common characteristics of a disfluent reader, however, is a word-by-word reading. When a reader reads in this way, "chunking" a text appropriately becomes more difficult and, therefore, finding meaning in that text becomes more difficult as well. (p. 32)

Background research in the area of fluency and its impact on reading attainment has been somewhat sporadic and sparse. One of the earliest documented articles on fluency was the work of LaBerge and Samuels (1974). Their article introduced the reading world to the idea of fluency and its impact on reading. The contents explained how important it was for emergent readers to automatically recognize words in print (automaticity) in order to achieve comprehension. In addition, they believed that until immature readers gained the skills necessary to recognize and decode words with minimal effort, much of their thinking would be tied to identifying words. When word recognition becomes effortless, the reader's focus is then freed up for comprehension. However, in his later solo work, as Samuels (2006) became more astute in his study of fluency, he expanded his thinking on this topic. He then believed, "Fluent reading is defined as reading where word recognition is largely 'automatic,' using little cognitive attention, thus

comprehension is possible. To be considered a fluent reader, the person should be able to decode and comprehend at the same time” (p. 340).

Some 25 years ago Allington (1983) wrote an article, “Fluency: The Neglected Goal.” In that paper he discussed the issue of struggling readers who read word by word rather than in phrases, and usually in boring, monotonous tones devoid of expression. He believed there was no way this experience could be meaningful or pleasurable for the reader, and he suggested these struggling readers needed more common instructional goals to be successful. This resulted in a number of studies conducted from 1980 to 1990, which investigated the instructional practice of repeated readings and their impact on fluency. However, in the following decade, 1990–2000, the issue of fluency seemed to simply vanish from both the research and instructional practices (Allington, 2008).

Over the next 25 years as the need for quantifiable reading research continued to emerge, NICHD was instrumental in funding a number of studies to examine the various aspects of reading attainment as well as barriers to acquiring such skills. Researchers Shaywitz et al. (2002) provided knowledge in the area of brain imagery, yielding some potentially noteworthy findings. They discovered the following:

Normal mature readers utilize three regions on the left side of the brain, the parietal–temporal region, occipital–temporal region, and Broca’s region.

Dyslexics, by contrast, often show impairment in these left-side regions. A slow speed in verbal processing can impair fluency for some readers. This process then impairs the speed of decoding, even though it is not rooted in phonological ability. (p. 214)

This evidence suggested that when a reader struggles in the area of fluency, there may be some other root causes in need of exploration.

Torgesen, Houston, Rissman, and Kosanovich (2007) believed “once students have become relatively fluent in the basic skills required to read the words in text, reading instruction must focus powerfully on both maintaining fluency . . . and increasing the knowledge and thinking skills required for comprehending complex text” (pp. 8–9). Snow et al. (1998) stated “Fluency should be promoted through practice, with a wide variety of well-written and engaging texts, at the child’s own comfortable reading level” (p. 14). Hasbrouck (2005) gave the following tips on developing fluent readers:

To help develop students’ fluency skills, teachers can use a variety of techniques, including modeling fluent reading by reading aloud to students, and at times by having students read aloud with them. This technique is sometimes referred to as choral reading. Students also benefit from opportunities to read aloud to their peers, especially when partners have been trained to correct and encourage each other. Another powerful technique for improving students’ reading fluency is to provide opportunities for repeated reading of text. Repeated reading is strongly supported by research as an effective strategy to develop fluency. (p. 1)

Fisher (2008) believed there has been a greater emphasis in teaching oral reading fluency in the last few years. He suggested that the by-product of oral reading fluency is an increase in silent reading fluency, which ultimately leads to better comprehension. The three components of oral reading fluency are rate, accuracy, and expression. Many school districts are now using some form of fluency assessment, usually referred to as a curriculum-based assessment, to briefly assess a child’s reading, since fluency is believed

to be a strong indicator of other measures of reading. Synthesizing the research on fluency, Allington (2008) stated,

Today in schools, fluency is one focus of early reading lessons (and a focus of lessons for older struggling readers), and in many schools fluency development is being monitored. In fact, in some schools, for some readers, fluency development is a major instructional goal. (p. 5)

As the subjects in this study were fourth- and fifth-grade intermediate readers, the issue of fluency was an important requirement of the overall instructional practices employed in the classroom. Guided reading provides opportunities for readers to practice fluency through partner reading, choral reading with a fluent model, and whisper reading into a phonics phone allowing immediate feedback on their reading. Allington (2008) adequately sums up the matter of fluency as it relates to intermediate readers, “Fostering fluency is one important aspect of reading lesson . . . however, a focus on fluency may be most appropriate with children who struggle with its development” (p. 31).

*Vocabulary.* Beck, McKeown, and Kucan (2008) defined vocabulary as “learning meanings of new words” or “words that a reader recognizes in print” (p. 1). The NRP (2000) stated that “vocabulary is comprised of two things, oral vocabulary and reading vocabulary” (p. 13). As cited in Blachowicz and Fisher (2005), over 20 years ago Chall (1983) distinguished between the two types of vocabulary that are necessary for reading attainment: word-recognition vocabulary and meaning vocabulary. Chall’s definition of the two is as follows:

Word-recognition vocabulary consists of the words that a student can pronounce when seen in print, whether by sight or by use of word attack skills. Meaning

vocabulary consists of words that a student can attach appropriate meaning to, or define. Recognition vocabulary is print-bound, whereas meaning vocabulary is not; students have many words in their speaking vocabularies that they have never seen or attempted to read in print. (p. 2)

Research has clearly specified that as a child learns to read, vocabulary development is of utmost importance to overall reading success. Not only does it affect a child's reading performance, it also impacts a child's ability to fully participate socially and academically. Vocabulary studies in the past have indicated that an average child enters kindergarten with approximately 5,000 words in his/her meaning vocabulary; however, many enter with far fewer than this, creating a disadvantage in reading success (Hart & Risley, 1995). Additionally, Beck et al. (2008) found that the gap only widens, because little is done to expand vocabulary knowledge in school, which was equally documented by a number of other researchers. Scott, Jamieson-Noel, and Asselin (2003) noted in their observational study of 23 intermediate-grade classrooms, teachers spend "little time discussing the meaning of words" (p. 282). Their focus of vocabulary instruction was mentioning a word, providing a synonym, and/or assigning words for students to look up the definition of in a dictionary.

The process of learning words happens in stages or increments. Many researchers agree on the following levels of word knowledge: (a) unknown, (b) knowledge that the word exists, (c) partial knowledge, and (d) complete knowledge (Dale, 1965; Chall, 1983; Stahl, 1999). Blachowicz and Fisher (2005) reported "this continuum highlights the difference between receptive and expressive vocabulary, with an individual's receptive vocabulary exceeding his or her expressive vocabulary" (p. 3). They further stated that

the “overall goal of a comprehensive vocabulary program is to expand both receptive and expressive vocabularies, and to continually move words from the receptive level to the expressive level” (p. 3). In other words, an individual gains vocabulary skills by hearing words and understanding their meaning, even before being able to read or write those words. As a result, reading vocabulary evolves from an individual’s oral vocabulary. This explains why beginning readers read and write only the words that they know how to speak. As students mature, vocabulary acquisition becomes more complex. Cooper et al. (2006) stated,

As you become a better reader, you increase your vocabulary through wide reading. Students learn oral and print vocabulary in a variety of ways. They are a) students learn some words through wide reading, discussion, and life experiences, b) students learn some words by developing an awareness of words, c) students learn some words through direct instruction, d) students learn some words by learning vocabulary related skills. (pp. 78–79)

The report of the NRP (2000) stated that vocabulary should be taught both directly and indirectly. The direct approach focuses on learning specific words, while the indirect approach employs context clues and knowledge of language features to determine word meaning. The most effective approaches, however, utilize multiple methods of instruction. Beck, McKeown, and Kucan (2002) felt that “a robust approach to vocabulary involves explaining the meanings of words along with thought-provoking, playful, and interactive follow-up” (p. 2). These might include drawing pictures to illustrate words, using examples and non-examples of the word, and relating it to other similar objects or ideas. They further stated that “instruction must focus on learning

vocabulary from context because there are just too many words to learn to get the job done through direct instruction” (p. 3). The use of root words, suffix, and prefix clues all aid students in deciphering the meaning of words in context.

Blachowicz and Fisher (2005) developed a framework for teaching vocabulary through explicit instruction. It focuses on the following categories of words: comprehension words, useful words, academic words, and generative words. While guided reading instruction may not always divide the essential vocabulary words into the four categories specifically shown, vocabulary instruction is a component of guided reading instruction, as an aid to comprehension. Table 2 lists an example of each of the different word categories that might be established in a fiction or nonfiction text from the following quote concerning the Civil War: “In contrast to the wounded soldier who was sent home, the homesick Rebel soldier was sent to be reunited with his regiment” (pp. 6–7).



Table 2

*Four Types of Words to Teach Explicitly*

Word Type	Explanation	Example
Comprehension Word	Essential to understanding the selection and/or critical to a unit of study	Rebel
Useful Word	Not critical to a particular domain, but likely to be encountered in other contexts	Homesick
Academic Word or Phrase	Causes much trouble for students lacking school experience	In contrast to
Generative Word	Provides a portal to further word learning or strategy instruction (e.g., includes a common prefix)	Reunited

*Note.* From *Integrated vocabulary instruction: Meeting the needs of diverse learners in k–5*, by C. Blachowicz and P. Fisher, 2005, Naperville IL: Learning Point Associates, pp. 6–7.

Due to the enormity of words in the English language, precluding teachers from teaching every single word, Beck et al. (2008) developed another framework for teaching

vocabulary through the concept of “word tiers” (p. 7). This concept involves the following tiers in vocabulary instruction,

Tier One representing every day, basic, familiar words; Tier Two as the set of words that are more sophisticated than the basic set but of high utility for literate language users; and Tier Three including words that are very rare, along with words that apply to specific domains. (p. 7)

Within this framework, these researchers particularly advocated the teaching of Tier Two words as the core of vocabulary instruction because of the strong role that they play in literacy. They believed readers encounter these type of words in their readings on a daily basis, however, they do not encounter them as frequently in listening to daily language. With the understanding acquiring meaning from written text is more difficult than from oral contexts, “learners are less likely to learn Tier Two words on their own in comparison to the words of everyday oral language” (p. 8).

One of the reasons that gaining meaning from written text is more difficult than gaining meaning from oral language has to do with the lack of clues. In oral language, listeners utilize tone, gestures, and the setting in which the communication is occurring as an aid to comprehend the intended meaning. In written text, however, readers are required to build their own meaning from the words on the page, and the context in which the words are written, without the aid of aural clues. This requires readers to work much harder to comprehend what is being said. Beck et al. (2008) summed up their findings on Tiers, with the following words:

If students are to become successful in academic life, they need to be able to get meaning from text, which in turn means being able to build meaning using the

more sophisticated vocabulary of written language. The sophisticated vocabulary of written language = Tier Two words. (p. 8)

In conclusion, vocabulary instruction for intermediate-grade students was deemed highly useful, as the content and complexity of subject matter continues to increase each year. The wide reading of nonfiction, occurring daily in guided reading instruction, aids in the development of a sophisticated vocabulary. In 2002 the RAND Reading Study Group (Snow) reestablished the essential relationship vocabulary knowledge has to overall reading comprehension. They determined that the kind of vocabulary instruction that is needed for comprehension improvement to be successful, however, must include the following items: several exposures to each word, both contextual and definitional information, and engagement of students in active or deep processing of the words. The guided reading format provides students opportunities to participate in each of these types of learning. Beck et al. (2008) added the following, “vocabulary knowledge needs to be deep and rich and imparted to students in energetic ways that encourage them to think about what they are learning” (p. 6).

*Comprehension.* The NRP (2000) found that “comprehension is critically important to the development of children’s reading skills and therefore to the ability to obtain an education” (p. 13). Durkin (1993) stated that “reading comprehension has come to be the essence of reading, and is essential not only to academic learning in all subject areas, but to lifelong learning as well” (p. 7). Further, Pressley (2006) credited Durkin’s landmark study in 1978–79 with enlightening the reading community about the need for instruction in the area of comprehension. Rather than teaching children how to comprehend, Durkin believed teachers were merely assessing comprehension through the

use of questioning. Students were assigned text to read and then were asked to respond to a series of questions over the material that had just been read, as a measure of their comprehension. The conclusions drawn from her study ignited researchers to begin studying comprehension as a process and discover ways to effectively increase it (Pressley, 2006, p. 300).

The study of comprehension and its vital link to reading has been well documented by Pressley (2006). He discovered in the late 1970s and early 1980s that representational theorists dominated much of the teaching regarding comprehension. Theorists believed the following,

If children failed to understand and remember text, the problem might have been that they were not constructing complete representations of the ideas coded in text. Their solution was to encourage students to construct fuller representations through instruction, using strategies for enhancing mental representations of texts - strategies that could be applied before, during, and after reading to construct summaries, images, story grammar representations, and specific instantiations of schemata capturing the ideas in text. (pp. 302–303)

By the middle 1980s researchers realized that a less encumbering method for teaching comprehension was needed. This led to the embracement of direct teaching, comprehension strategies. Teachers would begin instruction with explanation and modeling of the strategies, while students practiced the strategies with assistance from the teacher, until they were able to perform the tasks independently. In the 1990s, the idea that balanced reading instruction should be synonymous with balanced comprehension

instruction, took on a whole new level of meaning. Pressley (2006) stated the following about balanced comprehension instruction:

It involves the development of word recognition skills, vocabulary world knowledge, (e.g. through extensive reading), and the teaching of comprehension strategies – including strategies that include the use of prior knowledge, the reading of diverse type of texts, and diverse tasks . . . (p. 337)

In the 1990s Pearson, Dole, Duffy, and Roehler (1992) determined that proficient readers routinely use a set of interwoven strategies while reading to help them comprehend text. In the next decade, Miller (2002) expounded on this thinking by citing that active, thoughtful readers employ the following strategies: (a) activating prior knowledge before, during, and after reading; (b) visualizing while reading; (c) making inferences and drawing conclusions; (d) making judgments and interpretations; (e) asking questions of themselves and the author; (f) determining important ideas and themes; and (g) synthesizing what they read. The reader who is able to employ some, or all, of these reading strategies have increased comprehension.

The implications of studying comprehension over the past several decades have further revealed the need for an increased emphasis on the various components that intertwine, and assist students in truly achieving the end result of reading, also known as comprehension. Tovani (2004) noted “one critical concept embraced by researchers and literacy specialists is that learning to read doesn’t end in the elementary grades. Reading becomes more complex . . . and teachers need to help students understand difficult text” (p. 5). According to Harvey and Goudvis (2000) “Comprehension instruction is not just

one more thing; in fact, when it comes to reading, it's likely the most important thing” (p. 6).

The most current research regarding the best methods for teaching comprehension strategies to intermediate readers include a variety of strategies. Gallagher (2004) advised teaching students specific strategies to help them read text carefully and with purpose. Even students reading at or above grade level often need help, especially if the text is unfamiliar or complex. Keene and Zimmerman (2007) discovered “instruction that actively engages students in asking questions, summarizing and synthesizing text, and identifying important ideas improves comprehension, and that proficient reading involves using more than one strategy at a time” (p. 27). Additionally, Raphael, Highfield, and Au (2006) also believed that students must learn more than just individual strategies. Students must learn the following:

1. how strategies work together;
2. that there are multiple strategies that may be appropriate at different points in the reading cycle; and
3. that they need to develop—over the course of the school year and as they progress to higher grade levels—a growing sophistication for applying strategies to increasingly difficult texts for increasingly challenging purposes. (p. 62)

The research of Sousa (2001) examined the issue of comprehension attainment. He determined that the curriculum in today's schools must provide connections that are relevant to a student's past, if they are to find meaning. Additionally, the attitude of the

student, with regard to learning, predetermined the amount of effort devoted to it.

Gallagher (2004) further stated,

A critical component of achieving comprehension is the requirement of background knowledge on the part of the reader, although background knowledge before reading may not be enough. Students need to care about what they are reading. They must see the relevance of the assignment. (p. 29)

A student who has minimal background knowledge about a subject often fails to see the significance, as he or she lacks schema to connect the new information with the old. Poor comprehension and stifled learning may result.

Tovani (2004) identified metacognition of comprehension as another facet of comprehension that was required, and believed students must employ the following comprehension strategies to be a good reader,

Good readers monitor their comprehension. They know when the text is making sense and when it isn't. They recognize signals that indicate when they are understanding what they are reading. They recognize that they are confused and then do something to repair meaning. Good readers use "fix-up" strategies, which can be taught to readers at any age. (p. 5)

In consideration of all facets of comprehension, Duffy (2003) stated that "Good instruction in reading comprehension does not happen in a short unit of study or within an intensive reading program. Rather, teaching about thoughtful reading should happen in every class and throughout the year" (p. 47). Tompkins (2003) said, "students must comprehend what they are reading in order to learn from the experience, make sense of their reading in order to maintain interest . . . and derive pleasure from reading, to

become lifelong readers” (p. 247). In addition, struggling readers, and even those who have no difficulty reading, need ongoing explanations and discussions about the process of reading and how to make sense of what they read. Teachers need to describe the mental activities involved in making sense of text and encourage students to share the specific processes they use to understand as they read (Ivey & Baker, 2004). Teachers can accomplish this through modeling aloud thinking processes for students as they read, stopping to share thinking at key points, and inviting students to do the same.

In conclusion, the NRP (2000) suggested that teaching a combination of comprehension strategies is the most effective approach; however, there are questions that remain with regard to the type of strategies that are most effective for certain age groups. For example, do younger students require different strategies than older students? Can you teach too many strategies and overwhelm students? It was evident that ongoing research must be conducted in the area of comprehension instruction in order to fully understand how to acquire meaning from the written text, the true purpose for reading.

#### *Teacher Education and Reading Instruction*

The NRP (2000) documented that the ability to teach reading and comprehension strategies to students at any age level is complex. It requires teachers to have a firm grasp on the content that is presented in the various texts as well as a large amount of knowledge of the strategies themselves. Ivey (2003) stated that “it is your knowledge about the world and your experiences that enable you to bring life to text – a voice to a text – that many students cannot yet achieve” (p. 813). As a result, classroom teachers, according to Koepf (2008) must “strive for high-quality classroom reading and writing



instruction and know what it looks like. They must also rely on up-to-date professional research to inform daily decisions” (p. 12).

One complication that has arisen at the intermediate level has been the expectation that students would already have a solid foundation in reading skills upon their arrival in fourth or fifth grade. Further, intermediate-grade teachers often choose to teach at the intermediate level because of a passion for individual subjects, like science or social studies. Although the intention may have been an avoidance of teaching children to read, which dominates the curriculum and instructional time of primary grades, many intermediate-grade teachers are now discovering the necessity of possessing skills to teach reading as well. Tovani (2004) found the additional burden of adding more new content, due to changing state and national standards, made content area teachers avoid the teaching of reading even more. Tovani (2004) claims, “Few, if any, content teachers chose the profession because they wanted to be reading teachers” (p. 7).

Although there has been an increase in content to be taught, Tovani (2004) and Pearson et al. (1992) were in support of teachers paring the curriculum in terms of reading instruction, stating:

Currently, most reading curricula contain too many skills to teach. Pressured by so much to cover in so little time, teachers go quickly over everything, which leaves no time to teach anything very well. Everyone involved—teachers, students, parents—would benefit from a leaner, meaner comprehension curriculum composed of a handful of key strategies taught well and frequently applied to real texts. (pp. 188–189)

Raphael et al. (2006) believed that many teachers have felt the pressure to raise test scores and have succumbed to a curriculum comprised of test preparation strategies. This choice has resulted in an inferior education for students, and taken the joy out of teaching for educators. Raphael et al. further suggested that the short term goal of scoring well on a test has replaced the long term goal of reading instruction that teaches comprehension strategies that will serve a student well in school and in life. As a result, they called for a reform in teacher education practices and admonished teachers to incorporate reading instruction strategies that can be applied to a wide variety of situations, whether at school, work, or life in general. One solution to combating this problem, was to provide ongoing professional development opportunities so that teachers can stay apprised of the most current strategies for optimal effectiveness.

#### *Professional Development and Teacher Effectiveness*

The NRP (2000) found that only a small number of studies existed which studied the effectiveness of preservice and inservice teacher education. Generally, however, inservice professional development seemed to demonstrate positive effects on teaching by producing substantially higher student achievement. Wright, Horn, and Sanders (1997) and Marzano, Pickering, and Pollock (2005) stated that researchers have discovered that individual classroom teachers have more of an effect on student achievement than originally thought, citing the following:

Seemingly more can be done to improve education by improving the effectiveness of teachers than by any other single factor. Effective teachers appear to be more effective with students of all achievement levels, regardless of the heterogeneity in their classrooms. If the teacher is ineffective, students under the teacher's

tutelage will show inadequate progress academically regardless of how similar or different they are regarding their academic achievement. (p. 63)

The current era of accountability and school reform presents a growing number of challenges for teachers in the 21st century, particularly in the area of literacy instruction. Veteran teachers who have been teaching for a number of years, as well as teachers who are recent graduates, are held to vigorous standards for meeting AYP on the ISAT. Ongoing professional development is crucial for all teachers to continue updating their skills and maintaining the highest levels of knowledge with regard to the latest cutting edge research in education. Atkinson, Wilhite, Frey, and Williams (2002) concurred with Snow, Burns, and Griffin (1998):

Excellent reading instruction, implemented by teachers who receive ongoing staff development in research-based literacy practices and have access to sufficient resources to provide literacy-rich classroom environments, is essential in preventing the development of reading problems. (p. 159)

Allington (2001) and Koepf (2008) believed that each teacher has a personal obligation for their own ongoing professional development. A teacher's commitment to professional development should be driven by their desire to become a better teacher each year they are in the profession. Additionally, each district should be committed to helping develop and support each teacher in their professional growth. This is evidenced by providing quality professional development opportunities to all employees in each school district. One method for providing ongoing professional development has been the use of study groups. As reported by Allen (2006),

study groups provide teachers with the opportunity to reflect, review, and integrate new thinking into their classroom instruction. Study groups are not just about new activities to try tomorrow in the classroom. It's important that new literacy practices be integrated and fit within a cohesive literacy framework.

(p. 48)

Study groups can be employed not only as a method for helping teachers learn new ideas and implement new practices, but also as an avenue for deeper thinking and reflection. As teachers reflect on their own classroom practices, often they discover areas of weakness as well as methods to correct them, resulting in increased teacher effectiveness.

Realizing the critical role of professional development to any new initiative, a schoolwide book study was employed, prior to the implementation of guided reading instruction in this study. Teachers independently read *Strategies that Work* (Harvey & Goudvis, 2000), and meetings were held the first of each month to discuss the content. A second mid-month meeting occurred to discuss implementation ideas and successes. Innovative ways to teach reading comprehension strategies were discovered and shared collegially, increasing the effectiveness of all teachers.

#### *Teacher Perception and Commitment to Change*

Research on the effects of teacher commitment to the process of change was limited. Yero (2002) alleged the success of any new program is only as strong as the teachers who are instituting the change and contends,

The individual beliefs and values of teachers play a vital role in shaping the objectives, goals, curriculum, and instructional methods of schools. Those same

beliefs and values can spell success or failure for any reform efforts imposed by a school or district. (p. 1)

According to Routman (2005), real change in education is a very slow process, largely because teachers' beliefs are slow to change. Simply adding a new activity or program may only be a surface change and does not automatically insure the success or effectiveness of the program. An effective teacher must first recognize the beliefs they hold regarding an issue, then question and challenge those beliefs in tandem with new research and information on any new program or idea. Once teachers evaluate it and perceive it to be a worthwhile change, beliefs follow, and teacher commitment to the process occurs.

In developing a model of the teacher change process and factors that impede success, Guskey (2002) made some critical observations. He stated, "the majority of programs fail because they do not take into account two critical factors: (1) what motivates teachers to engage in professional development, and (2) the process by which change in teachers typically occurs" (p. 382). He purported any new teaching technique or program for improving student achievement required teachers' willingness to accept an additional workload immediately. New techniques required time to learn and incorporate, creating some automatic reluctance. Additionally, anxiety about abandoning current practices in favor of new practices that have not passed the test of time carried an increased risk of failure and embarrassment for teachers. Finally, uniform implementation was impossible, as teaching and learning are impacted by a multitude of factors, creating varied results. Guskey suggests that high-quality professional development must be a critical piece of any program focused on improving student achievement.

With regard to the research on teacher perception and commitment to change, the implementation of guided reading instruction in this study exhibited some cause for concern. The decision to implement guided reading instruction as a requirement for all fourth-and fifth-grade students was made prior to the start of the 2006–2007 school year. Professional development, in the form of a book study, was ongoing throughout the year. As the research stated, time to evaluate and refine current beliefs, in consideration of new information being received, is a necessity. Without such analysis true commitment to a program may not be fully realized. With the process of implementation and professional development occurring simultaneously, teachers had limited opportunities to alter their beliefs, which may have impacted their commitment to the program.

#### *Guided Reading Instruction*

“Guided reading is an instructional approach in which you bring together a small group of students who are similar enough in their reading development that they can be taught together for a period of time” (Fountas & Pinnel, 2006, p. 373). Guided reading instruction, in one form or another, has been gaining acceptance as a viable and effective means of providing reading instruction for the past 10 to 20 years. The study “Beating the Odds in Teaching All Children to Read” (Taylor, Pearson, Clark, & Walpole, 1999) discovered that in the most effective classrooms, students participated in various small-group instruction up to 60 minutes a day. These small groups might take on the form of guided reading, literature circles, reciprocal teaching, or shared-book experiences. Studies show that most primary teachers differentiate reading instruction through guided reading instruction (Fountas & Pinnel, 2001). However, “the landscape often changes when students enter fourth grade” (Robb, 2008, p. 14). According to Fountas and Pinnel

(2006), guided reading instruction may be highly utilitarian for intermediate students for the following reasons:

Its purpose is to help readers develop systems of strategic actions for processing increasingly challenging texts. . . . Most students require systematic small-group reading instruction. They need to learn how to read with comprehension and fluency, across a gradient of texts that makes ever increasing demands. (p. 373)

Trail (1999) and Hoyt (2000) have been strong proponents of guided reading instruction. The opportunities small-group instruction provides to observe learners closely and get to know them better as learners, and as individuals, is invaluable. Hoyt offered the following thoughts on individualizing instruction in small guided reading groups:

If we believe that children are individuals, with individual learning needs, we have an obligation to look beyond whole-class instruction and search for the small-group and individual teaching strategies that enable us to raise the bar for the children and ourselves. (p. 127)

Hoyt (2000) further believed that small groups increase engagement and provide a critical role in supporting learner development. This is accomplished through “focusing on individual needs, explicit teaching, teacher coaching and scaffolding, offering strategic support in materials that might be too difficult for independent reading, and social interaction” (p. 127).

Allington (2001) conducted a number of studies on the effectiveness of various reading strategies and best-practice reading instruction. As a result, the following conclusions with regard to guided reading instruction were compiled:

Reading books that are appropriate for a student's reading proficiency level is essential to motivate readers to improve and succeed. Schools and classrooms must be designed so that books are readily available and appropriate for all children. Children need to develop fluent reading to become proficient readers, and teachers need to be familiar with instructional models and methods for fostering fluency. (p. 167)

Guthrie, Schafer, and Huang (2001) concurred with Allington (2001). The culmination of their research showed that texts which are matched to struggling readers' actual reading levels results in more substantial gains for students who are at the lowest levels of proficiency. In this study, this was the purpose for dividing the members of each class into guided reading groups, and subsequently providing daily instruction on the group's guided reading level. Readers should ideally spend 80% of their day working with texts that they are able to read with 90% accuracy. If readers are to be successful, instruction needs to be based on materials they are able to read accurately, fluently, and with good comprehension. Therefore, guided reading instruction, when implemented correctly, can be a most effective method for achieving each of these purposes.

*The Principal's Flip Chart* (ISBE, 2004), a guide to best-practice instruction for administrators, endorsed the use of guided reading instruction. Guided reading instruction provides a framework to support struggling readers, as well as on-level readers, employing a multitude of strategies. It states the following about guided reading instruction:

The teacher encourages students to think critically about the text and apply strategies that have been modeled and demonstrated in shared reading. Most of



the time is spent in discussion, in appreciating and enjoying the literature (fiction and non-fiction), and in sharing personal and group insights. Oral reading is used to emphasize a particular passage or setting, to back up statements in discussion, and to teach strategies as the need arises. Guided reading is designed to provide an opportunity for students to develop and practice reading strategies necessary to read independently; it allows teachers to observe students as they read unfamiliar text and ensures that students read the new text successfully. (p. 13)

Harvey and Goudvis (2000) discovered that teachers of reading must make what is implied or imbedded very clear and precise. With the guided reading model of instruction, they suggested “modeling the strategy for the class, guiding students in its practice in small groups and pairs, and providing large blocks of time for students to read independently and practice using and applying the strategy” (p. 12). Ultimately, the goal of instruction is then for students to begin applying the necessary strategies with automaticity. Harvey and Goudvis (2000) credit Pearson and Gallagher (1983) with introducing the “gradual release of responsibility approach.” Fielding and Pearson (1994) further expounded on the gradual release of responsibility, as it relates to guided reading instruction, through the following steps:

1. After explicitly modeling, the teacher gradually gives the student more responsibility for task completion.
2. The teacher and students practice the strategy together.
3. The teacher scaffolds the students’ attempts and supports student thinking, giving feedback during conferring, and classroom discussions.

4. Students share their thinking processes with each other during paired reading and small- and large-group discussions. (p. 13)

Similar to the gradual release of responsibility, Fountas and Pinnell (2001) used Vygotsky's zone of proximal development to describe the experience of a learner who works successfully with the support of another and extends his knowledge in the process.

They believed

guided reading makes it possible for students not only to read a more difficult text but also to reflect on the text, understand it, and use it as a way of learning more about reading. In the Vygotskian sense, guided reading makes it possible to teach at the cutting edge of students' understanding. . . . With each guided reading lesson, focused instruction is being given to students at their point of need.

Without this teaching "at the point of need," many students will not progress.

(p. 192)

Guided reading instruction was also endorsed by Torgesen (2004), particularly for students who were at-risk in their literacy development. He believed that teachers should increase the instructional time and intensity for those students who were most at-risk.

Thus, guided reading instruction was the most practical method for delivering such intensive and focused instruction to a group of four or five children with similar instructional needs. He summed up his findings with the following statements:

Children with reading difficulties, or children at risk for these difficulties would learn better under conditions of greater instructional intensity than they learn in typical classroom settings and intensive small-group work must be frequent.

Success has been produced when groups met 20 to 45 minutes per day, four to five days per week. (pp. 7–8)

### *Summary*

According to the literature reviewed herein, teaching students to read is a rather complex process that involves a balance of pedagogy and theory, particularly in the areas of reading identified by the NRP (2000). Research has shown that phonemic awareness instruction had very marginal benefits for intermediate-grade students; however, phonics, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension must be integral components of a balanced literacy program for fourth- and fifth-graders. Intermediate-grade teachers must also avail themselves of opportunities for ongoing professional development as well as training in reading strategies for older students. Farstrup (2002) stated, “Qualified and talented teachers are essential if effective, evidence-based reading instruction is to occur” (p. 1). Knowledge and implementation of exemplary instructional practices for teaching literacy are also mandatory. To this end, guided reading instruction has shown great promise, not only for primary students, but for intermediate students as well. Bukowiecki (2007) sums up the matter of literacy instruction,

Becoming an exemplary teacher of reading evolves over time. New teachers need more than a broad knowledge base regarding optimal instructional practices, the diversity of student learners, relevant skills instruction, and appropriate varied assessment practices. Both novice and experienced teachers must be willing to extend their present knowledge regarding literacy education by constantly researching and learning about innovative and commendable literacy practices, theories, and policies. (p. 6)

### Chapter III – Methodology

Reading achievement is a crucial component for successful school performance at any grade level. As students transition into intermediate grades, the increased subject matter and challenging vocabulary make reading instruction a necessity (Tovani, 2004). The administration of District B discovered fourth- and fifth-grade reading scores had declined over a period of 3 years. With the escalating demands of the NCLB (NCLB Act, 2003), continuous school improvement measures were sought. The decision to institute an additional block of small-group reading instruction to the existing whole group basal instruction was chosen as a possible solution to the problem. At the start of the 2006–2007 school year, 25 minutes of daily guided reading instruction was implemented for all fourth- and fifth-grade students, in addition to 45 minutes of whole group basal instruction already intact.

The purpose of this study was to determine whether the implementation of guided reading instruction for all students in fourth- and fifth- grades was successful for improving reading achievement in District B. The implementation of guided reading instruction was evaluated on the basis of student achievement on the reading portion of the ISAT. Initially, the categorical variables of Meets or Exceeds were examined for a statistically significant improvement in reading scores. Further examination of statistical data compared the reading achievement of students before the implementation of guided reading instruction to the performance of the same students after having received guided reading instruction. The hypothesis for this study was that the implementation of guided reading instruction will result in a statistically significant improvement in reading achievement in fourth and fifth grades in District B, as measured by the ISAT. The null

hypothesis was that the implementation of guided reading instruction will not result in a statistically significant improvement in reading achievement in fourth and fifth grades in District B, as measured by the ISAT. The research questions were:

1. *Do teachers believe guided reading instruction is an effective instructional approach to improve ISAT scores?*
2. *Does teacher commitment to the instructional approach affect the success of guided reading instruction?*
3. *What instructional skills and strategies are required to develop an effective reading program for intermediate grades, particularly fourth and fifth grade?*

#### *Participants*

The district in this study was a community unit district of approximately 2,800 students in a semi-rural Midwestern community located in Illinois. The district was split into regions from east to west. The district included one high school (grades 9 through 12), one middle school (grades 6 through 8), two intermediate buildings (grades 4 through 5), and two primary buildings (grades k through 3).

The first-year scores were examined was the 2005–2006 school year. The demographics of the district included 94.5 % White participants, 2.4% Black, 1.2 % Hispanic, and 1.9% other. Low-income participants, based on free- and reduced-lunch status, comprised 27.2% of the population. The average class size for grades kindergarten through fifth was 22 students. The attendance rate was 93.2%, with a 12.7% mobility rate. The chronic truancy rate was 1.6 (ISBE, 2006). Overall demographics in subsequent

years might vary slightly, depending on the enrollment population and mobility rate each year.

For the quantitative portion of this study, reading scores from the 2006 through 2008 school years for third-, fourth- and fifth-grade students in District B were used. In particular, the ISAT reading scores were used for statistical comparisons. Individual standardized scores for each student were obtained from secondary core data, as reported by the ISBE. Hard-copy data (ISBE, 2006, 2007, 2008) is stored in the central offices of District B.

The qualitative portion of this study analyzed thoughts and opinions expressed by fourth- and fifth-grade teachers in District B. Each intermediate teacher in fourth- or fifth- grade, at the commencement of the 2006–2007 school year, received a survey to convey their thoughts on the implementation of guided reading instruction. Further, the same fourth- and fifth-grade teachers received an invitation, via email, to participate in a focus group discussing the implementation of guided reading instruction.

#### *Sampling Procedure*

The ISAT reading scores of the entire population of third-, fourth-, and fifth-grade students in District B were used for this study, with two excluded populations. The two exceptions were (a) two students in fourth- and fifth- grade who did not take the ISAT because their Individualized Education Plan provided an alternative assessment, and (b) three students who were new to the district and had not received guided reading instruction prior to taking the ISAT.

In order to account for the implementation of guided reading instruction, the independent variable, three control groups were established. The first control group

comprised reading scores of third-grade students in 2005–2006, the second comprised reading scores of fourth-grade students in 2005–2006, and the third comprised reading scores of fifth-grade students in 2005–2006, prior to receiving guided reading instruction. These control group scores were then compared to the reading scores of the treatment group of fourth-grade students in 2006–2007, and again in 2007–2008, following the implementation of guided reading instruction. Control group reading scores of students who were in fifth-grade in 2005–2006 were compared to the reading scores of the treatment group of fifth-grade students in 2006–2007, and again in 2007–2008, after receiving guided reading instruction.

For the qualitative portion of the study, a Guided Reading Survey was distributed to teachers in District B who taught fourth- or fifth- grade at the commencement of the 2006–2007 school year. There were no excluded teachers. Therefore, all 20 teachers in fourth- and fifth-grade were invited to participate.

All 20 of the same fourth- and fifth-grade teacher participants were invited, via district email, to attend a focus group held in their respective building. The focus group at each intermediate building was facilitated by reading teachers from District B, who served as peer committee members for this study. One focus group was held at the intermediate school in the east region; the second focus group was held at the intermediate school in the west region of District B.

#### *Research Design Procedure*

The design of this study was a mixed-method, causal–comparative study. The design was mixed method because it included both quantitative and qualitative data analysis. The design was also causal–comparative in that a causal relationship was being

sought between the independent variable *guided reading instruction* and the dependent variable *student achievement*, as measured by the ISAT.

In the quantitative portion, scores were initially analyzed, using chi-square goodness-of-fit tests, looking for an improvement in ISAT reading scores from 2005–2006 to 2006–2007 and from 2006–2007 to 2007–2008. The single categorical variable, Meets or Exceeds, was analyzed with the chi-square goodness-of-fit test. A second analysis employed an intact experimental group, fourth- and-fifth graders (as opposed to randomly assigned subjects), who were subjected to the independent variable *guided reading instruction*. The scores of the same students prior to having received guided reading instruction were compared with their post-instruction scores, using dependent *t* tests. See Table 3 below.

Table 3

*Causal–Comparative Design*

Group	Independent Variable	Dependent Variable
I	Guided Reading Instruction	ISAT
II	No Guided Reading Instruction	ISAT

The qualitative portion of this study examined the opinions of an intact group of fourth- and fifth-grade teachers in District B who implemented guided reading instruction. Using a Guided Reading Survey with five open-ended questions (see Appendix A), teachers were invited to share thoughts and opinions, on the implementation of guided



reading instruction. In narrative form, teachers could write what they learned about guided reading instruction during the process. Further, teachers were surveyed regarding the professional development received prior to the implementation of guided reading. To test for content validity, prior to the distribution of the survey, two peer-reading teachers took the survey, resulting in no alterations to the format. The survey was then distributed, via interdistrict mail, to all fourth- and fifth-grade teachers in District. B. Teachers were asked to complete the survey anonymously, place it in a sealed envelope, and return it to the school office. The same teachers were also invited to participate in a focus group at their respective school building. The focus groups were facilitated by two separate peer committee members of this study, who are employed as reading teachers in District B. Using an open-forum discussion, the groups collaboratively explored the advantages and disadvantages of guided reading instruction. Frustrations, as well as suggestions for improvement, were also conveyed.

### *Instrumentation*

The ISAT was the selected instrument for this study. ISAT scores were obtained from the annual statewide test that all children in third through eighth grade are required to take. The ISAT fulfills the accountability portion prescribed by NCLB (NCLB Act, 2003).

The survey (see Appendix A) was comprised of seven statements. Using a 4-point Likert scale, participants were asked to choose a response of *Strongly Disagree* to *Strongly Agree*. In addition, the survey included five open-ended questions to allow participants to share their thoughts and offer suggestions on ways to improve guided reading instruction. No participant demographics were asked on the survey to increase

the likelihood of participation and to protect the confidentiality and anonymity of the participants.

The focus group at each building was facilitated by a reading teacher employed in District B. Identical questions were asked at each focus group. (See Appendix B for complete script of questions.) Responses from each teacher participant were recorded in narrative form by the facilitator of each focus group. The responses were analyzed for recurring themes and implications for future directives.

#### *Statistical Treatment of Data*

Scores were initially examined using chi-square goodness-of-fit, which is a nonparametric test used with categorical/frequency data. Chi-square goodness-of-fit tests how well the distribution of scores in the categories (in this study Meets or Exceeds on ISAT) fit with what would be observed, based on the null hypothesis (Bluman, 2008), that the implementation of guided reading instruction will not result in a statistically significant improvement in reading achievement in fourth- and fifth-grades in District B, as measured by the ISAT. Recognizing the limitations of using a single categorical variable, such as Meets or Exceeds, a more thorough analysis ensued. Using dependent mean *t* tests, which compare means across samples from the same or related populations (Bluman, 2008), the reading scores of individual participants prior to receiving guided reading instruction in 2005–2006 were compared to their subsequent scores in 2006–2007, and 2007–2008. In the 2006–2007 school year, the students were subjected to guided reading instruction, the independent variable. Each student participant received a raw score which corresponded to a standardized scale score in one of four categories on the ISAT. The categories were *Warning*, *Below*, *Meets*, or *Exceeds*. The 2006–2007 post-

treatment raw scores were compared to each participant's 2005–2006 prior-treatment raw score. Additionally, after receiving guided reading instruction again in the 2007–2008 school year, the raw scores of participants were compared to their 2006–2007 and 2007–2008 ISAT scores.

An examination of all quantitative and qualitative data revealed trends and conclusions with regard to guided reading instruction. Results of the data will be discussed in chapter IV. The success of guided reading instruction as a means of improving reading achievement on ISAT will be reviewed in chapter IV as well.

## Chapter IV – Results

Declining reading scores in the fourth and fifth grades, as measured by the ISAT, were the driving force behind District B's decision to examine their core reading curriculum and pedagogical practices. As a result of this examination, the board and administration chose to supplement the existing basal reading instruction with a daily block of guided reading instruction. Therefore, at the beginning of the 2006–2007 school year, each fourth- and fifth-grade student received a 25-minute block of guided reading instruction in addition to the 45-minute block of whole-group reading instruction already being delivered. As with any change, the authenticity of this new program remains under scrutiny. These results are preliminary, and the guided reading model of instruction will require additional close scrutiny before determining its true effectiveness.

Table 4 shows percentages of students in the Meets or Exceeds categories on the ISAT. Students in fourth- and fifth-grade are presented independently for the 2005–2006 through 2007–2008 school years, while the scores across all grades include scores of third-, fourth-, and fifth-grade students. Percentages include the year before guided reading instruction was implemented (2005–2006). Additionally, percentages are stated for the year that implementation of guided reading instruction occurred (2006–2007), and for the year immediately following the implementation of guided reading instruction (2007–2008).

Table 4

*ISAT Scores in the Meets or Exceeds Categories*

Data Collection Years	Scores Across Grades	Grade 4	Grade 5
Before GRI (05–06)	79.6%	70.7%	68.8%
Implementation (06–07)	79.6%	73.6%	67.6%
After GRI (07–08)	81.4%	77.8%	76.1%

*Note.* From ISBE, Illinois School Report Cards, 2006, 2007, 2008.

*Analysis of Data – Quantitative*

A statistical analysis of ISAT data employing a chi-square goodness-of-fit test, with the categorical dependent variable of Meets or Exceeds on ISAT, was completed. The null hypothesis was that the implementation of guided reading instruction will not result in a statistically significant improvement in reading achievement in the fourth and fifth grades in District B, as measured by ISAT. An alpha level of .05 was used for all statistical tests in this study. Across all 3 years, before implementation (2005–2006), implementation (2006–2007), and after implementation (2007–2008), there was no significant improvement in the percentage of students who were in the Meets or Exceeds category:  $\chi^2(2) = 3.0, p = .22, ns$ .

Across all 3 years for fourth grade only—before implementation (2005–2006), implementation (2006–2007), and after implementation (2007–2008)—there was no significant improvement in the percentage of students who were in the Meets or Exceeds category:  $\chi^2(2) = 6.0, p = .20, ns$ .

Across all 3 years for fifth grade only—before implementation (2005–2006), implementation (2006–2007), and after implementation (2007–2008)—there was no significant improvement in the percentage of students who were in the Meets or Exceeds category:  $\chi^2(2) = 3.0, p = .22, ns$ .

In comparing test scores the year before guided reading instruction was implemented (2005–2006) to the test scores the year guided reading instruction was implemented (2006–2007), across all grades, no statistics were computed because the percentage of students in the Meets or Exceeds category remained constant at .80.(rounded up)

In comparing the test scores for fourth grade only the year before guided reading instruction was implemented (2005–2006) to the test scores the year guided reading instruction was implemented (2006–2007), there was no significant increase in the Meets or Exceeds category:  $\chi^2(1) = 2.0, p = .16, ns$ .

In comparing the test scores for fifth grade only the year before guided reading instruction was implemented (2005–2006) to the test scores the year guided reading instruction was implemented (2006–2007), there was no significant increase in the Meets or Exceeds category:  $\chi^2(1) = 2.0, p = .16, ns$ .

An additional chi-square goodness-of-fit-test was employed, comparing the test scores the year guided reading instruction was implemented (2006–2007) to the following year after guided reading instruction was implemented (2007–2008), across all grades. This analysis showed there was no significant increase in the Meets or Exceeds category:  $\chi^2(1) = 2.0, p = .16, ns$ .

In comparing the test scores for fourth grade only the year guided reading instruction was implemented (2006–2007) to the following year after guided reading instruction was implemented (2007–2008), there was no significant increase in the Meets or Exceeds category:  $\chi^2(1) = 2.0, p = .16, ns$ .

In comparing test scores for fifth grade only the year guided reading instruction was implemented (2006–2007) to the following year after guided reading instruction was implemented (2007–2008), no statistics were computed because the percentage of students in the Meets or Exceeds category was constant. The scores remained exactly equal at .68. (rounded up).

In summary, the collective analysis of ISAT data, using chi-square goodness-of-fit tests, did not yield a statistically significant improvement in reading scores across all grades after the implementation of guided reading instruction. There were no significant increases in scores when fourth- and fifth-grade scores were analyzed individually. Further, there were no significant increases in fourth- or fifth-grade scores in the year immediately following the implementation of guided reading instruction. These results cause a failure to reject the null hypothesis that the implementation of guided reading instruction will not result in a statistically significant improvement in reading achievement in fourth and fifth grades in District B, as measured by the ISAT.

Further contemplation of these results revealed that the initial chi-square goodness-of-fit analysis may have been a bit narrow in focus. Chi-square goodness-of-fit tested only whether the dependent categorical variable of Meets or Exceeds on ISAT had improved after the implementation of guided reading instruction. Therefore, before resolutely determining that guided reading instruction was ineffective for improving

reading achievement, a deeper analysis of scores was conducted. A paired-samples  $t$  test was then employed to test one group of students' scores as they progressed through the grades. Students' scores from third grade (2005–2006) to fourth grade (2006–2007), and then from fourth grade (2006–2007) to fifth (2006–2007), were used for  $t$  tests in the second analysis of scores. The hypothesis was that the implementation of guided reading instruction will result in a statistically significant improvement in reading achievement in fourth and fifth grades in District B, as measured by the ISAT. The null hypothesis was that the implementation of guided reading instruction will not result in a statistically significant improvement in reading achievement in fourth and fifth grades in District B, as measured by the ISAT.

The  $t$  test of means, on the same group of students in third grade (2005–2006) compared to their standardized scores on ISAT in fourth grade (2006–2007), after the introduction of guided reading instruction, produced the following results:

$t(161) = -37.76, p < .001$ . The mean for this group of students in third grade (2005–2006) was 162.79, while the mean in fourth grade (2006–2007) was 216.61. Using an alpha level of .05 for all statistical tests, these results are significant.

These students' standardized scores from fourth grade (2006–2007) also significantly increased when compared to fifth grade (2007–2008), with the following results:  $t(162) = -5.74, p < .001$ . The mean for fourth grade (2006–2007) was 217.59, while the mean for those same students in fifth grade (2007–2008) was 225.18. When the scores of the same students were examined over a 2-year period, the deeper analysis suggested that the effectiveness of guided reading instruction had a positive impact on



student achievement. Therefore, the results of the paired-samples *t* tests produced means that were significant.

#### *Analysis of Data – Qualitative Survey Questions*

Twenty surveys (see Appendix A) were distributed to all fourth- and fifth-grade teachers in District B. Sixteen of the 20 surveys were returned, resulting in a response rate of 80%. Table 5 displays the percentage of participants who chose each category on the questionnaire as well as the mean and standard deviation for each question.

Participants chose responses from the following categories: (a) (*Strongly Disagree*), (b) (*Disagree*), (c) (*Agree*), and (d) (*Strongly Agree*).

Table 5

#### *Survey Results*

Questions	1 Strongly Disagree	2 Disagree	3 Agree	4 Strongly Agree	Mean	Standard Deviation
1. Adequate Training	12.5%	25%	50%	12.5%	2.62	.86
2. Book Study	6.3%	37.5%	50%	6.3%	2.56	.73
3. Value of GRI	0%	6.3%	50%	43.8%	3.38	.62
4. Five Big Areas	0%	6.3%	50%	43.8%	3.38	.62
5. Others' Use	0%	18.8%	68.8%	12.5%	2.94	.57
6. My Use	0%	12.5%	81.3%	6.3%	2.94	.44
7. Scores	0%	0%	62.5%	37.5%	3.38	.5

*Survey question 1 of 7: I feel I was adequately trained to institute Guided Reading Instruction as part of my reading program, when we began in 2006.*

On a 4-point rating scale, the mean for Question 1 was 2.62, ( $SD = .86$ ), while the median and modal responses were each 3, indicating that participants did not feel they were adequately trained.

*Survey question 2 of 7: I feel Strategies that Work was a worthwhile book study for introducing the Guided Reading Instructional approach.*

The mean for question 2 was 2.56, ( $SD = .73$ ), with the median and modal responses each equaling 3. The results indicated a little less than half of participants believed the book study provided a helpful resource for introducing the guided reading instructional program.

*Survey question 3 of 7: I believe Guided Reading Instruction is a valuable part of my total reading program.*

The resultant mean was 3.38, ( $SD = .62$ ), with the median and modal responses each totaling 3. These results suggested that participants believed that guided reading instruction developed into a valuable part of their overall reading instruction.

*Survey question 4 of 7: I feel that Guided Reading Instruction has been beneficial for incorporating the Five Big Areas of Reading into the existing reading Program.*

Those five areas were phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. The results were statistically identical to the previous question, with a mean of 3.38, ( $SD = .62$ ), and the median and modal response each equal to 3. With the mean on the higher side of average, these results also suggested that participants believed

that guided reading instruction had been beneficial for incorporating the five big areas of reading into the participants' overall reading program.

*Survey question 5 of 7: I believe Guided Reading Instruction is being used effectively by other teachers.*

The mean for question 5 was 2.94, ( $SD = .57$ ), with the median and modal response both equaling 3. These results suggested a little more than half of the respondents believed that guided reading instruction was being used effectively by others.

*Survey question 6 of 7: I believe I am using Guided Reading Instruction effectively.*

The results reflected a mean of 2.94, ( $SD = .44$ ), and a median and modal response of 3. Once again, these results suggested that more than half of the participants believed they were using guided reading in an effective manner.

*Survey question 7 of 7: Guided Reading Instruction is a successful strategy for increasing reading comprehension scores on ISAT.*

Results indicated that 6 participants (37.5%) strongly agreed, while the remaining 10 participants (62.5%) agreed that guided reading instruction had been successful in increasing reading scores. This was reflected in a mean of 3.38, ( $SD = .5$ ), and a median and modal response of 3. With no participants responding that they disagreed or strongly disagreed with this statement, results indicated that participants were rather confident that guided reading instruction had been a worthwhile addition to the overall reading program in fourth and fifth grades.

*Analysis of Data – Qualitative Survey Narrative Responses*

The second page of the reading survey invited participants to write open-ended narrative responses to five general questions about guided reading instruction. Discovering perceptions and attitudes toward guided reading, as well as teacher commitment to the new program, was the goal of the narrative questions.

*Narrative question 1 of 5: What would make it easier for you to more effectively use Guided Reading instruction in your overall program?*

Four out of 16, or 25%, of the respondents stated more training. Increased time and more abundant resources were equally cited by 5 out of 16 respondents, or 31%. The most consistently cited suggestion, however, was the need for more help to work with small groups, as cited by 7 out of 16 respondents, or 44% of participants writing a response. These results suggest that additional help, and time and resources in providing guided reading instruction, would strengthen the benefits.

*Narrative question 2 of 5: What successes can you cite as a result of using Guided Reading instruction?*

Responses included 2 out of 16, or 13%, stated increased test scores. Additionally, 8 out of 16, or 50%, cited students were more engaged in reading during guided reading instruction. Furthermore, 9 out of 16, or 56%, responded they were able to differentiate their instruction more effectively through the use of guided reading instruction. These results suggest that student engagement increased during guided reading instruction. Meeting the needs of individual learners appeared to be more attainable when guided reading instruction was employed.

*Narrative question 3 of 5: Are there any negative aspects of using Guided Reading instruction?*

Lack of help to provide instruction was stated as a concern by 2 out of 16, or 13%, of participants. Grouping and management issues were cited by 4 out of 16 respondents, or 25% of the total responses. Furthermore, lack of time to provide guided reading instruction was cited by 5 out of 16, or 31% of the respondents. Collectively, these results suggested that the negative aspects were minimal, as the highest percentage was only 31% of the total respondents, and it concerned the lack of time. Although time constraints were a concern, respondents found the benefits of providing guided reading instruction outweighed the negative aspects.

*Narrative question 4 of 5: Do your students enjoy Guided Reading instructional groups? Why or why not?*

Responses included 13 out of 16, or 81%, of respondents stated their students did enjoy guided reading groups. Many felt this was due to the increased attention by the teacher in a small-group setting and the introduction of enjoyable books at the students' own reading level. Three teachers out of 16, or 19%, responded that students did not enjoy guided reading instructional groups. The teacher said it was usually due to lack of student interest in reading, diminished skills, or the mix of the group. These results suggest that guided reading instructional groups were generally well received by the majority of fourth- and fifth-grade students who were introduced to this method of instruction.

*Narrative question 5 of 5: In your opinion, should we continue using Guided Reading instruction? Why or why not?*

A total of 14 out of 16 participants, or 88%, responded affirmatively. Two out of 16, or 13%, did not reply either affirmatively or negatively, which suggested those respondents were unsure of a definitive answer to this question. With over 80% of respondents answering affirmatively, these results suggest that the majority of teachers are in favor of continuing guided reading instruction in District B. One additional comment provided by a single respondent stated that, especially with the limited time constraints for teaching subjects such as social studies and science, guided reading instruction was a good way to incorporate nonfiction books into the curriculum

#### *Analysis of Data – Qualitative – Focus Group Responses*

Optional focus groups were conducted at both intermediate schools in District B. One goal of the focus groups was to reflect and collaborate about the implementation of guided reading instruction. A second goal was strategizing ways to improve the practice of delivering this type of instruction. A total of 16 teachers from both buildings attended.

*Focus group question 1 of 10: What were your thoughts when you first learned we were implementing guided reading instruction in the Fall of 2006?*

Responses ranged from 13% who were concerned about resources, 19% who were concerned with the extra time constraints this would impose, and 31% who stated they felt completely overwhelmed, for a total of 63% responding to the question. These results suggest that participants were not overly enthusiastic about the idea of guided reading instruction upon initially learning about its implementation.

*Focus group question 2 of 10: Did you feel you were adequately prepared to implement guided reading instruction?*

Only 1 respondent, or 6%, felt confident because of having experience in guided reading instruction prior to coming to this district, while 13 out of 16, or 75%, of the attendees stated they were not adequately prepared to provide guided reading instruction at the outset of implementation. These results suggested that District B should have provided a more extensive training program, prior to implementing guided reading instruction.

*Focus group question 3 of 10: Do you believe the DRA has been an accurate assessment tool for determining reading levels? Why or why not?*

Three out of 16, or 19% of respondents believed the DRA2 was an accurate assessment tool. Five out of 16, or 31%, felt that the DRA2 was not an accurate assessment tool. Finally, 8 out of 16, or 50%, were unsure how they felt about the DRA2 as an accurate assessment tool. With over 80% of respondents having a negative or no definitive answer in support of the DRA2, these results suggest that District B needed to consider an alternative method of assessing students to determine reading levels or convince teachers why DRA2 is an effective assessment tool for determining guided reading instructional levels.

*Focus group question 4 of 10: Is guided reading instruction a valuable part of your total reading program? Why or why not?*

Eleven out 16, or 69%, of the respondents affirmed that it was a valuable part of their program. There were no negative responses. Five participants abstained from responding to the question. Positive responses included such things as allowing all students to become more successful regardless of their reading level and stating that

teachers get to work with all students. These results indicated that the majority of teachers believed that guided reading instruction benefitted their overall reading program.

*Focus group question 5 of 10: How has guided reading instruction helped your struggling readers?*

Responses included such things as help with fluency issues, more confidence by readers, increased student enjoyment compared to the traditional reading program, targeted instruction for specific student needs, teachers were better informed about their struggling readers, it provided better practice for readers, and grouping with other students of like ability allowed them to feel good about themselves as readers. These results suggested that guided reading instruction provided a positive experience for students and teachers alike.

*Focus group question 6 of 10: How has guided reading instruction benefited your stronger readers?*

Respondents gave mixed replies to this question. One participant stated it had not been helpful for the stronger readers. Another participant stated there were no stronger readers. Other comments included remarks such as, “it has not helped as much,” “it gives students freedom,” “it allows students to read at their own level,” “it teaches students to work independently,” and “it improves social skills.” These comments suggest that the results were mixed regarding the benefits of guided reading instruction for the stronger readers. While some respondents indicated it helped the stronger readers become more independent and afforded them some freedom, others believed the benefits were minimal or nonexistent.



*Focus group question 7 of 10: Name one thing you would like to see changed about our guided reading instruction.*

Respondents stated the following: someone to facilitate every group every day, more structure with regard to strategies taught, and more lower level books. These results echoed a recurring theme that more help was needed. The need for more leveled books to provide guided reading instruction effectively was also noted.

*Focus group question 8 of 10: What suggestions can you offer to make our reading program stronger?*

Answers included the following statements: “We have a strong reading program,” “we need more manpower,” “We need to allow kids to make mistakes,” “a major concern is for science and social studies that have been decreased,” “we need more trained volunteers to help out,” “more parent volunteers would help decrease the size of the groups,” and “retired teachers should be enlisted to help.” These results suggest that trained manpower was the overarching concern to help reduce the size of groups and to ensure that all children are serviced in a guided reading group each day.

*Focus group question 9 of 10: Is there anything you need in order for you to be more effective in using guided reading instruction?*

Responses to this question were as follows: people, people, people, more time in the day, more ideas, lower level books, more modeling of what guided reading looks like, more content area books, and copies of word ladders. Results seemed to suggest that trained helpers and resources are two major needs in order for District B to receive optimal results from the implementation of the guided reading instructional program.

*Focus group question 10 of 10: Do you feel guided reading instruction has helped you be a better teacher of reading?*

Each of the respondents replied affirmatively, adding the following comments: “It has made me look at students on an individual basis,” “I am now able to carry the same strategies into other content areas,” “it helps to understand where my students are struggling better,” and “it’s a better use of planning time.” These responses suggest that teachers were convinced that guided reading instruction had merit, not only for the student, but also for the teacher. Informed teachers were better able to serve their students. Guided reading instruction created a win-win situation for both.

Overall results of the qualitative analysis suggested that teachers embraced guided reading instruction as a beneficial aspect of their total reading program. They believe that it afforded success for their lower readers. Teachers also believe these students benefited from the small group time with the teacher.

There were two major concerns, however, that surfaced with regard to guided reading instruction. First, teachers believed there was a lack of adequate manpower to provide guided reading instruction in a daily, consistent manner. In addition, teachers believed they lacked the necessary training and resources to sufficiently provide guided reading instruction to their students in its fullest potential.

### *Summary*

The preliminary results of implementing guided reading instruction in District B indicated promise for continuing its practice in the future. Chapter V will address the internal and external validity of the study as well as the ability to generalize to other

populations. Best-practice recommendations for increasing the reading achievement of all students will be addressed. Final conclusions regarding this study will also be discussed.

## Chapter V – Discussion

District B is a unit district with an enrollment of approximately 2,800 students. The district has enjoyed a long-standing measure of success, based on achieving higher than the state's average scores on the annual Illinois School Report Card. High marks have also earned the district a reputation of respect in the community, compared with neighboring school districts. The authorization of the NCLB Act of 2001 (NCLB Act, 2003), however, has added an additional measure of evaluation and accountability for District B.

NCLB mandates that each state administer an annual test to all students in third through eighth grade, with emphasis focused on students' reading and math skills. In the state of Illinois, ISAT is the assessment which measures the mandates of NCLB. Incremental increases, referred to as AYP, are required annually in the percentage of students who either meet or exceed on these tests. The goal is for all students to be 100% proficient in reading and math skills by 2014.

Prior to the 2006–2007 school year, the board and administration of District B discovered that ISAT reading scores had declined, as students transitioned from third grade to fourth and fifth grades. With the knowledge that NCLB mandates AYP in test scores each year or face sanctions for non-compliance, the administration chose a proactive approach. The board's proposed solution to declining reading scores was supplementing the daily basal reading instruction already intact with an additional block of guided reading instruction.

The primary purpose of this study was to determine whether the implementation of guided reading instruction in fourth- and fifth-grade, was successful for improving

reading achievement in District B. The instrument used to measure success was ISAT reading scores. Each fourth- and fifth-grade student began receiving a daily block of guided reading instruction, at the commencement of the 2006–2007 school year, in addition to the whole group reading lesson. Therefore, guided reading instruction became an integral part of the daily core reading program in fourth- and-fifth grades in District B.

Guided reading instruction was administered in 25-minute blocks to groups of three to five students who were reading at the same or similar instructional reading levels. A typical guided reading lesson included a mini-lesson focused on a particular reading strategy or skill. A discussion of vocabulary, genre, and text features, followed by a silent or shared reading of the book, ensued. After reading, further discussion of themes and the author's message were explored. Concluding activities consisted of word work or other writing extensions, as a method of facilitating increased comprehension.

This research project was a mixed-method study. The rationale for this study was twofold. First, the impact of guided reading instruction on student achievement for fourth- and fifth-grade students in District B, as measured by ISAT scores, was examined. To achieve reliability and consistency, ISAT scores were evaluated over a 2-year period, including the 2006–2007 and 2007–2008 school years. Secondly, the commitment, attitudes, and perceptions of the teachers who administered the guided reading instruction were also investigated. There were three research questions. The first question was, *Do teachers believe guided reading instruction is an effective instructional method to improve ISAT scores?* The second question was, *Does teacher commitment to the instructional approach affect the success of guided reading instruction?* The third

research question was, *What instructional skills and strategies are required to develop an effective reading program for intermediate students, particularly fourth and fifth grades?*

#### *Internal Validity*

This study investigated 10 threats to internal validity. It was not possible to control all aspects that threatened the internal validity; however, 7 of the 10 threats were controlled. Additionally, as a causal-comparative study, there were 2 other threats unique to this type of research project: The random assignment of participants (students) to a group, and manipulation of the independent variable (guided reading instruction) could not be controlled.

#### *External Validity*

With regard to external validity, it may be difficult to generalize the results of this study to other populations because of the size of the sample that was studied and the absence of random sampling procedures. Schools that have similar participant pools with regard to demographics, however, may benefit from this information. Likewise, schools that face similar problems with reading achievement may also benefit from the results. Schools that are in need of particular programs to enhance their literacy instruction, at the intermediate level, may also find the information useful.

#### *Connection of Literature to Findings*

The review of literature revealed the critical importance of a firm foundation in reading as the basis for a child's success in school at any level as well as the future overall quality of life (Snow et al., 1998). The research also consistently reported that children must be taught essential literacy skills in primary grades as the prerequisite for meeting the more difficult challenges of life. These skills are necessary for understanding

technology and the ability to compete in an ever-changing global economy (Grigg et al., 2003). To accomplish these literacy goals, modern-day researchers have determined that a balanced approach to literacy yields the greatest success (Fountas & Pinnell, 2001). This was first reported in the findings of the NRP's (2000) research on the various components of effective reading programs. The summary of the panel's research included the recommendation that any best-practice literacy program must include instruction in five key elements including (a) phonemic awareness, (b) phonics, (c) fluency, (d) vocabulary, and (e) comprehension (NRP, 2000). The research further revealed that phonemic awareness instruction should be virtually non-existent at the intermediate level, as students' literacy skills have typically progressed past the point of usefulness (Ivey & Baker, 2004). If guided reading instruction is administered with fidelity (NCLB Act, 2003), it should include instruction in each of the other four critical areas—phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension—at the intermediate level. Thus the decision to implement guided reading instruction in District B was made on the basis of its ability to incorporate these four key areas into the daily reading instruction.

Since the research also suggested there is no single, clear-cut path to literacy attainment and continued success in reading, guided reading instruction was added as a supplement to the basal reading instruction already in place. The addition of guided reading instruction helped establish treatment versus non-treatment groups, for ease in judging its effectiveness to improve reading achievement.

To restate, guided reading instruction was successful for improving reading achievement when the same students were examined over time, replicating the recommendations of the NRP (NRP, 2000) with regard to the key components of any

successful reading program. Further benefits to continuing guided reading instruction include avoiding illiteracy and the social problems associated with it, as students progress through the intermediate grades and beyond.

#### *Implications of Quantitative Results*

Overall, chi-square goodness-of-fit analyses did not conclusively prove that guided reading instruction had been a successful model of instruction for increasing the reading achievement of fourth- and fifth-grade students. This resulted in a failure to reject the null hypothesis. Recognizing the single categorical variable of Meets or Exceeds was a limitation of the chi-square goodness-of-fit analyses calculated in this study, another type of analysis was warranted before accepting the null hypothesis.

Paired-samples *t* tests, providing a more extensive analysis, were then employed. Unlike chi-square goodness-of-fit, paired-samples *t* tests analyzed the ISAT scores of the same students, across all 3 years (2006–2008). This eliminated the single categorical variable of Meets or Exceeds as a limiting factor. The results of the paired-samples *t* tests produced means that were highly significant, resulting in a rejection of the null hypothesis. This deeper analysis suggested that the effectiveness of guided reading instruction had indeed rendered a positive impact on student achievement when the scores of the same students were examined over time. These results are optimistic and suggest that an ongoing analysis of guided reading instruction in District B must continue before guided reading instruction can be deemed an authentic method for increasing reading scores on ISAT.



*Implications of Qualitative Results*

Overall results of the qualitative analysis suggested that teachers have embraced guided reading instruction as a beneficial aspect of their total reading program. This was important, as the success of any new program is largely dependent on the teachers who institute the program and their attitudes and beliefs toward it (Yero, 2002). Teachers also believe guided reading has been successful, particularly for their lower readers, as these students benefit from the small-group time with the teacher.

There were two major concerns that surfaced with regard to guided reading instruction. First, teachers believe there is a lack of adequate manpower to provide guided reading instruction on a daily, consistent basis. In addition, teachers believe they lack the necessary training and resources to sufficiently provide guided reading instruction to their students to its fullest potential. This finding was not surprising, as the professional development (book study) introducing the strategies of guided reading instruction was ongoing throughout the year, rather than completed prior to the commencement of the school year. Guskey (2002) stated “high quality professional development is a central component in nearly every modern proposal for improving education” (p. 381).

Since the purpose of professional development is to inform teachers of best-practice techniques to bring about desired change, it must be provided at the outset of the proposed change. Effectiveness is increased when professional development continues throughout the change process, supporting teachers as they implement the change and encounter problems. While the book study provided an opportunity for teachers to collaborate and share ideas each month, teachers were learning new strategies each month, while also learning how to implement guided reading instruction, and deal

with a change in daily schedules to accommodate the additional 25-minute reading block. If the training had occurred prior to the implementation of guided reading instruction, the success of it, as well as each teacher's comfort level, may have improved significantly.

*Implications for Effective Reading Instruction in Schools*

Results of this study verified guided reading instruction can be a valuable addition to the core reading program of any school seeking to improve the literacy skills of their students. Major advantages of guided reading instruction include administration in small groups, at the student's instructional level, and instruction in the key components of reading prescribed by the NRP (NRP, 2000). This allows the student to engage in authentic reading, thus increasing the likelihood of comprehension. Gibson and Hasbrouck (2008) reported the following:

Teaching differently is necessary to address the diversity of students' needs.

Traditional practice using whole group lecture format is not working . . . teachers are told to teach in small groups and differentiate instruction to address specific student needs. (p. 1)

Current research on "grouping for instruction" reported positive changes in student outcomes. Findings revealed that students receiving instruction in small groups learn significantly more than students who are not instructed in small groups (Lou et al., 1996; Mathes & Fuchs, 1994; Moody, Vaughn, & Schumm, 1997).

As previously stated, identifying and employing an effective instructional approach for increasing the literacy skills of all learners was imperative for meeting the AYP requirements established by the NCLB Act of 2001 (NCLB Act, 2003). An added benefit to the teaching profession at large is that guided reading instruction can be

beneficial for all students in their literacy development. Upper elementary/intermediate teachers face the challenge of discovering methods to continue supporting students in their literacy development. Many lack the appropriate skills and strategies needed for proficiency in reading. Further, there appears to be an overall decline in academic achievement motivation as children move from elementary school into middle school and beyond (Stipek, 1984). Banks (2005) stated, “some researchers believe that as early as fifth grade, students separate into two tracks: the academic achievers and the underachievers. The underachievers increasingly give up in terms of motivation and achievement as they progress through the grades” (p. 272). Guided reading instruction shows promise for these learners because of the ability to meet learners where they are, producing more successful readers, thus eliminating the achievement gap. The most far-reaching result from employing guided reading instruction as a best-practice approach to reading is the improvement to society as a whole. Being a literate member of society adds to the happiness and future quality of life for all persons, regardless of age.

Within the limitations of mortality, location, and maturation threats set forth in chapter I, the results of this study allow inferences to be drawn about the use of guided reading instruction. Guided reading instruction may be beneficial for improving the literacy skills of fourth- and fifth-grade students when their success is examined over time. Any new program takes time to effect change. Continuing the study longitudinally, over 5 or more years, would allow those using the research to see if the program benefits are sustained over time, rather than a 2-year phenomenon. Repeating the study using alternative categorical variables on ISAT might allow greater substantiation of results.

The results of this study also allow inferences to be made about the necessity of providing ongoing professional development activities to teachers engaged in delivering guided reading instruction to fourth- and fifth-grade students. Although the book study was beneficial for introducing the critical strategies of administering guided reading instruction, completion of the book prior to implementation of guided reading instruction would have been more advantageous. Additionally, increased opportunities for collaboration with colleagues, sharing frustrations and successes, might have proved beneficial. Finally, ongoing professional development and training in how to administer guided reading instruction while managing the rest of the class would have increased the effectiveness of implementation.

A final inference garnered from this study was the need for more trained personnel to administer guided reading instruction in addition to the classroom teacher. All students should receive guided reading instruction on a daily, consistent basis for optimum results to be achieved. Teachers were expected to facilitate guided reading groups each day with limited additional help, making it impossible for all 5 or 6 reading groups to receive guided reading instruction each day.

#### *Answering the Research Questions*

The purpose of this study was to determine whether the implementation of guided reading instruction for all students in fourth- and fifth-grade was successful for improving reading achievement in District B. The results of the study revealed that guided reading instruction was successful for improving achievement on ISAT in fourth and fifth grades. When the scores were analyzed over time, guided reading instruction produced results that were highly significant. With its research-based foundation, guided reading

instruction incorporates each of the key components of reading instruction prescribed by the NRP (2000), adding to its practicality and usefulness for intermediate students.

The qualitative purpose of this study focused on the beliefs and attitudes of the teachers who implemented guided reading instruction. There were three research questions investigated. The first research question was, *Do teachers believe guided reading instruction is an effective instructional approach to improve ISAT scores?* This study revealed teachers affirmatively believe guided reading instruction has been beneficial for improving ISAT scores. The second research question was, *Does teacher commitment to the instructional approach affect the success of guided reading instruction?* Research has documented that the values and beliefs of teachers are of utmost importance in the success or failure of any new instructional method instituted (Yero, 2002). Additionally, Guskey (2002) discovered that lasting change is a very slow process because teachers must first change their belief system. Many times teachers adopt a “seeing is believing” attitude. Guskey reported, “significant change in teachers’ attitudes and beliefs occurs primarily after they gain evidence of improvements in student learning” (p. 383). In this study teachers reported they believe guided reading instruction has been an important addition to the overall reading program for fourth and fifth graders in District B. If the research is correct, commitment to continuing guided reading instruction should increase, as well as its overall effectiveness in improving ISAT scores.

The third research question was, *What instructional skills and strategies are required to develop an effective reading program?* Although teachers believe guided reading instruction has been highly significant for increasing scores on ISAT, they believe additional training would result in even greater gains. Guskey (2002) echoed this

sentiment, stating “Professional development programs are systematic efforts to bring about change in the classroom practices of teachers, in their attitudes and beliefs, and in the learning outcomes of students” (p. 381). With additional training, teachers will become more adept at incorporating the strategies of guided reading instruction, resulting in a stronger belief in its effectiveness, and ultimately increasing ISAT scores.

Finally, fourth- and fifth-grade teachers suggest more trained personnel are needed to provide guided reading instruction for optimum results to occur. If the budget allowed, reading aides could be employed and trained in guided reading instruction strategies. This additional manpower would ensure that every fourth- and fifth-grade student receives guided reading instruction on a daily basis. If budget constraints prohibit the hiring of reading aides, principals and teachers might seek parent volunteers willing to be trained in guided reading instruction to administer daily guided reading groups.

#### *Recommendations for Practice-Based on Findings*

1. The board, administration, and teachers must be committed to finding and utilizing current research-based pedagogy and instructional practices for teaching reading. In this study, guided reading instruction was implemented as a supplement to the daily basal reading instruction, thereby increasing the total amount of reading instruction each day.
2. Teachers must receive high quality, professional development that is ongoing throughout the year. It must include methods to employ research-based practices into daily classroom reading instruction. This could be accomplished in the following ways: (a) workshops, institutes, and in-service sessions conducted by recognized leaders in the field of

literacy and reading instruction; (b) appropriating district funds to send teachers to state and/or national conferences in reading and literacy; (c) teachers and administrators participating in on-site field visits to schools where research-based practices are being instituted, thus allowing instructional practices to be observed firsthand; and (d) professional development must be ongoing and sustained through follow-up, coaching, and observations to insure instructional practices are being delivered with fidelity. Tomlinson and McTighe (2006) stated,

Teachers should receive professional development and coaching on how to present material using a variety of methods. This will allow them to teach in a multitude of ways, differentiating their instruction, particularly in small groups. Techniques might include part to whole or whole to part explanations, visualization techniques, and modeling of ideas. (p. 18)

In this study, high quality professional development in guided reading instruction prior to its implementation would have allayed fears and increased productiveness.

Each classroom must be well stocked with high-interest books for providing guided reading instruction. Calkins (2001) suggests

Teachers should receive district funds to build a library for guided reading work. They should become familiar with each of the texts, learn to introduce the books well, and efficiently manage the rest

of the class, to achieve maximum benefits from guided reading instruction. (Calkins, 2001, p. 180)

Reading instruction must not only occur in guided reading groups, but embedded across the curriculum. Tomlinson and McTighe (2006) state, “Teachers should employ basic reading strategies across the curriculum, in every subject area, not just reading. This could be accomplished through close reads, teacher read-alouds, partner readings, double entry diaries, and journaling” (p. 18).

Students from kindergarten through fifth grade should receive 2 to 3 hours of daily reading and writing instruction. Guided reading instruction and sustained silent reading should be integral components of the total reading program.

Teachers, students, and parents should participate in literacy activities sponsored by the district. Such activities might include a family literacy night, reading bingo, a book study, book fairs, literacy circles, and a library night.

Teachers should conduct ongoing assessments—curriculum-based assessments, fluency assessments, comprehension assessments, observational assessments, and performance assessments—of their students. These assessments should then dictate the differentiated instruction for each student.



It is recommended that this study be repeated, perhaps several times, using different categorical variables, or perhaps another demographic subgroup of participants, to test the external validity of the study.

### *Conclusion*

The NCLB Act of 2001 (NCLB Act, 2003) has brought a new era of accountability to the world of education in the 21st century. Educators must continuously monitor students, remaining cognizant of meeting the demands of AYP, while seeking appropriate research-based solutions to the problems inherent in each individual school district. In this age of accountability, Routman (2003) offers the following advice:

If we want our students to be excited about literacy, they need to have teachers who love coming to work, who are literacy learners themselves, who find ways to make curriculum relevant to children's lives, and who can put high-stakes testing into perspective. (p. 3)

The findings from this study reinforce what many educators already know. Real and lasting change from any new program requires time to implement, with continuous support from administrators. Professional development activities must be ongoing and teachers must feel supported throughout the process of change, rather than being given an edict to accomplish with very little support.

In this study guided reading instruction was implemented with minimal professional development, materials, and manpower, resulting in modest improvement the first year. Broadening the scope of the study and following students over the course of time allowed teachers and students to grow accustomed to the new program, resulting in significant improvement the second year. Future sustainable results will require ongoing

professional development in guided reading instruction as well as additional materials and staff to provide the instruction. Additionally, the emergence of informal leaders and a system of accountability to ensure guided reading instruction is being delivered with fidelity will further maximize the overall effectiveness on ISAT scores.

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## Appendix A – Guided Reading Survey

The purpose of this survey is to collect information regarding the Guided Reading Instructional program, instituted at the start of the 2006-2007 school year. Your responses will be used as part of my dissertation research, and as a means of addressing any concerns and/or recommendations for our 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> reading program. Please take a few minutes to answer the questions honestly. Rest assured that your responses are not part of your evaluation or in any way related to job performance. In fact, please do not sign your name or identify yourself in any way, making your responses totally anonymous. When completed, please place your survey in the attached envelope and turn it in to the large envelope in the office, labeled Guided Reading Survey. Thank you in advance for your valuable responses and input.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1. I feel I was adequately trained to institute Guided Reading Instruction as part of my reading program, when we began in 2006.	1	2	3	4
2. I feel <i>Strategies that Work</i> was a worthwhile book study for introducing the Guided Reading Instructional approach.	1	2	3	4
3. I believe Guided Reading Instruction is a valuable part of my total reading program.	1	2	3	4
4. I feel that Guided Reading Instruction has been beneficial for incorporating the Five Big Areas of Reading into my reading Program	1	2	3	4
5. I believe Guided Reading Instruction is being used effectively by teachers.	1	2	3	4
6. I believe I am using Guided Reading Instruction effectively.	1	2	3	4
7. Guided Reading Instruction is a successful strategy for increasing reading comprehension scores on ISAT.	1	2	3	4

Appendix A – Continued

1. What would make it easier for you to more effectively use Guided Reading instruction in your total reading program?

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2. What successes can you cite as a result of using Guided Reading instruction?

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3. Are there any negative aspects of using Guided Reading instruction?

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4. Do your students enjoy Guided Reading instructional groups? Why or why not?

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5. In your opinion, should we continue using Guided Reading instruction? Why or why not?

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Any additional comments:

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## Appendix B – Focus Group Questions

Administrator script: Your participation in this focus group is completely optional; however, your input is valued and appreciated. Effective teachers are reflective thinkers and that is precisely what we are doing today, reflecting on our practices so that we may improve on them. Through collaboration we learn what others are thinking and can strategize to more effectively meet the needs of all of our students. Remember, nothing that you share can or will be used against you. Your responses will be recorded completely anonymously; therefore, rest assured that you have the freedom to share your thoughts honestly, without fear of reprisal. Your participation is in no way attached to your job evaluation or performance. Thank you in advance for your input; it is much appreciated.

1. What were your thoughts when you first learned we were implementing guided reading instruction in the Fall of 2006?

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2. Did you feel you were adequately prepared to implement guided reading?

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Appendix B – Continued

3. Do you believe the DRA has been an accurate assessment tool for determining reading levels? Why or why not?

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4. Is guided reading a valuable part of your total reading program? Why or why not?

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5. How has guided reading helped your struggling readers?

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6. How has guided reading benefited your stronger readers?

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7. Name one thing you would like to see changed about our guided reading instruction?

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8. What suggestions can you offer to make our reading program stronger?

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Appendix B – Continued

9. Is there anything you need in order for you to be more effective in using guided reading instruction?

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10. Do you feel guided reading instruction has helped you be a better teacher of reading?

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Appendix C – IRB

Lindenwood University

Institutional Review Board Disposition Report

09-11  
IRB Project Number

To: Vanda Underwood      CC: Drs. Terry Stewart and Susan Isenberg

The Institutional Review Board reviewed your proposal for research on Wednesday, 9/3/08 and it was accepted. The committee appreciates the hard work that has gone into this proposal. Good luck with your data collection.

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Colleen Biri, Psy.D.

9/10/2008

Appendix D – Superintendent Permission Letter



Bethalto Community Unit  
School District #8

610 Texas Blvd.  
Bethalto, IL 62010

Website: [www.bethalto.org](http://www.bethalto.org)

Phone: 618-377-7200  
Fax: 618-377-2845

**SANDRA J. WILSON, Ph.D.**  
SUPERINTENDENT

**CYNTHIA K. BLASA, Ph.D.**  
ASSISTANT SUPERINTENDENT

**DANETTE L. PEACH**  
DIRECTOR OF  
PUPIL PERSONNEL SERVICES

**RUSSELL CLOVER**  
BUSINESS MANAGER

Vanda Underwood  
316 Whispering Oaks Drive  
Bethalto, IL 62010  
June 30, 2008

Dear Vanda,

Your formal request for permission to use ISAT scores from Bethalto West Intermediate and Meadowbrook Intermediate Schools, from the 2005-2006, 2006-2007, and 2007-2008 school years is granted. I am hopeful you will be able to share your findings as to the effects of the guiding reading program on our 4<sup>th</sup> & 5<sup>th</sup> grade reading scores.

Good luck with your dissertation.

Sandra J. Wilson, Ph.D.

Superintendent of Schools

*"Our mission is to inspire all students to achieve their greatest potential."*

## Vitae

My name is Vanda Lea Underwood, and I was born on February 17, 1958, in Wood River, Illinois. I am a two-time alumnus of Greenville College; graduating in 1980 with a B.A. in Psychology, and in 1998 with a B.S. in Education. In 2001 I earned an M.S. in Education from Southern Illinois University in Edwardsville, Illinois. My doctoral studies began in 2007 at Lindenwood University. Upon graduation, I will have earned an Ed.D. in Instructional Leadership.

Presently, I am employed as a Literacy Coach in Bethalto, Illinois. My professional affiliations include membership in the Illinois Reading Association (IRA) and the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD). Twice I have been honored as a nominee of Who's Who in Education, with nominations in 2003 and 2004.

Future career goals include working full-time as an assistant professor at a college or university. As a lifelong learner, it is my desire to share my love of teaching with aspiring teacher candidates in the educational profession. I am passionate about diligently preparing students for the challenges of the 21st century. I believe the strength and future of our nation resides in the quality of education our students receive. To this end, there is no greater calling in life than for me to be deemed an educator.