

Fall 2017

Creating A Culture Of Independent Reading Among African American Students, Especially Black Males

Donna Carol Franklin Clemenson
Hamline University

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CREATING A CULTURE OF INDEPENDENT READING AMONG
AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS, ESPECIALLY BLACK MALES

By

Donna Carol Franklin Clemenson

A capstone submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Teaching

Hamline University

Saint Paul, Minnesota

December 2017

Primary Advisor: Patty Born Selly
Content Reviewer: Lisa Pawelak

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For my husband, David. Thank you for your love, your wisdom, and reminding me to keep my eyes on the prize.

For my children, Chelsea, Bonnie, and Patrick, and my grandchildren. You are my sunshine.

In memory of University of Houston philosophy professor M.G. Yoes, and my great-grandfather George "Papa" Chandler, huge inspirations in my life.

In memory of my parents, C.B. and Jeannine Franklin and my sister, Judith. You are missed.

For, after all, every one who wishes to gain true knowledge must climb the Hill Difficulty alone, and since there is no royal road to the summit, I must zigzag it in my own way. I slip back many times, I fall, I stand still, I run against the edge of hidden obstacles, I lose my temper and find it again and keep it better, I trudge on, I gain a little, I feel encouraged, I get more eager and climb higher and begin to see the widening horizon. Every struggle is a victory. One more effort and I reach the luminous cloud, the blue depths of the sky, the uplands of my desire.

~Helen Keller

In a word, literature is my Utopia.

~Helen Keller

Once you learn to read, you will be forever free.

~Frederick Douglass

Many argue Black boys live out what they see. I argue they live out what they read. They must never suffer from underexposure to texts.

~Alfred W. Tatum

A mighty flame follows a tiny spark.

~Dante Alighieri, *Paradiso*

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thanks to my constantly changing teams of colleagues. You are all amazing. I miss you, Claire Zinda and Beth LaCoursiere.

Thanks to my principal, Mauri Friestleben, and assistant principal, Lisa Pawelak. I appreciate you for trusting me, letting me teach, and motivating me to finish this capstone.

Thanks to my students, past, present, and future. You inspire me daily.

Thanks to my dear friend, Joan Gaulke, for always being there for me.

Many thanks to the authors and all the wonderful books I have read and have yet to read. It began with Dr. Seuss. One fish, two fish...

This paper would not have been possible without the therapy provided by my two dogs, Jaxon and Carrera, and the assistance of chocolate, lots of spicy salsa, Dr. Pepper, Beethoven, and David.

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Overview

The research question for my capstone paper has a direct impact on my effectiveness as a teacher in a large urban school district. My research question is: *How can I create a culture of independent reading among African American students, especially black males?* My goal is to motivate them to become lifelong readers and learners who will be well prepared to develop their chances and choices into great successes.

Every day I say to my students, who are predominately students of color: *Make it a great day, or not. The choice is yours.* The message, from my heart, is: *Make it a great life, or not. The choice is yours.* Choices. I want all of my students to have choices in life. I want them to have the opportunity to know what those choices are before they possibly lose them. I want them to be able to follow through with their choices and be successful at whatever they choose to do with their lives. One key component to this success is the ability to read.

When I say *read*, I do not mean simply decoding. I mean decoding, understanding the words, making meaning of the words, and critically thinking about the significance of the words. This process must be accomplished independently at the appropriate level. I consider it my duty as an educator to know, in detail, what the state of Minnesota expectations are for my students, not only now, but in the future. So, looking ahead from 5th grade, according to the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) for English Language Arts Appendix A, the appropriate text complexity level band, as measured by Lexile, in order to be college and career-ready is 1215–1355. College texts are written at even higher levels. *Descartes'*

Philosophical Essays, often assigned in college introductory philosophy classes, has a Lexile level of 1630, according to the *Lexile Framework for Reading Map*. Likewise, Poe's *The Fall of the House of Usher* has a Lexile level of 1460 (see Appendix E). My job is to prepare students for this type of reading, yet the vast majority of my students come to me as struggling readers, too often far below grade level. Specifically, I have 5th grade students who read at 1st, 2nd, and 3rd grade levels. Several of these students do not receive special education services and will be expected to keep up academically in middle school next year. I fear that they will, instead, fall farther behind.

My Teaching

I have taught literacy, reading, and/or English Language Arts (ELA) in high school, middle school, and now 4th and 5th grades, looping with my students. Looping means that I have the same students for two years. My current urban school is located in north Minneapolis, an area associated with poverty, and with a population that is overwhelmingly African American. I started teaching at this school when it was a pre-K-8th school and was able to teach many of the same students as they went through 6th, 7th, and 8th grades. Three years ago the middle school was relocated and my school became a pre-K-5th grade school. The principal asked me to stay and co-teach 4th grade literacy. I agreed, with the hope that I could help students raise their reading levels early so they could avoid struggling in middle and high school. I see all of the students at my grade level because 4th and 5th grades are departmentalized, which means students change classes for the different core subjects. This year my job changed somewhat. I moved from 4th to 5th grade, and as the 5th grade Literacy Content Lead, I am co-teaching less, observing classes, and coaching other teachers more.

The Statistics

In Minneapolis Public Schools (MPS), students take the Minnesota Comprehensive Assessment III (MCA-III) every spring to demonstrate whether or not they are proficient in reading beginning in 3rd grade. The levels of achievement are: Exceeds Standards, Meets Standards, Partially Meets Standards, Does Not Meet Standards. In 2015, according to the 3rd grade MCA tests as reported on the Minnesota Department of Education website (see Appendix B), of the 73 students entering 4th grade at my school, the achievement levels were: Exceeds - 0, Meets - 6, Partially Meets - 8, Does Not Meet - 59. In 2016, of the 74 students entering 4th grade at my school, the achievement levels were: Exceeds - 0, Meets - 6, Partially Meets - 7, Does Not Meet - 61. The bottom line of these numbers is that, of the students entering 4th grade at my school, 80.8% in fall 2015 and 82.4% in fall 2016 were in the Does Not Meet category. My experience and observation confirm that these test scores are generally accurate measures of reading ability and are valuable as such. The indication appears to be that at a time when students are supposed to be reading to learn, they still have not learned to read.

Standardized Testing

There is a debate about standardized achievement tests such as the MCA-III. This is not a debate I am going to delve deeply into here, but I will say that I value standardized tests, to a point. If my job is to help students be college and career ready when they graduate from high school, then I need to know if they are on track. When it comes time to make their choices, will they be prepared for the choices they want to make? If they are not on track, I need to get them there. I have to help them see what they, *themselves*, need to do in order to be on track. I tell them over and over that they have to want this; that they have to do the

work and it is not easy. It is up to me to show them that they *can*. Once they see what they *can* accomplish through success and confidence, they, more often than not, persist with the pursuit.

When discussing test scores at our school, I sometimes hear the comment that our students are smart, but they just do not test well. Of course our students are smart, but what are the reasons that they do not test well? Perhaps they need to be better prepared. They have to know vocabulary, including academic and content specific vocabulary as well as Tier 2 words. According to Beck et al. (2008), Tier 2 words are words that often appear in and are learned from books, but are not necessarily heard in daily informal conversations, where the meanings are more easily understood. Students also need to possess background knowledge that comes from reading substantive texts. They have to have stamina for the length of the readings. They must be patient enough to enter the same text multiple times to search for answers and evidence. They have to make sure they are answering the questions that are asked. They have to have confidence that they can do well and they have to care that they do well. It is my belief based on experience and observation that teacher attitude toward standardized tests can make quite a difference. I say, “Bring it on! Let’s show what we have learned and what we know. Let’s show everyone how smart we are.” My students respond positively to this. I think that if teachers dread the test, do not care about the test, or fear that their students will not perform well on the test, this negative attitude rubs off on students and their performance on the test may be adversely affected. Delpit (2012) says, “We cannot allow an expectation gap to result in an achievement gap” (p. 25). Additionally, it is my opinion that if students are barely at grade level or below grade level, parents who opt these children out of the tests are not helping their children. The best way to get better at tests is to

know what to expect and to take them. Testing retrieval is a skill vital to successful memory and learning, according to Brown et al. (2014). If standardized tests were to be eliminated, would high academic rigor be lost? The renowned African American James Baldwin (1963) wrote, “Americans have so little respect for genuine intellectual effort. The Negro level is low because the education of the Negro occurs in, and is designed to perpetuate, a segregated society” (p. 91). I take this to mean that low expectations result in low achievement, which perpetuates segregation, even today. Ladson-Billings (2009) relates that a colleague once remarked to her, “The very students who hate learning and intellectual rigor seem to be the ones who decide they want to teach” (p. 103). If true, this could explain the attitudes of some teachers who do not seem to value high expectations and intellectual achievement, and who, instead, appear to prefer mediocrity.

Minnesota Comprehensive Assessment (MCA)-III Reading Specifications

The specifications of the MCA-III reading test for 4th grade are as follows: 5-7 reading passages, 21-27 literature questions (45-55% of test), 21-27 informational questions (45-55% of test). Of the reading passages, 0-2 will have a Lexile level (reading level determined by sentence length and repetition of vocabulary words in a text) range of 450-765, 3-7 will have a Lexile range of 770-980, and 0-2 will have a Lexile range of 985-1040 (see Appendix D). According to the FAST (Fastbridge Learning) assessment test in the fall of 2016, 35 of my students had a Lexile range in which the upper range number was below 450. Only 3 students had upper range numbers over 765. Therefore, according to the results of the FAST assessment, only 3 of my students were even close to being able to read and comprehend, much less analyze, the bulk of the potential reading passages (mid-range) on the upcoming 4th grade MCA-III reading test. Again, this is the standardized reading test that

students take to show whether or not they are making adequate progress toward being college and career ready when they graduate from high school. Invariably, the students who show the lowest proficiency rates are the students who are not independent readers of grade level texts, and these students are most often African American males.

Teaching Life Challenge that Led to Research Question

Herein lies the challenge. The questions that remain at the heart of my teaching life are: If the only way to become a better reader is to read, how can students be motivated to read more so that they will become better readers? How can students be helped to discover that reading is a vital key to their future success and necessary for having more choices in life? What can make reading cool? What does it take for them to see that reading is a great equalizer; that anyone can become a better reader, and it is worth the effort? How can I, an adult white female middle-class teacher, foster a culture of reading in a classroom primarily consisting of African American children who live in poverty? How can I help close the achievement gap and, in particular, reach the students who are the most difficult to reach and who have the most need – African American males? What do the statistics show?

State of My Students

It is well documented that success in life can be correlated to the ability to read. Kunjufu (2005) states, “Ninety percent of inmates enter jail illiterate. Some governors determine prison growth based on fourth grade reading scores” (p. 64). Students who cannot read are at a higher risk of dropping out and not graduating from high school. Historically, the majority of my students come to me one to four years below grade level. According to the Minnesota Department of Education (see Appendix C), 86% of the students at my school are African American, 92% qualify for free/reduced lunch, 16.7% are homeless (and even

more are highly mobile), 18.4% are identified special education. What is not listed are the large numbers of students who live with mental health issues and different forms of trauma in their lives. Most people reading this cannot even imagine what many of my students live with daily. When was the last time your house was hit by bullets from a gunfight in a nearby vacant lot? Do you know anyone whose grandmother was shot and killed as she sat in the driver's seat of her car? Have you ever witnessed someone getting off the bus across the street from an elementary school while engaged in a gun battle? I have more shocking examples and they do not even make the evening news, presumably because our school lies precisely in the middle of a violence "hot spot." These are not trivial considerations.

I was asked not long ago by another teacher if I thought the MCA-III reading test was culturally biased against African Americans. Kendi (2016) states that racial equality would happen at a faster pace if the "racial preferences" of standardized testing were eliminated. Bhattacharyya et al. (2013) says that standardized testing lacks sensitivity toward students of various backgrounds and children from educated, upper income families have advantages when taking tests. The question of cultural bias in standardized testing is a common topic of discussion in my school district, but my colleague was interviewing me as part of a project for her reading licensure class. I responded that students who do not read much will not do well on the MCA-III and it is not that the test is biased against those of a certain race, but that it is biased against those who have not achieved a certain level of reading and then subsequent learning through reading. Delpit (2012) supports my view and asserts that when students enter fourth grade "they need considerable vocabulary and background knowledge to make sense of required reading material in classrooms and on standardized tests" (p. 36). She continues that if students have not acquired the necessary vocabulary and background

knowledge of the world outside of their own lives, they are “destined to fall behind.” Jarrrels (2009) contends that African Americans usually score lowest on standardized reading tests because they do not practice voluntary reading outside of school. Such “emphasis on reading,” says Jarrrels, “should begin at birth” with parents reading to children. Students should read “above and beyond what is required for school” (p. vii). It is within the power of families to improve the reading abilities and test scores of their children. I also tell my students that it is within their own power to improve their reading and reading assessment scores. I tell them that if they want to be better readers, they need to read more, just as to excel at sports, they need to practice more. If they read books, their learning rate rapidly accelerates. It can be tempting for teachers to lower expectations and sometimes students display *learned helplessness*. When given a task, they immediately say that they need help or “do not get it”, without even trying to accomplish it for themselves. The result is that some students end up seldom doing anything on their own. This is unfortunate, because the time will come when the students must rely on themselves to succeed at standardized achievement tests, college entrance exams, and job interviews, and they need to have the confidence and the skills to do so.

Professional Development

My school principal came to me last winter and asked if I would lead our professional learning community (PLC) for 3-4-5 grade literacy with her. PLCs are one-hour meetings in our school held once a week in which we set instructional goals, discuss strategies, and review student work and progress. She asked me to do this because of success I have had with students’ reading growth over the years and she wanted me to share my ideas and methods with other teachers. Of course, my methods are in constant flux as I learn from

experience, research, other teachers, and students, but there are some foundational ideas that stay fairly consistent. In addition, I do read a great deal of current literature. I agreed to work with her and subsequently decided to document my work. This process evolved into redoing and finally finishing my MAT capstone, which I started writing a few years ago. It has much more research and experience behind it now and I hope it will be useful to those who access it.

Also last spring, administration decided that the 4th grade teachers would loop to the 5th grade with our students. While working out the new schedule, I proposed that there be a thirty-minute block of time in the mornings during which all of the 5th grade teachers would participate in a read-aloud of a common text to our students. That proposal was accepted by administration as well as teachers and became a reality this school year. 4th grade teachers also implemented a version of it.

Summary

My project is the development and implementation of a simultaneous community teacher shared read-aloud of the same texts in the 5th grade of my north Minneapolis public school. The goal of this work is to answer my research question: *How can I create a culture of independent reading among African American students, especially black males?* The hope is that the community shared read-aloud project will help motivate students to become lifelong readers and learners who will be well prepared to develop their future chances and choices into great successes. As I explain in Chapter Two, research reveals that reading aloud promotes and inspires independent reading, and independent reading improves reading enjoyment and ability. Not trivially, this will result in increased reading standardized test scores and a shrinking of the achievement gap. With that said, I continue with the work of

Milner in mind, who stated, “The time has come to end the excuses: we must teach, empower, and educate Black male students and take education to the next level” (2007, p. 245).

Chapter Two consists of the literature review pertinent to my research question. Part One reviews the history of the education of African Americans, and the origins of the achievement gap. In Part Two I explore literature on the topic of motivating students to see the value of reading and education. Culturally relevant teaching (CRT) is discussed in this section. In Part Three I discuss literature that illustrates teaching vocabulary, independent reading, and teacher read-alouds.

Chapter Three is my plan for the community teacher shared read-aloud project. It includes project details, explanations, and provides context. Chapter Four is my reflection and conclusion. It summarizes what I learned, how I grew, and my future plans.

CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

Overview

My review of literature covers much ground in order to answer my research question: *How can I create a culture of independent reading among African American students, especially black males?* I hope to help motivate them to become lifelong readers and learners who will be well prepared to develop their chances and choices into great successes. Section One examines research on the history of education of African Americans and the ensuing achievement gap. Section Two discusses literature on the topic of motivating African American students, especially males, to see the value of reading and education and includes literature on culturally relevant teaching (CRT). Literature discussed in Section Three illustrates three specific areas of teaching and learning that influence the development of becoming a culture of readers. These areas are vocabulary, independent reading, and teacher read-alouds. All of this background is necessary for the 5th grade community teacher shared read-aloud project that I devise and implement in Chapter Three.

SECTION ONE: Dimensions and Historical Background of the Achievement Gap

This section explores the roots of the achievement gap and its pervasive ramifications.

African American (Black) – Caucasian (White) Achievement Gap Persists

Current data confirms the educational debacle that is the achievement gap. The Council of Great City Schools is an advocacy coalition composed of 65 of the nation's largest urban school districts. The Lewis et al. (2010) report reveals an analysis of National Assessment for Educational Progress (NAEP) test scores and shows the consequences of

these latest disparities between African Americans and Caucasians. The report concludes that the national tragedy of black male achievement deserves national attention and it makes a plea for action to national leaders. The report shows that black males continue to lag behind white males in reading achievement in proficient and basic levels in the eighth grade, that black males are almost twice as likely as white males to drop out of high school, and that black males are less likely than white males to participate in academic clubs or be involved in advanced placement studies. SAT and ACT scores show similar discrepancies between black and white males. Once out of school, the 2010 statistics show that the unemployment rate for black males over 20 is twice that of white males (17.3 percent to 8.6 percent). It should be no surprise, given these statistics, to discover that in 2008, black males represented only a small percentage of college population (5 percent), but over one-third of the national prison population. A review of NAEP data reveals that in 2015, only 36% of the nation's 4th grade students were proficient in reading. From 2013 to 2015, there was no significant progress. According to the Minnesota Department of Education website, there was no significant change in scores, or narrowing of the achievement gap between blacks and whites in 4th grade reading from 2011 to 2015, either statewide or nationally.

African American History in the Americas

One day while I was perusing books in the African American section of a used bookstore, a conversation began between myself and an older black man. Obviously well-read and extremely knowledgeable on the subject, he recommended a book to me by Lerone Bennet, Jr. It is a seminal work of scholarship referenced by most of the other African American history books that I found in my research. Beautifully written and meticulously

researched, I recommend the sixth edition, because it includes a timeline of sorts, a section called *Landmarks and Milestones*.

According to Bennett (1993), the first blacks arrived in the Americas in 1619 not as slaves, but as indentured servants with the same status as white indentured servants, and a few did earn their freedom. However, blacks came to be considered inferior by virtue of their skin color and a source of cheap labor by white land-owning society. Basically, racism became a statute when slavery was legalized in Massachusetts in 1641 and was soon followed by other colonies. There were some free blacks, and they were also considered intellectually inferior by the whites in power. The whites needed ways to convince the blacks that they were inferior so oppression could continue. Economics and greed demanded it.

Blacks were conditioned to accepting a lifetime of being the property of whites by methods of mental and physical cruelty. The slaves were conditioned to believe that they were helpless and their lives were hopeless. White slave owners knew if they controlled the minds of the slaves, they controlled the slaves.

Achievement Gap Background

The beginnings of the present day achievement gap can be found, according to Paige and Witty (2010), in legislation enacted from 1740 on, prohibiting slaves from learning reading or writing, as well as prohibiting anyone teaching slaves to read or write. Whites could be imprisoned for teaching or allowing teaching to slaves and blacks could be whipped and have body parts amputated for teaching or learning. The whites in charge seriously believed in the power of knowledge and they wanted that power only for themselves, and, by

extension, maintained that reading and knowledge made slaves restless, dissatisfied, and difficult to manage.

Since slaves were considered property, not “men” by the founding fathers when the Constitution was written, the phrase “all men are created equal” did not extend to blacks. The slaves were freed after the Civil War, but attaining equality was not that easy. The Supreme Court upheld “separate but equal” in the *Plessy v. Ferguson* case of 1896. The Jim Crow laws lasted into the 1960s and 1970s, resulting in denial of educational opportunities because of racial segregation for four generations of blacks, contend Paige and Witty (2010). *Plessy v. Ferguson* was overturned in 1954 by the *Brown v. Board of Education* Supreme Court decision, which stated that educational discrimination based on race was unconstitutional. The oppressive damage due to lack of educational opportunities for blacks, however, was already done. Paige and Witty (2010) maintain that the “black-white achievement gap continues to reinforce and perpetuate” the racial inferiority stereotype “created by a slave-holding society to justify slavery” even today. Page and Witty (2010) also say that the only way to destroy the stereotype is by destroying the achievement gap, which can only be accomplished by black educational performance.

The achievement gap cannot be considered static. According to the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) longitudinal data, after *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954, there was substantial reduction of the achievement gap between blacks and whites during the 1970s and 1980s. Even though the trend slowed and even stopped in the late 1980s, the positive news is that it *can* change, which means it can disappear, according to Paige and Witty (2010). The less than stellar trend since the late 1980s is the one we are currently experiencing and its causes are the subject of scholarly debate.

SECTION 2: Culturally Relevant Resources for Closing the Gap

This section will discuss literature that helps to reach and motivate African American students, especially males.

African American Males

As illustrated in the data reported at the beginning of this chapter, the achievement gap between African American males and Caucasian males is alarming and deserving of national attention. The Council of Great City Schools (Casserly et al., 2012) asks for action by national leaders and offers solutions as well. These recommendations include community and family involvement. They also include recommendations regarding schools and, in particular, teachers and teaching methods.

In his essay, Milner (2006) writes that white teachers need more than good intentions to successfully teach students of color. He contends that it is vital for teachers to find ways to motivate black students to achieve academically. To do otherwise is to fail as a teacher. Such readings remind me that I must find ways to *do better* and I constantly seek better ways to teach and motivate by reading, reflecting, and discussions with colleagues.

In the same collection of essays, Holbrook (2006) goes so far as to say that the worst form of racism is low expectations. I am convinced that this is true and I strive to maintain the same high expectations for all of my students. I do not simply consider where they need to be now, but what will later be expected of them. Similarly, Delpit (2012) states “ Never do the successful teachers of these children believe that students have learned enough or that they cannot learn more” (37). In fact, she maintains that students are extremely aware if teachers fail to provide rigorous instruction. When I started teaching as a long-term reading substitute teacher at my school, one middle school student, E, asked me in frustration during

a standardized test why teachers were not teaching kids what they needed to know to be successful on these tests. His words and tone struck me and I determined that I would do everything in my power to teach students what they were expected to know, and then some. There is never time to waste. In Holbrook's essay, a distinction is made between *education* and *training*. This resonates with me because it speaks to the very heart of my teaching and my project. Educated people have more choices in life and better chances to achieve success. Holbrook tells teachers to be honest with themselves and constantly self-reflect about their feelings toward all students. Teachers should never forget that they have tremendous power in the lives and futures of students.

Kunjufu (2005) gives insight into teaching African American students, especially males. Of special interest in his book is the section on illiteracy and how the inability to read is a problem of epidemic proportions among African American males. He makes the point that perhaps more reading teachers are needed, not more special education teachers, as so many black males are "dumped" into special education because they have not mastered reading by the third grade. He emphasizes that it is obvious that future life experiences, positive or negative, are dependent on the ability, or inability, to read.

Books Can Change Lives

Tatum (2009) maintains that the important texts for students of color, especially males, to read are those that help them define themselves and help them understand who they can become. He wants educators to remember the power of texts and how they can provide positive life direction especially in the current unpredictable society. Tatum's emphasis is on connecting students to texts that are meaningful and that are useful to them. Tatum goes on to explain that Dick Gregory's autobiography, *Nigger*, is part of his personal textual lineage

because it changed his life and helped him deal with his situation in the Chicago projects during the 1970s and 1980s. He says that *all* students can benefit from textual lineages, but African American adolescent males have the greatest need for special redirection right now. He continues that the trend is moving away from requiring the reading of meaningful texts that empower students or help them deal with life's problems and he warns that differentiated instruction legitimizes the practice. Building textual lineages is necessary for literacy development and helps students make sense of the bigger picture moving outside the school and into the world. According to Tatum, insufficient exposure to texts negatively impacts "reading, writing, language, and vocabulary achievement gaps and contributes to a life in which young African American males as a group experience greater economic, judicial, and social strife and disappointment" (2009, p. xii). His book contains a list of recommended lineage texts.

Other Notable Authors and Books

Other notable people have commented on the power of reading and literature to change lives, and I find it imperative that I bring these stories to my students. I intentionally highlight this because earlier in my career, while teaching at a public school in Saint Paul, I was criticized by administration for having my students read too much. My contract was not renewed, and the reason I was given was, "You aren't what we had in mind." As a result, since I did not have tenure, I could no longer teach in Saint Paul schools and I found my way to Minneapolis. This is a chain of events for which I am now thankful, but at the time it was difficult for me to stay positive. Fortunately at my present school, I can bring to my students these inspirational stories that show the power of reading and literature to change and even save lives. And I know they make a difference. First example, in the book he originally

wrote in prison in 1975, Rubin “Hurricane” Carter (2011) tells his autobiographical story about being a boxing-title contender accused of murder. He is sentenced to prison, and while behind bars, reads and educates himself enough to write his book about his unjust incarceration. His book is read by Bob Dylan who writes a famous song about him, bringing publicity to his plight. Another book (the basis, incidentally, of a compelling film) continues the same story. Chaiton and Swinton (2000) write about a young illiterate teenager, Lesra, who picks up Hurricane Carter’s book at a library’s used book sale; it becomes the first book he has ever read cover to cover. He writes Carter in prison and visits him. Eventually he gets his mentors interested in the case. As a result, Carter gets a new trial and is set free. The teenaged boy later goes on to college, then to law school, and finally becomes an attorney. It is a startling chain of events that demonstrates the power of reading; my students of color connect to it and derive meaning from it.

Motivational speaker Dr. Ben Carson was a troubled youngster who went from inner-city Detroit to director of pediatric neurosurgery at Johns Hopkins. In his book, which served as the basis of a film, Carson (1990) chronicles his journey from being a non-reader with a hot temper in 5th grade to becoming the smartest student in his class by 8th grade. This was accomplished by his illiterate mother requiring Ben and his brother to turn off the television and instead read books and write book reports for her. I have had several past students come and tell me how much this story influenced them and helped motivate them to read outside of school.

In another example of the power of textual lineage, Kafele (2009) tells of picking the book *To Kill a Black Man* by Louis Lomax off a library shelf and being so enthralled by the book that he realized he needed to read more and more to make up for all the reading he had

not previously been doing. He made it a point after that to read at least one meaningful book every week outside of school. He was repaid by a sense of purpose and vision to guide his life. His reward was the determination to excel and succeed in his chosen profession, and he did. He believes that one major crisis in the African American community is self-identity. When my students read stories like this about people they can connect to, they can see how reading can empower them too. Reading can maximize their potential. *Reading can save their lives*. This book also reminds me as a teacher to maintain high expectations for my African American students, especially the males. If I envision their academic success, perhaps it will help them achieve their academic success. I believe this is possible because quite often students tell me that I inspire them. I respond by saying that they inspire me, which is true beyond words.

Inspirational to read, and recommended by several people previously mentioned, Frederick Douglass's autobiography (1749) describes learning how to read when it was against the law. My students respect what he went through on his path from slavery to freedom and influential success. He makes it very clear how important reading was to his struggle for freedom.

Culturally Relevant Teaching

Culturally relevant teaching (CRT) involves providing meaningful, well-written content that students can connect with that gives readers hope, confidence, and direction in life. Choosing content is a task that I take seriously, because as a teacher I have limited time to deliver maximum impact in order to achieve maximum results. According to Kafele (2009), who cites Alfred Tatum, we must know our students well and use their culture as a source of their education. They must be able to read about the black experience, historically

and in contemporary literature. This relevant content will result in heightened interest and improved comprehension. Reading about the black collective experience also helps students in their search for self-identity. Students should be able to gather strength with the knowledge of where they came from and realize that with the proper tools and determination, they can have a future that is limited only by their own imagination.

Content and curriculum are critical, but Ladson-Billings (2009) asserts in her book that the way we teach profoundly affects how the subject matter is received by the students we teach. Ladson-Billings gives the following definition of culturally relevant teaching:

Specifically, culturally relevant teaching is a pedagogy that empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes. These cultural referents are not merely vehicles for bridging or explaining the dominant culture; they are aspects of the curriculum in their own right. (2009 p. 20)

Ladson-Billings' book is a study of effective teachers and their methods, and is an influence in my teaching as well as in my project development.

Samuels (2008) discusses the importance of becoming a part of students' lives in order to help them become better readers. He says the best way to do this is to mentor them. Mentoring helps students overcome the problems that are beyond their control, such as poverty, and gives them a better chance of being successful in life. This author is particularly helpful to me because he discusses inner-city schools in Minneapolis and Saint Paul, which is where I am located. The other chapters in the book, by different authors, are also informative as they are about motivating students to read using their interests, building engaging classrooms, and effective strategies to use with reluctant readers.

Jensen (2009) reminds me how important it is to build hope in my students and how important it is to have engaging instruction. He also emphasizes the necessity of building background (prior) knowledge. When students start discovering more about the world through reading and learning, they start making more connections and experiencing more “ah-ha” moments that give them confidence and motivate them to strive for even more.

A vital component of culturally relevant teaching is building relationships with students. This does not mean being a “pal” to students. Rather, it involves getting to know the students and their families, and respecting them and their culture. Kunjufu (2002) says in his book that significant relationships between teachers and students are necessary for significant learning to take place. He discusses how black students expect teachers to act with authority. Delpit (2012) adds that the trust that students have for strong teachers helps them to feel safe taking risks and learning. The students appreciate being pushed to excel. When someone believes in them, they begin to believe in themselves.

As well as culturally relevant teaching, teachers need to be aware of the importance of cultural literacy. According to Hirsch (1988), cultural literacy is the background knowledge that informed readers must possess and daily use to make meaning. Cultural literacy is what makes communication possible. In order to understand what is written on a page, readers need to know more than what is actually written on that page, and this includes intergenerational information as well as current information. The gap in cultural literacy has been widening since the 1970s. Hirsch emphasizes that in order for equality and social justice to exist, a high level of universal literacy is necessary. This concept extends beyond black and white and is an area I intend to investigate further. For now, it is sufficient to

know that this gap exists, and steps need to be taken to eradicate it. Of course, one of these steps is reading. Lots and lots and lots of reading!

SECTION THREE: Specific Teaching Ways and Means

In this section, which will conclude Chapter Two, I discuss specific teaching ways and means, that, when correctly applied, help to close the achievement gap. These include teacher read-alouds, independent reading, and vocabulary. There is a vast fund of teaching resources; the ones I mention in this section are the ones that I keep returning to. These have proven successful in my experience, so I am giving them attention here.

Teacher Read-Alouds

According to Lemov et al. (2016), teacher read-alouds are an important part of teaching literacy and should be done in all classrooms in all subjects and grade levels. Teacher read-alouds let students experience reading at Lexile levels above what they can read on their own. They are able to hear new vocabulary and complex syntax read by a fluent, adult reader. Students can also be a part of the love and excitement of literature. Teacher read-alouds help blast through achievement barriers.

Read-alouds have the benefit behind the idea of the “One Community -- One School - - One Book” initiative. The read-aloud books are a shared reading experience and a common topic of conversation. *Read to Them* is a non-profit organization that facilitates “One School – One Book” programs. Their website lists the many benefits of read-alouds and likens them to a “401k vocabulary account for future literate success in life” (<http://readtothem.org/why/overview/>).

“...in 1985, *Becoming a Nation of Readers: The Report of the Commission on Reading* identified reading aloud as “the single most important activity for building the

knowledge required for eventual success in reading” and “a practice that should continue throughout the grades” (Anderson et al. 1985, p. 23, p. 51, as quoted by Layne 2009, p. 52) in his book. Layne further maintains “A good book read well will do more for the woes of our disenfranchised readers than all the leveled books the publishers can crank out” (p. 53).

In an article from the National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP), Wadsworth states “Read alouds are powerful because they serve so many instructional purposes—to motivate, encourage, excite, build background, develop comprehension, assist children in making connections, and serve as a model of what fluent reading sounds like” (2008). She shows how this allows students to enjoy and learn from literature that is written beyond students’ abilities to read independently. Pennac (1994) echoes this idea when he says, “He read out loud – that’s what made the difference...A teacher who reads out loud lifts you to the level of books. He gives you the gift of reading!” (p. 111).

In an article written for an educational magazine, Lemov (2016) explains that it is important to read challenging texts to children in order to prepare them to navigate such texts on their own. Long after students can decode words, they will continue to struggle with complex ideas, and persistence with complex ideas is necessary for success in college. Unfortunately, many students reach college and do not yet have this skill, which makes reading college level texts difficult. Reading books aloud also gives children the opportunity to hear vocabulary words that are not generally heard in speech. If these words are not learned through reading, they are often not learned at all and can become obstacles to students. The listeners of books read aloud also have the benefit of having an introduction to complex syntax. Unusual and convoluted sentence structures can be barriers to

understanding, but hearing them before independently reading them can help readers engage them with confidence. Lemov believes that rich, enthralling, beautiful literature read aloud to children before they can read it on their own helps students immensely with their future reading. Lemov is a considerable influence on me in the development of the community teacher shared read-aloud project. Without read-alouds, Lemov contends, students can suffer from underexposure to texts. As I referenced earlier in this literature review section, Tatum and Milner both maintain that failure to expose African American students to challenging texts is a very real disservice to them. This means that they need to experience more texts rather than fewer and this includes books that they cannot yet read on their own. Adequate exposure to a wide variety of texts at elevated levels will help them with their future reading. Leveled, guided reading holds students back.

No discussion about read-alouds would be complete without mentioning Trelease (1993) who puts forth a formula for lifetime readers. He says that regardless of age, people will only do over and over again what they enjoy doing. Reading is an accrued skill that you must practice in order to improve, much like playing any sport. He relates research that shows that “it is not until eighth grade that a student’s reading level catches up to his or her listening level. Until that time, most students are capable of hearing, understanding, and enjoying material that is more complicated than what they can read” (p. xii). The listening experience directly affects vocabulary, reading, and writing skills. The person reading aloud is a role model and the material being read advertises the pleasures of reading. Trelease continues with an example of a middle school in a poverty-stricken urban area in Boston, Massachusetts. Four years after beginning teacher read-alouds and student sustained silent reading (SSR), the standardized test reading scores of the school went from last to first in the

district. Trelease has retired, but his books are tremendous read-aloud resources, as is his website on which he even has a variety of brochures that can be downloaded and printed to give to parents.

Fox (2008) says in her book that reading aloud can turn non-readers, especially adolescent boys, into excited readers! As I do more research, I continue to be amazed at how powerful reading aloud is in the development of readers. Fox tells how important it is to read well as we read aloud, and to express excitement and emotion. She recommends reading in a way that is authentic, not too sugary or patronizing, be they our students or children. She continues by saying that we should listen to the words of the books telling us how to read them, and that we should pause. It is important not to rush through a book in a monotone; we must take time to pay attention to the words. Expressive reading will be remembered. Fox maintains that it is vital that children be read to even before they are born, and then from birth for as long as they will let us, even after they can read for themselves. Reading aloud to our children readies them for learning reading at school. If parents do not read to their small children, they are not prepared to learn to read when they start school. Partly for this reason, the children already need to catch up when they begin school. There is no time to waste, and reading aloud to students is an opportunity that cannot be missed.

Independent Reading

One of my greatest teaching challenges is turning reluctant readers into avid readers. I have seen the “reading light” turn on many times, however. Give students opportunities to read and the right books to read, and they can start experiencing the joys that independent reading can provide. Once this happens, students never look back. Fountas & Pinnell (2001)

have a helpful chapter in their book that details starting the rituals and routines of independent reading in the classroom and explains how to get the students to think of themselves as readers, making reading choices. The first twenty days of school are critical in establishing rituals and routines. I know from experience that it is much more difficult to establish independent reading later on. In chart form, Fountas & Pinnell give ideas for mini-lessons, provide the key concepts of each, list the learning outcomes, and the resources needed. They proceed to give examples and descriptions in the chapter. They remind us that reading a book is not simply a task to accomplish, but a process for students to direct and manage their learning as they move toward becoming independent, self-directed learners.

I am not a fan of leveled reading in small reading groups. Evidence that independent reading is more beneficial than small group reading comes from Allington (2012). In his book, he maintains that students need a higher volume of reading to become better readers. When reading in small groups to the teacher, only one student reads at a time, even though others may be following along. So, each student may only read 100 words. The same students in a group doing independent, silent sustained reading would each read 700 words. It is typically the lower-achieving students who are selected for the small reading groups, yet these are precisely the students who especially need a higher volume of reading. This seems to show that the highly touted small, leveled reading groups are actually holding students back rather than pushing them forward. Miller (2009) agrees, saying that reading ability improves with actual increased reading time rather than simply interventions. Students who do not read well will not read regularly and the result is cumulative. After a few years, these students will become weaker readers who are even farther behind, which increases the achievement gap. Miller continues that this is called the Matthew effect, coined by Keith

Stanovich, because in the Bible, Matthew 13:12 is interpreted as *The rich get richer and the poor get poorer*. Students who read a lot will continue to become better readers, and the students who do not read a lot will become poorer readers. Miller maintains that independent reading time must be increased to change struggling readers into avid readers.

More strategies for motivating struggling, reluctant readers to read independently come from Tovani (2000). She illustrates problems she has experienced in her reading classrooms, and discusses ways to solve them. She encourages teachers to rethink their teaching and try new ways to make texts accessible. She warns against spoon-feeding students who are patient enough to wait for answers rather than try to figure out solutions for themselves. One helpful point she makes regarding comprehension is that it is when students realize they are confused that they can begin to help themselves. She suggests the strategy of backing up to the last understood part and constructing meaning from that point on in little pieces. Students understand more when they monitor their comprehension and take steps to fix it.

Sometimes it helps to have students think about how reading may benefit them in order to get them to make the effort to read independently. Gallagher (2003) presents ideas that can be used for students at any grade level. Sometimes it is necessary to remind students that although reading is hard, it is worth it because it will help them get to where they want to go in life. Teachers can ask students in surveys what they want their lives to be like in ten or twenty years and most students say they want to be professionals of some sort, either in sports or the legal or medical professions. Throughout the school year, they can be reminded of their goals and how important reading is to their achievement of those goals. Many of them will get it and strive to become better readers. It might be helpful for teachers to post

Gallagher's "Nine Reading Reasons" and refer to them at appropriate times.

Bambrick-Santoyo et al. (2013) offer some wonderful guidelines for independent reading in the classroom. Having a classroom library is important, and they give tips for placement of the library as well as organizational ideas. They say what I already know to be true, which is that independent reading time should not be a look-for-book time. Some students can avoid reading by continually looking for books and they often end up reading very little. Also, students' movements during independent reading time can be a distraction to those who are reading. The authors mention their expectations for independent reading time. Books should be kept flat on desks so teachers can observe that students are on task, and not flipping pages, or simply staring at the same page throughout reading time. Teachers should keep a watch on page numbers. This is important as a way of monitoring students' progress and because students will not always give an accurate answer when simply asked how many pages they have read. They need to know that someone is checking. Silence during reading is also important. Students often want to talk about what they are reading. Giving them time at the end of reading period to discuss their books with each other can help reduce their impulsiveness. I will add here that the same goes for teachers and other adults in the classroom. It sets a poor example when adults tell students to not talk and then they proceed to converse with each other in front of the children. The same goes for grading or working on the computer. I think it sets a better example for students if the teacher is modeling reading, while monitoring the students. If the teacher shows that independent reading is a priority, the students will be more likely to treat it as a priority as well. The benefits of a rigorous independent reading system cannot be emphasized enough, because it can make a lifelong reading difference. And that is our goal.

Miller and Kelley (2013) maintain that students must read a lot to reach even minimum levels of reading achievement and that it is important to give them time to read in school as well as encouraging them to read at home. They are passionate about reading becoming a lifelong pursuit. Miller and Kelley say that reading at school helps students connect with other readers, helps them build the habit of reading, and allows them to become part of a culture that values reading. This is important because otherwise, they probably will not become readers outside of school. They emphasize that it is imperative that schools make time for reading during the school day. They believe that daily read-alouds are important for building a reading community and for supporting developing independent readers. They give additional read-aloud resources and supply ideas for teacher read-alouds. Miller and Kelley also give suggestions for creating “book buzz” to excite students to independently read books from the classroom library.

Another author who discusses the importance of building a community of readers is Ripp (2017). She explains how teachers can make the classroom a place for all students to succeed. In order to build passionate reading communities, we need to help students rebuild their reading identities through wonderful learning experiences. She says teachers should fill their minds with reading research and be passionate about what they believe will enhance reading in classrooms. Teachers must approach each day with a burning sense of urgency about student learning and do everything possible to help make student reading success occur.

The authors Moss and Young (2010) make a case for independent reading and give ideas for implementing independent reading in the classroom, including building a classroom library and helping students choose books they will be interested in reading. Book talks are

discussed. These can be great ways to introduce students to books they might not otherwise notice. Teachers can give frequent short (5 minute) book talks. These can take the form of giving a short summary of the plot to a certain point, then leaving the students with a cliffhanger. Another type of book talk is character-based. This involves talking about the book from a character's point of view. One of my favorites mentioned is based on the first sentences of books. Teachers choose some books with fascinating first sentences and read them to students to pique their interest in the book. It is also particularly powerful when students give book talks. When students are excited about a text, they can get other students excited in the text also. Displaying books with their covers facing out is another good idea.

Access to Books

When I first started teaching at my present school, students were not allowed to check books out from the school library, so I made sure that students could borrow books from me. I have always thought that large classroom libraries are important and Allington (2012) confirms this in his research. "The classrooms of our exemplary teachers invariably had a much larger supply of books than were found in the typical classrooms of the school they worked in." He continues, "Higher-achieving schools had more books in classroom library collections than were found in lower-achieving schools" (p. 82). I believe this to be true and still maintain a large classroom library. Over the years, many former students have come back and told me that my books were always the best and that was what really made them want to read. Some even mentioned me in their 8th grade promotion speeches!

Atwell (2007) also discusses the importance of access to a wide assortment of compelling titles. The books should be diverse, with new books added regularly. She

continues that students will be more inclined to read if they get to choose their books. I find it interesting that she says that empathy is an important part of being in the “reading zone” because students place themselves in relation to the characters in their books, almost as if the readers are in the books. Beers and Probst (2017) extend this idea, by saying that students develop compassion as they read. They maintain that reading changes the readers, making them better, and even re-shaping them. This re-shaping can be the catalyst for social change. This illustrates how powerful reading can be. Not only can it change students’ lives, but reading can change the world. Yes, the effort is worth it.

Vocabulary

I continue to believe in the importance of direct vocabulary instruction and there is plenty of evidence to support my belief. Students cannot comprehend what they read if they do not know the meanings of the words. Robert Marzano is a well-respected researcher, author, and trainer in education. According to his website:

The importance of direct vocabulary instruction cannot be overstated. Vocabulary provides essential background knowledge and is linked to academic achievement. Effective teachers select terms for direct instruction, use a research-based process to teach those terms, and assess and track students’ progress with new terms. <http://www.marzanoresearch.com/vocabulary>

One resource that is useful in teaching vocabulary is by Vacca and Vacca (1998), who emphasize the strong relationship between knowledge of vocabulary and understanding what is read. They include a large variety of instructional strategies in their book in order to help students build vocabulary knowledge and to learn how words are related conceptually to one

another. They maintain that students must have several experiences to work with and must use words in different situations as part of the learning process. One strategy that I particularly enjoy is the Magic Square. Magic Squares are not new, but they are puzzles that can be fun devices for reinforcing the meanings of words across the curriculum.

Jim Burke (2000) also gives useful strategies for expanding vocabulary. In his book, he discusses the different types of vocabulary and ways to teach and reinforce them in the classroom. Among these strategies are: Read, Read, and Read More, Word Walls, and Examine Word Relationships (267).

Tier Two words are important in students' vocabulary development. Beck et al. (2008) explain how Tier Two words are those words that are usually found in print, but not in speech. If students do not read much, they will not be exposed to these words. By explicitly teaching some Tier Two words to students, they will not feel so overwhelmed when they come across these words in texts. Also discussed in the book is the importance of students being able to use dictionaries, because of all of the information they contain. Some people say that dictionaries are no longer needed because students can look up words online. However, exploring words on the printed page is much more powerful. Students will learn more of the nuances of words and language by using a "real" dictionary.

Graves (2006), advocates promoting word consciousness. This involves teaching students about words and encouraging word play. He also discusses the importance of dictionary use and stresses how vocabulary instruction is necessary to improve reading comprehension. He says that teaching elements such as Latin and Greek roots, prefixes, and suffixes is worthwhile, and helps students figure out unknown vocabulary.

Bringing It All Together

I have become more convinced than ever of the importance of students becoming lifelong independent readers. The more I research, the more I see that vocabulary is important to

independent reading, and teacher read-alouds are effective in boosting vocabulary. Partly for this reason, many researchers and educators consider read-alouds as the foundation, or heart, of reading instruction.

Allen (2000) makes a distinction between teacher read-alouds and shared reading. She says that with teacher read-alouds, only the teacher has the book and students listen to the reading. With shared reading, students also have a copy of the book and follow along. In this case, students are not only hearing the text, but they are seeing it too. Having the book and reading along gives the students confidence. Surveyed middle and high school students stated that this type of shared reading was the main thing that helped them raise their reading achievement. When texts are shared, more challenging and interesting texts can be read, and it will elevate the reading abilities of the students. Vocabulary and syntax will be more complex. There will be more complicated story lines, the story voice will be more challenging, and time might skip around more. Becoming familiar with such difficulties will make students feel better able to handle it themselves. Students are able to hear fluent reading. They have a shared experience that they can discuss, and they are introduced to the beauty of what reading can be. They will discover that the more they read, the better readers they will become, the more they will enjoy it, and the more they will learn. This is why I am making my project one of shared teacher read-alouds, and I am extending the concept by giving the students the books they read, so they can make a quality library at home. It is hoped that having read the books once in a shared teacher read-aloud, they will have the confidence to read them independently. I expect that the shared teacher read-alouds will raise our students' reading levels, motivate them to be independent readers, and help close the achievement gap.

Summary

The literature reviewed in this chapter has given me much material to use in my project development endeavor. In answer to my research question: *How can I create a culture of independent reading among African American students, especially black males?* I believe that shared teacher read-alouds will help illustrate the value of reading. I believe that it will inspire students to do more independent reading and to become lifelong readers and learners, well prepared to develop their chances and choices into great successes. Now it is time to move on to the project development and implementation of the 5th grade shared literacy community teacher read-alouds in Chapter Three.

CHAPTER THREE

Project Design

Overview

Writing this capstone paper generated a wealth of ideas for how to answer my research question: *How can I create a culture of independent reading among African American students, especially black males?* I hope to help motivate them to become lifelong readers and learners who will be well prepared to develop their chances and choices into great successes. It is time to put the research into action as I design my shared community teacher read-aloud project. First, I identify the audience for the project. Second, I provide context for the project. Third, I describe the framework for completion of the project. Lastly, I discuss when the project takes place. The project itself is placed after Chapter Four, in the Appendix (see Appendix A).

Audience

The participants in my shared community teacher read-aloud project are 5th grade teachers and students. There is one math teacher, one math content specialist, one literacy teacher, one literacy content specialist (me), and one teacher of science and social studies. We also have a special education teacher who supports the project and makes recommendations, but does not have a reading group, as well as one special education assistant and one general education assistant who help when needed, but do not have regular groups. All of the teachers have experienced considerable professional development, in our district and in our building, devoted to the topic of culturally relevant teaching, over the past two years. There are 70-5th grade students, the majority of whom are African American. This is our second year with most of the students, as we were their teachers in 4th grade and

have looped with them to 5th grade. The reading levels according to the fall FAST test are: Exceeds/Meets standards – 28%, Partially Meets Standards – 18%, Does Not Meet Standards – 53%. The general education, special education, and English language learner students are mixed together.

Context

Our pre-K-5 grade public elementary school is located in north Minneapolis. There are approximately 461 students, with 86% being African American. We are labeled as a turnaround school due to our low reading and math proficiency rates on the standardized Minnesota Comprehensive Assessment (MCA) test administered every spring. We have identified the need to increase the reading levels of our students. My principal asked me to take the lead in working with other teachers because of reading growth that my students have experienced over the years. When it was decided last spring that the 4th grade teachers would loop with our students to 5th grade, our daily schedule needed to be adjusted. I proposed to the teachers and administration a 5th grade shared community teacher read-aloud, lasting 30 minutes daily. When I started working on my capstone again during the summer, I intended to plan professional development sessions for literacy teachers; the sessions were to focus on vocabulary, independent reading, and teacher read-alouds. As I worked on the read-aloud project at school and researched my paper, it became apparent that while proficient independent reading is the main goal, the shared teacher read-alouds should be the main focus of the project due to their positive effect on independent reading. The project is regarded by administration as a whole-grade reading intervention.

Theories

Always keeping culturally relevant teaching (CRT) in mind (Ladson-Billings 2008), the project focus is on shared teacher read-alouds. Teacher read-alouds help expose students to more complex syntax and vocabulary at higher levels than they can read on their own, which directly informs their independent reading (Trelease 1993, Wadsworth 2008, Lemov et al. 2016). The theory is that with the right choice of books being read, students will be motivated to read independently more often. Students will hear fluent adult readers, get excited about reading, and will have exposure to quality books and elevated vocabulary (Fox 2008). Tatum's (2008) textual lineage ideas will be a factor in book choice. CRT is always a consideration for teachers at our school and this project is no exception. Adults from families, other parts of the school, and the community are invited to be guest readers. Student grouping is different from the homeroom cohorts they travel in during the day. There are five smaller, flexible groups rather than the usual three large groups. These groups will be changed weekly in order to permit students to experience different adults reading. Rituals and routines will be established for this unique activity, for adults as well as students. A work in progress, it will be constantly monitored and adjusted, using teacher, student, and administration input. One variation to many teacher read-alouds is that students will be given their own copies of the books we read. This is why it is called a *shared* teacher read-aloud. Students will follow along during the reading, so they will see the words as well as hear them, and when the books are finished, they will take their copies home, for possible re-reading and sharing. Students will be building their home libraries with quality books, and having read the books once as part of the reading community, they may have the confidence to read the books again on their own. I am personally supplying the books, which I am able

to buy at a discounted rate from Scholastic. This does limit book choice, however.

Unfortunately, if the school buys the books, the students cannot keep them, and I think that students building their home libraries, with quality books that they have read, is an important component of the project. It would be worthwhile to investigate alternative funding sources, such as grants or donorschoose.org, in the future, in order to provide more choices and to make the project sustainable.

Project Timing

This teacher read-aloud project is taking place in the fall of 2017; in fact we started reading the third day of school. I expect it to last for the entire 2017-2018 school year. It will be reviewed by the professional learning community (PLC) and the 5th grade team during the year. We should be able to read at least one book per month, for a total of nine books!

Presentation

My presentation will be in the form of written documentation of the project.

Summary

The shared literacy community teacher read-aloud project was designed and implemented as a partial answer to my research question, which is: *How can I create a culture of independent reading among African American students, especially black males?* Through shared community teacher read-alouds, I hope to help students to become lifelong readers and learners who will be well prepared to develop their chances and choices into great successes.

This chapter has (a) identified the project's participants, (b) provided context for the project, (c) described the framework for completion of the project and (d) identified the

project's timing and duration. In Chapter Four I review and reflect on the project, its implementation, and its implications.

CHAPTER FOUR

Conclusion

Overview

My research question is: *How can I create a culture of independent reading among African American students, especially black males?* I consider this to be a critical need. The majority of African American students who come to my literacy class each fall read below grade level, often far below. I want my students to have choices in life and once they make their choices, I want them to have the skills to be successful doing what they choose. Their chances for success will be greater if they can read proficiently. Since the only way to become a better reader is to read, it is important for reluctant, struggling readers to be motivated to become enthusiastic, independent readers. Statistics on the achievement gap show that African American students are the farthest behind, especially black males. These students are typically the most difficult to reach, particularly for white, female, middle-class teachers like myself. I feel compelled to do whatever I can to help my students turn on their internal reading lights, particularly the ones who have the most need. Once those reading lights turn on, there are no limits. The students know it too. They can feel the knowledge, the power, and the joy that reading gives them, so they continue, knowing that their futures are in their own capable hands.

This concluding Chapter Four contains what I learned while working on this capstone paper and project. I revisit my Chapter Two literature review and consider possible implications and limitations of the project. I recommend a future research project. I also reflect upon my personal growth and my future research agenda.

Introduction

My project changed from what I originally expected it to be. I started my research a few years ago, focusing on African American education and achievement gap history. Developing curriculum with textual lineage in mind was my first idea for motivating African American students to become independent readers. Then I realized I needed to develop a culture of independent reading, especially for African American males. Professional development at school led me to deeper research of culturally relevant teaching and social-emotional learning. When I decided to restart my capstone in earnest, my intention was professional development with vocabulary, independent reading, and teacher read-alouds as the three areas to focus on in order to motivate our African American students to boost independent reading at our school. We needed to make independent reading an important part of our school culture. We had to make it cool to be eager, proficient readers.

As I researched, however, I found that teacher read-alouds were extremely effective for increasing vocabulary, understanding complex sentence structure, and motivating students to read independently. Thus my shared teacher read-aloud project was born. I am fortunate that my school administration and 5th grade team agreed to my proposal. The plan was put into motion in August 2017 and teachers started reading to students in a shared text the third day of school! I expect it to continue throughout the current (2017-2018) school year.

Revisiting the Literature Review

The literature I initially investigated on African American education and the achievement gap was supported by my study of recent statistics, but none of it was encouraging. There has been little, if any, reduction of the achievement gap between blacks

and whites in the last several years. The literature regarding the importance and methods of independent reading and vocabulary were not surprising, but what did surprise me was what I learned about adult and teacher read-alouds. I learned that reading comprehension does not catch up to listening comprehension until 8th grade. I learned how listening to complex syntax can help prepare students for reading it. I learned that not doing teacher read-alouds was especially a disservice to students of color because it can result in underexposure to texts for them. I found more and more powerful evidence that convinced me that one way to increased vocabulary knowledge and independent reading was through teacher read-alouds, which is why I changed the project to the shared teacher read-aloud project.

I also found sources (Tatum, 2009, Layne, 2009, Lemov, 2016) that do not agree with the current popular practice of small group leveled guided reading. These sources maintain that leveled guided reading actually holds students back and withholds quality literature from them. I found no research that gives evidence showing that leveled guided reading works. This was corroborated through private correspondence with Tim Shanahan (see Appendix G). In fact, if that is what programs have used for the past several years, there is evidence that it does not work, because reading levels have not increased for African Americans.

Possible Implications

There has been a reduction in independent reading and teacher read-alouds in classrooms over the past several years because to some people they appear to be an abdication of teaching. But this is false. In read-alouds, the teacher is teaching by setting an example and giving students exposure to challenging texts. The only way to get better at reading is to read...whether independently or following along as the teacher reads. In an ideal world, all parents and caregivers would read to children from the time they are born and

all students would read outside of school. But this ideal is not the reality, so time must be made within the school day for independent reading and teacher read-alouds. This will help prepare them for reading, both in future classwork and in adult life.

Schools should make more time for teacher read-alouds and read quality literature. Teachers should be mindful of choosing high-interest, culturally relevant literature that will motivate students to read more.

Our students have responded positively to our read-aloud project. They witness the excitement of the teachers, they talk about the common text in the different classrooms, they are interested in the texts. They are making connections between the texts, increasing vocabulary, navigating more complex syntax than most would be able to do on their own, and several students are reading sequels to our books. Several students were writing down vocabulary and definitions as we discussed them, so it was decided that we would give them the compiled vocabulary list with page numbers and definitions for future reference as we finish each book. We expect to see high growth in reading abilities on standardized tests and a reduction of the achievement gap. We expect to see students choosing to read when it is not required. We expect to see enthusiasm and a growing culture of independent reading among our African American students, especially black males.

Schools should reconsider their leveled guided small reading groups. They should at least consider whether or not they are seeing progress. My research does not support this method of reading instruction.

Possible Limitations

Funding can be a limitation in shared teacher read-alouds. In my project, each student gets a copy of the book to follow-along and take home when the book is finished.

This requires 70 copies of each book for the 5th grade at our school, as well as books for the adult readers. Pacing can be a limitation. During our simultaneous reading time, we found that even with a reading schedule, adults read at different speeds, so the reading schedule is recalibrated every Monday. If this is not done, teachers will finish the books at different times. Another limitation might be getting approval from administration and agreement by the teachers. Often something else will have to be sacrificed to make time for the read-alouds.

Future Research Projects

Based on current research, I encourage future research on whether the practice of leveled guided small reading groups is the best use of school resources and students' instruction time. Rather than blindly doing it because everyone else is doing it, administrators and teachers should ask for research to show that it works. Vocabulary instruction has dwindled in recent years. It should be determined whether this trend has been helpful or harmful to reading ability. It would be interesting to see direct comparisons between classrooms that do different amounts of teacher read-alouds and independent reading, especially among students of color.

My Growth

I am truly happy that I decided to return to my capstone and finish it. This has been an illuminating process for me. I did not expect to find teacher read-alouds so compelling. I was not sure that my project would be so well received by teachers and students alike. I am more convinced than ever that vocabulary instruction, independent reading, and teacher read-alouds are critical components of a literacy program and I will always make time for them and fight for them. I will continue to maintain a large classroom library and try to find books

for students that turn on their internal reading lights, because once lit, they burn brighter and brighter. I will continue to say to my students, “Make it a great day or not. The choice is yours,” while thinking about their future choices. I will continue to read and study as much as possible in order to be a better teacher to my students. I will continue to question exchanging methods that work for methods that, though popular, are not proven. I will always hold my students to high standards, because low expectations yield low achievement, and I want better than that for my students.

My Future Research Agenda

My principal requested that I make it a professional priority to continue my research on textual lineage and culturally relevant texts, curriculum, and teaching methods. This I will do, and I will certainly continue my search for texts that illustrate the value of reading and education that excite my students. I am interested in what more can be done with teacher read-alouds and how I can convince others to make time for the practice. I will look for more ways to get parents reading aloud to their children. I plan to do additional research on cultural literacy. I will continue to seek research that shows the ineffectiveness of leveled guided small reading groups. I will do more research about putting the right book in the right hands at the right time. I will continue to look for ways to encourage my African American students, especially black males, to become strong independent readers.

Summary

This capstone was written as a partial requirement for the Master of Arts in Teaching degree from Hamline University. However, the topic is also the center of my teaching world and one for which I remain passionate. The goal of this work is the heart of my teaching, expressed by my research question: *How can I create a culture of independent reading*

among African American students, especially black males? The hope is that this project will help motivate students to become lifelong readers and learners who will be well prepared to develop their future chances and choices into great successes. Research reveals that teacher read-alouds promote and inspire independent reading, and independent reading improves reading enjoyment, ability, and vocabulary. This will result in increased scores on standardized tests of literacy and a shrinking of the achievement gap, as well as students developing the confidence and acquiring the tools to make their lives all that they can imagine and desire.

A world, a glimmer, or a flower?

~ James Joyce

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Appendix A

The Shared Literacy Community Teacher Read-Aloud Project

This project was approved by school administration and implemented by 5th grade teachers during the 2017-2018 school year at a Minneapolis, MN public school.

According to research, teacher read-alouds are an important part of literacy education and should be performed in all classrooms in all subjects and grade levels. Students are able to hear syntax and vocabulary that are above their own reading levels being read by experts, who are the teachers and other adults from the community. With wise book choices, students will be excited by the texts, which will encourage their love of reading and literature and will help remove reading achievement obstacles. The goals are to raise reading levels, close the achievement gap, and establish a community of independent readers who become lifelong readers and learners.

Rather than taking place within the literacy block, the Shared Literacy Community Teacher Read-Aloud occurs for thirty minutes every school day, after homeroom at 9:05 until 9:35. During that time, every 5th grade teacher and content lead simultaneously reads the same book to groups containing all of the school's 5th grade students. The pace is one book per month, so nine complete high quality and high interest books are read over the course of the nine-month school year. Student pull-outs are discouraged during the reading time.

Other adults in the school, parents, and community members are invited to be guest readers. They are offered a book ahead of time, and shown the suggested pacing and vocabulary to highlight.

As the teachers read, students have their own copies of the book, so they follow along as well as listen. This is what makes it a *shared* teacher read-aloud. When the books are

finished, students take their books home for possible re-reading and sharing. Having high quality books in home libraries can help boost literacy also. Students are made aware of any sequels, as well as other books by the same authors, in case they are interested in reading more.

Some important factors to remember: This is a teacher read-aloud, not a time for students to do the reading. Asking students to say the next word in the text when the teacher stops reading is a great way to keep them engaged in the text, but they should not do any substantial reading-aloud. Teachers should follow the suggested pacing for each week as closely as possible. There may be some follow-up teaching activities or clarifications given during the literacy block, but the read-aloud time is mainly for reading and only limited discussion of text and vocabulary.

Criteria for Read-Aloud Texts

- ❖ The book should be one that our students are able to relate to culturally (CRT).
- ❖ The book should be well-written as evidenced by an earned literary recognition and/or status as a classic.
- ❖ The book should have a suitable Lexile level (complex syntax and vocabulary).
- ❖ The book should explore meaningful topics students can learn from (textual lineage).

Our First Read-Aloud Book

Holes by Louis Sachar.

- ❖ Our students can relate to this high interest book culturally. The main characters are adolescent boys, some of color. Race is a topic in the book.
- ❖ *Holes* was awarded the Newbery Medal in 1999.

- ❖ *Holes* has 233 pages and its Lexile level is 660, which is in the middle of the Bottom Lexile Range (450 – 765) of the MCA reading specifications for 5th grade.
- ❖ Topics in *Holes* include: Responsibility, Friendship, Luck, Destiny, Loyalty, and Family.
- ❖ Eighty copies of the book have been purchased outside of school funding, so all 5th grade teachers and students will have their own copy of the book to keep.

Logistics

There are five adult readers, so the three homerooms have been divided into five groups. Teachers received student group lists and, after the Monday morning all-pod meeting, teachers read the names of students in their groups and students follow the teachers into the rooms for reading. The teachers have the books with students' names on them. They are provided with a pacing guide for the week, and vocabulary words and definitions in the week's readings. They also have some comprehension questions for discussion if they want to use them, or need to fill some time. When teacher read-aloud time is over, students go to their lockers for their binders and line up for their Block 1 class. After Friday's shared community reading time, the literacy content lead teacher collects all the books and mixes the students into new groups. This way, students have the benefit of hearing different adults read. It also reminds everyone that it is a group of seventy reading the same book, not just the fourteen in each group. Additionally, after the Friday reading, the literacy content lead asks what page all of the groups ended on, because the adults do not all read at the same pace, even with a pacing guide. The literacy content lead makes up a new reading guide for the following week, beginning at the lowest page number completed for everyone, so that all groups begin in the same place on the following Monday. This recalibration is necessary in

order to ensure that if students were in a slower reading group, they will not miss any of the book if they move to a teacher who reads at a faster pace. The result is that some students reread a few pages, but that is good reading practice anyway. This is one way to keep teachers on a similar reading schedule, because some stop and talk more, while others read the entire time. After the next Monday all-pod meeting, teachers read the students' names in their new groups. They already have the books for their groups, a new pacing guide, new vocabulary lists with definitions, and the reading starts again for the week. The literacy content lead does all of the organization so the teachers have no extra planning or lesson preparation. A few teachers may like to read ahead and review vocabulary, but aside from that, none of their time outside of the actual reading is necessary.

We read the final few pages all in one room, take a group picture with students holding their books, then start watching the movie as a way to celebrate, if a movie is available. We watch the movie during the shared community read-aloud time for the rest of the week and begin the next book on the following Monday. Students keep a copy of each book, and they receive a copy of the discussed vocabulary, with page numbers and definitions for future reference.

Next Books

Hatchet by Gary Paulsen

Pages – 181 with a Lexile of 1020

Awards – Newbery Honor Book in 1988

Themes – Survival, Identity, Coming of Age

Esperanza Rising by Pam Munoz Ryan

Pages – 262 with a Lexile of 750

Awards – Pura Belpre Award Winner, Publisher’s Weekly Best Book of the Year, ALA Top Ten Best Books for Young Adults

Themes - Perseverance, Home, Justice, Hopes/Dreams, Poverty, Prejudice

Freak the Mighty by Rodman Philbrick

Pages – 169 with a Lexile of 920

Awards – California Young Reader’s Medal, Judy Lopez Memorial Award

Themes – Friendship, Transformation, Misfits in Society

Bud, Not Buddy by Christopher Paul Curtis

(Students read *The Watsons Go To Birmingham* – 1963 by Curtis last year.)

Pages – 243 with a Lexile of 950

Awards – Newbery Medal in 2000 and Coretta Scott King Author Award

Themes – Importance of Family, Poverty, Race, Compassion, Perseverance

Remaining books for the year to be determined later. Text suggestions are always welcome!

Expected Results

We expect to see enthusiasm for the shared texts and for independent reading. This we are already witnessing. We expect an outcome of high growth on standardized reading tests. We expect to hear conversations about the texts between students as well as between students and teachers.

Appendix B

3rd Grade MCA-III Reading Scores

2015 and 2016

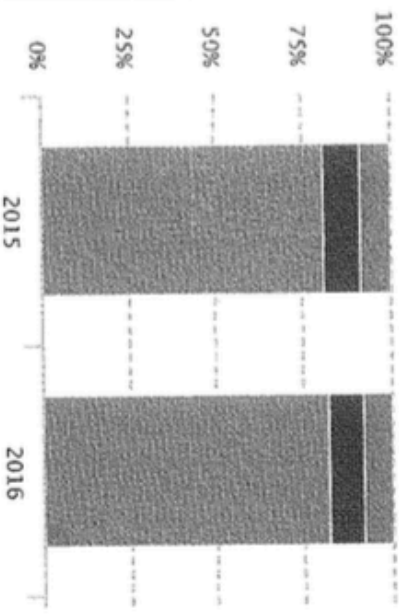
MCA/MTAS: Are students meeting academic standards?

Lucy Baney **Cleveland Park** **Minneapolis Public School District**

Subject : Reading Grade : 3

2015 - 2017 Student Achievement Level

2015 - 2017 Student Achievement Level



Year	Exceeds	Meets	Partially Meets	Does Not Meet
2015	Count: 0	Count: 6	Count: 8	Count: 59
2015	Percent: 0.0%	Percent: 8.2%	Percent: 11.0%	Percent: 80.8%
2016	Count: 0	Count: 6	Count: 7	Count: 61
2016	Percent: 0.0%	Percent: 8.1%	Percent: 9.5%	Percent: 82.4%

Appendix C

My School Demographics

Minnesota Report Card

10/23/17, 4:40 PM

My School: What can I learn about my school, students, and teachers?

Share This Report

-
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[Redacted] **Minneapolis Public School District**

Summary

Summary

Demographics

A pie chart illustrating the racial and ethnic composition of the school. The largest slice is Black at 86.1%, followed by White at 2.8%, Two or More Races at 3.0%, Am Indian at 3.5%, Asian at 2.0%, Hawaiian/PI at 0.0%, and Hispanic at 2.6%.

Hispanic

Am Indian

Asian

Black

Hawaiian/PI

White

Two or More Races

Race/Ethnicity	Count	Percent
Hispanic/Latino	12	2.6%
American Indian/Alaska Native	16	3.5%
Asian	9	2.0%
Black/African American	397	86.1%
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	0	0.0%
White	13	2.8%
Two or More Races	14	3.0%
All Students	461	100.0%

Proficiency Trends

Appendix D

MCA-III Reading Test Specifications – Lexile

Lexile Levels

Reading MCA-III use the Lexile readability indices. The Lexile Framework for Reading has been developed by MetaMetrics, Inc. The scientific formula used to calculate the Lexile level of a text uses the word frequency and the sentence length from that text. To be consistent with Common Core State Standards' philosophy about approaching text complexity, Reading MCA-III will utilize qualitative dimensions of text complexity, quantitative dimensions of text complexity, and reader and task considerations. These three elements were taken into account when developing the target ranges in Table 1. The middle Lexile passage range represents the text complexity aligned to college-and-career-ready expectations (as specified in Appendix A of Common Core State Standards).

MCA-III Specifications

Table 1. Lexile Readability Ranges by Grade

Grade	Bottom Lexile Range	Middle Lexile Range	Top Lexile Range
3	300-445	450-790	795-860
4	450-765	770-980	985-1040
5	450-765	770-980	985-1040
6	770-950	955-1155	1160-1225
7	770-950	955-1155	1160-1225
8	770-950	955-1155	1160-1225
10	955-1075	1080-1305	1310-1400

Appendix E

THE LEXILE[®] FRAMEWORK FOR READING MAP

Matching Readers with Text

Imagine getting students excited about reading while also improving their reading abilities. With the Lexile[®] Map, students have a chance to match books with their reading levels, and celebrate as they are able to read increasingly complex texts!

Let your students find books that fit them! Build custom book lists for your students by accessing our "Find a Book" tool at Lexile.com/fab.

HOW IT WORKS

The Lexile[®] Map provides examples of popular books and sample texts that are matched to various points on the Lexile[®] scale, from 200L for emergent reader text to 1600L for more advanced texts. The examples on the map help to define text complexity and help readers identify books of various levels of text complexity. Both literature and informational texts are presented on the Lexile Map.

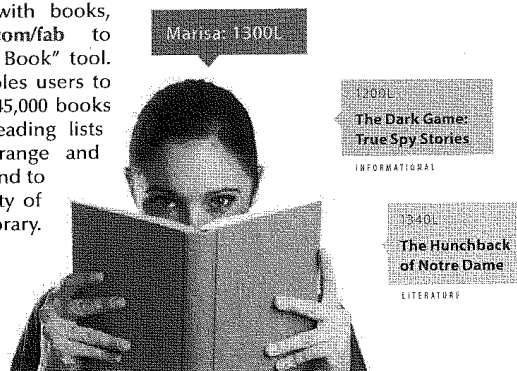
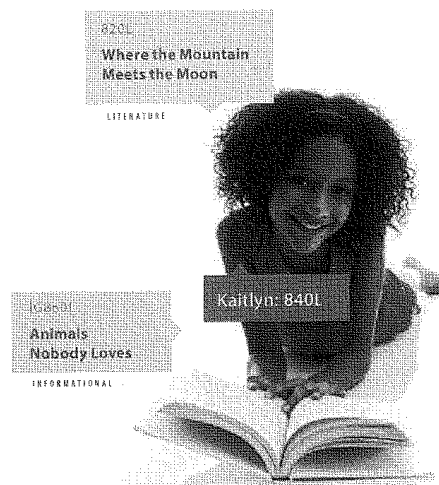
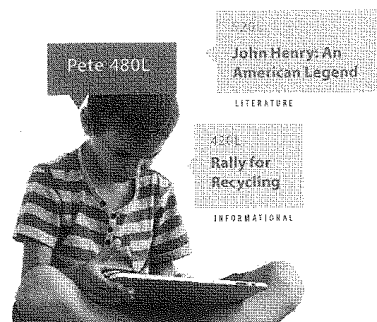
HOW TO USE IT

Lexile reader and text measures can be used together to forecast how well a reader will likely comprehend a text at a specific Lexile level. A Lexile reader measure is usually obtained by having the reader take a reading comprehension test. Numerous tests report Lexile reader measures including many state end-of-year assessments, national norm-referenced assessments, and reading program assessments. A Lexile reader measure places students on the same Lexile scale as the texts. This scale ranges from below 200L to above 1600L. The Lexile website

also provides a way to estimate a reader measure by using information about the reader's grade level and self-reported reading ability.

Individuals reading within their Lexile ranges (100L below to 50L above their Lexile reader measures) are likely to comprehend approximately 75 percent of the text when reading independently. This "targeted reading" rate is the point at which a reader will comprehend enough to understand the text but will also face some reading challenge. The result is growth in reading ability and a rewarding reading experience.

For more guidance concerning targeting readers with books, visit www.Lexile.com/fab to access the "Find a Book" tool. "Find a Book" enables users to search from over 145,000 books to build custom reading lists based on Lexile range and personal interests and to check the availability of books at the local library.





The Lexile Framework for Reading

1300 L › 1500L+
LEXILE RANGE

1500L+

1500L *Don Quixote** CERVANTES

The Words were to me so many Pearls of Eloquence, and his Voice sweeter to my Ears than Sugar to the Taste. The Reflection on the Misfortune which these Verses brought on me, has often made me applaud Plato's Design of banishing all Poets from a good and well governed Commonwealth, especially those who write wantonly or lasciviously. For, instead of composing lamentable Verses, like those of the Marquiss of Mantua, that make Women and Children cry by the Fireside, they try their utmost Skill on such soft Strokes as enter the Soul, and wound it, like that Thunder which hurts and consumes all within, yet leaves the Garment sound. Another Time he entertained me with the following Song.



SAMPLE TITLES

LITERATURE	1640L	The Plot Against America (ROTH)
	1560L	Rob Roy (SCOTT)
	1530L	The Good Earth (BUCK)
	1520L	A Fable (FAULKNER)
	1500L	The Decameron (BOCCACCIO)
INFORMATIONAL	1600L	Sustaining Life: How Human Health Depends on Biodiversity (CHIVLIAN & BERNSTEIN)
	1550L	The Art of War (SUN TZU)
	1560L	The United States' Constitution
	1520L	Fair Play: The Ethics of Sport (SIMON)
	1500L	Critique of Pure Reason (KANT)

1400L › 1495L

1400L *Nathaniel's Nutmeg* MILTON

Setting sail once again they kept a sharp look-out for Busse Island, discovered thirty years previously by Martin Frobisher, but the rolling sea mists had grown too thick. Storms and gale—force winds plagued them for days on end and at one point grew so ferocious that the foremast cracked, splintered and was hurled into the sea. It was with considerable relief that the crew sighted through the mist the coast of Newfoundland—a vague geographical term in Hudson's day—at the beginning of July. They dropped anchor in Penobscot Bay, some one hundred miles west of Nova Scotia.



SAMPLE TITLES

LITERATURE	1460L	The Legend of Sleepy Hollow (IRVING)
	1450L	Billy Budd** (MELVILLE)
	1430L	The Story of King Arthur and His Knights (PYLE)
	1420L	Life All Around Me by Ellen Foster (GIBBONS)
	1420L	The Scarlet Letter** (HAWTHORNE)
INFORMATIONAL	1490L	Gettysburg Address (LINCOLN)
	1480L	America's Constitution: A Biography** (AMAR)
	1480L	The Declaration of Independence
	1410L	Profiles in Courage (KENNEDY)
	1400L	The Life and Times of Frederick Douglass (DOUGLASS)

1300L › 1395L

1300L *1776: America and Britain at War** MCCULLOUGH

But from this point on, the citizen-soldiers of Washington's army were no longer to be fighting only for the defense of their country, or for their rightful liberties as freeborn Englishmen, as they had at Lexington and Concord, Bunker Hill and through the long siege at Boston. It was now a proudly proclaimed, all-out war for an independent America, a new America, and thus a new day of freedom and equality. At his home in Newport, Nathanael Greene's mentor, the Reverend Ezra Stiles, wrote in his diary almost in disbelief: Thus the Congress has tied a Gordian knot, which the Parliament will find they can neither cut, nor untie. The thirteen united colonies now rise into an Independent Republic among the kingdoms, states, and empires on earth...And have I lived to see such an important and astonishing revolution?



SAMPLE TITLES

LITERATURE	1360L	Robinson Crusoe (DEFODE)
	1350L	The Secret Sharer (CONRAD)
	1340L	The Hunchback of Notre Dame (HUGO)
	1340L	The Metamorphosis** (KAFKA)
	1340L	Fever Pitch (HORNBY)
INFORMATIONAL	1390L	In Defense of Food: An Eater's Manifesto (POLLAN)
	1380L	Politics and the English Language** (ORWELL)
	1370L	Jane Austen's Pride and Prejudice (BLOOM)
	1340L	Walden** (THOREAU)
	1300L	Arctic Dreams: Imagination and Desire in a Northern Landscape (LOPEZ)



The Lexile Framework for Reading

1000 L ▶ 1295L
LEXILE RANGE

1200L ▶ 1295L

1200L *Why We Can't Wait* KING

We sing the freedom songs today for the same reason the slaves sang them, because we too are in bondage and the songs add hope to our determination that "We shall overcome, Black and white together, We shall overcome someday." I have stood in a meeting with hundreds of youngsters and joined in while they sang "Ain't Gonna Let Nobody Turn Me 'Round." It is not just a song; it is a resolve. A few minutes later, I have seen those same youngsters refuse to turn around from the onrush of a police We sing the freedom songs today for the same reason the slaves sang them, because we too are in bondage and the songs add hope to our determination that "We shall overcome, Black and white together, We shall overcome someday."



SAMPLE TITLES

- LITERATURE
- 1280L *The House of the Spirits* (ALLENDE)
 - 1270L *Tarzan of the Apes* (BURROUGHS)
 - 1270L *Chronicle of a Death Foretold* (GARCÍA MÁRQUEZ)
 - 1220L *Annie John* (KINCAID)
 - 1210L *The Namesake*** (LAHIRI)
- INFORMATIONAL
- 1290L *A Brief History of Time* (HAWKING)
 - 1280L *Black, Blue, and Gray: African Americans in the Civil War*** (HASKINS)
 - 1240L *Blood Done Sign My Name* (TYSON)
 - 1230L *Stiff: The Curious Lives of Human Cadavers* (ROACH)
 - 1200L *The Dark Game: True Spy Stories* (JANE CZKO)

1100L ▶ 1195L

1100L *Pride and Prejudice** AUSTEN

Lydia was a stout, well-grown girl of fifteen, with a fine complexion and good-humoured countenance; a favourite with her mother, whose affection had brought her into public at an early age. She had high animal spirits, and a sort of natural self-consequence, which the attentions of the officers, to whom her uncle's good dinners and her own easy manners recommended her, had increased into assurance. She was very equal therefore to address Mr. Bingley on the subject of the ball, and abruptly reminded him of his promise; adding, that it would be the most shameful thing in the world if he did not keep it. His answer to this sudden attack was delightful to their mother's ear.



SAMPLE TITLES

- LITERATURE
- 1180L *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time* (HADDON)
 - 1170L *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier & Clay* (CHABON)
 - 1150L *A Wizard of Earthsea* (LE GUIN)
 - 1130L *All the King's Men* (WARREN)
 - 1110L *A Separate Peace* (KNOWLES)
- INFORMATIONAL
- 1160L *The Longitude Prize*** (DASH)
 - 1160L *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens* (WALKER)
 - 1140L *Winterdance: The Fine Madness of Running the Iditarod* (PAULSEN)
 - 1130L *The Great Fire*** (MURPHY)
 - 1100L *Vincent Van Gogh: Portrait of an Artist*** (GREENBERG & JORDAN)

1000L ▶ 1095L

1000L *Mythbusters Science Fair Book* MARGLES

There may be less bacteria on the food that's picked up quickly, but playing it safe is the best idea. If it hits the floor, the next thing it should hit is the trash. If putting together petri dishes and dealing with incubation seems like a bigger project than you're ready to take on, there's a simpler way to observe bacterial growth. Practically all you need is some bread and your own two hands. Cut the edges off each slice of bread so that they'll fit into the plastic containers. Put one slice of bread into each container. Measure one tablespoon of water and splash it into the first piece of bread. Put the lid on the container and use your pen and tape to label this your control.



SAMPLE TITLES

- LITERATURE
- 1080L *I Heard the Owl Call My Name* (CRAVEN)
 - 1070L *Savvy* (LAW)
 - 1070L *Around the World in 80 Days* (VERNE)
 - 1010L *The Pearl* (STEINBECK)
 - 1000L *Hobbit or There and Back Again* (TOLKIEN)
- INFORMATIONAL
- 1070L *Geeks: How Two Lost Boys Rode the Internet Out of Idaho*** (KATZ)
 - 1030L *Phineas Gage* (FLEISCHMAN)
 - 1020L *This Land Was Made for You and Me: The Life and Songs of Woody Guthrie* (PARTRIDGE)
 - 1010L *Travels With Charley: In Search of America*** (STEINBECK)
 - 1000L *Claudette Colvin: Twice Toward Justice* (HOOSE)



The Lexile Framework for Reading

700L ▶ 995L
LEXILE RANGE

900L ▶ 995L

900L *We are the Ship: The Story of
Negro League Baseball* NELSON

Rube ran his ball club like it was a major league team. Most Negro teams back then weren't very well organized. Didn't always have enough equipment or even matching uniforms. Most times they went from game to game scattered among different cars, or sometimes they'd even have to "hobo"—which means hitch a ride on the back of someone's truck to get to the next town for a game. But not Rube's team. They were always well equipped, with clean, new uniforms, bats, and balls. They rode to the games in fancy Pullman cars Rube rented and hitched to the back of the train. It was something to see that group of Negroes stepping out of the train, dressed in suits and hats. They were big-leaguers.

800L ▶ 895L

800L *Moon Over Manifest* VANDERPOOL

There wasn't much left in the tree fort from previous dwellers. Just an old hammer and a few rusted tin cans holding some even rustier nails. A couple of wood crates with the salt girl holding her umbrella painted on top. And a shabby plaque dangling sideways on one nail, FORT TREECONDEROGA. Probably named after the famous fort from Revolutionary War days. Anything else that might have been left behind had probably been weathered to bits and fallen through the cracks. No matter. I'd have this place whipped into shape lickety-split. First off, I picked out the straightest nail I could find and fixed that sign up right. Fort Treeconderoga was open for business.

700L ▶ 795L

700L *The Miraculous Journey of Edward Tulane* DICAMILLO

Edward, for lack of anything better to do, began to think. He thought about the stars. He remembered what they looked like from his bedroom window. What made them shine so brightly, he wondered, and were they still shining somewhere even though he could not see them? Never in my life, he thought, have I been farther away from the stars than I am now. He considered, too, the fate of the beautiful princess who had become a warthog. Why had she become a warthog? Because the ugly witch turned her into one—that was why. And then the rabbit thought about Pellegrina. He felt, in some way that he could not explain to himself, that she was responsible for what had happened to him. It was almost as if it was she, and not the boys, who had thrown Edward overboard.



SAMPLE TITLES

- LITERATURE
- 980L *Dovey Coe* (DOWELL)
 - 950L *Bud, Not Buddy* (CURTIS)
 - 940L *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets* (ROWLING)
 - 940L *Heat* (LUPICA)
 - 900L *City of Fire* (YEP)
- INFORMATIONAL
- 990L *Seabiscuit* (HILLENBRAND)
 - 970L *The Kid's Guide to Money: Earning It, Saving It, Spending It, Growing It, Sharing It*** (OTFINOSKI)
 - 950L *Jim Thorpe, Original All-American* (BRUCHAC)
 - 930L *Colin Powell A & E Biography* (FINLAYSON)
 - 920L *Talking with Artists* (CUMMINGS)



SAMPLE TITLES

- LITERATURE
- GN840L* *The Odyssey* (HINDS)
 - 830L *Baseball in April and Other Stories* (SOTO)
 - 820L *Maniac Magee* (SPINELLI)
 - 820L *Where the Mountain Meets the Moon*** (LIN)
 - 800L *Homeless Bird* (WHELEN)
- INFORMATIONAL
- 880L *The Circuit* (JIMENEZ)
 - 870L *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens* (COVEY)
 - IG860L* *Animals Nobody Loves* (SEYMOUR)
 - 860L *Through My Eyes: Ruby Bridges* (BRIDGES)
 - 830L *Quest for the Tree Kangaroo: An Expedition to the Cloud Forest of New Guinea*** (MONTGOMERY)



SAMPLE TITLES

- LITERATURE
- 770L *Walk Two Moons* (CREECH)
 - 760L *Hoot* (HAASEN)
 - 750L *Esperanza Rising* (RYAN)
 - 720L *Nancy's Mysterious Letter* (KEENE)
- INFORMATIONAL
- GN720L* *Sherlock Holmes and the Adventure at the Copper Beeches* (DOYLE)
 - 790L *Be Water, My Friend: The Early Years of Bruce Lee* (MOCHIZUKI)
 - 760L *Stay: The True Story of Ten Dogs* (MUNTEAN)
 - IG760L* *Mapping Shipwrecks with Coordinate Planes* (WALL)
 - 720L *Pretty in Print: Questioning Magazines* (BOTZAKIS)
 - 720L *Spiders in the Hairdo: Modern Urban Legends* (HOLT & MOONEY)

*GN denotes Graphic Novel, IG denotes Illustrated Guide



The Lexile Framework for Reading

400L ▶ 695L
LEXILE RANGE

600L ▶ 695L

600L *You're on Your Way, Teddy Roosevelt* ST. GEORGE & FAULKNER

But from his first workout in Wood's Gymnasium he had been determined to control his asthma and illnesses rather than letting his asthma and illnesses control him. And he had. On that hot summer day in August he had proved to himself—and everyone else—that he had taken charge of his own life. In 1876 Teedie—now known as Teddy—entered Harvard College. He was on his own ...without Papa. That was all right. "I am to do everything for myself," he wrote in his diary. Why not? He was stronger and in better health than he had ever been. And ready and eager for the adventures and opportunities that lay ahead.



SAMPLE TITLES

- LITERATURE
- 680L *Charlotte's Web* (WHITE)
 - 660L *Holes* (SACHAR)
 - 620L *M.C. Higgins, the Great*** (HAMILTON)
 - 610L *Mountain Bike Mania* (CHRISTOPHER)
 - 610L *A Year Down Yonder* (PECK)
- INFORMATIONAL
- 690L *Where Do Polar Bears Live?**** (THOMSON)
 - 680L *An Eye for Color: The Story of Josef Albers* (WING)
 - 660L *Remember: The Journey to School Integration* (MORRISON)
 - 660L *From Seed to Plant*** (GIBBONS)
 - 630L *Sadako and the Thousand Paper Cranes* (COERR)

500L ▶ 595L

500L *A Germ's Journey* ROOKE

Excuse me! Let's blow out of this place! In real life, germs are very small. They can't be seen without a microscope. Rudy forgot to use a tissue. His cold germs fly across the room at more than 100 miles an hour. Whee! I can fly! Best ride ever! A few germs land on Ernie. But skin acts like a suit of armor. It protects against harm. The germs won't find a new home there. Healthy skin keeps germs out. But germs can sneak into the body through cuts, scrapes, or cracks in the skin. Most germs enter through a person's mouth or nose. Rudy's germs continue to fall on nearly everything in the room—including Brenda's candy.



SAMPLE TITLES

- LITERATURE
- 560L *Sarah, Plain and Tall* (MACLACHLAN)
 - 530L *It's All Greek to Me* (SCIESZKA)
 - 520L *John Henry: An American Legend* (KEATS)
 - 500L *Judy Moody Saves the World* (MCDONALD)
 - 500L *The Curse of the Cheese Pyramid* (STILTON)
- INFORMATIONAL
- IG590L* *Claude Monet* (CONNOLLY)
 - 560L *Lemons and Lemonade: A Book about Supply and Demand* (LOEWEN)
 - 560L *Molly the Pony* (KASTER)
 - 530L *Langston Hughes: Great American Poet* (MCKISSACK)
 - 510L *A Picture for Marc* (KIMMEL)

400L ▶ 495L

400L *How Not to Babysit Your Brother* HAPKA

I continued to search. I checked under Steve's bed. Then I checked under my bed. I searched the basement, the garage, and my closet. There was no sign of Steve. This was going to be harder than I thought. Where was Steve hiding? CRASH! Uh-oh, I thought. I heard Buster barking in the kitchen. I ran to see what was going on. When I got there, the dog food bin was tipped over. Steve's head and shoulders were sticking out of the top. Dog food was stuck in his hair, on his clothes, and up his nose. He looked like an alien from the planet Yuck. He giggled as Buster licked some crumbs off his ear.



SAMPLE TITLES

- LITERATURE
- 460L *Chrysanthemum* (HENKES)
 - 410L *The Enormous Crocodile* (DAHL)
 - IGN400L* *Pilot And Huxley* (MCGUINNESS)
 - 400L *The Fire Cat*** (AVERILL)
 - 400L *Cowgirl Kate and Cocoa*** (SILVERMAN)
- INFORMATIONAL
- 480L *Martin Luther King, Jr. and the March on Washington*** (RUFFIN)
 - 460L *True Life Treasure Hunts* (DONNELLY)
 - 460L *Half You Heard of Fractions?* (ADAMSON)
 - 420L *Rally for Recycling* (BULLARD)
 - 400L *Animals in Winter* (RUSTAD)

*GN denotes Graphic Novel, IG denotes Illustrated Guide



The Lexile Framework for Reading

200L ▶ 395L LEXILE RANGE

300L ▶ 395L

300L *Princess Posey and the Next-Door Dog* GREENE

"We have to stop now," said Miss Lee. "It's time for reading." "Ohhh..." A disappointed sound went up around the circle. "Here's what we'll do." Miss Lee stood up. "You are all very interested in dogs. So this week, you can write a story about your own dog or pet. Then you can read it to the class." Everyone got excited again. Except Posey. She didn't have a pet. Not a dog. Not a cat. Not a hamster. "Those of you who don't have a pet," Miss Lee said, "can write about the pet you hope to own someday." Miss Lee had saved the day! Now Posey had something to write about, too. Posey told her mom about Luca's puppy on the way home.



SAMPLE TITLES

LITERATURE	380L	<i>Martha Bakes a Cake</i> (BARSS)
	380L	<i>Junie B. Jones is (Almost) a Flower Girl</i> (PARK)
	360L	<i>Poppleton in Winter</i> ** (RYLANDT)
	340L	<i>Never Swipe a Bully's Bear</i> (APPLEGATE)
	330L	<i>Frog and Toad Together</i> ** (LOBEL)
INFORMATIONAL	GN380L*	<i>BMX Blitz</i> (CIENCIN)
	380L	<i>Lemonade for Sale</i> (MURPHY)
	350L	<i>A Snowy Day</i> (SCHAEFER)
	330L	<i>Freedom River</i> (RAPPAPORT)
	300L	<i>From Tree to Paper</i> (MARSHALL)

200L ▶ 295L

200L *Ronald Morgan Goes to Bat* GIFF

He smacked the ball with the bat. The ball flew across the field. "Good," said Mr. Spano. "Great, Slugger!" I yelled. "We'll win every game. It was my turn next. I put on the helmet, and stood at home plate. "Ronald Morgan," said Rosemary. "You're holding the wrong end of the bat." Quickly I turned it around. I clutched it close to the end. Whoosh went the first ball. Whoosh went the second one. Wham went the third. It hit me in the knee. "Are you all right?" asked Michael. But I heard Tom say, "I knew it. Ronald Morgan's the worst." At snack time, we told Miss Tyler about the team.



SAMPLE TITLES

LITERATURE	280L	<i>Hi Fly Guy</i> ** (ARNOLD)
	260L	<i>The Cat in the Hat</i> (SEUSS)
INFORMATIONAL	GN240L*	<i>Lunch Lady and the Cyborg Substitute</i> (KROSOVCZKA)
	200L	<i>Dixie</i> (GILMAN)
	200L	<i>The Best Bug Parade</i> (MURPHY)
	290L	<i>The Story of Pocahontas</i> (JENNER)
	250L	<i>Math in the Kitchen</i> (AMATO)
	230L	<i>What makes Day and Night</i> (BRANLEY)
	220L	<i>I Love Trains!</i> (STURGES)
	210L	<i>Sharks!</i> (CLARKE)

*GN denotes Graphic Novel

**Common Core State Standards Text Exemplar

Please note:

The Lexile measure (text complexity) of a book is an excellent starting point for a student's book selection. It's important to understand that the book's Lexile measure should not be the only factor in a student's book selection process. Lexile measures do not consider factors such as age-appropriateness, interest, and prior knowledge. These are also key factors when matching children and adolescents with books they might like and are able to read.



Lexile codes provide more information about developmental appropriateness, reading difficulty, and common or intended usage of books. For more information on Lexile codes, please visit Lexile.com.

LEXILE TEXT RANGES TO GUIDE READING FOR COLLEGE AND CAREER READINESS

GRADES	CCSS LEXILE TEXT RANGE
11-12	1185L-1385L
9-10	1050L-1335L
6-8	925L-1185L
4-5	740L-1010L
2-3	420L-820L
1	190L-530L

COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS FOR ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS, APPENDIX A (ADDITIONAL INFORMATION), NGA AND CCSSO, 2012

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Appendix F

Suggested Books and Videos

This is a partial list of additional books and videos that have been successful with my students, used either whole, or as excerpts. Many are more appropriate for older students, so be aware!

Picture Books

Richard Wright and the Library Card by William Miller

Dream Big: Michael Jordan and the Pursuit of Excellence by Deloris Jordan

Dave the Potter: Artist, Poet, Slave by Laban Carrick Hill

Virgie Goes to School with Us Boys by Elizabeth Fitzgerald Howard

More Than Anything Else by Marie Bradby (about Booker T. Washington)

Please Bury Me in the Library by J. Patrick Lewis

Alan and his Perfectly Pointy Impossibly Perpendicular Pinky by Alan Page and Kamie Page

Promises to Keep: How Jackie Robinson Changed America by Sharon Robinson

When Marian Sang: The True Recital of Marian Anderson by Pam Munoz Ryan and Brian Selznick

Books and Videos

Losing My Cool: Love, Literature, and a Black Man's Escape From the Crowd by Thomas Chatterton Williams

Rite of Passage by Richard Wright

47 by Walter Mosley

Yes Ma'am, No Sir: The 12 Essential Steps for Success in Life by Coach Carter

Coach Carter by Jasmine Jones (also a video)

The Playbook: 52 Rules to Aim, Shoot, and Score in This Game Called Life by Kwame

Alexander

All Rise: The Remarkable Journey of Alan Paige by Bill McGrane

Akeela and the Bee by James Ellison (also a video)

The Autobiography of Malcolm X: As Told to Alex Haley by Malcolm X and Alex Haley

(also a video)

Handbook for Boys: A Novel by Walter Dean Myers

Monster by Walter Dean Myers

Nightjohn by Gary Paulsen (also a video)

I Never Had It Made: An Autobiography of Jackie Robinson by Jackie Robinson and Alfred

Duckett (also the video 42)

The Great Debaters (video)

The Watsons Go To Birmingham - 1963 by Christopher Paul Curtis (also a video)

The Skin I'm In by Sharon Flake

Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry by Mildred D. Taylor

A Lesson Before Dying by Ernest J. Gaines

Double Dutch by Sharon Draper

The Blind Side by Michael Lewis (also a video)

I Beat the Odds: From Homelessness to The Blind Side and Beyond by Michael Oher with

Don Yaeger

A Question of Freedom: A Memoir of Learning, Survival, and coming of Age in Prison by

R. Dwayne Betts

You Have a Brain: A Teen's Guide to T.H.I.N.K. B.I.G. by Ben Carson with Gregg Lewis and

Deborah Shaw Lewis

Breaking Night: A Memoir of Forgiveness, Survival, and My Journey from Homeless to

Harvard by Liz Murray

Life is So Good by George Dawson and Richard Glaubman

The Other Wes Moore: One Name, Two Fates by Wes Moore

The Pursuit of Happyness by Chris Gardner and Quincy Troupe (also a video)

Of Beetles and Angels: A Boy's Remarkable Journey From a Refugee Camp to Harvard by

Mawi Asgedom

Finding Fish: A Memoir by Antwone Quenton Fisher

Letters to a Young Brother: MANifest Your Destiny by Hill Harper

Letters to a Young Sister: DeFINE Your Destiny by Hill Harper

A Hope in the Unseen: An American Odyssey From the Inner City to the Ivy League by Ron

Suskind

The Pact: Three Young Men Make a Promise and Fulfill a Dream by Sampson Davis and

George Jenkins (also a documentary)

Glory Road by Coach Dan Haskins and Dan Wetzel (also a video)

The Souls of Black Folk by W. E. B. Du Bois

Appendix G

Correspondence from Shanahan on Guided Reading

From: Timothy Shanahan <shanahan@uic.edu>
Date: Thursday, March 16, 2017 at 11:01 AM
To: Donna Clemenson <donna.clemenson@mpls.k12.mn.us>
Subject: Re: Guided reading pressure

Donna—

My question for the proponents of guided reading would be to ask for the research support behind it. Not opinion pieces, but data analysis showing that the approach has been beneficial to kids.

Here is a list of some studies of the practice of placing students at reading level:

- Fulmer, S. M., & Tulis, M. (2013). Changes in interest and affect during a difficult reading task: Relationships with perceived difficulty and reading fluency. *Learning and Instruction, 27*, 11-20.
- Gambrell, L. B., Wilson, R. M., & Gantt, W. N. (1981). Classroom observations of task-attending behaviors of good and poor readers. *Journal of Educational Research, 74*, 400-404.
- Gickling, E. E., & Armstrong, D. L. (1978). Levels of instructional difficulty as related to on-task behavior, task completion, and comprehension. *Journal of Learning Disabilities, 11*, 559-566.
- Gray, W.S. (1933). *Improving instruction in reading*. (Supplementary Educational Monographs, No. 40). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Jorgenson, G. W., Klein, N., & Kumar, V. K. (1977). Achievement and behavioral correlates of matched levels of student ability and materials difficulty. *Journal of Educational Research, 71*, 100-103.
- Kuhn, M. R., Schwanenflugel, P. J., Morris, R. D., Morrow, L. M., Woo, D. G., Meisinger, E. B., Sevcik, R. A., Bradley, B. A., & Stahl, S. A. (2006). Teaching children to become fluent and automatic readers. *Journal of Literacy Research, 38*, 357-387.
- Morgan, A., Wilcox, B. R., & Eldredge, J. L. (2000). Effect of

- difficulty levels on second-grade delayed readers using dyad reading. *Journal of Educational Research*, 94, 113-119.
- O'Connor, R. E., Bell, K. M., Harty, K. R., Larkin, L. K., Sackor, S. M., & Zigmund, N. (2002). Teaching reading to poor readers in the intermediate grades: A comparison of text difficulty. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 94, 474-485.
- O'Connor, R. E., Swanson, L. H., & Geraghty, C. (2010). Improvement in reading rate under independent and difficult text levels: Influences on word and comprehension skills. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 102, 1-19.
- Powell, W. R. (1968). Reappraising the criteria for interpreting informal inventories. In D. L. DeBoer (Ed.), *Reading diagnosis and evaluation* Vol. 13, Part 4, Proceedings of the Thirteenth Annual Convention, International Reading Association. (pp. 100-109). Newark, DE: International Reading Association.
- Powell, W.R., & Dunkeld, C.G. (1971). Validity of the IRI reading levels. *Elementary English*, 48, 637-642.
- Stahl, S. A., & Heubach, K. M. (2005). Fluency-oriented reading instruction. *Journal of Literacy Research*, 37, 25-60.

Good luck. I'm always skeptical about anyone who is deeply committed to particular instructional procedures without any consideration of their impacts on learning or other student variables.

tim

Timothy Shanahan

Distinguished Professor Emeritus
 University of Illinois at Chicago
 208 W Washington St. #711
 Chicago, IL 60606
 (312) 933-2835
shanahan@uic.edu
www.shanahanonliteracy.com