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# An investigation into the impacts of peer discourse on students' comprehension proficiency with a specific focus on English Language Learners and Students with Disabilities: A meta-analysis

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An investigation into the impacts of peer discourse on students' comprehension proficiency with  
a specific focus on English Language Learners and Students with Disabilities: A meta-analysis

by

Laura Gallagher

May 2015

A thesis submitted to the Department of Education and Human Development of The College at  
Brockport, State University of New York in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree  
of Master of Science in Education

**Table of Contents**

Chapter One: Introduction ..... 4

    Problem Statement ..... 6

    Significance of the Problem..... 7

    Purpose of the Study ..... 9

    Research Questions ..... 10

    Rationale ..... 11

    Study Approach ..... 13

        Conceptual Framework..... 13

        Methodology ..... 15

Chapter Two: Literature Review ..... 17

Chapter Three: Study Design..... 23

    My Positionality as the Researcher..... 23

    Data Collection/Analysis ..... 25

    Procedures..... 26

    Criteria for Trustworthiness..... 27

Chapter Four: Findings ..... 29

    Discussion..... 39

Chapter Five: Implications..... 43

References..... 45

## **Abstract**

This paper investigated the findings of a previously conducted meta-analysis involving the impacts of peer discussion on student's comprehension. This paper also examined, synthesized, and analyzed the previous quantitative studies that have been conducted regarding the effectiveness of engaging students in classroom discussion after reading, in order to enhance their comprehension of what they read. The present research serves the purpose of adding to and extending the current knowledge of the roles that teachers and students play in peer discourse, the ways in which classroom interactions can impact the comprehension of culturally and linguistically diverse students, make connections between the types of discourse used and teacher methods for facilitating effective communication among students, and the types of students that seem most receptive to the benefits of interactive discussion. The findings suggest that the quality of teacher prompts and questions throughout classroom discussion seem to play a significant role in student performance in regards to comprehension. The results also suggest that open-ended questions and higher order thinking skills should be integrated into conversations surrounding complex text so that students can think more deeply about the meaning of the text and share ideas with one another that will help build their understanding.

## **Chapter One: Introduction**

This paper serves as an in-depth meta-analysis based on a previously conducted meta-analysis of the quantitative research pertaining to the various roles that classroom discussion can play in students' comprehension (Murphy, Wilkinson, Soter, Hennessey, & Alexander, 2009). There is an emerging concern that students are not meeting or exceeding the level of literacy proficiency needed to be academically successful in college and fulfill employer expectations for the literacy that careers of the 21<sup>st</sup> century demand, due to advances in technology occurring daily (Murphy et al., 2009). Lee, Grigg, and Donahue (as cited in Murphy et al., 2009) state that approximately 67% of fourth graders and 70% of eighth graders currently are performing at or above Basic level for literacy learning according to the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). Furthermore, the National Assessment Governing Board (as cited in Murphy et al., 2009) states that only 25% of fourth graders and 27% of eighth graders are scoring within the proficient range for comprehension. To address this gap in comprehension achievement, my meta-analysis research aims to collect, analyze, and synthesize several sources of quantitative data from previous research studies that have been conducted in the past ten to twelve years which examined the impacts of peer discourse on students' comprehension of a text to discover the roles that teachers can play in facilitating and implementing these conversations into their curriculum. Moreover, this research aims to distinguish the specific types of discussion that seem to be most effective for students with disabilities and English language learners (ELLs), so that educators can attempt to differentially modify the structure of class discussions to suit individual learning needs. It is hoped that through differentially modifying the structure of class discussions, every student can gain significant meaning from complex texts regardless of social, cultural, and linguistic differences.

Students with disabilities and ELLs in particular will vary in their abilities to derive meaning from the variety of texts they are exposed to on a daily basis; therefore, further examination into the topic of discourse is needed to afford these students multiple opportunities to participate in authentic literacy experiences that will allow them to derive deeper levels of meaning as well as develop other significant literary skills (i.e. critical thinking, inferring, making textual connections). According to Morocco and Hindin (2002) students with disabilities often do not participate in classroom discussions because they may not understand how to effectively communicate their ideas; however, there is a belief that their active engagement in peer discourse can enhance their critical literacy skills. Peer discourse that involves collaborative thinking activities increases students' understanding of a text and societal issues as well as promotes a willingness to read; however raises the bar for cognitive demands placed on students (Morocco & Hindin, 2002). Students can play numerous roles while participating in group discussion such as asking and answering questions, responding to the ideas of others while synthesizing those ideas with their own, contributing their perspectives, making interpretations or inferences, using textual evidence to support their inferences, and using a variety of comprehension strategies to increase their understanding of a text (Morocco & Hindin, 2002). Galda and Beach (as cited in Morocco & Hindin, 2002) believe that students also need to bring to the conversations the connections they have based on their prior experiences and relate it to the characters and events in the text in order to gain deeper levels of understanding. Morocco and Hindin, 2002 suggested that students should be reading engaging texts as well as learning to interact with the texts that they encounter in a similar manner to proficient readers. Maloch; Morocco and Chiarelli (as cited in Morocco & Hindin, 2002) support the belief that many teachers and students agree that implementing and participating in peer discourse presents many

obstacles due to the rigorous cognitive demands being placed on students. Cultural and linguistic diversity also plays a major role in these challenges that many students and teachers face surrounding the implementation of classroom discussion to support students' comprehension (Morocco & Hindin, 2002).

### **Problem Statement**

The New York State Common Core State Standards (NYSCCSS or CCSS) for English language Arts (ELA), grades K-5, require that students are able to read and comprehend a variety of genres at or above grade level proficiency with a strong emphasis being placed on non-fiction text (CCSS Initiative, 2014). The standards for speaking and listening also encourage student engagement in collaborative discourse with peers about grade level text in order to support students' comprehension (CCSS Initiative, 2014). The problem is that many students are scoring below required proficiency levels on state wide assessments in regards to their comprehension. Student conversations and the ways in which teachers facilitate and scaffold these conversations can play a variety of roles as well as have a significant impact in the enhancement or regression of students' comprehension (Jordan & Massad, 2004). In my role as the researcher, I reviewed the quantitative research that has been previously conducted surrounding the topic of classroom discussion, its' effects on student comprehension for my data collection purposes, and then analyzed these studies in search of patterns of the various discussion approaches as well as patterns in the demographic information of the subjects who participated in the studies in order to draw conclusions as to which discussion approaches appear to be most effective for each population of students. The results of my study will provide insight on effective implementation of student interaction, in order for students who are currently struggling to score at or above grade level on assessments of comprehension. Peer interactions allow students to have more

opportunities to practice their literacy knowledge and skills, which is thought to have a positive impact on test scores. Based on the research of Jordan & Massad (2004), it seems that student discussions can be a powerful tool, when utilized appropriately, for the development of comprehension surrounding complex, informational text. According to Jordan & Massad (2004) improvement in student comprehension relies on meaningful interaction with the text and with other learners, so that students can reveal their thought processes engaged in throughout the reading process in order to increase all students' metacognitive awareness as opposed to simply being taught the comprehension strategies or processes.

### **Significance of the Problem**

According to Murphy et al. (2009) "The role of classroom discussions in comprehension and learning has been the focus of investigations since the early 1960's" (p. 740). There are several reasons that my research is significant, the first is so that teachers, administrators, student advocates, curriculum specialists, and policy makers may be able to gain further insight on the impacts that classroom discussion has on the reading comprehension of students and discover effective methods for differentially implementing multiple discussion approaches into their curriculum. The need to gain further insight surrounding implementation of classroom discourse is crucial for making effective instructional decisions based on individual learning needs when teaching comprehension; to discover the population(s) of students which seem to benefit more or less from each type of discussion approach in order to enhance comprehension; and to potentially improve instruments used for reading comprehension assessment purposes. Teachers need to be willing to sometimes go beyond the intended context of their lesson based on individual student's responses and questions in order for effective teaching and learning to occur (Boyd, 2012).



A second significant aspect of my research is that a myriad of comprehension strategies can be demonstrated for students through peer discourse with appropriate scaffolding by the teacher, which can increase the students' understanding of the texts they interact with. However, the careful examination of each individual discussion approach and its effectiveness may allow teachers and researchers to develop a better understanding as to which comprehension strategies work best for various population(s) of students or learning styles as well as which comprehension strategy pairs best with each type of discussion approach based on lesson objectives and chosen text. Oftentimes, teachers will discuss a variety of comprehension strategies, apart from actual reading time, such as questioning, rereading, making connections, predictions, and inferences to assist students with improving their understanding of texts they read. The strategies being taught outside of authentic literacy experiences can cause a separation for students between reading and the application of these processes throughout the reading process. Jordan & Massad (2004) believe that teachers need to go beyond simply teaching students strategies for comprehension and provide students multiple opportunities to thoughtfully interact with texts utilizing the strategies taught in order to effectively increase their understanding of a text. Peer collaboration allows readers' thought processes to be modeled in real-life scenarios which can potentially enhance the meaning and knowledge of use of these strategies for many students due to their active engagement. Student discussion with peers often encompasses a variety of tasks that the students must perform which leads to the issue of the specific roles that these conversations play within the classroom context and how the various roles can be implemented to most effectively meet the needs of each individual learner. Jordan & Massad (2004) suggested that the type of student discourse that was portrayed in their study may not be effective for other third grade classrooms where students are not reading at or above grade

level. Thus, a need for further research surrounding the roles of classroom discussion and its' impact on student comprehension is needed.

### **Purpose of the Study**

My research serves several purposes, the first was to conduct a meta-analysis so that I could examine, synthesize, and analyze the previous quantitative studies that have been previously conducted regarding the effectiveness of engaging students in classroom discussion after reading in order to enhance their comprehension of what they read. The present research also served the purpose of adding to and extending the current knowledge of the roles that teachers and students play in peer discourse, the ways in which classroom interactions can impact the comprehension of culturally and linguistically diverse students, made connections between the types of discourse used and teacher methods for facilitating effective communication among students, and the types of students that seem most receptive to the benefits of interactive discussion. Lastly, I wanted to more extensively examine the various types of discourse that take place in the classroom so that I could gain further insight regarding the types of discussion approaches that are most commonly used.

Classroom discourse and comprehension play a significant role in literacy instruction and assessment. Teacher's must explicitly model for the students how to engage in meaningful conversation with one another, offer plenty of guided practice, carefully scaffold students participation in these discussions, and allow ample opportunities for students to practice applying these skills while engaging in authentic reading and writing practices. Therefore, teachers need to be well versed regarding research based methods that are most effective toward engaging students in higher level cognitive activities and facilitating meaningful discussion that works toward enhancing the comprehension proficiency of every student. There has been much

discussion lately on the importance of student led discussions for the purposes of improving comprehension instruction and creating a culture of active versus passive learners. Students must be active participants in their learning by sharing thoughts, ideas, connections, questions, predictions, and inferences in order to potentially improve their comprehension.

## **Research Questions**

My research consisted of one main topic and three subtopics:

- I investigated the broad topic of “the role of classroom discussion on students’ text comprehension” (Murphy et al., 2009), retrieved from (Duke & Mallette, 2011, p.274). What are the ways in which classroom discussion impact students’ comprehension proficiency?
- I specifically focused on the roles that teachers play to facilitate and implement these discussions. How can teachers effectively implement and facilitate meaningful conversation in the classroom surrounding complex text in order to improve student comprehension proficiency?
- I also focused on the role that diverse populations of students, such as ELLs and students with disabilities have as part of these discussions in order to discover the ways in which discourse may impact their comprehension. In what way does discourse among peers impact the comprehension proficiency of ELLs and students with disabilities?
- I attempted to weave together common themes between each method of discourse, the comprehension strategies that are demonstrated as part of the lesson, and the populations of students that seem to have increased their comprehension abilities based on the type of discourse used. What are the discourse approaches that seem

to be most effective for enhancing the comprehension abilities of ELL's and students with disabilities?

### **Rationale**

Conducting research of this nature will help to provide deeper insight for me, current and future teachers regarding the most effective ways to incorporate peer discourse into literacy instruction in order to increase students' metacognitive awareness during their thought processes throughout reading. Meta-cognitive awareness is an important factor for enhancing students' ability to self-monitor their own use of strategies which will lead to deeper levels of thinking and meaning that students can make. Furthermore, social interactions between students with their peers and between students and their teachers can provide all learners with opportunities to demonstrate the valuable funds of knowledge that they bring to the classroom through discussion and sharing of diverse perspectives. In addition, the results of my research will enable me to more effectively support my students' learning and comprehension through social construction of knowledge, and deepen my understanding of the ways in which these classroom discussions can impact the comprehension of ELLs and students with disabilities. These diverse populations of students will need varied levels of support, guided practice, and scaffolding because their values, cultural norms, and beliefs toward literacy activities may be different than that of other students in the class or the teacher. That is why it is important to research how classroom discussion can impact the teaching and learning for these students. Cultural responsiveness should always be a factor when selecting appropriate texts, planning instructional activities and assessments, and engaging students in conversations.

Also, examining the different types of discourse approaches used and their effectiveness as literacy instructional methods will expand my knowledge base and increase my

understanding; thus allowing me to model the use of language surrounding literacy activities for my students who are culturally and linguistically diverse. I believe that allowing students to make meaningful connections to their reading and writing assists them with gaining further insight in a manner that allows them to store the information using multiple networks in their brain.

In finality, this research topic is important because I plan to teach students with disabilities, and I would like to know more about how interactions with others can impact their understanding of texts that they encounter. I currently work with individuals with disabilities, supporting a wide variety of age levels with achieving their personal goals related to independence with learning life skills such as money identification when making purchases, cooking, household chores/maintenance, exercise, reading, and social integration into their local communities. I have seen firsthand the power of oral language and how it helps support the learning and comprehension of some individuals I work with. For example, there is a young woman I work with that has developmental disabilities and based on her conversations with me and her inquiries about the meanings of words she is unfamiliar with, she has been able to increase her vocabulary by five new words. She is also able to use the words in context by asking me “can you warm me up with some friction” or “yawns can be contagious”. I also investigated the levels of participation in classroom discussion for students with disabilities and ELLs. The level of student participation can be an indicator of the effectiveness of the discussion approach being used and the methods that the teacher exercises to facilitate the students’ talk among each other. Students need varying levels of support; therefore, it is important for me to be familiar with several ways in which I can facilitate meaningful discussion, whether large group or small group, so that every student regardless of abilities has an opportunity to create new knowledge. I

have learned from previous experiences and my own college course discussions that discourse allows for knowledge to be shared and added to, so that further insight can be gained and deeper levels of understanding can be reached.

## **Study Approach**

### **Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework for my study was grounded upon the socio-cognitive, socio-linguistic, and socio-cultural theories of teaching and learning literacy. Morocco & Hindin (2002) assert that “Teaching for understanding in the area of literature is a social and culturally situated process” (p. 145). In regards to the socio-cognitive and social constructivist theories of literacy teaching and learning Murphy et al. (2009) state that, “Vygotsky (1934/1986) conceived of learning as a culturally embedded and socially mediated process in which discourse plays a primary role in the creation and acquisition of shared meaning making” (p.741). Vygotsky’s (1978) view suggested that when children are active participants in authentic literacy activities such as engaging in classroom conversations after reading an article with classmates, teachers, and parents, they are more likely to develop their literacy skills by building knowledge based on the multiple perspectives that others bring to the discussion (Murphy et al., 2009). Murphy et al. (2009) also noted that Piaget (1928) maintained the perspective that the use of expressive and receptive discussion is necessary for one to develop their cognitive abilities, higher order thinking, and problem solving skills. Verbal scaffolding is a significant component to Reading Recovery in that teachers model the use of meaning, syntactic, and visual cueing systems for word decoding during reading activities then employ the gradual release model so that students can begin to apply these strategies to their independent reading (Triplett, 2002). In this case teacher- student interactions lead to higher levels of understanding. Reciprocal teaching has also

been noted as a “verbal comprehension scaffold” because teachers orally model the use of various comprehension strategies during read aloud then provides students with the opportunity to model their thinking strategies aloud. (Triplett, 2002). Triplett (2002) contended that activities involving think-aloud had a positive impact on the comprehension of fourth graders. In reference to the socio-linguistic theories of literacy learning, Triplett (2002) cited the work of Vygotsky (1978,1986) in which the belief is held that thought processes are further enhanced through interactions with more experienced peers and adults.

Furthermore, Triplett (2002), in regards to the socio-cultural theories of literacy learning, noted the fact that many researchers believe cultural perspectives such as values, beliefs, traditions, and ways of life all play a major role in the development of literacy skills and practices, however only one set of values seems to permeate many schools and curriculums. In addition, Triplett (2002) suggested that there are benefits when communication practices within a student’s home and community are closely aligned with their school and classroom settings. Research has demonstrated that Caucasian students, mainly in generalized educational settings, from families with moderate to high SES have the benefit of discourse methods most closely matching their school’s discourse practices and beliefs (Triplett, 2002). Triplett (2002) further supported the notion that interactions within the classroom either among peers or between the teacher and student has been shown to benefit the literacy learning of culturally and linguistically diverse students. Research also reveals that “instructional conversations around concrete classroom experiences helped nonmainstream students to make connections with their own cultural experiences, construct new cognitive knowledge, and develop language skills in a secondary discourse” (Triplett, 2002, p.123-124).

## **Methodology**

I have reviewed the literature using three main databases (ERIC, PsycINFO, and Education Source) to find studies that have used a quantitative approach. All of the included studies in my search have been conducted over the last ten to twelve years, and involve the impacts that classroom discussion has on students' comprehension proficiency; the methods teachers can utilize to effectively implement and facilitate these conversations; studies that pertain to the impacts that classroom discourse has on the comprehension proficiency of ELLs and students with disabilities; and the specific discussion approaches that seem most effective for these particular populations of students. I used a variety of keywords while conducting my search such as classroom conversation and comprehension, peer discourse and comprehension, classroom discussion and comprehension, and discussion approaches and student comprehension. Many of my search results came up studies that were qualitative in nature. I decided to use these studies within my literature review. I attempted to begin narrowing my search results by adding the keyword quantitative to my search. However, this method did not yield any significant results. In order to narrow my search, I began clicking on the titles of each article within the results list to obtain a detailed record of each article. There I began to find studies that have used a quantitative approach or a mixed method approach. I labeled each reference from a level A-D, depending on which category of my research questions the study most closely resembled. For example references labeled with an 'A' most closely relate to the impacts that classroom discussion has on students' comprehension proficiency. References labeled with a 'B' involve methods that teachers can use to effectively implement and facilitate student discussion to improve comprehension proficiency. References labeled with a 'C' pertain to the ways that classroom discussion impacts the comprehension proficiency of ELLs and/or



students with disabilities. References labeled with a 'D' include discourse approaches used to improve the comprehension proficiency of ELLs and/or students with disabilities.

## **Chapter Two: Literature Review**

Jordan & Massad (2014) conducted a study that involved the exploration of various roles that a third grade teacher played in guiding and scaffolding student-led discussions in order to enhance students' understanding of complex, non-fiction text such as an article in an online newspaper. For the activity designed by the teacher, titled "In the News", two students were selected and paired together each week to be the designated reporters. As designated reporters they chose the article, read and summarized it, then reported the article to the whole class, and lead discussion. "When students summarize text they can develop a better understanding of complex material ,increase competence at expressing their understanding, improve knowledge retention, actively construct meaning, and increase metacognitive awareness" (Jordan & Massad, 2014,p.12). The results of this study demonstrated three roles that the teacher played throughout this activity to guide and scaffold the students' comprehension of the text and interactions with each other which include checking for understanding periodically during the reading and summarizing of their chosen article; the intermediary role to guide discussion by providing prompts so that deeper levels of meaning can be made; and Moderator to foster students' active self-monitoring of the ideas that are being communicated among themselves (Jordan & Massad, 2014).

Kucan & Beck (2003) aimed to examine three questions involving student discussion and comprehension. These three questions addressed, "does the environment in which the discussion takes place impact a student's comprehension, does talking about texts with peers influence the quality of students' talk, and do experiences talking about the text influence individual thinking about the text" (Kucan & Beck,2003, p.1)? For this study, participants were asked to read an expository text, think aloud while reading, and respond to prompts following the reading for pre-

test and post-test sessions as well as discuss the text in an intervention session either in a small group with peers or individually. The findings insinuate that environment does not necessarily impact a student's comprehension because all participants in this study exhibited improved results when asked to respond to the prompts; nevertheless, participating in a group discussion does affect comprehension as opposed to individual talk, and a student's experiences talking with others can influence their individual thinking about the text (Kucan & Beck, 2003). Students that questioned, summarized, predicted, and frequently interacted with peers about texts that have been read displayed enhanced comprehension scores on standardized assessments and support the use of discourse for teaching comprehension (Kucan & Beck, 2003). According to Kucan & Beck's (2003) review of the literature students that voice their thoughts during reading as opposed to reading and thinking silently, display improvement in recall of information provided in the text and response to beyond literal level questions about the text. Kucan & Beck (2003) also suggest that student conversations that involve questioning the author allow students to make meaningful connections by synthesizing the author's ideas with the perspectives of others as well as their own, actively participate in discourse with peers in a reciprocating manner, and generate a variety of their own questions.

Morocco & Hindin (2002) sought to investigate the ways in which students with disabilities at the middle school grade level interact during whole class or small group discussions and how their conversations among peers enhances their understanding of a text presented in class. Morocco & Hindin (2002) support the belief that students gain valuable literacy skills and practice, along with enhanced understanding by engaging in discussion with peers. Their findings indicate that students with disabilities can gain the skills necessary to actively participate in discussion with peers to build deeper levels of meaning when interacting

with complex texts (Morocco & Hindin, 2002). Due to the complexities surrounding students' diverse academic, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds it can be difficult to increase student participation in classroom discussions which aim to interpret ideas in a text (Morocco & Hindin, 2002). Therefore, educators should develop their knowledge of discourse and teaching practices that will encourage and motivate student participation, so all students can derive deeper levels of meaning from the text (Morocco & Hindin, 2002). Morocco & Hindin (2002) suggests that teachers should ask questions that encourage thoughtful discussion and elicit a variety of perspectives surrounding the meaning of a text. Morocco & Hindin (2002) encourage teachers to further support the understanding of culturally and linguistically diverse students by reiterating what students say in a different format so that the ideas shared can be coherent to everyone. Morocco & Hindin (2002) asserted that students gain higher levels of control over their use of "literacy discourse" practices when multiple opportunities and a variety of situations to apply these skills are presented. Morocco and Hindin's (2002) analysis of "student talk" demonstrated that students had a clear understanding of the various discussion roles that had been previously taught. Students also demonstrated use of these roles by their ability to make inferences, using textual evidence

Wiseman's (2011) research examined how student learning can be enhanced through student discussion and interaction immediately following a read-aloud. The participants of this study included 21 African American Kindergarten students of low SES and a Caucasian teacher who uses mostly culturally specific, picture books for her read-aloud sessions to engage students in rich discussion through contribution and interaction (Wiseman, 2011). The teacher who participated in this study maintained consistency with daily book introductions which included pointing out and discussing various features of the text such as the front and back covers as well

as the dedication and copyright pages in order to elicit predictions and inferences from the students. The author of this article conducted his research under the premise that interactive read-aloud sessions contribute to student's learning because they provide opportunities for teachers to model and scaffold as well as opportunities for students to model effective comprehension strategies through classroom discourse (Wiseman, 2011). According to Wiseman's (2011) review of the literature teachers often utilize the IRE discussion model which includes teacher initiating questions and evaluating responses and students responding to the teacher initiated questions or choose to emphasize comprehension, fluency, and vocabulary during interactive read-aloud. The findings of this study suggested that interactive read-aloud encourage open ended questions and responses as well as promote student understanding through the social construction of knowledge model of teaching and learning which can be built upon each individual student's strengths and knowledge that they bring to the discussion (Wiseman, 2011).

Worthy, Chamberlain, Peterson, Sharp, & Shih (2012) aimed to report the ways in which exemplary teachers effectively utilize read-aloud sessions along with classroom dialogue by encouraging positive, interactive, and attentive communication among students in a second grade classroom. The participants of this study included 19 students in an inclusive classroom setting, with mostly Caucasian as well as four Latino, one African American, and one Middle Eastern student (Worthy et al., 2012). The teacher who participated in this study believed student interaction immediately following a read aloud allows students to connect as a community of learners and increase their oral language and critical thinking skills (Worthy et al., 2012). The teaching and learning philosophy of developing a positive classroom culture which includes a community of literacy learners through peer discourse is also supported by the research of

Wiseman, 2011 and Morocco & Hindin, 2002. Worthy et al.'s (2012) belief was that read-aloud sessions followed by meaningful whole class discussion are an effective practice to enhance student engagement and interaction with texts to improve their level of understanding and use of strategies while reading. The teacher in the study used discussion techniques such as encouraging students to elaborate on what they have said; students to think critically about the author's purpose and rationale; and students to interact meaningfully with the text by predicting, questioning, and dramatizing scenes or dialogue in the text (Worthy et al., 2012). The results illustrated that the use of these techniques by the teacher fostered a learning environment in which each student's voice could be heard, and encouraged respectful, patient, and attentive listening (Worthy et al., 2012).

Zhang, Anderson, & Nguyen-Jahiel's (2013) study focused on exploring the effects of an approach to student discourse called Collaborative Reasoning (CR). Zhang, Anderson, & Nguyen-Jahiel (2013) report that there are significant gaps in performance level on assessments of reading and writing skills among ELL's, specifically when their primary language is Spanish and come from low SES backgrounds when compared with their peers who's primary language is English. Zhang, Anderson, & Nguyen-Jahiel (2013) state that literacy instruction targeted toward ELL's does not often incorporate activities and tasks that are geared toward oral language proficiency. CR involves student-led, small group discussions in which students take a position on the issue(s) presented in the text, present a reasonable argument, respond to other arguments presented during the discussion, and support their argument using textual evidence (Zhang, Anderson, & Nguyen-Jahiel, 2013). The teacher sits on the sidelines and offers support and scaffolding when needed in order to keep the discussion on track (Zhang, Anderson, & Nguyen-Jahiel, 2013). Zhang, Anderson, & Nguyen-Jahiel (2013) believe that CR discourse provides

students with multiple opportunities to interact with their peers surrounding complex societal issues, and allows students to practice skills such as oral language and higher order thinking. The researchers of this study examined three questions to narrow their research which included do CR discussions improve ELLs English listening, speaking, reading, and writing, their motivation and level of participation in class discussions, and learning attitudes. The participants included seventy-five Spanish speaking fifth graders. The results of the study purport that students who participated in the CR group showed enhanced listening and reading comprehension when compared with that of the control group. The findings also indicated that the students also had improved in several of the other areas of oral and written language development that were assessed throughout the research.

### **Chapter Three: Study Design**

I specifically designed my study after that of a meta-analysis to examine previously conducted, quantitative research studies that inquired about the ways that classroom discussion impacts students' comprehension proficiency. I investigated the ways that teachers can effectively implement and facilitate meaningful conversation in the classroom surrounding complex text in order to improve student comprehension proficiency. I also focused on the role that diverse populations of students, such as ELLs and students with disabilities have as part of these discussions in order to discover the ways in which discourse may impact their comprehension. I also wanted to examine the connections between each method of discourse, the comprehension strategies that are demonstrated as part of the lesson, and the populations of students that seem to have increased their comprehension abilities based on the type of discourse used.

#### **My Positionality as the Researcher**

I am currently a classroom substitute teacher, primarily teaching in the primary grades as well as assisting individuals with disabilities within the community that I live with obtaining and maintaining independence through working on individual goals. I am interested in the ways that peer discourse can be effectively incorporated into the curriculum in order to engage students in meaningful discussion. By creating a classroom environment that values diverse perspectives and offers every student daily opportunities to share their ideas and build upon the ideas of others, it will allow them to make deeper connections that will lead to increased understanding of texts that they encounter. I believe that classroom discussion also helps students to enhance other



literacy skills that are necessary for becoming successful within 21<sup>st</sup> century college and career markets.

I specifically wanted to focus on the impact that peer discussion and interaction has on the comprehension of students with disabilities and ELL's because I feel that these specific populations of students may benefit most from discourse in many aspects of their literacy development. I have learned a great deal about the ways in which students with disabilities process information presented to them through discussion with more capable peers and adults. A prime example is a young lady that I work with, who was able to learn the meaning of the word friction through questioning, discussion with an adult, voicing the definition, and applying the concept to real life actions such as rubbing her hands together. This leads me to the conclusion that discussion among peers and more capable others can enhance comprehension when incorporated with repetition of the concept through action. Peer discussion should be incorporated with a variety of learning techniques in order to increase effectiveness because use of multiple strategies encourages students to utilize a myriad of abilities which can lead to deeper levels of understanding. I have also learned that speaking and listening are significant aspects to literacy development that can enhance a student's experience when engaging in literacy activities by allowing him/her to be exposed to a variety of perspectives.

The topic of student discourse and its' effectiveness in regards to comprehension instruction is relevant to my pedagogy because some students with disabilities may have a difficult time with grasping some the complex ideas embedded in non-fiction texts that are presented in class. Engaging students in paired, small group discussions, or whole class discussions with explicit teacher guidance and scaffolding may afford them opportunities to observe and reenact the processes needed to foster proficient development in a myriad of literacy

skills including comprehension. These skills can include speaking, listening, reading, summarizing, synthesizing, making inferences, making connections, rereading, and predicting. I firmly believe that student participation and engagement in every activity or lesson will increase the chances for effective teaching and learning to occur, as opposed to rote methods in which the teacher does the talking and teaching and the students do the listening and learning.

Comprehension instruction is an especially significant focus involving peer discourse due to the current rigors of the CCSS, increased population of English Language Learners, and high level of demand and competition in 21<sup>st</sup> century college and career markets. The ability to read and decode words is an important literacy skill; however, many children, parents, and community members may not realize that comprehension is the key that unlocks many doors in the world of words.

### **Data Collection/Analysis**

For data collection purposes, I will be searching for research articles, literature reviews, and meta-analyses using three major databases including ERIC, Education Source, and PsycINFO. I coded the data by categorizing each discussion approach by letter A, B, C, D, etc., categorize each method used by the teacher to implement or facilitate the discussion (i.e. checking for understanding frequently, modeling discussion techniques, grouping students together either homogeneously or heterogeneously, etc. by number 1, 2, 3, etc., and categorizing the specific populations of students by lowercase letters a, b, c, etc., and the students' levels of participation by low, medium, and, high. I plan to search for common themes among the results of each study after the coding is completed. I will then analyze the results of each study and synthesize the ideas and findings presented by each author to create a broad perspective on the

most effective discussion approaches, best practices for implementing peer interactions, and how these interactions relate to successful student comprehension.

## **Procedures**

- I began my data collection process for a total of six to eight weeks.
- I included in my data quantitative research studies pertaining to the topic of classroom discussion and its effects on student comprehension. Under the umbrella of this topic for inclusion were methods of classroom, peer discourse, and teacher methods for implementing and facilitating these conversations, so that students can effectively communicate their ideas and perspectives with one another in a manner that promotes deeper levels of thinking and understanding.
- I coded the data according to my analysis process described above.
- I was then able to search for common themes among the various sets of my collected data. I will be examining the types of discussion approaches used in each study, the contexts of each study including participant's used, the ways in which the teacher facilitated the discussion, and if possible the comprehension strategies that were demonstrated through the discussion.
- I noted the findings from each study and made connections between the findings of each study.
- I analyzed the connections and themes in order to draw conclusions about whether or not the results of each study were valid.
- Lastly, I reported my findings based on common themes that were found. I also briefly discussed possible implications for future research.

## **Criteria for Trustworthiness**

- Prolonged engagement- I engaged in this research and collected data for a period of six to eight weeks. Then I spent a considerable amount of time examining, analyzing, and synthesizing my data so that I could draw conclusions.
- Triangulation- I collected several types of data including scholarly, peer-reviewed journal articles, literature reviews, meta-analyses, and research studies all pertaining to the role of classroom discussion on student's comprehension. I analyzed the data in search of trends that included demographic and contextual information about participants and settings of each study, types of discussion used to promote student understanding, and methods of implementing and facilitating meaningful classroom discourse.
- Negative case analysis- I thoroughly investigated the literature surrounding my topic and have presented multiple perspectives in my research. I searched a variety of educational research databases such as Education Source, ERIC, and PsycINFO and included multiple genres to ensure that a variety views related to my research topic were conveyed. It is essential to collect, analyze, and evaluate similar and opposing perspectives while conducting research so that the author's beliefs are not isolated. This process also allows for bias to be reduced as well as validity of findings to be increased because the analysis will be based on diverse ideologies and beliefs related to literacy teaching and learning.
- Dependability- I have included a detailed research process and procedures in my research. I have fully described my data collection and analysis procedures, methods for conducting my research using the meta-analysis approach, and criteria for inclusion of my data.

- Confirm ability- At the conclusion of my data analysis process, I began to formulate findings as to the types of classroom discourse that can be used to enhance students' comprehension, teaching methods for implementation and scaffolding these conversations, and populations of students that seem to benefit most as a result of discussion with peers and proficient readers. My findings were directly derived based on the results of the collected data due to the nature of the meta-analytic methodology.

## Chapter Four: Findings

### *A -The Impact that Classroom Discussion has on Students' Comprehension Proficiency*

Liu, Wu, and Ko (2014) sought to investigate the impacts of classroom online discussion approaches used along with prediction strategy instruction on students' comprehension. The participants for this study included approximately 113 students from four fifth grade classrooms located in an urban district. Liu, Wu, and Ko (2014) noted that the threshold for selecting participants for this study was that scores on the comprehension pre-assessment had to be greater than 5% due to the fact this system for instruction was not beneficial for students with reading disabilities. According to Liu, Wu, and Ko (2014) reading comprehension strategies are an essential component to literacy instruction. Liu, Wu, and Ko (2014) mentioned that many classroom discussions involve more talk by the teacher rather than the students which can negatively influence perceptions toward the effectiveness of the use of discourse practices within the classroom to promote student comprehension. Liu, Wu, and Ko (2014) suggested that if students are not active participants in these conversations it may reduce their ability to extend the understanding that they have. Liu, Wu, and Ko (2014) also suggested that online discussion may be an alternative solution to incorporate so that students who may be reluctant to participate in oral discussion may be more likely to engage in online discussion.

According to Liu, Wu, and Ko (2014) there are four types of comprehension instruction which include single strategy, combined strategy, direct instruction, and constructivist. Liu, Wu, and Ko (2014) purported that constructivist approaches tend to be more effective when compared with the other methods, because they encourage students to formulate their own perspectives to deepen their understanding. Liu, Wu, and Ko (2014) contended that group discussion does seem

to improve the comprehension proficiency of students when paired with constructivist and single strategy approaches to comprehension instruction.

The study conducted by Applebee, Langer, Nystrand, and Gamoran (2013) included a discussion relating to the similarities between the results of previous studies that they have conducted to the research of others involving the subject of student- teacher interactions using various discourse approaches. The researchers of this study wished to draw upon these similarities to investigate student literacy achievement in classrooms that promote classroom discussion to build understanding from those classrooms which do not often use various types of discourse within the classroom. Applebee, Langer, Nystrand, and Gamoran (2013) also pointed out that another goal of their study was to examine how their findings from previous qualitative studies would correlate to the findings of this particular study that presented quantitative data with a wider range of participants. There seems to be a great deal of diversity among the participants of this study which included approximately 974 students from schools ranging across five different states, urban and suburban classroom settings, middle and high school students, and varying ability levels.

Applebee, Langer, Nystrand, and Gamoran's (2013) findings suggested that factors such as gender, SES, location of school setting urban versus suburban, ethnic background, and high school or middle school grade levels are all factors that may impact student performance on assessments of literacy skills and knowledge. According to Applebee, Langer, Nystrand, and Gamoran (2013) the results of their study also demonstrated that students who attended schools that were located in suburban settings at the high school level had higher levels of performance when compared with urban, middle school settings. Furthermore, female students of non-Hispanic descent that have higher SES also seemed to have higher performance levels on literacy

assessments. Applebee, Langer, Nystrand, and Gamoran (2013) further indicated that students displayed increased amounts of academic rigor and engaged students in meaningful discourse also had satisfactory performance levels on assessments of literacy performance at both the high school and middle school grade levels and seems to be beneficial for all students. However, in regards to race/ethnicity students with Asian backgrounds seemed to benefit most from instruction that utilized discourse and prompted rigorous thinking from students (Applebee, Langer, Nystrand, and Gamoran, 2013).

Vaughn et al. (2013) sought to investigate the quality of a content acquisition and reading comprehension intervention program used within eighth grade social studies classrooms using a quantitative methodology. A total of 419 students from two schools located in an urban district were chosen to participate in this study and were divided into 16 treatment groups and 11 control groups (Vaughn et. al, 2013). According to Vaughn et.al (2013), most of the students who participated in both the control and treatment groups were of Caucasian background with an even mixture of male and female subjects. About 30% of participants in the treatment group were of Hispanic origin and 25% in the control group (Vaughn et.al, 2013). Fewer than 10% of the participants from both groups were labeled as African American or Asian (Vaughn et.al, 2013). Approximately 23% of participants from each group were considered low SES and 6% were considered ELL from both groups combined (Vaughn et.al, 2013).The academic content for both treatment and comparison groups was the same, however in the treatment classes instructional approaches consisted of essential word study, text-based reading and discussions, as well as team-based learning approaches (TBL).

The findings of Vaughn et al.'s (2013) study suggested that students in treatment groups demonstrated significantly higher scores on assessments of content procurement and both



standardized and content based comprehension assessments. Vaughn et al. (2013) also suggests that the team based learning (TBL) approach and active participation in peer discourse can increase student's comprehension either in individual or group based activities. Vaughn et al's (2013) research did not provide any insight as to which population of students the TBL and discussion approaches seemed to work best for.

***B - Methods that Teachers can use to effectively Implement and Facilitate Student Discussion to Improve Comprehension Proficiency***

Mikyung, Crosson, and Resnick (2005) conducted a study that involved a mixed methods approach, in which they collected both quantitative and qualitative data. Their goal was to investigate various types of classroom discussion so that they could determine if there was a correlation between student-teacher interactions and the rigor of the comprehension lessons being presented to the students. The participants of this study included 21 teachers from ten schools; 441 students ranging from grades one through eight, 20% of whom have been identified English Language Learner's. Instructional Quality Assessments (IQA) were used as part of the data collection instruments to measure the quality of classroom discourse, critical thinking involved in lessons, clarity of expectations, and level of student self-management. The types of discussion techniques that were examined and observed were those to which the teacher and students linked knowledge related to discussion; teacher asking for knowledge from students and students providing knowledge; and teachers asking for rigorous thinking versus students providing rigorous thinking.

The results indicated that the teachers were the main facilitators of the discussions that took place (Mikyung, Crosson, and Resnick, 2005). The number of teachers prompting students

for responses was higher when compared with the number of students who offered responses or knowledge that they gained (Mikyung, Crosson, and Resnick, 2005). According to Mikyung, Crosson, and Resnick, (2005) higher order thinking mostly occurred when the mean scores were listed as 3 or higher. In the cases of teacher's linking knowledge and student's linking knowledge during whole group discussion the mean scores were approximately 2.14 and 2.00 (Mikyung, Crosson, and Resnick, 2005). The average scores indicate that teachers were linking knowledge throughout the discussion more often than students which demonstrates that there were lower level cognitive demands being placed on students. The mean scores for teachers asking for knowledge and students providing knowledge throughout the discussion were 3.14 and 3.10 respectively (Mikyung, Crosson, and Resnick, 2005). These scores delineate that students provided knowledge almost equally to the amount of times teachers prompted the students to provide knowledge throughout the discussion which raised the level of rigor for student thinking throughout the discussion. The mean scores for teachers prompting students to think rigorously and students providing rigorous thinking were 3.38 and 3.14 (Mikyung, Crosson, and Resnick, 2005). These scores demonstrate that students were actively using higher order thinking skills while engaging in whole group discussion a majority of the time.

As a result of conducting their study, Mikyung, Crosson, and Resnick, (2005) found that teachers were the primary leaders of most of the whole group discussions that took place. Mikyung, Crosson, and Resnick, (2005) were intrigued by the fact that students often did not seem to make connections to each other's ideas throughout classroom conversations. Mikyung, Crosson, and Resnick, (2005) cited the notion that reiterating and building upon the perspectives of peers throughout dialogue can enhance the depth of knowledge and meaning that is obtained by the students. Mikyung, Crosson, and Resnick, (2005) suggested that creating a community of

learners is essential for deeper learning to occur. A community of learners interacts to share perspectives and build upon ideas presented while respecting the diverse opinions that may emerge during classroom discourse. Mikyung, Crosson, and Resnick, (2005) also suggested that teachers should become more educated on effective ways to implement teacher and student linking discussion approaches to enhance the effectiveness of teaching and rigor of student thinking.

### ***C - Ways that Classroom Discussion Impact the Comprehension Proficiency of ELLs and/or Students with Disabilities***

McElvain (2010) chose to utilize a mixed method approach involving both quantitative and qualitative data. For the purposes of this meta-analysis, I focused on the quantitative data that was presented. McElvain's (2010) study aimed to investigate the academic and psychosocial impacts of the Transactional Literature Circles (TLC) program on 75 fourth through sixth grade students in two different low SES schools. The researchers also examined the impacts of the implementation of TLC's on the reading comprehension of mainstreamed ELL's over a period of one year as well as measured the reading comprehension progress of the participants within the treatment group after seven months. Students that participated in this study as members of the treatment group were classified as English Language Learner's (ELL's) who are at risk for retention according to district appointed criteria (McElvain, 2010). Students had to meet one or more of these four criteria in order to participate in the study which include, their scores for the California STAR Test in ELA (CST-ELA) were at or below basic level; their performance on the California English Language Development Test (CELDT) was at or below intermediate level; were performing below required state grade level standards in reading, were proficient in their

native language and been attending schools in the U.S. for two or more years; or were not enrolled in any other specialized learning programs (McElvain, 2010).

The demographics of the participants in the treatment group for this study was inclusive of 37% in grade four, 36% in grade five, and 27% in grade six (McElvain, 2010). In relation to gender statistics, male participants seem to be more abundant as the gender makeup of the participants was 37% female and 63% male (McElvain, 2010). The racial demographic makeup of the students participating in this study was 72% Hispanic, 15% Filipino, 7% Vietnamese, 3% Chinese, and 1% Asian Indian, White, and Pacific Islander (McElvain, 2010). In contrast, the teachers' demographics within the treatment group are 62% White and 77% female (McElvain, 2010). Results for this study were compared with a similar control group of students who did not participate in the study, although the percentages vary slightly, the only significant difference among the demographics of the control group compared to the treatment group was a slightly lower percentage of Hispanic participants, a higher percentage of male participants, and a higher percentage of White teachers. McElvain (2010) raised a concern that many ELL students are gaining very little meaning from what they read based on the fact that a majority of the students believe that good readers simply use grapho-phonetic cues to decode words, use voice intonation while reading, and speak clearly. McElvain (2010) suggested that ELL students will be more successful with reading comprehension when meaningful discussion takes place surrounding literacy activities and explicit comprehension strategy instruction is provided.

Race/Ethnicity	Percentage of Participants
Hispanic	72%
Filipino,	15%
Vietnamese	7%
Chinese	3%
Asian Indian, White, and Pacific Islander.	1%

*Figure 4.1, demographic makeup of McElvain's (2010) study involving the TLC program*

McElvain's (2010) first inquiry involved how the implementation of TLC programs influenced the reading comprehension scores of mainstreamed ELL's. The results demonstrated that students who scored "far below basic level" for both groups had significantly improved their performance percentage on the CST-ELA with a 34% improvement in test scores for members of the treatment group and a 2% increase in test scores for members of the control group (McElvain, 2010). ELL students were able to raise their reading level by one grade in less than a year, and demonstrated a stronger sense of engagement and motivation to be active participants in discussions with peers as well as an improvement in self-image as a reader (McElvain, 2010). Scores on the CELDT reading and writing portions demonstrated an increase of approximately 33 points and 30 points for participants within the treatment group; furthermore the scores demonstrated an increase of approximately 25 and 12 for participant within the control group respectively (McElvain, 2010). McElvain (2010) suggests that there is a strong connection between knowledge of reading and writing which could explain the increase of achievement in both areas of literacy learning.

Van Staden (2013) utilized a quantitative approach to examine the effectiveness of implementing and combining the use of multi-sensory coding strategies and scaffolding techniques to guide readers who are deaf in four essential areas of students' reading development including sight word fluency, word recognition, knowledge of receptive and expressive vocabulary, and reading comprehension. The participants included 64 children, aged six to eleven years, who had been diagnosed with severe to profound bilateral hearing loss, and who were two or more years behind grade level in reading. The study was conducted in a residential school for the deaf, located in a rural area of the Free State Province, South Africa. The participants were randomly chosen from hearing families with a low SES background and

randomly assigned to the experimental or control group. The study implemented a balanced literacy approach to instruction that allowed students to participate in a variety of multi-sensory word coding activities and use sign language to engage in interactive reading activities to increase their comprehension and build other essential literacy skills. A total of five pre and post tests were administered to the participants.

The results illustrated that students who participated in the experimental group had vastly increased their scores from pre-intervention assessments to post-intervention assessments when compared with students who are deaf that were members of the control group. Students increased their scores for word recognition by 67.5%, 69.8% for sight words, and 78% for comprehension (Van Staden, 2013). Van Staden's (2013) research also demonstrated that some children who are deaf can acquire and incorporate reading comprehension strategies into their reading and some have significant difficulty in applying these same strategies when compared with their peers who are hearing. Word decoding and vocabulary knowledge seemed to be areas that some students who are deaf struggled with the most, in turn affecting their ability to effectively comprehend (Van Staden, 2013).

***D - Discourse Approaches used to improve the Comprehension Proficiency of ELLs and/or Students with Disabilities.***

Silverman et al. (2014) scrutinized the relationship between the instructional approaches used by the teacher and students' vocabulary and comprehension achievement. The authors also wanted to compare monolingual students to bilingual students in relation to the impacts that instruction has on their vocabulary and comprehension abilities. The researchers used a quantitative approach for collecting and analyzing the data for this particular study. The

participants of this study included 274 students as members of 33 different classrooms which were located in various geographic regions of the United States. Silverman et al. (2014) used three different measures of comprehension throughout the course of their study which include the WMLS-R, GMRT-4 (Gates-MacGinitie Reading Test), and TOSREC (Test of Silent Reading Efficiency and Comprehension). The WMLS-R is an untimed assessment that includes a series of cloze passages for students to read and verbally fill in the blanks using contextual clues (Silverman et al., 2014). The WMLS-R has moderate to high reliability with a score of .80-.94 for students aged 7-13 (Silverman et al., 2014). The GMRT-4 and TOSREC are both group administered, timed assessments in which students were required to read grade level passages, answer multiple choice questions, and true or false questions (Silverman et al., 2014). These comprehension assessments also have moderate to high reliabilities with scores of .92-.93, .86-.87, and .82-.97 respectively (Silverman et al., 2014).

The results indicated that there was a difference in impact for monolingual and bilingual students on their particular improvements involving assessments of vocabulary and comprehension. Further analysis of that data uncovered that bilingual students seemed to benefit the most from instructional approaches used by teachers. Based on their review of literature, Silverman et al. (2014) found that “differences in what teachers say may create differences in student understanding” (p.35). Silverman et al. (2014) also found that many discussion approaches that were primarily student led resulted in enhanced levels of literal and inferential comprehension for students. Silverman et al. (2014) point out that increased levels of comprehension does not necessarily demonstrate a clear link between conversations that are student led and improved comprehension. Silverman et al. (2014) also found that the components

<i>Assessment</i>	<i>Timed/Untimed</i>	<i>Reliability scores</i>
WMLS-R	untimed	.80-.94
GMRT-4	timed	.92-.93
TOSREC	timed	.82-.97

to more effective discussion approaches include “authentic questions”, “reasoning words”, and extended responses from students.

*Figure 4.2 Reliability scores of assessments used in Silverman et al.’s (2014) study*

## **Discussion**

In regards to my first inquiry that involved the ways in which classroom discussion impacts student comprehension proficiency, my findings suggested that all students seem to benefit in one way or another from various types of discourse being implemented within the classroom regardless of gender, ethnicity, linguistic background, SES, or abilities. However, past research has demonstrated that factors such as ethnicity, linguistic background, and SES can hinder student comprehension proficiency, so careful consideration must be taken when designing differentiated literacy instruction. The findings of my study also suggested that student comprehension scores on a variety of national, state, and formative assessments do seem to improve most when there is a certain level of teacher support, guidance, and scaffolding used in conjunction with any type of discussion approach. My findings demonstrated that the use of online discussion may not be an appropriate discussion approach to implement when working with students with reading disabilities. However, my findings also suggested that the populations of students that seem to benefit most from online discussion approaches are students who are reluctant to participate in oral discussion within the classroom. Online discussion did not seem offer students practice with oral language proficiency as well as speaking and listening skills,



therefore this type of discourse may not be beneficial for ELL's. My research also suggested that students seem to benefit from the teaching of a variety of comprehension strategies in the context of discussion with explicit modeling, multiple opportunities to practice the application of these strategies during discussion of text, therefore are more able to apply these strategies to their independent reading. My findings also suggested that active participation in discussion versus passive seems to benefit the enhancement of student comprehension because they are sharing their ideas, actively listening to the ideas of their peers, making predictions and inferences, asking and answering questions, and justifying their arguments with the use of textual evidence which allows students to think on deeper levels within, about, and beyond the text. Students are not only actively interacting with each other but they are also interacting with the text on more complex levels. My research also suggested that constructivist and single strategy approaches to comprehension instruction used in conjunction with rich classroom discussion seems to be most effective for the enhancement of comprehension proficiency for students. My findings also suggest that the TBL approach seems to be an effective method of discourse for improving students' comprehension proficiency.

For my second inquiry, I investigated the ways that teachers can effectively implement and facilitate meaningful conversation in the classroom, surrounding complex text, in order to improve students' comprehension proficiency. My findings insinuated that comprehension strategy instruction must be explicit and supported by modeling and guided practice. Quality of teacher prompts and questions throughout classroom discussion also seem to play a significant role in student performance in regards to comprehension. My research also suggested that open-ended questions and higher order thinking skills should be integrated into conversations surrounding complex text so that students can think more deeply about the meaning of the text

and share ideas with one another that will help build their understanding. My findings suggested that teachers must facilitate and scaffold student discussions so that students can learn to be effective leaders in discussion, to take turns, and effectively listen to each other's ideas. To accomplish this, prior to implementing any type of classroom discussion teachers must create anchor charts with students to discuss traits of good speaking and listening, discussion rules, how to transition from one topic to another, and respectfully responding to the arguments presented by peers. Implementing any discussion approach takes a great deal of work for the teacher in the beginning stages to effectively model and instruct for the students how these conversations take place then gradually the teacher releases responsibility to the students to lead discussions and the teacher will step in for further scaffolding when needed. My findings suggested that teachers will need to provide students with prompting so that they can effectively make connections to the ideas presented in the text and to the ideas of others in order to potentially increase the level of understanding that they incur as a result of these discussions because students may not automatically link this knowledge on their own.

My third inquiry sought to determine the ways in which peer discourse impacts the comprehension proficiency of the specific student populations of ELL's and students with disabilities. Overall my research demonstrated that there was a positive impact on the comprehension of ELL's due to the implementation of peer discourse within the classroom. One study suggested that Asian American students seemed to benefit most from classroom discourse that involved rigorous, critical thinking. Silverman et.al's (2014) research suggested that bilingual students also seemed to benefit from comprehension instruction that utilized discussion approaches to promote further student understanding. There were some instances where the number of ELL's or students with disabilities who participated in the studies I have researched

was not that large, therefore researchers were not able to determine the validity of their results in relation to these particular populations of students. My findings suggest that the use of TLC discussion approach seems to benefit ELL students because they seem to be more actively engaged in these types of discussion which also seems to increase their comprehension proficiency.

Lastly, I examined the various discourse approaches that seemed to be most effective for enhancing the comprehension abilities of ELL's and students with disabilities. There has been very little research studies conducted in regards to which types of discourse approaches seem most effective for ELL's and students with disabilities. However, the aforementioned seems to suggest that ELL's do seem to benefit from comprehension instruction that involves peer discourse in some form or fashion. One finding that I found surprising that I came across while conducting my research was the positive impact that the use of sign language and multi-sensory coding strategies for literacy instruction has on the literacy learning and understanding of students who are deaf or hard of hearing. While formulating my research questions in regards to students with disabilities I did not really take into consideration the use of sign language and multi-sensory literacy activities to promote deeper levels of understanding for deaf students.

## **Chapter Five: Implications**

Further quantitative and qualitative research needs to be conducted to investigate specific types of discourse approaches that seem to benefit ELL's and students with disabilities. In the meantime teachers can carefully assess their students literacy learning needs, align literacy instruction to assessment by designing differentiated instruction that most closely matches the needs of each student, integrate various types of discussion within the classroom, and assess individual student's comprehension following each discussion. If certain discussion approaches don't seem to be helping to improve student comprehension proficiency, especially for ELL's and students with disabilities, then teachers must keep some considerations in mind. These considerations include what was the level of the guidance, scaffolding and modeling that was provided throughout instruction, was the discussion conducted in a whole group, small group, homogeneous, or heterogeneous academic setting, did the questions and prompts posed by the teacher foster the use of critical thinking skills by the students in order to promote rigorous cognitive demands on student understanding, were there ample opportunities offered to all students to share and participate during the discussion, and what other teaching methods were employed during the discussion that may influence the effectiveness of the discussion on students understanding. After these factors have been taken into careful consideration teachers can try implementing another type of discussion approach until they find a specific one that seems to benefit ELL's and students with disabilities the most in regards to their comprehension proficiency.

Further research also needs to be conducted in regards to the ways in which multi-sensory literacy activities and sign language can be used to support reading comprehension proficiency for students who are deaf, hard of hearing, blind, autistic, or any combination of these specific

disabilities. With the new and emerging concerns about the numbers of children being diagnosed with autism, learning more about multi-sensory literacy activities in order to enhance reading comprehension among these students who may not communicate in the same manner as their peers is essential to providing meaningful insight to guide instruction methods and materials used with these students.

In addition, further research should also be conducted regarding the specific types of discourse that seems to be most beneficial for increasing the comprehension proficiency of students that come from families with a low SES background. These students may also need varied levels of support when implementing certain types of discussion due to possible lack of literacy support they are receiving in their homes.

Regarding the recently implemented Common Core State Standards, more research should be conducted involving the best practices and approaches to help all students achieve the goals of speaking and listening standards through various types of classroom discourse. Book Clubs are becoming increasingly popular in many classrooms because they are a fun and engaging way to encourage students to participate in meaningful discussions with their peers surrounding texts. In this manner students are given multiple opportunities to use a variety of deeper level thinking strategies such as predicting, making inferences, making connections to the text or the ideas of others, posing questions, and answering questions.

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