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## **How can Guided Reading Help Elementary Students Read at Grade Level by Middle School?**

Magan Graham

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HOW CAN GUIDED READING HELP ELEMENTARY STUDENTS READ AT  
GRADE LEVEL BEFORE MIDDLE SCHOOL?

by

Magan Graham

A capstone project submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Masters of Teaching.

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Faculty Advisor: Dr. Trish Harvey and Julianne Scullen, Ed.S.  
Content Reviewer: Serena Christensen

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## CHAPTER ONE

### Introduction

Throughout the last few years as a reading tutor in an elementary school setting, I have worked with many students ranging from kindergarten to third grade. While working with these students I realized that teaching students to read is not an easy task. Students not reading proficiently by the end of third grade are four times more likely than proficient readers to drop out of high school (Rose & Schimke, 2012). Twenty three percent of these children drop out or fail to finish high school on time, compared to nine percent of children with basic reading skills and four percent of proficient readers (Sparks, 2011). After learning the reality of what happens to students who are below reading level I knew I needed to learn as much as I could about how to help my students succeed. This led me to my research question: *How can guided reading help elementary students read at grade level before middle school?*

### Background

Growing up my mother was a teacher. As an only child, I was told that I needed to grow up and be a teacher just like my mother. By the time I was getting ready to pick my future and apply to colleges, there was nothing I wanted more than not to be a teacher. After graduating with my Bachelor's degree and working in the corporate world for five years, I realized that the work I was doing was not fulfilling or important to me.

After much time researching and soul searching, I realized that being a teacher was what I was meant to do. I decided to go back to school to get my teaching license as well as my Master of Arts in Teaching. I had never really worked in a school setting with elementary students, so I started searching for a way to be in an elementary school setting

without having my teaching license. Luckily, I stumbled upon the Minnesota Reading Corps and became a literacy tutor. During the first year of tutoring, I knew I had made the right decision.

I worked as a literacy tutor for another school year before doing my student teaching at the same school in a third-grade classroom. While working as a tutor, I learned that students who are not at grade level in reading are more likely to drop out of school. In the two years, I was a tutor I did not have one third grader exit the program which left me feeling very discouraged. I loved third grade and hoped to be able to be in third grade in the future. This is why I want to do what I can to understand more about guided reading and to help other teachers do the same.

### **Reading Experiences**

I was always a good reader. My mother was a reading teacher which made my house a reading house. My extended family always had books in their homes. My parents would read to me each night, and if I was at my grandmother's house, she would also read to me. I think it is important to know that the women in my family are avid readers. I cannot remember a time when my mother, grandmother, or aunt were not reading something. They read books, magazines and then would share them with each other.

As I grew up, I caught the reading bug and was reading each Harry Potter as soon as they came out and anything else I could get my hands on in between. I continued to read throughout middle school and high school. When I went to college, I stopped reading for fun as I had so many different textbooks to read each day. It was not until I started going back to school for my master's degree that I actually thought about reading

a book again. Now that I have my license and am almost done with my master's, I have caught that bug again and read as much as I am able.

As a Minnesota Reading Corps Literacy tutor, I attended yearly training on each intervention that is used with students. Minnesota Reading Corps works with students in grades kindergarten through third. The rationale for working with this age range is that after third grade students transition from learning to read and start reading to learn. Seventy four percent of children who read poorly in third grade continue to read poorly in high school. From age three through third grade, children are learning to read. After third grade, they have to read well in order to learn (The numbers are in: Reading corps gets results. 2019).

This is where my spark for third grade reading, as well as third graders in general, started. I love working with this age of students and was excited to be in a third-grade classroom for my student teaching experience. Some of my students were past Minnesota Reading Corps students which made the experience even more exciting. After working with the Minnesota Reading Corps interventions I was eager to get into the reading curriculum the teachers use to see how I could take what I had learned in my coursework and from the Minnesota Reading Corps materials and interventions I had been using.

### **Summary**

With this capstone project, I will make a guide with materials to help teachers who are starting to use guided reading in their classrooms. I will incorporate resources from professional texts and websites as well as helpful classroom resources. I will also incorporate a communication document for teachers to keep track of their students' literacy data so all teachers who service students have access to the most up-to-date

literacy data. In my research, I hope to find the best practices and helpful tips that teachers are using to help get their struggling readers in elementary up to grade level before moving on to middle school.

I have several questions and thoughts that are guiding my research. For example, if a student is reading at a low level would they be able to reach grade level by the end of that school year? What other interventions or guided reading strategies are out there that will assist me in being able to get my students as close as possible to the desired reading level? Do these students need more support throughout the day than their guided reading time? Do I need to use multiple different strategies or curriculums to get my readers to grade level? All of these questions will help me in my research question: *How can guided reading help elementary students read at grade level before middle school?*

In chapter two, I will outline the information that I gather during my research. I will also analyze and synthesize my findings to start formulating my approach to help the struggling readers in my classroom. In chapter three I will start formulating and organizing my project. This is the chapter where I will be able to start answering all the questions that I have regarding my research question. Chapter four will discuss my project as a whole and the insights I have gained along the way while also revisiting my literature review to make connections and identify which resources proved to be the most helpful to my capstone project.



## CHAPTER TWO

### Literature Review

#### Introduction

The implementation of guided reading in the classroom is an integral tool in helping struggling readers find success. In chapter one, I talked about the importance of third grade students reading at grade level before the end of the school year. I also talked through how helping struggling readers was a major piece of my own teaching experience. In Chapter Two, I will address the research behind guided reading and will help me address my capstone research question: *How can guided reading help elementary students read at grade level before middle school?* It is important to note that guided reading is being used around the world to assist educators in helping students learn how to read. The research has been broken down into three themes to organize my research to better understand my capstone question.

Throughout my research on the topic of guided reading, I discovered overarching themes. The four themes discovered in the research are included in chapter two. The first theme will be addressing the definition of guided reading and the experts on the topic. The next theme discussed will be how to run a guided reading block in the classroom. Next, I will discuss the materials needed to run a successful guided reading block. The last theme will be about forming instruction through assessment. These overarching themes are important because they help surmise that utilizing guided reading for literacy instruction in the classroom is valuable to student achievement. These themes break down the research to understand how the implementation of guided reading helps struggling readers find success.

At the end of chapter two, I will address the research behind the Understanding by Design Curriculum framework that will be used to develop my capstone project. I will give the rationale for my research and how that relates to my research question, *How can guided reading help elementary students read at grade level before middle school?* Finally, I will introduce Chapters Three and Four. In the following section, I will define guided reading, as well as introduce experts in this field of study.

### **Guided Reading**

In this section, guided reading will be defined through various sources, and in addition, guided reading strategies will be explained through an in-depth look at the related literature. Finally, experts in the field will be mentioned to give expertise behind the guided reading strategies that see the most growth in students.

#### ***Definition.***

“The definition of guided reading is stated as follows: Guided reading is a small-group differentiated instruction that supports students in developing reading proficiency” (Richardson, 2016, p. 13). One of the reasons that I really enjoy teaching guided reading groups is that it acknowledges that children bring different backgrounds and instructional experiences to the reading process and therefore move forward at different rates (Richardson, 2016). Based on my research it is very important that guided reading supports all readers: striving, advanced, and dual-language learners (Richardson, 2016). This way, no student is left behind based on their needs.

#### ***Why Guided Reading?***

In classrooms around the world, you will see teachers working with small groups of children using leveled books in guided reading lessons (Fountas & Pinnell, 2012).

Based on my experience and research, teachers like guided reading because it allows them to see individual students' strengths while working through each of their needs. This is important because each student is unique in their needs while learning to read. The fact that guided reading is able to give the teacher that level of visibility is vital to their teaching.

Another positive part of guided reading is that it allows the teacher to give differentiated instruction to students. Differentiated instruction, also called differentiation, is a process through which teachers enhance learning by matching student characteristics to instruction and assessment (Access Center, 2004). Being able to differentiate your instruction for students is important because not all students learn the same way, catch on to topics and new ideas at the same time or have the background skills to understand certain concepts. According to Fountas and Pinnell (2012, pp. 2-3), “ensuring that all students develop an effective reading process requires differentiated instruction. One-size-fits-all or single-text teaching does not meet the varied needs of diverse learners.” Letting students know that you see them and understand that they are individual learners is going to not only help them in their learning but also help the relationship between the student and teacher.

Guided reading essentials include small groups, instructional leveled texts, and targeted teaching (Richardson, 2016). Teachers are enthusiastic about providing instruction to the students in ways that allow them to observe their individual strengths while working toward further learning goals. “With guided reading, books are selected with specific students in mind so that, with strong teaching, readers can meet the demands of more challenging texts over time” (Fountas & Pinnell, 2012, p. 2).

Guided reading provides teachers with the opportunity to give their students the differentiated instruction needed to reach all of their needs. “Inherent in the concept of guided reading is the idea that students learn best when they are provided strong instructional support to extend themselves by reading texts that are on the edge of their learning - not too easy but not too hard” (Fountas & Pinnell, 2012, p. 2). Because readers engage with texts within their control (with supportive teaching), teachers have the opportunity to see students reading books with proficient processing every day. In addition, it is vital to support students in taking on more challenging texts so that they can grow as readers (Fountas & Pinnell, 2012). Teachers are the ones to choose the books that the students will be reading during their small group time, meaning that the level of the book will be within the students’ ability and will also push the students a little further out of their comfort zone.

One of the most important changes related to guided reading is in the type of books used and the way they are used (Fountas & Pinnell, 2012). Many schools have started to create book rooms where they store all their leveled books for guided reading instruction. Books are categorized by level. A level is not a score; it stands for a set of behaviors and understandings that you can observe for evidence of, teach for, and reinforce at every level (Fountas & Pinnell, 2012, p. 3). Teachers can access a wide variety of genres and topics and make careful text selections at each level. The individual titles enable teachers to choose different books for different groups so that they can design a students’ literacy program and students can take “different paths to common outcomes” (Fountas & Pinnell, 2012, p. 3). In the next section, I will address some of the disadvantages of guided reading.

### ***Disadvantages of Guided Reading***

Research provides reasons why some teachers do not want to use guided reading. An article by Alison Williams (2017) states that time constraints of small group time can have a detrimental effect on guided reading; it is important to allocate sufficient time to ensure that all students have sufficient individual attention during the session (Alison Williams, 2017). This can be difficult for even the most seasoned teachers. Time management is very important during guided reading to make sure that all students are getting the same amount of time. Keeping this in mind as you are making your groups and reevaluating as you go will help in making sure that students are all getting the most out of their time with their teacher. Some teachers will set timers during their group time to keep themselves on track. When teachers find what works best for them is what will help them in the long run.

Another issue that guided reading presents is covered by Wilson (2016) from the site [misswilsonsays \(https://misswilsonsays.wordpress.com\)](https://misswilsonsays.wordpress.com). She states that when observing teacher-led groups in guided reading, questioning doesn't seem to be focused on one reading skill, rather it jumps around and covers a multitude of them superficially. The group is also inevitably dominated by the confident child, whereas those that are less confident get the chance to sit back. (Our solutions to the problems with guided reading. 2016). While this can be an issue, I have noticed that it is important that while in small groups each student has a chance to talk and speak their minds. It may take some time to get the quiet students comfortable with this, but as they get comfortable with the teacher and students in their group, they will be more willing to participate.

Throughout my research on the disadvantages of guided reading, I have found that many issues can be addressed through classroom management. As long as classroom management is solid and students know what is expected of them, guided reading can run smoothly. Teachers are able to use assessments to figure out each students' reading level. In the next section, I will explain more in-depth what those assessments are and how they are used.

### ***Forming Instruction from Assessment***

“Teachers engage in authentic, text-based assessment conferences that involve students in reading real books as a measure of how they read” (Fountas & Pinnell, 2012, p.3). One assessment that teachers can use is a list of site words shown individually to the student. Once the student has trouble identifying the words on the list, the teacher will stop the assessment and figure out the students' level based on where they stopped on the list of words. Another assessment that can be used is to have the student read a passage at their reading level from the previous school year. Depending on how the students' reading is, the teacher can either give another passage to the student at either below that level or above until the student makes the designated amount of errors while reading.

Many teachers have learned to use the standardized procedure of running records to make assessments more robust (Fountas & Pinnell, 2012). Serravallo (2015) stated, “Running records are a simple yet essential way to record what children read in a short passage and then analyze their reading”. From this information, the teacher can make decisions about the level that is appropriate for students to read independently (independent level) and the level at which it would be productive to begin instruction (instructional level) (Fountas & Pinnell, 2012).

“Teachers strive for the text selection that will help students read proficiently and learn more as readers every day, always with the goal of reading at grade level or above” (Fountas & Pinnell, 2012, p. 3). Often the only assessments given are at the beginning of the year and at the end of the year, and nothing systematic happens in between (Fountas & Pinnell, 2012). To make effective decisions for readers, one must have an efficient system for *ongoing* assessments using running records. “Good assessment is the foundation for effective teaching” (Fountas & Pinnell, 2012, p. 3). When assessment is carried out in the classroom in an ongoing or continual way by the teacher it is called continuous assessment (Iqbal et al., 2017) The use of this information also helps teachers to understand their students, plan and monitor their teaching to create a feasible culture (Iqbal et al., 2017)

There are many different reading assessments available to teachers. As a teacher, many often use the ones that their school or district provides, whether they come with the reading curriculum or service that the district pays to use. The assessments discussed in this project are the Benchmark Assessment System from Fountas and Pinnell as well as the PRESS, Path to Reading Excellence in School Sites (Minnesota Center for Reading Research, 2018), and CORE, Consortium On Reading Excellence Assessments (Powerschool Learning, 2021) There are many different assessments that can be used to address reading skills, finding out what your school and district use will give you what you need to move forward.

The BAS assessment from Fountas and Pinnell is used to determine student’s independent and instructional reading levels, teachers are able to observe student reading behaviors one-on-one, engage in comprehension conversations that go beyond retelling,

and make informed decisions that connect assessment to instruction. (Heinemann, 2021) This assessment is used in conjunction with the guided reading system from Fountas and Pinnell so the levels will match when a teacher grabs books for each group's reading level. Margaret Goldberg from the Right to Read project wrote about some disadvantages to the BAS. She has said that the books are not consistent with the reading levels nor do they get more difficult as the levels go higher. (Goldberg, 2019) She also says that the time it takes to give a BAS assessment and analyze it after, a teacher could give multiple students other assessments that give more information with better results.

With my capstone project in mind, I needed to know what materials were crucial to have in the classroom to effectively teach the guided reading of small groups. I also needed to understand the best way to conduct the small group sessions in the classroom in order to give the best information in my project. In the next section, I will discuss the materials needed as well as some best practices for guided reading instruction.

### ***Guided Reading Essentials***

Guided reading essentials are materials or procedures that are needed for a teacher to successfully be able to teach a guided reading group. These essentials include small groups of students, instructional leveled texts, and target teaching (Richardson, 2016). “A teacher conducts guided reading in small groups (four to six students), based on each student’s individual needs. Configurations change as students progress and as the teacher identifies new learning goals” (Richardson, 2016, p. 13). These groups are flexible throughout the year as some readers may gain enough knowledge to reach a higher reading level.



Texts are chosen at the group members' instructional reading level, not their independent level. The text needs to be a tad bit harder than the students' independent reading level. They should encounter challenges that require them to problem solve and practice strategies that help them comprehend and discuss the passage (Richardson, 2016). As students read the teacher will observe, listen, question, prompt, and coach. The interactions between students and the teacher help students internalize the strategy focus so they can apply the skill independently. In the next section, I will address the importance of comprehension as a skill that students need to be successful at to be able to understand what they are reading.

### **Comprehension**

To help students achieve that lost-in-a-book, engaged sort of reading that makes reading enjoyable, they have to understand what is going on (Serravallo, 2015). Readers must integrate complex mental processes of decoding, fluency, vocabulary, and background knowledge to comprehend text. Truly understanding what one reads is a complex endeavor, so efforts to improve comprehension must be made in a variety of ways (Mahdavi & Tensfeldt, 2013). Another pair of reading experts agree on the importance of being able to comprehend what students are reading. Beers and Probst believe that if the reader isn't responsive, if she doesn't let the text awaken emotion or inspire thoughts, then she can barely be said to be reading at all (O'Donnell, 2018).

Teaching comprehension can be an intimidating task for teachers but teaching comprehension does not have to be complicated. When you understand the strategies used to teach comprehension and how readers apply them, you will be able to teach comprehension with any text (Richardson, 2016). In the classroom, teachers use many

techniques to improve the reading comprehension of their students. Many of these strategies are found in a guided reading lesson in the form of a small group. When students practice reading aloud to an adult, with error correction, this improves reading comprehension whether the student engages in repeated or continuous reading practice (Mahdavi & Tensfeldt, 2013). Research also supports repeated reading as a method to improve comprehension. Repeated reading is when the student reads either a section of the passage or the whole passage many times in a row to gain fluency. Greater reading fluency has been found to be a predictor of better reading comprehension performance (Mahdavi & Tensfeldt, 2013). In the next subsection, I will be going over some strategies teachers can use to teach comprehension during guided reading.

### ***Comprehension Strategies***

Research shows that reading comprehension does not come naturally for all students; teachers must make a concerted effort to help their students understand what they read (Mahdavi & Tensfeldt, 2013). According to the National Reading Panel (NRP) as cited in Mahdavi & Tensfeldt, scientifically based research has determined the following specific reading comprehension strategies to be effective;

Monitoring comprehension, using graphic and semantic organizers, answering questions, generating questions, recognizing story structure, and summarizing.

The NRP also recommends the following guidelines for teaching comprehension strategies: explicit or direct instruction that includes explanation, modeling, guided practice, and application; cooperative learning and multiple strategy instruction so that students learn to use strategies flexibly and in combination.

Various studies suggest specifically teaching students to engage in activities to understand what they read, such as activate background knowledge, use inference, self-question, and self-explain text, use story maps, and semantic or graphic organizers, and engage in peer-mediated text study. (Mahdavi & Tensfeldt, 2013, p 2)

In Richardson's book *The Next Step Forward*, she provided twelve strategies for teaching comprehension (see Table 1). These strategies can be used in whole group form as a lesson or mini-lesson or in guided reading groups. When figuring out what strategy to use for your students, Richardson (2016) said that after you have given your students a comprehension assessment you will know where to begin. If you have not used an assessment, you can start with the first strategy and teach the lessons sequentially. The goal of using these strategies is for your students to internalize the strategies and use them independently to construct meaning while reading any text (Richardson, 2016).

With many guides out there telling teachers what questions to ask students while working on comprehension and reading, Beers and Probst (2018) want teachers to remember to talk with students about what they don't understand, through dialogic questions that develop thinking. Compared with monologic questions, dialogic questions are viewed by children as "authentic" problem-solving opportunities, resulting in higher engagement; increased student-to-student interaction; more frequent use of complete sentences; stronger inferences; and improved test scores (O'Donnell, 2018). This strategy will not only help students while they are reading but in many other situations throughout their education. In the next section, I will be discussing how the difference between fiction and nonfiction books plays a role in supporting comprehension skills.

**Table 1*****Comprehension Strategies***

|    | Strategy                          | The reader...   |
|----|-----------------------------------|---|
| 1  | Comprehension Monitoring          | is aware when meaning breaks down.  |
| 2  | Retelling                         | recalls information in nonfiction.<br>recalls story elements in fiction.  |
| 3  | Developing Vocabulary             | understands the meaning of a phrase or word.  |
| 4  | Asking and Answering Questions    | asks and answers questions based on details in the text.  |
| 5  | Identifying Main Idea and Details | is able to identify the main idea/central message and most important details.   |
| 6  | Analyzing Characters              | can identify character traits and motives.  |
| 7  | Analyzing Relationships           | expresses an understanding of relationships between people, events, or ideas (e.g., cause-effect or compare and contrast)   |
| 8  | Inferring                         | makes an inference or draws a conclusion from details in the text.  |
| 9  | Summarizing                       | synthesizes information and prepares a condensed account that covers the main points.   |
| 10 | Evaluating                        | understands the theme, author's purpose, point of view, and fact vs. opinion, and gathers evidence to support the author's main point.                                |
| 11 | Using Text Features               | uses the table of contents, headings, bold words, sidebars, pictures and captions, and diagrams and maps to clarify and extend his or her understanding of the topic. |
| 12 | Understanding Text Structure      | understands how the author organizes the information within the text: description, problem-solution, cause-effect, compare  |

|  |  |  |
|--|--|--|
|  |  | and contrast, and time order/sequence. |
|--|--|--|

Stephanie Harvey (2015) goes a little deeper on a few of the strategies that Richardson talks about in the table above. She gives different ways of monitoring comprehension which is Richardson's number one strategy:

- listen to their inner voice and follow the inner conversation
- notice when meaning breaks down and/or mind wanders
- leave tracks of their thinking by jotting thoughts when reading
- stop, think, and react to information
- talk about the reading before, during, and after reading
- respond to reading in writing
- employ "fix-up strategies" ---reread for clarification, read on to construct meaning, use context to break down an unfamiliar word, skip difficult parts and continue on to see if meaning becomes clear, check and recheck answers and thinking, examine the evidence (Lipman, 2013).

Stephanie Harvey (as cited in Lipman, 2013) also has a few ideas for asking questions which include; wondering about the content, concepts, outcomes, and genre; questioning the author and ideas and information in the text; reading to discover answers, and gain information about the text (Lipman, 2013). After talking through some of the strategies of teaching comprehension in general, I will discuss how the difference between fiction and nonfiction books plays a role in supporting comprehension skills.

### ***Fiction vs. Nonfiction***

In Jennifer Serravallo's (2015) text, *The Reading Strategies Book*, she broke down supporting comprehension into fiction and nonfiction genres. Knowing the differences between what type of support fiction and nonfiction books give to students is an important piece of teaching comprehension as well as other reading skills. To support reading comprehension in fiction teachers need to focus on understanding the plot and setting, think about the characters, and understanding the themes and ideas. In nonfiction texts, the focus is on defining the main topic(s) and idea(s), determining the key details, and getting the most from text features. In this section, I will break down these goals.

With supporting comprehension in fiction, understanding the plot and setting is important because to make reading enjoyable students need to be able to understand what is going on. They need to be able to "make a movie in their minds" (Serravallo, 2015, p. 129). Supporting student understanding of plot and setting can have a few parts as written by Serravallo (2015) and Harvey (2015):

- Understanding problems/conflicts and solutions/resolutions as a way to determine what is important (Serravallo, 2015, p. 130).
- Construct main ideas from supporting details (Lipman, 2013, p. 8).
- Retelling/summarizing. These terms are often confused, perhaps because some use the terms interchangeably. Serravallo quotes Kylee Beers in her book by defining retelling as an "oral summary of a text, based on a set of story elements" Serravallo thinks of retelling as sequential with more detail than a summary, which gives the essential information without too much detail (Serravallo, 2015, p. 131).

- Visualizing setting, understanding how setting impacts the events in the story, drawing conclusions from text evidence, predicting outcomes, events, and characters' actions (Lipman, 2013, p. 9).
- Synthesizing cause and effect, so that the reader is clear on what causes certain events to take place, and how all the events in the story connect (Serravallo, 2015, p.131).

Supporting comprehension in fiction means thinking about the characters in the text. This is important because character development is often intertwined with plot development (Serravallo, 2015). Characters are the actors connecting the events of the story and in large part, they help the readers to stay engaged while reading. Characters can become our friends, can help us learn and live outside of our own, and can help us think differently about or better understand people in our own lives (Serravallo, 2015). Readers need to pay attention to details that the author includes to figure out who the character is. Some of the types of details that Serravallo (2015) suggested focusing on are the following:

- What characters look like, how they dress, what possessions they keep
- What characters say and how they say it
- What is left unsaid
- Thoughts the character has that are revealed through the narrator
- The moods and emotions of the characters
- A character's actions
- How characters respond to events and other characters
- Backstory and beliefs of the character

- The options other characters have about the character  
(Serravallo, 2015, p.163)

Serravallo also said that after the reader can pull all of these details together, they will need to do the following work to better understand their characters:

- Infer about character feelings and synthesize change in those feelings.
- Infer about character traits, and synthesize multiple parts of the text to explain a change in traits.
- Synthesize ideas about characters to articulate character theories or interpretations.
- Understand not only the main character but also secondary characters.
- Infer to explain relationships between characters (Serravallo, 2015, p.163).

The last piece of supporting comprehension in fiction is understanding the themes and ideas. Stories are rich with issues and ideas, many of which don't always jump off the page at you. It takes imagination, inference, determining importance, and the ability to synthesize all that happens in a story to truly understand the ideas that are hiding (Serravallo, 2015).

Supporting comprehension in nonfiction starts with determining the main topic(s) and Idea(s). Craftily written, engaging nonfiction for children often includes zinger, wow-worthy facts (Serravallo, 2015). Sometimes when students are asked what they learned in a nonfiction text they will say back only these sorts of facts: "Did you know that the hippo population in the Congo decreased from 22,000 to 400 in less than twenty years?!" When pressed to say more, many can't (Serravallo, 2015). Learning how to



understand what a section of a text or whole text is *mostly about* is critical to comprehension. Some of the questions or prompts you may consider using are:

- What is this text (or chapter or book) mostly about?
- What is the main idea?
- Please summarize what you have read so far. Be sure to include the main idea and details (Serravallo, 2015, p.192).

Another piece of supporting comprehension in nonfiction is determining the key details. There is a difference between reading for *details* and reading for *key details*. That difference is in the reader's ability to determine importance (Serravallo, 2015).

Determining key details is the difference between taking a highlighter to every single word in a textbook, and highlighting just those facts that align to your purpose for reading, or that align to what the author is trying to say (Serravallo, 2015).

According to Kuhn et al. (2017), "Given the innate interest young children have about the world around them (Heard & McDonough, 2009), nonfiction text can be highly engaging for those learning to read". Nonfiction texts can catch the interest of students in ways that fiction stories cannot, and increase student domain knowledge. Kuhn et al. (2017) also stated that "in addition to identifying key vocabulary and explicitly talking about text features, teachers can use nonfiction text in an intentional way to engage students and further inquiry-based learning".

While supporting comprehension in nonfiction it is important to get the most from text features. Text features are a really large part of reading, navigating, and understanding nonfiction texts (Serravallo, 2015). To really treat these features as the information-rich resources they are, we need to shift our thinking about them. Instruction

needs to be more than about *identifying* the features; rather we need to help students use these features to get more information from a text (Serravallo, 2015).

Wijekumar et al. (2012) talk about the structure strategy that is used to help readers understand and use text structures in nonfiction to apply the knowledge they learned of the text when needed. “The three basic tenets of the structure strategy are the signaling words that focus the readers’ attention to the text structure organizing the reading passage, then using the text structure to strategically organize the ideas in the passage and create a main idea, and finally creating a well- organized mental representation and recall of the text using the structure” (Wijekumar et al., 2012).

Improving comprehension in fiction and nonfiction is also a topic because students need to be able to understand vocabulary and figurative language (Serravallo, 2015). A reader’s ability to understand vocabulary and language in a text has been empirically linked to reading comprehension, which is why instruction around words and language deserves such a prominent place in our classroom (Serravallo, 2015). Vocabulary knowledge helps students access background knowledge, express ideas, communicate effectively, and learn new concepts (Serravallo, 2015). Teaching comprehension doesn’t have to be complicated. When you understand the strategies used to teach comprehension and how readers apply them, you will be able to teach comprehension with any text (Richardson, 2016).

### ***Chapter Summary***

This chapter provided a detailed literature review. It talked about what guided reading is, how it is used and why experts that have studied guided reading and used it in their classrooms find it valuable and how to utilize guided reading in the elementary

classroom. Furthermore, it talked about the impact guided reading has on struggling readers as well as using assessments to inform instruction. Finally, it talked about the rationale for the research and what it means to the research question. *How can guided reading help elementary students read at grade level by middle school?*

The focus for Chapter Three will be on how my research will support the creation of a guide for teachers who will be using guided reading. This guide will bring all the necessary materials together in one place for teachers to download or print materials they need to start the year off prepared to start guided reading groups and how to use the literacy communication document. Chapter Three will be about my project description, what will be included and how the materials will be helpful to the teachers who will be using them.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **Project Description**

#### ***Introduction***

As a first-year teacher, entering the school year with as many materials, ideas, lessons, and helpful guides are going to make me feel more prepared for the year ahead. Planning for guided reading can be very intimidating if you don't have the background knowledge or materials to get started. After extensive research behind guided reading and the materials needed to be successful, I thought it would be beneficial to make a guide for myself so I have everything at my fingertips when I need it throughout the school year.

In Chapter Three, I will address my capstone project and the research behind my decisions on what to include in a guide to start guided reading for teachers. Additionally, I will address why my project is important to teachers. I decided to make a guide that included all the necessary information and materials for a teacher just starting out with guided reading. I also decided to add a literacy communication document to house all your student literacy data throughout the year. Finally, I will address a summary of the chapter and highlight the information that will be in Chapter Four.

#### ***Project Description***

After extensive research on guided reading and the importance of being prepared for your small group, I realized that going into the school year with all my materials ready and at my fingertips is going to establish a solid starting point. There is no shortage of materials online through sites where teachers can sell their created work. This can be overwhelming if you are not sure where to start and what you actually need. This guide is going to give teachers an idea of what is needed to start out in the world of guided

reading. I will further explain the materials and my reasoning behind adding them into the guide in the following paragraphs. The materials that you will need are as follows: assessments, a list of the reading level bands, and appropriate grade levels for each, lesson plan templates, a way to take notes on individual students as you are working in a small group setting.

Some of the materials included in the guide are going to be able to be used on a digital platform and some would be better off printed for in classroom use. Other resources are going to be up to the teacher whether they use them as a digital resource or print them out for in classroom use. I will give my reasoning for both based on my research into the materials.

### ***Included Materials***

**Assessments.** At the beginning of guided reading, you assess students to find out what reading level to start out your instruction. This information also helps guide your small group creation, text selection, and lesson planning for the future. Jan Richardson (2016) has the letter/sound checklist and a word list by level in her book, *The Next Step Forward in Guided Reading*. This is a resource that can be used digitally or in a printed out version. Depending on the grade a person is teaching they may need both assessment resources or just one. After the assessment has been given the teacher will find the students' reading level. In addition to the sound checklist and word lists for the assessments, the table below will help guide the teachers decision on what reading stage to start making their lessons.

**Table 2*****Alphabet Reading Levels***

| <b>Reading Stage</b> | <b>Alphabetic Level</b> | <b>Approximate Grade Range</b> |
|----------------------|-------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Pre-A                | --                      | Pre-K                          |
| Emergent             | A-C                     | K                              |
| Early                | D-I                     | 1                              |
| Transitional         | J-P                     | 2-3                            |
| Fluent               | N and Higher            | 3-5                            |

Note. Adapted from *The Next Step Forward in Guided Reading* (11), by J.R. 2016, Scholastic. 2016 by Jan Richardson.

**Lesson Plan Templates.** There are also many lesson plan formats that are out there for teachers to use. Depending on the curriculum the school or district is using, they may have a template they want teachers to use. If they do not have to use a certain template, it can be overwhelming to find one that will include all the pieces of a guided reading small group. The one that I will be incorporating into this guide is the Jan Richardson (2016) templates based on the alphabetic reading level and reading stages. There are five different bands of guided reading levels that Jan Richardson talks about, there are lesson plans made to reflect each of these bands. This helps teachers be able to differentiate their lessons for each small group's needs. These templates include all the choices teachers need to make for each stage as well as all the pieces that they need in order to be successful in a small group guided reading session.

**Teacher Notes.** This resource goes along with the lesson planning template to help determine the next steps. I adapted this resource from Jan Richardson's (2016)

teacher notes to make it fit more of my needs, other teachers may find it useful as well. There is a place for the student name, observations during the lesson, and next steps to help the students move forward in their learning. There are also many other recording sheets out there for guided reading, so this can also be a teacher preference. If you are using the Jan Richardson lesson plan template though, this one will parallel nicely.

**Strategies and Skills by Level.** This resource is from Jan Richardson (2016). The charts are used to assist the teacher in planning lessons and guiding acceleration decisions throughout the school year. They go hand in hand with the lesson plan templates as you would use this resource to help guide instruction. Some things included in these charts are examples of what guided writing would look like for a level A student, making words ideas for certain levels, and what students should be learning at their given level. This could be either printed out or kept in a digital format depending on teacher preference.

**Small Group Schedules.** After you have assessed your students and have formed your small groups, you need a schedule of when you are seeing each small group. This resource can be printed out or in a digital format to project for students to see. Not only do you need to know who is in each group to make sure they are all coming to their guided reading group time, you also need to know what groups you are seeing at what time throughout your guided reading block. These resources are teacher preference so they are in a digital format that can easily be accessed during the day or in a printed-out version.

**Student Binders or Notebooks.** Depending on the age of the students, a three-ring binder or notebook to house all their work is beneficial. The first section is called Guided Reading for the notes or thoughts the students will write down as they are

in a small group. Lined paper is in this section of the binder. The next section is Work on Writing for use at their seats with lined paper again in this section for the student's written work. Some days in a small group, kids will write about the stories they are reading. They may write a retelling of the story, other days they may write a response to a prompt the teacher has created about the story they are reading. The type of writing will go with what the students are learning in the whole group lesson as well as the skills they are working on in small group. The students are also able to keep all their work in the same place so the student always knows where their reading materials are located. It can also be helpful to teachers to have all the student's work in one place if they want to look at progress or show examples to parents at conferences.

**Teacher Binder.** A great way to keep track of all the guided reading materials a teacher may need throughout the guided reading block is in their own binder. I have seen this setup in many different ways throughout my research. I will give examples of sections that other teachers have used in their binders and let the teachers decide what will work best for their classroom. In the teacher binder, I would suggest a note-taking page with room for each student's name, a skill they are working on, and enough space to add anecdotes throughout the small group time each day.

**Literacy Communication Document.** This document is in the form of a Google Sheet so it can easily be shared with multiple teachers in your building. This document includes a comprehensive list of reading skills and assessment scores to give all teachers working together with a one-stop shop for every student in each grade level. This document was created to help classroom teachers and intervention teachers stay in constant communication about where students are at in learning specific reading skills.



The document will be updated by each teacher that services students throughout the school day and can be constantly updated.

### ***Summary***

The research and theories behind why I chose to include these resources in my guided reading guide for teachers are addressed in Chapter Two. In addition, the research behind my question is *How can guided reading help elementary students read at grade level by middle school?* can also be found throughout my literature review in chapter two. This section addressed the materials I will be adding to my guide as well as why each would be a useful resource when starting to teach guided reading. In the next section, I will address the setting of my capstone project.

### **Setting**

In this section, the setting of my capstone project will be reviewed. My project was created during the summer before my first year as a classroom teacher and continued through the fall as I used the materials. The school I taught in targets kindergarten through fifth grade students. I am not currently aware of what grade I will be teaching or what school building I will be in, so I have included materials for all reading levels. I will address my audience next.

### **Audience**

My intended audience for my project is myself as well as other teachers who need assistance organizing their guided reading materials. I used this guide to get myself ready for my first year as a classroom teacher implementing guided reading. My first year of teaching was not in a classroom. I was an intervention teacher so I taught small groups all day. I am aware now of how I planned lessons best as well as how I ran small groups.

This guide will aid me and other teachers in hitting the ground running as soon as school starts in the fall. I will address my intended timeline next.

### **Timeline**

In this section I will address my project timeline. The timeline was followed to make sure I completed my capstone project. My project question was established in March of 2021. This question was: *How can guided reading help elementary students read at grade level by middle school?* After my question was created, I began writing my first chapter. As the semester continued I was able to start my research. During this time I found books, articles, and websites of research on guided reading. In April and May of 2021, I read and wrote my literature review.

During the summer of 2021, I created a guide for teachers as well as myself who will use guided reading as part of their literacy block. This led me to research all the different materials educators use during their guided reading block in the classroom. As we started school in the fall I continued my research and was able to use some of the materials that I created over the summer. Being able to use my resources I was able to see what worked well and what else was needed to be a successful small group reading teacher. Some resources needed to be updated to be more effective during the short time teachers have their students for guided reading and some worked just as they were. All of these changes are reflected in my project. This is also when it was decided that a document was needed to house all the student literacy data. As an intervention teacher in my first year teaching, I noticed that teachers who see so many students from different classrooms every day needed a document to help with communication regarding student progress.

As summer came to a close I went into many of my resources to find helpful materials to take into the classroom to ease the lesson planning process as well as materials to help students succeed in guided reading. I was also able to get into my classroom to start to set up my learning space. I was able to label, print, and organize my materials in my classroom to hit the ground running with guided reading when the year started. My capstone project was utilized throughout my first year as a classroom teacher. Materials and resources were used and tossed as needed for the needs of my students. This guide will evolve as my experience with guided reading grows as well as my process gets better.

This timeline was used to make sure that I was able to stay on track throughout my capstone project process and all the elements were completed. It allowed my goals to be completed on time. In this final section, I will summarize the chapter and introduce the next chapter.

### **Summary**

In Chapter Three I included a description of the capstone project. This project is a guide with materials to help teachers who are starting to use guided reading in their classrooms as well as a literacy communication document. This chapter also included a summary of the materials that will be included in my guide. Chapter Three included the setting, target audience, and timeline for my project. In Chapter Four, you will read about the finalized project and my reflection on the project.

## Chapter Four

### Reflection

#### Introduction

Growing up with the aversion I had to becoming a teacher and discovering that is exactly what I should be doing will be one of the greatest learnings of my life. I never thought I would not only go back to school but go back to become a teacher. After three years of working with students to become better readers, I wanted to make sure I knew how to run a guided reading block in my classroom. As I went through my classes at Hamline University, I realized that teaching reading was something I held close to my heart. This work led me to my capstone project question, *How can guided reading help elementary students read at grade level by middle school?*

The purpose of my project was to discover how I can be a more effective guided reading teacher for my students as well as provide teachers with resources they can utilize in their classrooms. Throughout my research, I discovered that guided reading allows teachers to hear students read individually to be able to gain a greater knowledge of the strengths and weaknesses they have with reading. Guided reading also allows teachers to differentiate lessons based on what students need.

In this chapter, I will explain what I have learned from the capstone process. Additionally, I will revisit my literature review and highlight important points that were made in response to my research question. I will explain the implications of my project and the limitations I came across as I worked. In addition, I will highlight the research projects that could be done related to guided reading. This chapter will also address how

my project results will be communicated. Finally, I will include how this capstone project will impact the teaching profession.

### **Major Learnings**

Throughout my time working on my capstone project I have learned many of the ways I am able to work as an individual as well as with my peers. I have grown as a student, researcher, and teacher during these months of researching and writing. It taught me to ask questions and where to begin to find the answers to those questions, how to look at new opportunities with confidence, and how to be a student as an adult. I also learned new things about guided reading. The opportunity for differentiation and one on one reading with students are two major learnings. These learnings will be discussed in detail below.

When teaching students it is important to remember that not all students learn in the same way, this is why my learning of the opportunity for differentiation within guided reading lessons is huge. Being able to tailor my lessons to help zero in on what exactly my students need is a teacher's dream. While teaching reading it is also important to be able to listen to them read. If you can't hear them read aloud to you, it is hard to see where they are and what they need. These are my two most important learnings about guided reading.

Asking questions was something that I was not used to doing not only in my daily life but also in an academic setting. Throughout this process, I have learned that asking questions not only helps me better understand what is being discussed but also gives me a feeling of confidence that I didn't have in previous situations. I had always heard that asking questions is a good thing, but growing up in a small town, asking questions made

people look at you like you were not very bright. This squelched my question-seeking mind fairly young. Now that I am an educated adult, I am getting more confident in asking questions in a public setting.

Additionally, I started to look at new opportunities with confidence instead of fear. It took me a long time to decide to go back to school for my teaching license and masters. I was not a great student the first time I went to college and that made me cautious of what would happen if I went back to school as an adult. Taking the plunge and going back was one of the best decisions of my life. I taught myself that I am capable of doing hard things and liking the process. I won't look at new things as something I need to just think about from time to time, it will be something I might dive into in the future.

The last major learning came from being a student again as an adult. I will always be learning how to be an effective teacher throughout my years as an educator. I will never stop learning, we are all forever learners. Through professional development opportunities within my district as well as ones that I search for myself, I will always be reaching to become better. I can always learn new things and help others implement them.

In this section, you learned about some of my personal major learnings from this project. I learned how to feel comfortable asking questions, seeing new opportunities with confidence as well as being a forever learner as an adult. In this next section, I will revisit my literature review and recap my professional learnings..

## **Revisiting the Literature Review**

During my research about guided reading, I discovered that my literature review could be broken down into three main sections. These sections will be highlighted below as they are the most important parts of creating my capstone project. These sections pushed me to better understand the importance of guided reading in the classroom. I will also explain any new learnings I had as well as connections to my project.

***Definition of Guided Reading.*** The most important thing to start with in my literature review was the definition of guided reading using definitions from the top experts in the field. I discovered that guided reading is not only about hearing students read. “Guided reading includes not only the decoding of a text but also the understanding and interpreting of that text. Students should engage with the text, critically evaluating it and reflecting on their responses to it, bringing prior knowledge to their understanding of the text” (Alison Williams, 2017). After learning about what guided reading really is, I knew I needed to understand how to effectively teach guided reading in my classroom.

***Use in the classroom.*** During the guided reading block the teacher will be with a small group of students for about 20 minutes at a time. The other students will be engaging in other activities the teacher has provided for the day. Many teachers will incorporate the Daily 5 (Boushey & Moser, 2012) to organize their reading block. The Daily 5 is “simply a workshop approach with two or three cycles embedded” (Gail Boushey & Joan Moser, 2012). Students will move through their two or three cycles as the teacher is meeting with the small groups. The tasks during the cycles can consist of the following: read to self, work on writing, partner reading, word work, and listening to reading.

Another positive of guided reading is that it allows the teacher to give differentiated instruction to students. Differentiated instruction, also called differentiation, is a process through which teachers enhance learning by matching student characteristics to instruction and assessment (Access Center, 2004). Being able to differentiate your instruction for students is important because not all students learn the same way, catch on to topics and new ideas at the same time or have the background skills to understand certain concepts. Letting students know that you see them and understand that they are individual learners is going to not only help them in their learning but also help the relationship between the student and teacher.

***Materials needed.*** After extensive research on guided reading and the importance of being prepared for your small group, I realized that going into the school year with all my materials ready and at my fingertips is going to establish a solid starting point. There is no shortage of materials online through teacher blogs, sites like Teachers Pay Teachers, Pinterest and from teachers in your building. This can be helpful as well as overwhelming if you are not sure where to start and what you actually need. This guide is going to give teachers an idea of what is needed to start out in the world of guided reading. I will further explain the materials and my reasoning behind adding them into the guide in the following paragraph.

The materials I decided to add to the resource guide were chosen due to the importance of their use. Teachers could have many more resources that they could use for guided reading, my guide is the bare minimum to give myself and other teachers a solid jumping-off point. In my resource guide, I added Jan Richardson's lesson plans at different reading levels to make sure all teacher's bases were covered. One can have a



variety of students reading levels in the classroom at one time. I also added a few other resources from Jan Richardson's website that can help in knowing what road to go down when teaching comprehension and what skill set to target when a student is struggling.

I created my own resources for a few different organizational purposes. The teacher notes and teacher binder resources are to keep myself and other teachers organized during the reading block. There is a place designated to take short notes on each student you hear provides you the peace of mind to not have to remember each student's strengths and what they need to work on each time they read. The students also have a binder they keep and use during the reading block which is used to keep all their small group writing and materials organized. I made templates for the student binders as well to keep them organized. The last two resources I made help the students as well as the teacher know what each small group of students is doing during the reading block when they are not with the teacher. The small group lists and small group schedules can be presented on the board or in their binders to help the students remember what they need to be working on during each rotation. Next, I will talk about the implications of the project.

### **Implications of Project**

The implications of my project are that teachers will be able to grow in their understanding of what a guided reading block looks like as well as utilize any resources they have to help make their classroom run smoothly. Additionally, they will be able to run a successful guided reading block giving their students the resources they need to become better readers. This will also help teachers be able to dig into each student's needs when it comes to their reading abilities. Giving teachers the extra time to think and

work with their students instead of finding materials or organizing their resources daily or weekly will give the students the time back they may have missed due to teachers needing to take their learning time to find a resource. Next, I will address the project limitations.

### **Limitations of Project**

This section will address any limitations of this project. The first limitation to my project is getting this material resource into the hands of teachers who are in need of help. When I started this project my main goal was to help myself during my first year of teaching guided reading. Now that I have these resources, I want to be able to get them out to the teachers who are in need of these resources. Giving teachers resources to utilize in their classrooms is so important because teachers have so much to do in a day that anything that can help them throughout is very beneficial.

Another limitation to my project is that all teachers organize differently. There is no perfect way to do this, so some of my resources may be helpful to me, but another teacher may want to use a different system, different colors, or different names for their small groups. If a teacher gets my resource but isn't likely going to use it, then I was not able to help that person directly. It may help them gain ideas to make their resources and then that would be beneficial. I will address future research in the next section.

I only used the teacher notes and literacy communication document during my first year of teaching. It means that I am not sure how the students will receive the student schedules or student binders or notebooks. I also do not know if the organizational materials will help me out as much as they are made to. I will need to use these resources

and take notes on how they need to be updated or changed for future use. This will help my guided reading process in my future classrooms.

### **Future Research**

In this section I will address future research. There are a few ways in which I can see myself continuing this research. After working with my resources for the school year I can see myself adapting my schedule and group lists to be easier to change on the fly in the classroom. Sometimes the schedule changes due to fire or tornado drills, school assemblies, and early outs. Also, the colors that I used in making the student schedule that will be projected in the classroom during a literacy block are very bright and vibrant. I can understand how some teachers would not want those bright colors used in their classrooms. I can also see teachers such as myself getting bored with the same colors used year after year, so cosmetically this schedule could be updated to seem new and different.

I could also see myself researching beyond elementary reading strategies. If I were to teach another level I would want to make sure I am well versed on age-specific issues in reading. If another way of teaching reading is created or modified and becomes the better option, I would be more than open to learning and implementing that strategy. The next section will go into how I will communicate my results.

### **Communication of Results**

My results will be communicated through my capstone project which will be posted on Hamline Digital Commons. They will also be communicated through conversations with other teachers and teaching professionals. I will be using these

resources in my own classroom and will be sharing them with team teachers and other grade levels at my school. I will talk with these teachers to see how the resources helped them create a more organized guided reading block. I will also ask my students to share their opinions on the resources they used to help me better understand how the students would like to see the material.

### **Benefits to Profession**

My capstone project was developed to provide teachers with resources they can utilize in their classrooms. After extensive research on guided reading and the importance of being prepared for your small group, I realized that going into the school year with all the materials ready and at the teacher's fingertips is going to establish a solid starting point. This guide is going to give teachers an idea of what is needed to start out in the world of guided reading.

The other piece of my project is the literacy communication document. This document is used to help teachers communicate with other teachers who service their students. It is a document where teachers can store all their student's literacy data and keep up to date with where students are at in learning their reading skills. The document can be shared year after year for a comprehensive look at students' skill progression. Communication throughout the school is hard enough on a daily basis that this document was made to take some of the stress off of teachers.

### **Conclusion**

In this chapter I have addressed how my project relates to my capstone project question, *How can guided reading help elementary students read at grade level by middleschool?* I have discussed my learnings from the capstone project; I have discussed

sections of my literature review and how that relates to my project; I have stated the limitations and implications of my project. I have also discussed the research that could be done in the future as well as how my research results will be communicated. I have expressed how my capstone project may benefit the teaching profession.

As I went through this process I have learned many things about myself that will help me become a better teacher for my students and a better team teacher for my peers. I have worked to create resources for teachers to be able to utilize in their classrooms and edit to fit their specific needs. I have hope that my project will help at least one other teacher feel more organized and ready to help their students become better readers. At this time I am moving forward with extensive knowledge of guided reading strategies as well as resources to help when I get stuck. I have grown as a learner myself and have learned that asking questions can only help you grow as we are all always learning.

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