THE EFFECTS OF IMPLEMENTING VISUAL, VERBAL, AND PERFORMANCE-BASED STRATEGIES FOR READING COMPREHENSION WITH STRUGGLING ADOLESCENT READERS.

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative research study examined the effects of implementing visual, verbal, and performance-based, non-traditional reading comprehension strategies with struggling adolescent readers. The participants were seventh-grade general education and special education students in a remedial Language Arts class. The class met twice daily to engage in lessons that included drawing, acting, and retelling to enhance overall reading comprehension.

This study proposes that positive effects result from using non-traditional approaches with struggling readers. With the use of instruction in the non-traditional format, students’ attitudes toward lessons improved, classroom assessment scores remained proficient, and standardized test scores improved.
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RESEARCHER STANCE

I love books! I have always loved books. Some of my fondest childhood memories involve my mother reading stories to me and my younger sister. I still can recall the fun my sister and I had pretending we were characters we loved, visiting far-away places, walking in another’s shoes, all through the pages of a book. As my love of listening to stories grew, my ability to read them on my own grew as well. I ventured into many genres and many titles.

I have never had just one favorite book, but rather a collection of favorites that have impacted me over the years. Dr. Seuss was a household name when I was a child. By the time I was in sixth-grade, my taste in reading had already begun to develop and I read *Love Story* by Erich Segal for a class project. It was the first book that ever made my cry. My seventh-grade reading teacher introduced me to J. D. Salinger, who at the time, I found very difficult to understand, yet appealing and insightful. I have found that many summers through my teenage and early adult years have been enhanced by reading. Now as a mother, I relive the wonder and excitement from picture books each day with my children. I read books on topics they enjoy, and I too can remain a learner, remain in suspense, and remain in the grasp of a good book.

I carry this love of books with me into my own classroom as well. I am excited each time I share a story with my class. I am energized when I find a picture book, play, or novel that connects to the lives of my students. I want
nothing more than to share my love of books and my love of reading, learning, and experiencing stories with my students. I want for them to develop this connection with literature.

As a teacher of children with special needs, I work with struggling readers every day. I feel for them because imagining my life without books and my experiences from books is almost tragic. Although my middle school students have been in Language Arts classes year after year, they have not grasped the needed skills and concepts to be independent readers and therefore have not made this connection with literature. If they did once enjoy read alouds, many are now “too old” to hear stories at home and initially tell me that picture books are for babies when I first bring one to class. Many are reading two or more years below grade level and are sensitive to being singled out as needy readers. As a result, these students shy away from reading all together and know very little about themselves as readers, other than their belief that they will continue to do poorly in reading and therefore struggle in classes throughout their schooling. They do not have preferences in the types of books they read. They do not favor certain authors. I have met several students, who upon completing a novel in my class with my support, have informed me that it was the first book they have ever really read cover to cover.

Year after year, I initially see very little enthusiasm from students to read and very little enjoyment with reading when we begin school. It saddens me, and
each year I am on somewhat of a mission to help each and every student connect
with at least one book. I have found that some students, when truly immersed in a
piece of literature in a variety of ways, have shown some improvement in reading
and an increased desire to read on their own.

I have experimented with many different learning approaches throughout
my teaching career, all centered around increased reading comprehension and an
increased interest in reading to reach these struggling learners. I believe that
reading comprehension and reading enjoyment are of the most important skills
that students will gain as a result of their formal schooling, and therefore have
focused much time and effort to ensure my students are given every chance to
become skilled readers. Vocabulary acquisition, visualization and dramatization
are just a few of the approaches I tried.

In 2006, I recorded some data on reading comprehension when I
conducted a mini-study on vocabulary acquisition. I hoped to link successful
vocabulary instruction and vocabulary acquisition strategies to improve reading
comprehension. I was excited when my students, who were receiving vocabulary
instruction with me as well as pre-taught vocabulary introduction by the Speech
and Language Therapist, began to improve in reading comprehension, as
measured by the Qualitative Reading Inventory, as well as on class assessments
on vocabulary. I also experimented with incorporating visualization and drama as
another aspect of the multi-faceted skill of reading comprehension. I had students
act out scenes from stories, write short scripts about narratives they had read, even
build scenery to represent story settings, in hopes of inspiring them to read, to
love reading, and to want to learn from their reading. They passed the assessments
I created, both paper-pencil format and performance-based with ease.

I saw what I considered to be successful results again and again. Students
improved on vocabulary assessments. Students improved on the Qualitative
Reading Inventory. They appeared excited to engage in reading activities, from
acting out vocabulary words, to writing scripts, and building sets. I believed what
I was doing was working. It was good, maybe even great, for the struggling
readers who used to shy away from any text.

The missing piece of my experimental approach was the collection of my
own data for analysis. The study itself, the personal accounts of the day to day
methods I implemented, was needed to defend my beliefs. Therefore, it became
important for me to determine exactly which of my teaching techniques from the
past have worked best for the students by yielding the greatest improvement in
reading comprehension, development of a love of reading, and confidence to
approach reading tasks. It was equally important for me to identify those
techniques that have not been as successful and either change them or eliminate
them based on my findings. Hendricks explains that educational research can
potentially enhance a teacher’s knowledge about his or her teaching techniques
and student methods of learning (2006). It is in the hands of the researcher to
appropriately continue in a cyclical pattern of reflection, action, and evaluation to fully reach this learning potential.

In order to best follow the practice pattern outlined by Hendricks, my own approach to action research must be flexible and continuously evolving based on my reflections (2006). I documented the variety of approaches, some of which I had unofficially implemented before, to determine what activities were worthwhile to continue throughout the study and those that can be replaced with more meaningful approaches that will allow students to deepen their connection with reading. My research question was: What will be the observed and reported experiences when struggling readers engage in visual, verbal and performance-based reading comprehension strategies?
LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

Reading comprehension is essential for success both in and out of school. It is the basis of all other learning, and therefore, the focus of curricula especially in the elementary school where students are provided with the building blocks for their challenging school journey. However, in spite of the efforts put forth by elementary teachers and their students, many children are reaching middle school reading far below grade level (Institute of Education Sciences, 2005, as cited in Slavin, Chamberlain, & Daniels, 2007). These struggling readers have often experienced failure after failure and have essentially given up on the reading process. They do not see the value in reading and even more rarely the enjoyment.

Consequently, effective reading programs must be developed that reach these adolescent learners before it is too late. These programs must expose students to a variety of texts and text experiences, help students to make connections to texts and provide the basis for continued reading growth on an individualized basis.

Reading Comprehension Strategies

Students with special needs often struggle in the area of reading comprehension because they have a difficult time monitoring their own comprehension of a text. While they have learned strategies, such as questioning, predicting, or re-reading, they do not necessarily know when to use these
strategies because they are not cognizant of their comprehension or lack of comprehension (Gersten et al., 1998). Therefore, strategies must be introduced in ways that help the reader gain insight into his or her own comprehension, not just in isolation.

It is likely that since the needs of the learners vary, these approaches will need to vary as well. By differentiating and being sensitive to students learning styles, teachers can incorporate a variety of techniques to meet the needs of a diverse group. The use of visual, verbal, and performance-based techniques have been incorporated into classes in hopes of finding success for reaching these struggling readers (e.g., Gersten et al., 1998; McConnell, 2003; Swanson & De La Paz, 1998). Beers (2003) finds that “clarifying, comparing and contrasting, connecting, inferencing, predicting, questioning the text, recognizing, seeing, summarizing, and visualizing” are all strategies that aide in comprehension (p. 41).

**Visual Strategies**

In their 1998 study, Gersten et al. found that students must be taught to monitor their comprehension. One way to do this is through the use of visual imagery (Gersten et al., 1998). When reading non-fiction texts, students often struggle because there are difficult and multiple text structures within one reading. There is no “story” and therefore students do not see the same patterns as they do within the narratives they are more familiar with navigating. Students can use
graphic organizers to help sort thorough these complex non-fiction texts (Gersten et al., 1998). Johnston’s study supports this idea, citing that visual imagery used as an organizational tool to help students recognize text structure of a passage to be successful with struggling adult readers (Johnston, 1980).

Teacher researchers, McKown and Barnett (2007), determined that their students continued to struggle with the reading comprehension process as a result of more class time being spent on doing worksheets about literal information from texts rather than explicitly teaching strategies to improve reading comprehension. They also incorporated the use of visualization with graphic organizers as one of six strategies to teach their young learners. By using the Metacomprehension Strategy Index, a tool to “ascertain whether students increased their awareness of strategic reading processes” (p. 26) they found that all areas, including visualization, increased. They also found that students had begun to use visualization on their own, while other strategies were only used when teachers prompted students to do so.

Picture books represent visualization from a different angle. Booth describes picture books as an “ingenious and all encompassing source” (p. 58). According to Booth, the picture book is a unique medium that allows readers to draw on their own experiences, see and hear new information, and navigate between the two (Booth, 2005). While the use of picture books appears to be visually-based, the overall experience of the picture book is much more diverse.
Students must first interact with the pictures, then interact with the text, and finally incorporate their own experiences and imagination to fully comprehend, or make meaning, of the story. Picture books allow students to bridge the gap between simply visualizing and visualizing with the purpose to broaden and deepen the text.

**Verbal Strategies**

Some verbal strategies that can be used for reading comprehension are using retelling, orally responding to readings, and self-questioning. In a study by McConnell, it was found that the regular use of retelling and orally responding to questions improved the comprehension of a sixth-grade student with limited literacy skills (2003).

Retelling is also addressed by Swanson and De La Paz (1998). It is noted that retelling “helps students organize, analyze, and remember the content of stories” which leads to development of the abilities to “make inferences, characterizations, judgments and predictions, as well as to determine the author’s purpose for writing the story” (p. 6). Booth explains several ways that storytelling can extend and enhance student understanding of text. Storytelling, which can be approached as a paired/partner activity or group activity, allows struggling readers to connect to a text. By retelling, improvising, and reflecting, students are not only able to verbally express the major theme of a story, but also to find new stories within the text as well (Booth, 2005).
Self-questioning is a strategy that proficient readers engage in frequently. Teachers who model this strategy regularly are helping students to learn to self-question as well (Swanson & De La Paz, 1998.) Self-questioning stimulates the mind of the reader. While teachers can direct a lesson or provide an initial purpose for it, self-questioning by the students allows readers to develop viewpoints and interpretations of the concepts presented. Self-questioning encourages students to be authentic, to ask questions when they need clarification, and to make sense of what is happening around them (Booth, 2005). It is no wonder that Booth reminds teachers that the “most significant questions are asked by the students” (p. 74).

**Kinesthetic Strategies**

When the theory of multiple intelligences is a major consideration in the planning and implementing of lessons, it is no wonder that kinesthetic strategies, such as performance-based learning, would be useful in a diverse classroom. In their 2003 study, Krueger and Ranalli taught their students several performance-based activities in hopes of seeing an improvement in reading comprehension. Students used a variety of techniques, such as pantomime, improvisations, dramatic productions, and readers’ theater during the two month process (Krueger & Ranalli, 2003). Krueger and Ranalli found that while student attitude did not appear to change as a result of the study, the number of students who enjoyed the
dramatics approach increased by 20%. In addition, students demonstrated improvement in reading comprehension skills in all targeted areas “including expressive voice, fluency, comprehension, summarization, and sequencing (p. 39).

Role play is another kinesthetic strategy that can easily be incorporated into a Language Arts class for struggling readers. Booth (2005) finds that using role play allows students to be engaged in situations that “require them to think, explore, and interact within a framework of attitudes that may differ from their own” (p. 41). Students’ comprehension certainly improves from using this method because students “gain insight into the motives and feelings” of the characters about whom they are reading (p. 41).

Wilhelm (2006) took these ideas a step further by infusing the use of drama and role-playing in classes, not just to improve comprehension, but also to provide students with meaningful and authentic ways of understating any concept. By playing a role, students can see the perspective of others, address real-life problems, and formulate solutions without having to risk sharing very personal views (Wilhelm, 2006). Since this mimics the way they will engage with others in the real world, it also allows for students to analyze a situation in greater detail because they can take time to stop and study a particular moment-- a benefit that true life does not often offer us (Wilhelm, 2006). By using drama in the classroom, we can help students to become inquirers, help them connect learning
to their lives, and negotiate difficult tasks that they will face both academically and socially in the future.

In the 2005 research report that outlines a study on teaching reading comprehension using drama, Van Wyk notes that dramatic approaches allow struggling readers to think the way proficient readers usually do. They gain insight not normally gained from a traditional lesson. In addition, some students who normally exhibited fidgety and off-task behavior during traditional lessons were active participants in drama. Drama allowed for the kinesthetic learners to move during the lesson, providing them a break from sitting in a chair without breaking from the learning (Van Wyk, 2005). One could conclude that this added time on task and deep engagement in the content would have a positive effect on students’ ability to make meaning of the reading.

Hertzberg concurs in the 2001 research report, noting that by simply allowing students to explore drama, to “get up and do it,” we enable students to critically interpret texts in a meaningful and valuable way (p. 9).

**Writing Strategies**

Often students are asked to write about what they have read as an “after reading” activity. The use of chapter comprehension questions is an example of this form of assessment. When a proficient reader who can typically successfully execute metacognitive behaviors while reading is given this task, the outcome would likely be a success (Swanson & De La Paz, 1998). There are writing
strategies, however, that can be used before and during reading as well that can not only help to assess students’ learning thus far, but also to increase the comprehension of struggling readers as they read. According to Swanson and De La Paz, poor readers are those who are not able to acquire the skills without explicit instruction or do not use the acquired skills appropriately. They will need this type if instruction to bridge the gaps.

The use of summarizing and journaling can be helpful. Summarizing has been found to improve comprehension. The process of summarizing allows students to not only recall information but also make decisions about what is important and how those important things relate to the overall main idea (Swanson & De La Paz, 1998).

Other research, such as the 2000 study by Kariotakis, Kelly-Moutvic, and Roberts, found that students took more ownership over their learning and the process of evaluation of their progress when they engaged in a variety of responding-to-reading activities, such as journaling. Since journaling is an authentic assessment, students also tended to be more motivated because they connected what they were learning in school to their lives outside of school. Journaling could also be used to help students begin to chart their own strategy use, something that good readers do already. McKown and Barnett, who introduced a variety of comprehension strategies, used journaling in this way. Students monitored and recorded the processes they used and how these processes
were helpful (2007). This is an essential step for struggling readers who are often not cognizant of their comprehension or lack thereof (Gersten et al., 1998).

**Struggling Readers**

For struggling readers, many of whom are students with special needs, the development of successful use of reading strategies does not come naturally. While some students may even be able to become fluent readers in terms of their accuracy and rate of reading grade level material, their lack of interaction with the text causes their comprehension to suffer.

These struggling readers are in today’s classrooms. In the book, *When Kids Can’t Read; What Teachers Can Do*, Beers discusses the three key areas where students struggle in reading. The first group consists of students who are unable to read independently. They lack skills in areas such as comprehension, vocabulary, and fluency. The second group of readers has negative attitudes about reading. They have failed at reading before and their attitudes remain scarred as a result. They become disengaged in reading tasks and lack reading confidence. The final struggling readers do not know what kinds of books they enjoy. They do not have specific authors or genres that they like. These readers approach every text the same way, whether it is an essay, news article, or story book. They do not differentiate their reading for different purposes and therefore they rarely stay focused on difficult texts as their stamina is quite weak (Beers, 2003).
Tovani further explains that while people in general perceive reading to be a simple task, in actuality reading becomes more sophisticated and more demanding as students get older, creating even more opportunities for students to become struggling readers. Reading is far more than sounding out words. Struggling readers fail to realize that reading involves thinking (Tovani, 2000). According to Tovani, students who struggle, such as those described by Beers, must learn “how meaning is constructed from print” if teachers are to facilitate the improvement in overall reading comprehension (p. 17).

Beyda describes good readers as those who can monitor their own comprehension, react when comprehension is lacking by rereading or slowing down, and hold inconsistencies about a text in their short-term memory. In order to help struggling readers, teachers must facilitate the movement from passive reading, simply decoding a text, to active reading, interacting with the text the way good readers already do. Using theatre is one approach that can allow students to strengthen their skills in listening, visualizing, and remembering. Furthermore, by allowing struggling readers to create theatre drama, reading comprehension improves because the same skills needed for enacting a story, such as inventing, clarifying, and analyzing, are needed for reading. Teachers must find the best ways to take such approaches and apply them to a class of learners with diverse learning styles (Beyda, 2003). Teachers must successfully differentiate.
Differentiated Instruction

In order to tap into the great potential that these struggling readers have, it is necessary to take several steps. In their 1998 study, researchers, Gersten et al. note some of these approaches. They found that before beginning to incorporate specific reading strategies to improve comprehension, one must first have an understanding of these common difficulties that learners with special needs have in the area of reading. One difficulty shared by most readers with special needs is a lack of persistence. Gaps in areas, such as background knowledge, fluency, and use of learned strategies cause students to give up quickly when they are reading. These students also typically lack knowledge of story structures and expository text structures (Gersten et al., 1998). There are many needs to be met. Sadly, many students experience a lack of motivation as a result of teachers not making necessary adaptations in their classes to suit the needs of the students (Kariotakis, Kelly-Moutvic, & Roberts, 2000).

Moran, Kornhaber, and Gardener (2006) caution teachers against simply giving multiple intelligence tests as their way of differentiating since the use of multiple intelligences has, in many cases, been mistakenly implemented. Rather than using a multiple intelligences test to limit the ways you teach a certain student or narrow your expectations for him or her, it should be used only to identify areas of strength and weakness. One will find that different students score in different ways. One child might have a varied result while another may have a
tendency towards only one area. Since no one person uses only one intelligence in complete isolation, these profiles are simply an instrument to differentiate lessons, not to create nine completely unconnected lessons. As the teacher, one must observe how the different intelligences are interacting, per student and per class, to design lessons that allow for appropriate collaboration (Moran, Kornhaber, & Gardner, 2006).

Differentiated Instruction expert, Wormeli (2006), explains that a differentiated lesson will look different depending on the age of the student, the ability levels, and the student needs. He describes strategies for differentiation that work best for “tweens,” because this group of students has a unique way of learning. According to Wormeli, it is necessary to create lessons according to the developmental needs of the students. If one is teaching tweens, it is likely that they will respond well if classroom activities allow for “opportunities for self-definition, creative expression, physical activity, positive social interactions with adults and peers, structure and clear limits, and meaningful participation in family, school, and community” (Wormeli, 2006, p. 1). Additionally, a well-differentiated class will allow for students to learn from their own struggles. Teachers can model self-questioning by presenting challenging questions and then seeking and finding answers. Students can learn that not knowing a certain skill is acceptable so long as they use that information to seek understanding (Wormeli, 2006).
Providing students with opportunities to show their learned skills in a variety of ways is also useful. One should “never let the test format get in the way of the student’s ability to reveal what he or she knows and is able to do” (Wormeli, 2006, p. 3). When challenging content must be taught as part of a curriculum, using adapted texts (on the student level) is one way to help students improve and reach success (Gersten et al., 1998). If the assessment itself cannot be changed (e.g., writing a persuasive essay), one can adjust the pacing, provide organizers, and use flexible approaches to instruction to make that assessment a valid reflection of what a student truly can and cannot do.

Peck and Virkler found success with differentiating when they implemented a shadow puppet project in their classroom. The students were able to function in different roles, from improvisation artist, to script writer, to puppeteer or scene developer, all demonstrating knowledge of the story being studied. Not only did the students in this study show increased confidence, which appeared to be a result of performing as a puppet, out of view from the audience, but several other valuable gains were also noted in cooperative learning, team work, social negotiations, oral reading and reading comprehension (Peck & Virkler, 2006).

Formative feedback throughout these processes is imperative as many students often are unaware of their own learning or lack of learning about a particular concept. Teachers must keep in mind that being unconventional may in
fact be the conventional approach to differentiation. Teachers must be novel, be exciting, and make learning appealing if they want to look back at motivated and successful learners (Wormeli, 2006).

**Motivation**

Even if a successful reading technique can be determined, adolescent learners often lack the motivation to try. A disconnect between school and “real life” tends to exist that must be addressed in conjunction with teaching reading. Students need to experience success before willingly engaging in any class policy, procedure, or practice. They have to believe they can do it and believe that it is worth their efforts to improve (Margolis & McCabe, 2004.)

In their book, *Going with the Flow; How to Engage Boys (and Girls) in their Literacy Learning*, Smith and Wilhelm note the extreme importance of students feeling competent. They found that while the areas in which students felt competence varied, the need to feel competent was universal. Once equipped with self-confidence, the students were more likely to put forth effort into a project. Conversely, when competency or confidence lacked in an area, students tended to reject activities. Smith and Wilhelm found that by connecting school experiences to student life experiences and interests, topics about which students already feel competent, and building from that point, students were more engaged and more willing to learn (Smith & Wilhelm, 2006).
Since many of the students that enter middle school special education classes have in some way failed in school, teachers must restore and rebuild this competence. Whether it is an F in a subject area, low scores on a standardized test, or a loss of confidence due to low expectations, the frustration teachers must counteract has already set in. Margolis and McCabe (2004) offer some additional promising information to help students remain motivated and face their fears of failing again.

Teachers must determine students’ instructional and independent levels for learning. Margolis and McCabe (2004) suggest that students should be allowed to work on the level that will allow for success. Therefore, on homework, the level should be independent. In class, where teacher support is offered, instructional level work can be assigned. Smith and Wilhelm note that students are able to recognize and request work on their instructional level, not too easy or too hard, and are more likely to engage in ability-appropriate tasks (Smith & Wilhelm, 2006).

When many of the students have failed, one must create experiences for success that will prompt motivation (Margolis & McCabe, 2004). Linking new work and concepts to recent success, reinforcing and praising effort and persistence, and continually incorporating motivating factors that vary from child to child, are all principles in improving motivation (Margolis & McCabe, 2004).
**Conclusion**

One must assess the learner and his or her needs, explicitly teach the strategies that will help develop these comprehension skills in ways that correlate to their specific learning needs and learning style, and help the learner develop the competence and motivation to use the strategies that assist with reading comprehension.
METHODOLOGY

Introduction

I conducted a 12-week study on the effects of using a variety of reading comprehension strategies in a class of struggling readers. Visual, verbal, and performance based techniques were introduced and used throughout the study with a variety of texts and text structures. The overall goal was to assist students in comprehending text in a way that was efficient, meaningful, authentic and, hopefully, fun. Students were taught several strategies through guided lessons, and over time, they were given the choice to use the strategies that worked best for them individually during independent practice and in cooperative groupings. I served as the facilitator, but students became their own advocates for learning, by selecting and successfully implementing strategies they had learned to improve their understanding of texts, enjoy reading, and become confident in their abilities to advance to more difficulty reading challenges.

Setting

The school where my study took place is located in a suburb eastern Pennsylvania. Our relatively small district, which consists of one elementary, one middle, and one high school, is located on a 100 acre campus. All three connected schools are housed within this campus facility. The middle school, which opened in 1999, along with the new elementary school and previously built high school are considered state-of-the-art facilities, where classrooms are wired for the
technological age. All classrooms have internet access. There is a working TV
studio and a technology department and helpdesk available to assist teachers in
integrating technology in the classroom. Additionally, there is a freshwater
stream, often visited by science classes, ball fields, playgrounds, stadiums and a
track, along with physical education facilities with new equipment.

Currently the middle school population is approximately 600 students,
with about 185 in the current 7th grade class. Each grade is split into two academic
teams with two different sets of teachers. Fifteen students participated in my
study. My class had students from both teams due to their needs for this more
restrictive setting. My study was conducted in the middle school in a Remedial
Language Arts class. This class met for 45 minutes, two times per day as
compared to a general seventh-grade class that met only one time per day. The
general education students attend a World Language such as French or Spanish.
The students in Remedial Language Arts do not attend a World Language class in
order to accommodate the additional support period needed in Language Arts.

The students that participated in the study attend several other classes
throughout the day. They are mainstreamed for science and social studies. Some
are mainstreamed for math, while others take a remedial math class, as well. The
Remedial Language Arts class was co-taught in a large classroom with large
windows which kept it bright. There were two computers in the room at all times
and laptop carts available on a daily basis. A chalk board, overhead projector, and
teacher laptop are also available daily. The lobby and Large Group Instruction Area can be utilized when more space is needed than is found in my classroom. In addition, my small group classroom was located in the same hallway and served as a place where small group lessons took place.

Participants

The participants in the study were seventh-grade middle school students in a remedial Language Arts class who were either identified as students with special needs and have reading comprehension goals in their Individualized Education Programs (IEPs), or students who had not scored in the proficient range on the PSSA and had been identified as students who required more intensive support in Language Arts than offered in a general education class. The remedial class consisted of 15 students. The ratio of males to females was 12 to 3. Two of the students were in the English as a second language (ESL) program and reported to the ESL teacher one period per day. One student received Speech and Language Therapy one day per week during the study. One student was classified as having Emotional Support needs. One student was in the process of Emotional Support testing by the conclusion of the study. The learning needs of the students in this class varied in the areas of reading and writing from performing one year to several years below grade level in a given area.
**Procedures**

The purpose of my study was to determine the effects of explicitly teaching and implementing a variety of reading comprehension strategies in a class of struggling readers. The following is a timeline of lesson plans as well as an example of each device and how it was used in the context of a given lesson.

**Timeline**

Week 1-2

- Hand out consent form
- Explain the study to the students
- Students bring home, review and sign consent forms

Week 3

- Re-explain the study before beginning
- Initial Student Survey
- Jeopardy Review Game
- Begin new reading series
- Introduce use of guided notes and goal setting
- Introduce flashcards
- Act it Outs
- Standardized Vocabulary Assessment
Week 4

- T-Chart Notes
- Text Connections (self, world, text, media)
- Independent Reading Lessons
- Draw a vocabulary word
- Vocabulary Quiz
- Word wall
- Flashcards

Week 5

- Act it Outs
- Self-Selected Reading using t-charts
- Introduce self-correction using color pencils and workbooks
- Unit on Summarizing (main idea, details, summary)
- Connections and Class Discussions
- Flashcards
- Vocabulary Game
- Sequencing Activity

Week 6

- Lessons on Main Idea and Detail
- Independent Reading and Comprehension Assignments from workbook
• Before, During, and After Reading Strategies
• Vocabulary Game using synonyms, antonyms and examples
• Study Guides
• Fluency Checks

Week 7
• Writing Prompt
• Writing Summaries
• Fluency checks with expression focus
• Analogies
• Workbook
• Vocabulary Game (Guess the Word)
• Vocabulary Quiz
• Speech and Language Therapist Visits

Week 8
• Students begin research reports
• Koko’s Kitten Read Aloud and Retelling Activity
• Students use note taking to aid in comprehension
• Video clips for visual and verbal approach to material
• Library Visit (using data bases for research)
• Using source sheets for citations
• Brainstorming packets for research reports
• Independent writing time
• Students conference with teacher
• Graphic Organizer for Writing

Week 9
• Complete first drafts
• Editing
• Video clip

Week 10
• Students complete final drafts of research reports
• Using Lists as a strategy to help summarize
• Read aloud
• Reviewing Main Idea, Detail, and Summary Strategy
• Speech and Language Pathologist lesson

Week 11
• Workbook usage
• Open ended response strategies
• Reading comprehension of PSSA practice passage
• Students analyze sample responses to open ended questions
• Using highlighter to aid in reading comprehension strategy
• Putting information in our own words
• Vocabulary lesson
• Flashcards (as a group)
• Act it Outs with challenge (application)
• Discussions

Week 12
• Post Survey
• Read Aloud and prompt

The Qualitative Reading Inventory (QRI) was used one time per marking period per student throughout the study.

**Devices: Visualizing Using Drawing and Illustrating**

*Vocabulary flashcards and drawings/word wall.* Students were given new vocabulary words and definitions during guided vocabulary lessons based on our reading series. As a class, we discussed the words and their definitions in order to create a new definition in student language. Students filled out the vocabulary flashcards throughout this process (Appendix A). On the flashcard, students noted information from our class discussion including synonyms and antonyms for new words. They also noted other forms of the word. For example, if the word was “sluggishly” we talked about what it meant to be “sluggish” and noted the different uses since sluggishly was an adverb and sluggish was an adjective. We then drew pictures to help us illustrate the words in the section of the card called
“how I can remember.” Lists and categories were added there as well. For the word sluggishly, one might draw a picture of him- or herself waking up very early for school if this was a time he or she often moved sluggishly. They might have drawn details, such as a ringing alarm clock in the picture if that helped them to associate the vocabulary term with their own experience. One might also add a drawing of a slug or list times people feel sluggish, such as early in the morning, during an illness, or late at night.

Students were then each assigned a word. They had to draw a picture to represent the word (not using any words within the drawing). The detail of the pictures helped other students guess what word was being portrayed. Students then revealed their word by using it in a sentence that coordinated with the picture. Example, a student might draw the scene about waking up early and feeling sluggish. He or she might write the sentence, “I always feel sluggish when I first wake up in the morning.”

I displayed the new words on a word wall with student assistance as well as displayed the pictures and sentences.

**Sequencing and verbalizing using retelling.** This activity involved using a sentence or phrase from the text to sequence a story, which then allowed students to retell the story based on the phrases.

For example, students were given a sentence that reflected a scene from a story or a phrase from a non-fiction reading (Appendix B). One by one, students
discussed their sentences, and based on their thoughts, placed their phrase on the board where they felt it fit best. I assessed using a checklist for sequencing throughout the process (Appendix C). If the phrase was in the beginning of the story, it was posted to the far left, the end, to the far right, or somewhere in the middle. As students shared their phrases, the cards were shifted to stay true to the order in the story. Once completed, students took turns retelling the story by utilizing the phrases on the board. A different checklist was used to collect data on the completeness of the retelling (Appendix D). We spent time discussing how some phrases might fit in more than one place. Justification of placement was necessary to earn full points for this activity.

**Oral Retelling.** This activity was done following a read-aloud or following an independent read of a text. Students listened to a read aloud or read the given text. They took notes on the main elements of the story (particularly the characters, setting, plot, and theme). Students then retold the story to the teacher or to classmates. Teacher-made checklists were used to record details of the assessment. (Appendix D.)

**Devices: Writing Strategies**

**Summarizing.** Students wrote summaries of the readings. These summaries took place after reading passages from non-fiction readers and after completing short stories. For fiction texts, they included the story elements of
character, setting, plot, and theme (Appendix E). For non-fiction texts, topic, main idea, and details were included on checklists from the AMP Reading Series.

*Journaling.* Students kept journals to reflect upon their reading. With these journals students had a running T-chart (Appendix F). The left side included details from the readings, while the right side was used for students to make connections to what they had read. Students may have recorded character traits of the main character on the left side, and then told about a friend they have who has similar traits on the right side. For non-fiction, students may have included facts on the left side and prior knowledge they had about this fact on the right. Students also indicated if the connections were text-to-text, text-to-self, text-to-media, or text-to-world.

*Comprehension questions.* Students answered comprehension questions (Appendix G). Students had a chance to preview the questions prior to reading to set purpose for reading. Students responded to questions before, during, and after reading.

*Qualitative Reading Inventory.* Students were assessed using the QRI one time per marking period during the study to determine present levels of reading comprehension. I recorded scores on the QRI chart sheet (Appendix H).

*Survey.* Students completed a reading survey before and after the study (Appendix I). They were asked to share their own views, experiences, and preferences about reading and reading techniques.
Devices: Kinesthetic Strategies

Act it outs. Students had the opportunity to act out the vocabulary terms from the units. They were able to use tone, expression, and body language to make their scenes come to life. Others were able to watch the scenes for visual reference. The class then had a discussion to determine if the scene and the actors portrayed the word as the other classmates had expected. The viewers were able to guess the word they thought was showcased. Discussions were held to defend their choices. The actors also were able to justify why their scene showed the word. If two possible correct answers were shared, the class discussed the value of seeing the scene from two perspectives. Students were asked to justify each choice. I used an assessment checklist for acting to collect data (Appendix J). So long as answers were supported, they were accepted as correct.

Vocabulary words. Students worked in groups of two or three to make mini-scenes to demonstrate a vocabulary term. The other students then guessed the word from the clues in the scene. This was also done as a pantomime, when appropriate. The same teacher checklist was used to assess student portrayal as well as to document student guesses (Appendix J).

Data Sources

I used a variety of data sources throughout my study that coordinated with the activities above. The use of a student survey, student work, and teacher observations and logs were used to triangulate data.
Class activities included, but were not be limited to the following:
drawings of scenes, sequencing of drawing and/or sentence strips, retelling,
journals with T-charts for connections, summaries written by students,
comprehension questions, Qualitative Reading Inventory, vocabulary flashcards,
dramatization of scenes, and survey on reading comprehension.

Data Analysis

I kept a daily shadow log of experiences in the class. I also kept a journal
of daily reflections. Throughout the 12 week period, I coded the documents I was
keeping. These codes were categorized into bins and then used to make theme
statements. I organized data from the pre- and post-surveys as well.

Summary

The goal of my study was to improve students’ reading comprehension.
Struggling adolescent readers engaged in a variety of reading comprehension
techniques, including visual, verbal, and performance-based approaches.
Trustworthiness Statement

I conducted a 12-week research study in my middle school Language Arts class where I implemented a variety of reading comprehension strategies. This study was important for my students because it provided them with the chance to become true readers—those who can read with understanding and connect to the book by helping to identify which comprehension strategies work best for their own learning style.

Reading has always been my passion, and part of me would like every child to develop a similar relationship with books as a result of this study. I knew it would be difficult for me if students did not seem to be making this progress. I needed to be sure I was ready to react to such a situation. In order to maximize the potential benefits of this study and not allow my worries to take me off task, I stayed true to following the research-based techniques I was prepared to teach when they were yielding success as well as continued to reflect and make necessary changes when the situation called for a corrective action. I did this by reflecting during and after lessons by keeping a shadow log of experiences in the class. I also kept a journal of daily reflections. I used several methods of collecting data to get a true picture of my research.

Throughout the 12 week period, I coded the documents I was keeping. These codes were categorized into bins and then used to make theme statements. I organized data from the pre- and post-surveys as well to see patterns and make
further decisions based on my finding, rather than just a hunch. The use of a
student survey, student work, and my observations and logs were used to
triangulate data. It was my responsibility as the researcher to remain cognizant of
the fact that unexpected results might arise and that I must consider these data
with as much care as those of the expected result.

I worked hard to keep this study student-centered. While I normally would
lead the students towards a particular technique, in this study I served as the
facilitator and allowed students to become their own advocates for learning, by
selecting and successfully implementing strategies they had learned to improve
their understanding of texts, enjoy reading, and become confident in their abilities
to advance to more difficulty reading challenges. Participants were exposed to all
of the strategies in order to have the opportunity to choose which work best
individually.

I remained focused on the most important reason to do research in a
classroom—that was, to improve student learning. The more specific goal of my
study was to improve students’ reading comprehension and love of reading. If
students were to believe in this study and trust me as their teacher, I knew I must
involve them in the process and not just use their work as a product. I did this by
discussing the study with my students and informing their parents of the activities
that took place in class. By giving permission of participation, students and
parents alike had ownership over this process and knew what we are doing and
why (Arhar, 2005). Additionally, I was sure to answer any questions about the study and to encourage students to help me collect data and share their points of view. I informed my students that they could withdraw from the study at any time, to ease any potential stress they might feel in deciding if they would, in fact, like to participate (Appendix K). Holly suggests that the assurance of confidentiality and anonymity will help students to feel more comfortable with the study. I explained that students’ names and other identifying information would not be shared with the readers of my study or any other participant in the study. By creating a classroom environment where students are respected and trusted, I expected that in turn the students would respect and trust me in the classroom and be willing to do their best at all times (2005). I also submitted my study to the Human Subjects Internal Review Board (HSIRB) and to my school principal for approval (Appendixes L and M). This ensured that the practices I was using were appropriate and ethical.

Finally, I remained professional in my classroom, planning, data collection, and journaling to ensure that the information I collected was accurate, useful, and meaningful. If it were not for the potential growth of my students and me, this study would not be so very important. I gave this study the time, attention and focus it called for to make each and everyday we were involved in it worthwhile.
Inside the Mind of Mrs. Russo

I was so excited to introduce my study to my class. They had no idea how great this was going to be. I already had activities prepared and lessons planned that I believed would make this year not only meaningful to my students, but fun as well. Here I go. Time to tell them all about it.

Figure 1. Layered Story Part 1

I sat with my students and explained the process of my study. I talked about the fun and interesting things I planned to do with our class. I told them that we would be acting, drawing, retelling, sharing, and discussing—all things I imagined they would love to try. I explained that my study was important for our class because it could help make each of the students better readers. I expected everyone to be as excited as I was. I gave out and explained my consent form and anxiously asked if they had any questions (Appendix K). I could not wait to respond to their ideas and to get the study underway. The students, on the other hand, did not initially show any level of excitement, and they had very few questions or concerns. I knew right away that getting the students to really believe
in my plan was going to be the first, and probably one of the most important steps to success with my study.

**Getting Started**

I gave a student survey (Appendix I) to gain insights about my students’ reading habits and attitudes towards reading. I was curious to find out how the students perceived themselves as readers, what strategies, if any, they were already using, and what strategies that I was planning would best match their interests. I kept in mind that gaining the interest and the trust of the students would be imperative for this study to come to life. I handed out the survey and explained how to fill it out. I read the first few statements aloud and discussed the possible responses from which they could choose. I explained that the survey was not graded and that in no way would any response be detrimental to the participant. I knew that truthful answers would help me gear my plans much better than if students responded by writing what they thought I wanted to read. “Even if it means you tell me that you do not like reading,” I said to them, “I still want to know the truth about you as a reader.” They began to fill out the surveys. Later that day, I met with the students individually to administer their first reading inventory.

**Results of My Initial Survey and Reading Inventory**

I was surprised at how many students told me that they did not consider themselves good readers when I met with them. Few were able to tell me authors
they liked or the types of books they preferred to read. After testing, I found that the majority of the students were reading on the 6th or 7th grade level with a proficient comprehension level. I had already glanced at the pre-surveys and based on student responses, I was not expecting such high scores. I was pleasantly surprised. It appeared to me, based on class samples, that writing was the most deficient area for this class as a whole and reading was only slightly lacking. However, the ability to demonstrate comprehension would likely suffer due to the writing needs, so we would certainly need explicit instruction in order to achieve demonstration of comprehension in ways other than verbally, as it was measured on the QRI. I carefully studied the pre-survey results to learn more about my students.
Students responded to the following fifteen statements by marking always, sometimes, or never.
1. I am a good reader.
2. I enjoy reading.
3. I am good at learning new vocabulary words.
4. I learn new information when I read.
5. I have read books on my own for school.
6. I have read books on my own for pleasure (for fun).
7. I keep a journal.
8. I reread parts of books if I do not understand something the first time I read it.
9. I like to tell and retell stories I have read.
10. I like acting.
11. I like when teachers let me do a hands-on project instead of writing.
12. When I read, characters in the books remind me of myself or other people I know.
13. I like drawing and other kinds of art.
14. Picturing the story in my head helps me understand it better.
15. Taking notes when I read helps me remember a story.

Figure 2. Pre-Survey Results
I planned to re-administer the survey at the end of my study. I was curious to find out if exposure to a variety of strategies (visual, verbal, performance-based) would lead students to discover different preferences for learning or develop different attitudes towards reading. Would anyone in the class feel like a good reader once they learned these new techniques? Would more students enjoy reading? Would any students begin to use these non-traditional approaches on their own? I planned to continue to base lesson format on student learning styles and interests and hoped to gain insight from my pre- and post-surveys to help me accurately accomplish this goal for the remainder of the year. I also planned to administer the QRI in the coming weeks to monitor progress of comprehension of implicit and explicit material with and without look-backs and give assessments that would allow students to demonstrate comprehension in other ways. It would be interesting to see if student opinions of themselves as readers improved if reading comprehension and fluency began to improve.

**Class Activities and Routines**

I carefully thought about how to incorporate a variety of strategies into a new Language Arts curriculum and reading series that had been adopted by my school district the previous summer. Along with the techniques I was already intending to use, I would also be working with the AMP Reading Series, which contained high-interest, low-readability, non-fiction reading books (readers), student workbooks, and scripted lessons for teachers to follow. The series was
based on explicitly teaching specific reading comprehension strategies to
struggling readers. Each level of the series began with a unit on summarizing. My
study would now be part of this unit. I would supplement my non-traditional
lessons with the new program’s lessons to create a comprehensive and multi-
modal approach to teaching reading. The main activities/strategies that would be
used during this unit were: vocabulary flashcards, act it outs, vocabulary games,
retelling, sequencing, and the AMP series workbook, which included independent
reading, comprehension, fluency, and vocabulary pages.

A Workbook Day

Inside the Mind of Matthew

Workbook? Again? I hate the workbook. I am putting my head down. This is
incredibly boring and there is nothing I will find in here that I like. Maybe it will
be over soon, but I doubt it.

Figure 3. Layered Story Part 2
Inside the Mind of Mrs. Russo

I am not sure why Matthew is so quick to put his head down when we take out workbooks or do any kind of book activity. He is so smart. He excels in class discussions and I can tell he knows the content. What is he afraid of? I bet he would really do well if he gave it a shot. He is one of the brightest students and highest level thinkers in the class.

Figure 4. Layered Story Part 3

Matthew was like many others in the class. He seemed turned off by another workbook. Matthew had struggled with reading, writing, and spelling for years. Any activity involving these tasks was not of interest to him. I taught Matthew three periods each day (I was also a co-teacher in his Social Studies class) and I knew it was typical for Matthew’s head to drop to his desk at the sight of a workbook or ditto-style sheet. I often had to work one-on-one with Matthew to get him going on these types of activities. I knew I needed a plan to help improve Matthew’s attitude, as well as the similar attitude of his classmates, towards lessons that involved use of the workbook. My Language Arts co-teacher, Debra Apple, and I decided that we would try teaching the workbook lessons in small group settings. We would break our class in half and each take a small group on these days. Our intention was to help students develop a confidence and a connection with the workbook. We already knew that our students loved to talk
and discuss, and we knew a small group class would allow for more sharing by each participant. We knew we could build on their strength and interest for sharing. We began adding student-centered discussions to the scripted lessons, even though it meant the lessons would take more time, and we allowed students the chance to share connections they had to the reading, the workbook passages, and the vocabulary words almost every day.

At the same time, I began introducing my drama-based activities. We incorporated acting out vocabulary words regularly. We began using flashcards (Appendix A) that helped students to “see” the vocabulary words from a variety of perspectives, and we held discussion, after discussion, after discussion for each new lesson. In my heart, I knew that this was what we needed to do to get the most out of the summarizing unit. We began seeing positive changes right away.

**Inside the Mind of Matthew**

Today was great. We talked almost all period. We didn’t even have to do any real work. We got to walk around, come up with skits. I wish class was like this every day. I wonder if Mrs. Russo realizes that we didn’t even have to learn anything today. Man, she would be mad at that. I bet tomorrow we will have to do some work, especially once Mrs. Russo realizes we wasted today.

*Figure 5. Layered Story Part 4*
Inside the Mind of Mrs. Russo

Today was great. The class was engaged and learning all period. They shared so many ideas about the new vocabulary words. They were even able to act out the words in skits, and accurately, too. It is so amazing that this much learning can take place during what might look like total chaos to an outsider. I saw today as a unique way for the students to really become resources for their own learning. Discussion and drama have been so valuable to this class today. The students are really coming out of their shells. I can’t wait to have them do this again. I wonder if they realize how much they learned today. I am so proud of them.

Figure 6. Layered Story Part 5

Play the Game

I always intended to use games on occasion for purposes such as review or to allow a different approach to a particular learning objective. However, class games became more prevalent throughout my study than I had expected. I did not realize the impact that play would have on my class. Very early on in the study, I observed some interesting happenings during games that encouraged me to continue their regular use as part of my lessons.

Jeopardy Review

During one vocabulary jeopardy game, I observed two boys in the class named Carmine and Rafael. They appeared to be disagreeing. I knew I would
have to watch Carmine and Rafael a lot. They went to ESL class together a few
days a week and missed half of my class each time, so they were often a bit
behind and they certainly could not afford to waste time arguing with each other.

Carmine was an interesting young man. Sometimes his outspoken
behavior would interrupt the class. He would call out, argue with others, and fool
around. Other times, he would flat out refuse to start working on something or put
almost no effort into a task that I was certain he was capable of completing.
Nonetheless, Carmine was smart and performed well when he paid attention to
the task at hand and decided on his own that the activity was worth his attention,
especially graded tasks like quizzes. Rafael was almost Carmine’s opposite.
While he also performed well on assessments, it was hard work and diligence that
accounted for his success. He was a quieter student. He studied, he volunteered,
and he always demonstrated respectful behavior. Carmine and Rafael were
friends, but they had very clearly defined roles in that friendship. Carmine was the
boss, more in control. Rafael was a follower and ready to do what Carmine
thought was cool or fun. But during the jeopardy game, an unexpected change in
the partnership occurred.

We were playing Jeopardy to review for a vocabulary quiz, and I had just
given the first clue. Each team had a whiteboard and a marker. The teams were
instructed that they must work together to decide on the response, but ultimately
the person whose turn it was to use the whiteboard would decide on the team’s
answer. I knew that the group dynamics could affect the final answers, but planned to observe each group to determine who would be more dominant and who would be more likely persuaded by teammates.

Here is a dramatization of the events of that day…

Drama: Following the Rules

Mrs. Russo: Ok, talk with your group and jot down your answer. Remember to look at the board for your choices or if you need help spelling the word. It is a 500 level question, so do not let me trick you.

Rafael: *(writing the answer on the whiteboard)* I got it.

Carmine: No, erase that. That isn’t the right one.

Rafael: I know the answer.

Carmine: That’s wrong. We are gonna lose the points. It is worth 500 point you know?

Rafael: Mrs. Russo said that whoever has the board gets to decide what to write, so this is what I am writing. We will get the points.

Mrs. Russo: *(calling on Rafael)* Can you show the class your team’s response.

Rafael: *(Turns the whiteboard towards me and the class)*

Mrs. Russo: *(smiles at Rafael)* That’s right, Rafael. Good job, team 3. Mrs. Apple, please mark their points on the board. They’ve got it.
Rafael: *(looking at Carmine)* See, we got it.

Carmine: Ok, ok

I was happy during the game when Rafael not only stayed on task but refused to let Carmine, who was the more dominant in the friendship, sway him to change his correct answer. As Vygotsky explains, “A child’s greatest self-control occurs in play” (p. 99). Rafael demonstrated this beautifully by confidently displaying his own response as he knew he was permitted to do based on the rules of the game. Even though Rafael was usually easily persuaded by Carmine, he would not allow Carmine to force him to break a rule. He knew he did not have to listen to Carmine in this situation and that the rules protected him from any backlash that might occur in other situations where he went against Carmine’s ideas. Rafael had the chance to be the leader, be in change, and be the decision-maker. And he took the opportunity and ran with it. I will remember to never under-estimate the value of play and to bring play into my classroom whenever I can.

**A Vocabulary Day**

*Vocabulary Gurus!*

As the study progressed, vocabulary performance was outstanding. The use of the flashcards with the Act It Outs had helped students connect to the terms. We saw the terms repeatedly in our readings and students were able to
apply what they had learned. On vocabulary assessments of a more formal nature, students showed proficiency (Appendix N). The class word wall allowed for continued reference to the words. The fact that I co-taught in other subject areas also allowed me to use these words to make cross-curricular connections. This was becoming a strength for the class.

**A Vocabulary Day— A Day of Play**

**Drama: I'm Being a FISH!**

On October 20, we went to the lobby to do some Act It Outs for our new vocabulary words. I assigned groups and noticed right away that today the groups seemed a bit chatty. I gave an index card with a vocabulary word to each group and had them spread out to begin planning their scenes.

I saw that Steve, Matthew, and Jason were already practicing their scene and appeared on task. Drew and Branden were quiet, but when I asked them about their word, which was “substantial”, they were able to tell me about the trees in their skit, one that had only a few leaves and one that had a substantial amount. They started to practice. I moved to Johnny’s group. I could tell already that they were far off task as Johnny was lying on the floor.

**Mrs. Russo:** Ok, guys. What is your word?

**Phil:** Nourishment

**Mrs. Russo:** And what are you doing to show the word nourishment?
**Phil:** Well, I have to feed Johnny.

**Johnny:** Yeah, Mrs. Russo. Can’t you tell? I’m being a fish.

Even flopping on the floor in a manner that would appear to be total chaos to an outsider and off-task at the least even to the teacher, was part of the play. It was an organized learning experience for that group. What was even more wonderful was that Johnny and Phil could share that skit with their classmates. We all learned more about the word nourishment by Johnny “being a fish”. As noted by Dewey, “It is not enough to insist upon the necessity of experience, nor even the activity in experience. Everything depends upon the *quality* of the experience which is had” (1997/1938, p. 27). This was quality experience.

**Vocabulary Testing**

The students became more active in their learning, especially vocabulary lessons. Therefore, it was no surprise when students performed well on their first vocabulary assessment. I spent time discussing the format of the test to be sure that I had clarified all of the tasks. I allowed students to ask questions about the quiz before beginning as well to ensure that they felt ready to begin. Drew asked if he could change the word migrate to migrating when he wrote his sentence. I was very happy that he was already planning ahead for his writing. Most students worked at a decent pace throughout the quiz. Chris, however, took a very long
time. Carmine also took longer than expected. Once everyone was finished I collected the tests and asked how students had felt they did on it.

**Drew:** It was easy.

**Johnny:** Yeah, it was easy.

*(The class chimes in with similar comments.)*

**Mrs. Russo:** Really? Easy, huh? You know, this was *not* an easy quiz.

But, if you listened to the definitions of the words, acted them out, used them in sentences, studied your flashcards…then you were ready. It felt easy because you really know the words!

All of the students in the class scored an A or B on this quiz, except for Chris who scored a C. I hope they learned the real lesson here— that is, that if they apply themselves, and immerse themselves in the act of learning, this task of reading will get easier. As the study progressed, students continued to perform well on vocabulary assessments.
**Figure 7. Vocabulary Assessment Scores**

*It should be noted that Assessment 4 included vocabulary and comprehension.*

**The Students were the Resource**

Throughout my study I found that students had a great amount of knowledge that was not only relevant, but necessary to achieve the highest level of potential success for that class when that knowledge was shared. The students were the resource. Some examples of what students already knew made a huge impact on our discussions and our connections to new vocabulary terms and new concepts. In order to tap into this vast knowledge, discussion became a central theme in our class. Students were encouraged to participate daily in our talks that helped them connect what we were learning to their own unique experiences. Freire tells us that dialogue is revolutionary and that communication is what leads
to authentic thinking. He writes “The teacher’s thinking is authenticated only by the authenticity of the students’ thinking. The teacher cannot think for her students, nor can she impose her thoughts on them” (2003/1970, p. 77). Some examples to follow reflect experiences within classroom discussion where students’ own knowledge forwarded discussion and enhanced understanding.

**Salmon**

We had just read about salmon and their difficult swim against the current. We had learned that salmon can jump. Chris asked *how* they jump. Debra and I did not know the exact answer to this. We were not sure how to help Chris understand this aspect of the reading without going to look up more specific information on this topic. I had learned a lot about Chris in the past months. He struggled often and I knew I must answer his questions or clarify information for him, or he would be unable to move forward. I felt that this would be one of those times. Just then, the students guided the way.

**Drama: Jump!**

**Wyatt:** You know, Chris, how dolphins jump out of the water. Salmon jump just like that.

**Jessica:** Yeah, sharks jump, too.

(This jogs my memory)
Mrs. Russo: You are right, Jess. I just learned from one of the shows on sharks that my son watches that great white sharks can actually jump out of the water. I don’t think other sharks can though.

Steve: But humpback whales can.

Scott: Yeah and swordfish.

Drew: Sea bass do, too.

Matthew: I think sting rays do, but I am not sure

Jason: Blind fish and wing fish do, too.

Chris: Oh, yeah. I have pet fish at home and one of them is a kind of a shark. He tries to swim really fast and hit the top of the water. I bet if he was stronger then he could jump too.

Chris was able to connect with the text and picture how salmon jump. The students were the resource.

Convey

A lesson on new vocabulary began. The first word was “convey.” I asked if anyone knew this word and could tell us about it. Wyatt said he did not know this exact word, but he did know what a conveyor belt was. Steve knew what a conveyor belt was, too, and pointed out that maybe an escalator could be a kind of conveyor belt. I tried to use what the students had said about a conveyor belt to clarify the word convey.
Mrs. Russo: If an escalator moves people from one place to another, and a conveyor belt moves things from one place to another, what then must convey mean?

(Nothing…)

Ok, let’s try this. How do you convey a message to a friend?

Matthew: Call them, text them.

Scott: Just tell them

Jason: Send them a letter

Branden: You can email them

Aaliyah: You can tell them when you see them at school

Wyatt: Face to face or on AIM

Mrs. Russo: Ah, yes. You all know how to convey a message, to get that message from one place- in your head, to another place- your friend. So let’s write our definition of convey in our own words.

(All are successful)

The students were the resource.

A Read Aloud Day with Retelling

Tell and Tell Again

I planned to use retelling activities several times throughout my study. As a result of some of the curricular changes, I was only able to incorporate one
formal retelling lesson. I began class that day by telling students about a writing research report we would be working on over the next weeks. The research topics were based on the readings we had recently completed in our AMP Series. It was imperative to continually incorporate writing because most students in the class showed deficiencies in written expression. The students did not seem happy to be getting a writing assignment; however, when we told them the topics they could research they were much more interested. These topics included animal training, animal jobs, and famous trained animals such as Lassie or Shamu.

I explained that I was going to read them a book about an amazing animal and her trainer to help inspire them to decide on their research topic. I called the class to the carpet to do a read aloud of *Koko’s Kitten*. This book was about a gorilla that learned American Sign Language from her trainers. Koko became so good at ASL that she eventually was able to ask for a kitten. The story tells about Koko and the two kittens she gets to have as pets.

Read alouds were not completely new to this class, but I had not done one recently. The students were excited to sit and hear the story. It seemed that the excitement caused a bit of talking. I paused a few times and made eye contact with those students who were talking to help redirect. The talking appeared to be related to the book, but I was still concerned that if it continued it would interrupt others.
They class appeared to like hearing about Koko. One student made a prediction as I read when he noticed the cat on the cover was grey and the cat on the back was orange. They students asked questions as I read. The book held everyone’s interest.

Once I completed the book, I explained that each student would have a chance to retell the story of Koko’s kitten. I sent them to their desks to get materials such as paper and pencils and I reread the story a second time allowing students to take notes. They would be able to use these notes to help them to retell if they needed it, but they were encouraged to retell as much as they could from their own memory. The notes were there to help ease nervousness and allow students a hint if they should fail to remember part of the story during the retelling.

After students took notes on the reread, I had them work with a partner to practice retelling. The students were engaged and I could overhear that they were accurately retelling facts.

The co-teacher Debra, the reading specialist, Mrs. Bonaventure, and I called students up one at a time to do the retelling. We used a checklist to record their retelling (Appendix D). After the retelling, I talked with the other professionals and we discovered that there was a discrepancy in the way we administered this assessment. I had prompted students if they skipped a section or major topic. I also recorded any extra facts they told even if they were not part of
the original checklist. The other teachers had not prompted, but did record extra facts. I wondered how I could interpret these scores, knowing that the results would likely be different for each group. I considered not scoring the assessment at all, but decided that based on the theory of Vygotsky, this assignment might be very useful in determining the true level of development for my students. Vygotsky writes that, “what children can do with assistance of others might be in some sense even more indicative of their mental development than what they can do alone (p. 85).”

I scored the assessments and I was very happy to find that those students who received the prompting did perform better than those who did not. With assistance, they were able to recall more of the story than they were sharing on their own. The average score of the seven students who did not receive prompting was only 61%. The average score of the seven students who did receive prompting was 84%. The value of teacher prompting, as well as the value of allowing for group work, was made evident. These students did perform better with assistance, even though they were not given any additional answers or information, only prompts. I knew I would want to continue group work and other assisted activities throughout the study.

**Comprehension**

Student comprehension of implicit and explicit material was at the sixth-to seventh-grade level at the beginning of my study. The class, however, was
struggling to use this knowledge for reading tasks, such as identifying topic, main idea, and details in order to write a summary. They tended to perform better when asked questions in a “during reading” comprehension question format and when the questions were presented verbally. In order to continue to assess progress in comprehension, I incorporated several lessons and assessment tools over the course of the study, including sample PSSA passage practice, QRIs, and workbook lessons based on the non-fiction readers.

A Comprehension Day

I decided to expose the students to a practice PSSA passage that had been released to teachers on the Pennsylvania Department of Education Website in order to measure comprehension as it would be measured on the state assessment in the spring. My co-teacher and I felt it was important to show the students the texts that were on the seventh-grade level, as they were reading either at this level or very close to it, and to spend some time navigating the test and teaching some good test-taking practices. Given that there were still some reading and writing needs that were prevalent among this group of learners, I believed that some simple test strategy discussion and guided lessons would likely lead to more valid results on the state and district tests. I would know that the format of the test was not hurting students’ abilities to show mastery of learned concepts.

The passage we selected was called Fish, Flowers, and Fruit by Joyce Sidman. It was a two and a half page, difficult story about an island village and
how the resources on the island were used. Symbolism was used throughout the story and I worried that maybe this passage might still be too difficult. I did not want to discourage the students.

I spent some time reminding the students to skim the story first, to preview the multiple choice and open ended questions, and to highlight as they read. Then I silently panicked as the students took what seemed like forever to read the passage to themselves. I mentally prepared to add some guided practice to this lesson.

Once all the students were finished reading, I nervously referred back to the open ended question and asked what the students thought. They were being asked to tell what the old woman in the story represented (symbolism) and to give at least two examples to support their ideas (text references). I cringed at the level of difficulty and worked hard not to let my body language discourage them. But, Steve confidently raised his hand.

Here are the events that unfolded…

**Steve:** The woman represents the tree.

**Mrs. Russo:** {Was this a lucky guess?} Good, Steve. Where did you find that in the passage?

**Steve:** Page 21

(We turn to page 21 and students begin to read and highlight. Steve continues to explain his response.)
She has an empty bowl and the tree is running out of food for the village. Then the woman disappears, just like the tree will do if they keep cutting too much food from it.

Mrs. Russo: {The answer is spot on. I celebrate in my mind just a little, but I try not to act too excited. I still want others to share and I do not simply want them to mirror Steve’s response because they perceive that I like it.}

Matthew: I agree with Steve, but I think the woman represents the spirit of the tree. You know, like when it says “the spirit of the tree is unhappy” and the lady says “I hear it crying in pain.”

Mrs. Russo: {These answers are amazing. I truly cannot believe my ears.}

Drew: The old lady feels the tree crying. The old lady feels what the tree feels and so she cries, too.

Mrs. Russo: {I am blown away. This is awesome. What a hard and abstract concept and they really get it. I begin to imagine the challenge they will face trying to translate these ideas into writing.}

I am so impressed. You have all done such a great job. These answers would earn you the highest levels on this test.

{By now, I am beaming with excitement.}
Drew wanted to tell more. I told him to hold his thoughts because we were going to begin writing our ideas down. Johnny leaned over and patted Drew on the back. He encouraged him to remember what he wanted to say while he waited to get started on his writing.

I was impressed by the camaraderie that began to show in my class. I briefly helped the students restate the question, so they could begin writing their responses. Then they wrote. What a joy it was to see them write. Their ideas were right on track. Their comprehension was beyond the level of proficiency. Their progress was tremendous. The day was joyful. I stopped worrying and began anticipating great things from these determined learners— the great accomplishments I envisioned at the start of my study.

It was no surprise to me that the students were able to demonstrate mastery on comprehension assessments during the study even as the content became increasingly more difficult.
In addition to the tests and quizzes scores, students also continued to perform well on the Qualitative Reading Inventories. Most students were able to demonstrate proficiency on a grade-level six passage, as measured by an 80% or better in a given comprehension category, and were therefore able move on to an upper-middle level passage. Those who did not yet demonstrate the ability to move on to a more challenging passage, did either maintain proficiency in both areas or improve in at least one of the comprehension scoring categories. Rafael was the one exception to this pattern. However, it should be noted that Rafael refused to use the looking back option even with prompting on his second test, but had used this option on his first test. The scores for each student may be found in the Table 1. Each student was scored on initial comprehension of a text without
being allowed to refer back to the text, as well as a second score, when the text was again available to the reader. Bolded scores indicate proficiency. Italicized scores indicate improvement on the same level assessment. An asterisk indicates improvement on a higher level test.
Table 1 *Qualitative Reading Inventory Results*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student and Marking Period</th>
<th>Reading Level of Test Passage</th>
<th>Comprehension w/out looking back</th>
<th>Comprehension with looking back</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Matthew-1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matthew-2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Branden-1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Branden-2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rafael-1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rafael-2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chris-1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chris-2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aaliyah-1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aaliyah-2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jason-1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jason-2</td>
<td>Upper-Middle</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scott-1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scott-1B</td>
<td>Upper-Middle</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scott-2</td>
<td>Upper-Middle</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Steve-1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Steve-2</td>
<td>Upper-Middle</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jessica-1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jessica-2</td>
<td>Upper-Middle</td>
<td>100 *</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drew-1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drew-2</td>
<td>Upper-Middle</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student and Marking Period</td>
<td>Reading Level of Test Passage</td>
<td>Comprehension w/out looking back</td>
<td>Comprehension with looking back</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Johnny- 1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Johnny- 2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Johnny- 2B</td>
<td>Upper-Middle</td>
<td>100 *</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phil- 1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phil- 2</td>
<td>Upper-Middle</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carmine- 1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carmine- 2</td>
<td>Upper-Middle</td>
<td>95 *</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: Scores for Wyatt are not shared here because he joined our class midway through the study. He was given the QRI earlier in the year in a different format that was not comparable to the score I had for him for marking period two.

**Things that Got Away… and Things that Didn’t**

I learned that even the most well-planned study required some changes throughout the research process. For me, these changes were mostly based on the change in curriculum prior to the start of the school year. Since I had planned to focus my study around fiction reading, I planned to use some strategies regularly that easily lent themselves to my original lessons, but these plans had to be altered due to the new texts. For example, I introduced the journaling aspect of my study
early on. I assigned independent reading time in class on a few occasions and I
assigned independent reading as homework almost nightly. While reading,
students were expected to take notes in a T-chart format, as I had instructed in an
earlier lesson. I made it a point to continue to refer to these notes, but as we
delved further into the new series, adding activities such as our research project,
the focus on these notes became less and less part of the class. I was not able to
monitor these T-charts and have the student conferences I had planned. I was a bit
disappointed that it had become so difficult to make this part of our daily routine.

However, as we further explored our new series, which was heavily based
on non-fiction reading, I did find some unexpected benefits. I had always been a
fiction fanatic. I loved to read fiction and lived to teach it. I wanted every student
to find this love of literature in my class. What I neglected to realize was that
students could love reading, could love texts, and not necessarily love fiction.
Early on in my study, I began to notice that students in my class had a real
connection with non-fiction. The materials seemed to really peak their interests.
Discussions were brought to life when students asked questions, shared examples,
and pondered ideas that were based on non-fiction readings. I had never imagined
that this much interest could come from facts. Non-fiction, in my mind, had been
a somewhat daunting read in the past—just facts, little creativity. What I now
know is that students can be creative even when reading non-fiction. They can
still imagine, visualize, and connect with this sort of text. They can extend their
learning when their interests are genuine. Dewey writes, “The intensity of the desire measures the strength of the efforts that will be put forth” (1997/1938, p. 70). When students showed a desire to learn non-fiction, they made valuable connections with the information.

During one lesson that began with a video clip, Jason commented that he was surprised about what he was seeing. The video showed a golden retriever that was trained to work with a cheetah. The retriever was used to human contact and not very easily startled. It became the dominant partner in this animal pair. Its presence allowed the cheetah to be part of a program through the zoo where it performed in shows that educated students. This cheetah, although typically a very nervous animal that would not be comfortable in front of an audience, was comforted by the dog and able to perform its tasks. Jason very quickly noted how shocking it was to him to see dogs and cats working so well together. Asking questions and making connections, the same skills I hoped children would do when reading fiction, were taking place in this non-fiction context. Jason did not just accept words on a page, or facts presented on a video. He thought about what he saw and shared his ideas with us. He had a desire to learn and therefore, he connected with the material.

**Attitude is Everything**

As I documented observations throughout the study, I found that student and teacher comments and attitudes changed in a positive way as the format of the
lesson shifted from traditional to non-traditional. The following pastiche is a summary of change that occurred.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Traditional Lessons</th>
<th>Non–Traditional Lessons</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Matthew’s head is down-again. He refuses to do workbook pages.</td>
<td>The students are engaged. They are talking. Matthew is sharing!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Today was boring.</td>
<td>Today was great.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“I hate the workbook, Mrs. Russo.”</td>
<td>“I like the acting, Mrs. Russo.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I can tell the students are off task.</td>
<td>“I’m being a fish.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>We all learn.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I can’t pass these tests. They are too hard. The readings are impossible.</td>
<td>Fish, Flowers, and Fruit? That passage was easy. I think the woman represents the spirit of the tree.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>They are improving. The scores are improving. The data supports what we are doing in here.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 9.* Pastiche of Teacher Attitudes (in green) and Student Attitudes (in blue) towards Traditional and Non-Traditional Lessons
DATA ANALYSIS

Each day brought new information and new ideas to my study. I kept a daily log of my classroom observations so that I could look back on them, reflect on the happenings of the day, and begin to analyze any patterns that emerged.

During each class period, I kept a notebook close at hand. I wrote down any event, student/teacher dialogue, or experience that I could while still effectively teaching. Some days I found the note-taking to be difficult, especially on large-group instruction days. Other times, particularly during small group lessons, note-taking became very natural. At first, students inquired about what I was writing and why. Once I explained the process of my observations, the students became less distracted by the writing and eventually seemed totally unaffected by my jotting notes throughout the day. However, if a student said something he or she found to be particularly “smart,” I was often asked if I had written it in my notebook. Sometimes students even said things such as, “Jason is the smartest boy in the world” just to see if I was really writing everything, and if so, to see if I would use this information in my final paper. It appeared the students were aware that I was recording, but for the most part, were able to stay on task as I documented our progression.

At the end of each day, I spent some quiet time in reflection. I reread the observations from class and wrote any personal thoughts or opinions I had about what had occurred. Often, I found this reflection to be equally, if not more, telling
than the observations themselves. Many times when teaching, I made quick
decisions about a lesson, a student, or a problem. I wondered, “Do I stop teaching
to correct a student who is off-task or do I just tap him on the shoulder as I pass?
How much time do I spend on a student question that I had not planned for, but is
relevant to our discussion?” The reflections allowed me the chance to look back
on the split-second decisions I made and the events that followed. The reflections
allowed me to determine if the choices yielded the results I had hoped for. They
also allowed me to record inner dialogue about what I noticed in terms of student
and personal attitudes, demeanors, and actions. I found myself explaining what I
had done, thought, or perceived in my reflections. This process helped me to see a
new perspective on my classroom—one that incorporated the more human nature
of perception, not strictly the scientific nature of observation. Both sides of my
log together now reflected a full view of the events in my classroom.

I spent much time analyzing my field log. I began labeling each lesson
with codes that identified patterns within the observations. Codes such as “student
volunteers” and “students making connections” helped me to determine when
particular behaviors occurred, and to begin to discover the antecedents and
subsequent behaviors that were connected to it. I then placed these codes in bins
based on their relationships. Each categorized bin represented a theme that
became prevalent throughout my study.
The observation notes, reflections, codes, bins, and theme statements all added to my own understanding of the progress of my study. However, it was important to me to also know how the students felt about the journey we had shared. To better understand their opinions and perspectives, I re-administered my survey at the end of the study to compare findings between pre- and post-survey results. I also kept records of students’ assessment scores, QRI results, and other data collection, such as the Act It Outs checklist for further review. I wanted to ensure that I was noting student summative assessment scores, as well as formative daily progress and attitudes towards lessons. I agree with Kohl when he writes “intelligence is more important than the conformity to the norms of testing” (2002, p. 149). Therefore, a full review of a variety of sources was an essential aspect of my analysis process. By the end of my study, I was able to triangulate the data I had collected to reach the following findings.
Figure 10. Categorized Bins of Observed Behavior Patterns
FINDINGS

Drama/Non-Traditional Approaches: A variety of approaches to teaching and learning, such as visual, verbal, and performance-based techniques, can meet the needs of students with a range of learning styles and learning needs.

Based on my pre- and post-surveys, the students in my class had different preferences for learning. The challenge of any classroom teacher is to find a way to reach all students, regardless of their diverse learning needs. As my study progressed, I found that students who often appeared disconnected from one type of lesson would excel in other types of lessons. For example, visual learners most often drew pictures or symbols on their vocabulary flashcards in the section called “How I Can Remember” (Appendix O). Students who did not have this visual preference were able to put a list of examples in this spot that did not require images. By allowing students to act out the words, kinesthetic learners could become engaged in comprehending the word. Visual and auditory learners who watched the skits further benefited from the visual and verbal dynamic. By the conclusion of the series of vocabulary lessons, all the students had an opportunity to connect with the term in a way or ways that worked best for them individually. As demonstrated on the graphs of student assessment scores (Figure 7), students were able to
perform well on the written assessments after taking part in the variety of activities we had explored. These assessments were cumulative, and therefore, it appears that the students were able to make long-term connections with these words and add them to their growing vocabulary repertoires.

*Students Initiated Learning: Students initiate and take responsibility for learning when they feel competent in regard to content and confident to safely take risks in class.*

It is no easy task to get struggling learners to take risks in a classroom, but it is possible. Throughout my study, I began seeing students take risks or volunteer in ways that they had not done in the past. I noticed that students tended to do this most when they were knowledgeable about the content being discussed. About six weeks into my study, my class was playing a vocabulary game called Guess the Word. During the game, one student gave clues while the others in the group tried to guess the vocabulary word to which he or she was referring. By this point, I was already recognizing that vocabulary acquisition was becoming strength for this class. They were playing the game using their newest words and any sets of past words from that particular story. I encouraged the groups to use each word more than once because hearing how several people described the word could be beneficial to helping students connect to it in a personal way. As
I circulated the room, I was very happy with how students performed. No one was afraid to take a turn as the clue giver, and all students were actively guessing. Some students referred to their flashcards if they were unable to think of the correct word, but most guessed first, before referring to any helpful devices. They were very successful with the words being studied.

Eventually the groups seemed that they had almost finished the game. I told the class we would be moving on in a few minutes. At that time, I overheard one group saying that they had really already finished the game. Rather than re-playing each word a third time and rather than fooling around, which many seventh-graders would do, Matthew said, “Why don’t we go back and do the words from *The Diamond Necklace*?” I was overjoyed to hear that this group was ready to review words from our previous unit. These words would not even be on the quiz and we had not looked at them in quite some time. Yet, this group was ready to challenge themselves. One student said he did not think he remembered the words. They called me over and I reminded them of some of the words from that list. Almost immediately, they were giving clues for these “old” words, discussing their meanings, and talking about the story we read nearly two months ago. Unafraid to take a risk, these students challenged themselves,
reviewed vocabulary, and competently examined the terms and the story that many students would have long since forgotten.

Class Procedures: A variety of strategies and class procedures that are predictable for the students allow for learners to develop a sense of security in the classroom.

Many of the students I see each day have specially designed instruction noted in their Individualized Education Plans that inform teachers to have clear and predictable routines. These routines, things such as always listing the daily objective on the board, posting homework in the same place, or signing agenda planners, becomes the anticipated activity for students who have difficulty with unfamiliar transitions or changes, and their presence can lead to lessened anxiety for these struggling learners each day. I tried very hard to incorporate predictable routines into our study, so that as we introduced new and more difficult skills, we did so in a way that did not cause anxiety. For example, every time we learned new vocabulary words, we always used the workbook activity provided, made flashcards, drew pictures, did a dramatization, and had a discussion. Regardless of the difficulty level of the words, the routine was predictable and safe for the students. Additionally, on tests and quizzes, I was careful to format the assessments similarly. I did not want the form of the test to affect the answer. To ensure that I was not tricking students by varying the
format of the vocabulary tests, I kept the format the same and increased the difficulty of the words and content within the test. I was able to create tests that had a vocabulary component (definitions, synonyms, antonyms, examples, fill-ins, and application/visualization) and content component (reading, fluency, comprehension, multiple choice, and open-ended responses) that were challenging, but not purposefully tricky. I was confident that the scores on the assessments were valid and reliable, in part due to this method for creating them.

**Reading Comprehension Strategies:** Students who experience a variety of reading comprehension strategies and have ability and desire to choose their preferred strategy for learning are more likely to excel when they are allowed to use their strategies of choice.

It is difficult to assess what students are thinking while they read. One way to begin to examine this is by allowing students to take notes while they read. This, however, requires students to take on the task of independent reading. Struggling readers may not be very willing to read on their own or perhaps they may be lacking the skills to do so. Coupled with the difficulty of trying to think metacognitively, it is no surprise that these students are also unlikely to share notes that have much more than surface information from a reading (lacking in higher-order processes such as questioning, drawing conclusions, etc.). As I taught students new
strategies for comprehension, I relied mostly on discussion and class assessments, and somewhat on workbook activities to assess comprehension. However, one other measure of whether or not students were using the new reading skills was to determine if the students were reading on their own and considering themselves competent readers. Did they become readers who could choose and use a strategy to learn from their reading? While I did not see a significant increase in the amount of students who read for school or for pleasure on my post survey, I did notice a difference in the attitudes towards reading. On the pre-survey, zero students said they always felt like good readers, eleven students said they sometimes felt like good readers, and two students said they never felt like good readers. On the post-survey six students said they always felt like good readers, six students said they sometimes felt like good readers, and only one student indicated he or she never felt like a good reader. Charted here, are the complete post-survey results.
Students responded to the following fifteen statements by marking always, sometimes, or never.

1. I am a good reader.
2. I enjoy reading.
3. I am good at learning new vocabulary words.
4. I learn new information when I read.
5. I have read books on my own for school.
6. I have read books on my own for pleasure (for fun).
7. I keep a journal.
8. I reread parts of books if I do not understand something the first time I read it.
9. I like to tell and retell stories I have read.
10. I like acting.
11. I like when teachers let me do a hands-on project instead of writing.
12. When I read, characters in the books remind me of myself or other people I know.
13. I like drawing and other kinds of art.
14. Picturing the story in my head helps me understand it better.
15. Taking notes when I read helps me remember a story.

Figure 11. Post-Survey Results
**Behavior:** Most off-task behaviors take place when students are not fully engaged in a lesson.

While this is not the most profound statement, it does appear to be true.

Matthew is the perfect example. I remember days and days in a row that I worried about Matthew. I knew he was a high-level thinker, but he easily tuned out and put his head down. He did not seem motivated to read or write, and he dreaded workbook pages and print outs. Matthew was not a defiant student, but he certainly was not engaged. Helping Matthew connect with the lessons in a way that was interesting and meaningful to him made a huge difference in his behavior. During a non-traditional lesson, those that included drama, discussion, or games, Matthew was almost always on task. In fact, he often was the leader in small group activities. The connections he made to reading, such as during our PSSA preparation passage lesson, were extraordinary. But, Matthew’s best work came at times when he was engaged. It did not just appear because it is Monday through Friday between the hours of seven-thirty and two-thirty. Just being at school was not enough. When Matthew found motivation and true engagement in a lesson, it led to great connections, discussions, and learning experiences for him and for the peers with whom he shared.
**Class Climate:** A class that includes a positive teacher/student rapport, teaching with praise and humor, and the use of one-on-one assistance, leads to an overall positive class climate.

I have always believed that the most important thing I could do in my classroom was to build a positive relationship with my students. This year was no different. If I wanted students to participate in this study, perform in my class, and work to their fullest potential, I had to show them that I cared about what I was asking them to do and that I cared about them.

“Teaching and learning are rooted in and are dependent upon a common language between teacher and student” (Hilliard, 2002, p.89). We needed to form a trusting partnership and a common language.

To build a positive rapport with my students, I allowed for student choice as much as possible in my classroom. I respected the opinions and thoughts of the learners, regardless of whether I agreed with these ideas. I asked students how they felt about the lessons, and I made it a point to alter lessons that I did not feel were meaningful and enjoyable. As students needed help, I was careful not to embarrass or single-out the struggles. I spoke one-on-one with many students throughout the study, whether it was during or after class to help address any issue of concern. There was never yelling or scolding in my room—only explaining and encouraging. Even on days that I was a bit frustrated, I worked hard to
ensure that my frustration was invisible to the learners. Humor was one way that I was able to keep my class climate positive. My students appeared to respond very well to humor. For example, during a lesson on context clues, I asked students to raise their hands if they knew what a Pomeranian was. Scott blurted out, “A dog!” In his excitement for knowing the answer, he forgot to raise his hand. Unfortunately, that Pomeranian was going to be my example of how to use context clues. I planned to tell characteristics of a Pomeranian in sentences until we could decipher that this was a breed of dog. Instead of scolding Scott or getting upset, I joked with him. I told him that the book had that example and that now I would have to think of one on my own. I teased with him a little bit about how he was making me do some extra work and I told him I wondered if this was because I had given him too much work lately. All this was said with a smile. Scott smiled back. I asked him not to call out like that again, so that I wouldn’t have to do so much “thinking on my toes.” He agreed and we moved on. Scott and I left that lesson each feeling respected. No one was upset or put down. We all learned what context clues were just as well. I eventually thought of the word “thoroughbred” to use as an example and all was again right in our classroom.

Class Discussion: Classroom discussion is beneficial to helping students who typically struggle with newly introduced material. It
allows students to make connections between that material and their own experiences.

Discussion became very important in my classroom. I found, as noted in my story, that students often served as their own resources when they were allowed the opportunity to discuss their learning and their thinking. Often, the examples that students shared became hints for remembering new terms or new material, rather than the examples the teachers shared. I did wonder if students were able to connect better with peers on their own level than with their teachers. This was something I thought of exploring in the future, perhaps through the use of some structured group work. Our class discussions added so much life to our classroom. They allowed for the students to learn from the experiences of others and allowed my class to form a community-like bond. No one was afraid to discuss or share and it seemed that almost everyone looked forward to taking a turn. In our discussions, no one was ever ridiculed or made to feel as if their contributions were lacking. It was a safe forum for us to make meaning of our learning. I believe it was one of the most meaningful events that took place during my study.
Quiz/Test/Assess: Using different approaches to assess student progress allows learners, regardless of learning style or preference, to demonstrate their knowledge and/or mastery of a concept.

While I used the same format for my vocabulary and comprehension quizzes/tests, I used a variety of approaches to assess progress throughout our lessons each day. Checklists, observations, discussions, drawings, and visualizations are just some of the ways students were able to show what they had learned. In a time when test-taking is very high-stakes and authentic learning sadly takes a back seat to test prep in many classrooms, I was proud to say that my students were able to excel in both of these areas. By teaching authentically and teaching to the learning style of the students, I was able to note progress throughout a unit that mimicked the progress data I collected from assessment scores. Students in my class had all moved into the basic or proficient categories on the second benchmark test with the exception of one student who was still below basic as compared to six students who were below basic on the first test prior to the beginning of my study. The variety of experiences that have been incorporated into my classroom have yielded success thus far.
Figure 12. 4Sight Assessment Scores from Tests 1 and 2
NEXT STEPS

One of the most rewarding aspects of conducting this study was knowing that it could impact future lessons and future classes in a positive way. My findings indicated that continuing with the non-traditional approaches would be beneficial to struggling adolescent readers.

A Story in the Making

My plan for the future is to take my study one step further by allowing students to self-select their preferred strategies for comprehension and apply them to independent reading books of their choice. I would like to conference with students about their books and the reading strategies they have chosen. I believe that if students are able to select a strategy that is in line with their preferred learning style that they will be able to apply this strategy to texts, even ones that are unfamiliar or challenging, because they are equipped with the skills to truly connect with and comprehend a reading. Thus far, I have only collected data on using these strategies with teacher-selected texts from the AMP Series. If students are able to choose the texts based on their interests, they might also be even more motivated to apply the strategies that will help them to learn about their book. Freire writes that as students are, “increasingly posed with problems relating to themselves in the world and with the world (they) will feel increasingly challenged and obliged to respond to that challenge” (2003/1970, p. 81).
I will continue using non-traditional techniques as often as I can. It was a pleasing experience to have students ask if they could act out new words, look back at their flashcards, and be excited as we learned. Based on the success of my study, I will work to incorporate the use of strategies such as flashcards, drama, drawing, and retelling to enhance not only my Language Arts classroom, but also other subject classrooms where I co-teach to meet the needs of my future students in all settings. Students drawing pictures to help understand math problems or becoming a dramatized hurricane to learn about weather in a science class would be great extensions of these types of lessons. Lessons would be based on curricular goals, but routed in student learning styles and needs. As noted by Delpit, “The object is not to lower standards or just teach what is interesting to students, but to find the students’ interests and build an academic program around them” (2002, p. 45).

I believe that students, when given the tools to succeed, can accomplish great things regardless of challenges that may arise. These great moments of the future are still just my story in the making, but I believe that the continuation of non-traditional lessons will ensure this ongoing story has a happy ending for the readers who once struggled and now can succeed. Dewey writes “The most important attitude that can be formed is that of desire to go on learning” (1997/1938, p. 48). With competence and confidence, my students will be equipped to be life-long learners who can meet with success.
REFERENCES


Krueger, A., & Ranalli, K. (2003). *To be or not to be dramatic! The effects of drama on reading ability.* (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED480255)


RESOURCES


APPENDIXES

Appendix A- Vocabulary Flashcard

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Word</th>
<th>definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Synonym**

**Antonym**

**Forms of word**
Appendix B- Sequencing Sentences for Reading on Salmon

- Male a female salmon swim close together and look like they are dancing.
- Salmon are born in freshwater streams or lakes.
- Fry, or baby salmon, hide in gravel for several weeks.
- Salmon develop the urge to swim all the way to the ocean.
- Some salmon go to the ocean again.
- Salmon adapt to different water.
- Salmon swim around the ocean eating and getting bigger and bigger until it is time to breed.
- Salmon swim from the ocean back to the stream.
- Salmon return to where they were born.
- Salmon adapt to different water again
- Salmon swim upstream and must get through dams.
- Salmon again face the danger of menacing bears.
- Females lay eggs in gravel while males fertilize the eggs.
- Young salmon face dangers such as birds and bears.
Appendix C- Sequencing Checklist

**Sequencing Checklist**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Students</th>
<th>*</th>
<th>✓</th>
<th>-</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Carmine</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Johnny</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Drew</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Chris</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Jessica</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Phil</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Steve</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Aaliyah</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Rafael</td>
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<tr>
<td>Branden</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Scott</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Matthew</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Jason</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Wyatt</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Grading:
* = correct order with support
✓ = correct order without support/inadequate support
- = incorrect order
Appendix D- Koko’s Kitten Retelling Scoring Sheet

Retelling Activity for Koko’s Kitten

- A graduate student meets a gorilla named Koko.
- Koko is only 6 months old.
- Koko was abandoned because she was sick.
- Koko needed a mother.
- The student decided to work with Koko for four or five years.
- She would teach Koko American Sign Language (ASL).
- Koko has a birthday party every year…
- Where she gets presents, cake and special foods/drinks.
- Koko tells her trainer that this year she wants a cat for her birthday.
- Koko knows about cats because her trainer has read many books about cats to her.
- Koko’s trainer orders her a vinyl cat toy.
- The toy does not arrive in time for Koko’s birthday so her trainer saves it for Christmas.
- Koko usually loves Christmas, but this year she signs “that stink”.
- Koko is upset with her present- she wants a real cat.
- Koko will not show the toy cat to her trainer.
- Six months later, Koko’s trainer introduces her to three real cats.
• Koko gave the cats the “blow test”
• Koko decides she wants the tailless tabby cat.
• Maybe Koko likes this cat because it doesn’t have a tail and gorillas do not have tails.
• Koko loves to visit with her cat.
• She tries to carry the cat on her thigh and back like a baby gorilla
• Koko names her cat All Ball.
• At first All Ball went home with the trainer, …
• But eventually Ball stayed with Koko.
• Ball was a very aggressive cat, but Koko was always gentle with her.
• Koko loved Ball.
• Koko was a good mother to Ball and even kept her clean and found her ear mites.
• Koko loved to talk about Ball and she could paint pictures of Ball.
• Koko would play games with Ball.
• On a foggy December day, Ball was hit by a car and died.
• The trainer told Koko and Koko did not react at first.
• Then Koko cried.
• Koko’s trainer talked to her about Ball.
• Koko was sad- it was an unhappy time.
• Thousands of people write letters saying that Koko should get another kitten.

• Koko’s trainer tried to arrange this. She talked to Koko about what kind of kitten she would like. She called shelters, etc looking for the kind of cat Koko wanted (tailless Manx, red)

• A breeder of cats offered to help and in March, Koko got a new kitten.

• Koko was happy to have her new kitty (Lips-Lipstick).
## Sample Rubric for Summarizing Activity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Characters</strong></td>
<td>Characters are described in detail including character traits in all 4 areas (mental, emotional, social, physical) with support.</td>
<td>Characters are accurately described with less detail (not all 4 traits) with limited support.</td>
<td>Not all characters are described.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Setting</strong></td>
<td>Accurately describes time and place of story with support.</td>
<td>Accurately describes time and place with limited support.</td>
<td>Does not accurately describe time and place.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Plot</strong></td>
<td>Detailed description of conflict, climax and resolution with support.</td>
<td>Limited description of conflict, climax and resolution with limited support.</td>
<td>Missing one or more elements of plot.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Theme</strong></td>
<td>Theme is indicated with adequate support.</td>
<td>Theme is indicated with limited support.</td>
<td>Theme is not shared, or theme is inaccurate.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Comments:
Appendix F- T-Chart Sample
Journal Entry T-Chart Template

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Connection to You</th>
<th>Type of Connection</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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</table>
Appendix G- Sample Comprehension Questions Reformatted from the AMP Series using student accommodations

**Multiple Choice and Short Answer**
For multiple choice questions- Read the question and all of the answers. Circle the answer that **BEST** answers the question.

For short answer- Answer in complete sentences.

**Paragraph One**

1. What is the **topic** of paragraph 1? (HINT- remember to look at headings)
   a. whooping cranes
   b. white birds
   c. tall birds of North America

2. What is the **main idea of paragraph 1**? (Hint- Who or what is this about?)
   
   ________________________________ ________________________________
   
   ________________________________ ________________________________
   
   ________________________________ ________________________________

3. **Whooping cranes** got their **names** because they
   a. have **unusual calls**
   b. have **wide wing spans**
   c. **whip their wings**
We Are Families Section

4. What is the main idea of the section “We Are Families”? (Hint- who or what is this about?)

___________________________________________________
___________________________________________________
___________________________________________________
___________________________________________________
___________________________________________________

5. Which is an important detail that supports the main idea of the section “We Are Families”?

   a. They fly back north for summer to hatch their eggs.

   b. The main family of whooping cranes is known as the Western Flock.

   c. In 2004, their population was at 216.

6. What is the main difference between the Western Flock and the Eastern Flock?

   a. Whooping cranes in the Western Flock are larger and love longer.

   b. The Western and Eastern flocks migrate in different directions.

   c. The Western flock lives in the wild while the Eastern flock is raised by humans.
Training to Fly Section

7. What is the **main idea** of the section “Training to Fly”? (Hint- who or what is this about?)

   a. **Migration of the Western flock is longer** than the migration of the Eastern flock.

   b. Young **Eastern flock cranes follow an ultralight** on their migrations.

   c. **Human handlers** dress is costumes to **give the cranes flying lessons**.

8. Each fall new cranes are **added** to the Eastern Flock______________.

   a. because **not all cranes survive**.

   b. so that they can **prepare to follow the ultralight**

   c. because some young **chicks cannot learn to migrate**.
The Entire Passage

9. What is the main idea of the entire passage? (Hint- who or what is this entire passage about?)
   
   a. Whooping cranes are unusual because some migrate and some do not.
   
   b. Whooping cranes are in danger of disappearing.
   
   c. There are two families of whooping cranes.

10. Write a SUMMARY of the entire passage. Remember to include the main idea of the entire passage and at least three important details.

   ____________________________________________________________
   ____________________________________________________________
   ____________________________________________________________
   ____________________________________________________________
   ____________________________________________________________
   ____________________________________________________________
   ____________________________________________________________
   ____________________________________________________________
   ____________________________________________________________
Appendix H- Qualitative Reading Inventory Score Sheet

Name:______________________________________________ ______________

QRI Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Level</th>
<th>WPM</th>
<th>Accuracy</th>
<th>Accept.</th>
<th>Comp w/o lookbacks</th>
<th>Comp w/ lookbacks</th>
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</table>
Appendix I- Pre- and Post-Survey

Name: _________________________________

Date: _________________________________

Reading Student Survey

Using the grid below, describe yourself as a reader.
There are no right and wrong answers on this paper-only your opinions. I will be using this information to help me be the best teacher I can be for you!

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Always /Yes</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Never / No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I am a good reader.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>I enjoy reading.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am good at learning new vocabulary words.</td>
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<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>I learn new information when I read.</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have read books on my own for school.</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have read books on my own for pleasure (for fun).</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I keep a journal.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I reread parts of books if I do not understand something the first time I read it.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I like to tell and retell stories I have read.</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I like acting.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statement</td>
<td>Always /Yes</td>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>Never /No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I like when teachers let me do a hands-on project instead of writing.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When I read, characters in the books remind me of myself or other people I know.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I like drawing and other kinds of art.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Picturing the story in my head helps me understand it better.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taking notes when I read helps me remember a story.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix J- Act It Outs Checklist

Acting It Out Vocabulary Checklist

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Students</th>
<th>*</th>
<th>✓</th>
<th>X</th>
<th>X2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Carmine</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Johnny</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drew</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chris</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jessica</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phil</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Steve</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aaliyah</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rafael</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Branden</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scott</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matthew</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jason</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wyatt</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Grading:

* = acting accurately portrayed word
✓ = correctly guessed word by watching other actors or guessed incorrectly but offered valid support
X = acting does not accurately portray word
X2 = guess was incorrect with no support
Appendix K- Student and Parent Consent Form

Dear Parent/Guardian:

I am completing my Master of Education degree at Moravian College. My courses have enabled me to learn about the most effective teaching methods. One of the requirements of the program is that I conduct a systematic study of my own teaching practices. This semester, I am focusing my research on reading comprehension. The title of my research is The Effects of Implementing Visual, Verbal and Performance-based Strategies for Reading Comprehension with Struggling Adolescent Readers. My students will benefit from participating in this study by becoming better readers. They will be exposed to a variety of reading comprehension techniques and guided through the process of determining which techniques work best for their individual learning styles. Students will then be able to use these techniques to help them read material in my class, other classes and outside of school. There are no anticipated risks with this study.

As part of this study, students will be asked to partake in a variety of activities before, during and after reading in the Language Arts classroom. These activities include taking a reading survey, illustrating scenes from stories, creating flashcards, writing and acting out scripts, summarizing and journaling. This study will take place from September 1, 2008 through December 24, 2008.

The data will be collected and coded, and held in the strictest confidence. No one except me will have access to the data. My research results will be presented using pseudonyms - no one’s identity will be used. I will store the data in a locked cabinet. At the conclusion of my research, the data will be destroyed.

A student may choose at any time not to participate in this study. However, students must participate in all regular classroom activities. All students, participants and non-participants, will engage in the reading comprehension activities presented. Non-participants will not be asked to complete the reading survey. In no
way will participation, non-participation or withdrawal during this study have any influence on any aspect of the class. If a student experiences any distress as a result of this study, the student can contact the school principal, Pamela Bernardo, or school counselor, Howard Heffelfinger at (610) 838-7071. Students who do not wish to participate can inform me at any time to withdraw from the study with no penalty.

We welcome questions about this research at any time. Your child’s participation in this study is voluntary; refusal to participate will involve no penalty or consequence. Any questions you have about the research or about the process for withdrawing can be directed to me, Dana Russo, the school principal, Pamela Bernardo, or my advisor, Charlotte Zales, Education Department, Moravian College, (610) 625-7958, crzales@moravian.edu. Any questions about your rights as a research participant may be directed to Dr. Debra Wetcher-Hendricks, Chair HSIRB, Moravian College, Bethlehem, PA 18018, (610) 861-1415.

Sincerely,

Dana Russo

I agree to allow my son/daughter to take part in the project. I understand that my son/daughter can choose not to participate at any time.

Parent/Guardian Signature  Date

Student Signature  Date
Appendix L-HSIRB Approval Letter

September 3, 2008

Dear Dana L. Russo:

The Moravian College Human Subjects Internal Review Board has accepted your proposal: “The Effects of implementing visual, verbal, and performance-based strategies for reading comprehension with struggling academic readers.” Given the materials submitted, your proposal received an expedited review. A copy of your proposal will remain with the HSIRB Chair.

Please note that if you intend on venturing into other topics than the ones indicated in your proposal, you must inform the HSIRB about what those topics will be.

Should any other aspect of your research change or extend past one year of the date of this letter, you must file those changes or extensions with the HSIRB before implementation.

This letter has been sent to you through U.S. Mail and e-mail. Please do not hesitate to contact me by telephone (610-861-1415) or through e-mail (medwh02@moravian.edu) should you have any questions about the committee’s requests.

Debra Wetcher-Hendricks
Chair, Human Subjects Internal Review Board
Moravian College
610-861-1415
Appendix M- Principal Consent Form

May 2, 2008

Dear Ms. [REDACTED],

I am completing my Master of Education degree at Moravian College. My courses have enabled me to learn about the most effective teaching methods. One of the requirements of the program is that I conduct a systematic study of my own teaching practices. During the fall semester, I am focusing my research on reading comprehension. The title of my research is *The Effects of Implementing Visual, Verbal and Performance-based Strategies for Reading Comprehension with Struggling Adolescent Readers.*

My students will benefit from participating in this study by becoming better readers. They will be exposed to a variety of reading comprehension techniques and guided through the process of determining which techniques work best for their individual learning styles. Students will then be able to use these techniques to help them read material in my class, other classes and outside of school. There are no anticipated risks with this study.

As part of this study, students will be asked to partake in a variety of activities before, during and after reading in the Language Arts classroom. These activities include taking a reading survey, illustrating scenes from stories, creating flashcards, writing and acting out scripts, summarizing and journaling. This study will take place from September 1, 2008 through December 24, 2008.

The data will be collected and coded, and held in the strictest confidence. No one except me will have access to the data. My research results will be presented using pseudonyms- no one’s identity will be used. I will store the data in a locked cabinet. At the conclusion of my research, the data will be destroyed.

A student may choose at any time not to participate in this study. However, students must participate in all regular classroom activities. All students, participants and non-participants, will engage in the reading comprehension activities presented. Non-participants will not be asked to complete the reading survey. In no way will participation, non-participation or withdrawal during this study have any influence on any aspect of the class.
I would be happy to meet and discuss my research further to address any questions or concerns you may have. You may also contact my faculty sponsor, Dr. Charlotte Zales. She can be contacted at Moravian College by phone at (610) 625-7958 or by email at crzales@moravian.edu should you have any questions. Student participation in this study is voluntary; refusal to participate will involve no penalty or consequence. Any questions about students’ rights as a research participant may be directed to Dr. Debra Wetcher-Hendricks, Chair HSIRB, Moravian College, Bethlehem, PA 18018, (610) 861-1415.

I am hopeful that my study will benefit the students in my class. If you approve my study, please indicate below. I look forward to the coming semester and to learning more ways to successfully prepare my students for their future experiences.

Sincerely,

Mrs. Dana Russo
Learning Support Teacher

I have received a copy, read and approve this study.

_________________________________________  ___________ ___
Signature                                                                 Date
Appendix N- Vocabulary Assessment Sample
Name: ________________________________
Date: ________________________________

Vocabulary Quiz 2 (B)- “Animal Tricks and Treks”

A. Definitions
Match the word with its correct definition.

1. ______ not having something you need or want a. inhabited

2. ______ ability to last through a difficult situation b. deprived

3. ______ easily understood, obvious c. evident

4. ______ a place that is lives in d. endurance

______________________________________________
B. Fill in the blank
Write the word that BEST completes each sentence. *Hint- context clues are bolded.

| menace          | nourishment  | substantial | tend |

5. Mrs. Russo’s family cooked a ________________ amount of food on Thanksgiving.

6. Babies ________________ to cry when they are hungry, which is very often.

7. Hurricanes can be a ________________ if you live near the shore.

8. In order to grow and thrive, people need ________________.
C. Synonyms, Antonyms and Examples

Use the words in the box to fill out the chart below. NOT all words will be used.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Word</th>
<th>Synonym</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>menace</td>
<td>Large, important</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nourishment</td>
<td>Lived in</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Use the words in the box to fill out the chart below. NOT all words will be used.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Word</th>
<th>Antonym</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>deprived</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Endurance</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tend</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>evident</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Use the words in the box to complete the examples. NOT all words will be used.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Word</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>nourishment</td>
<td>A bully.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>deprived</td>
<td>Starving.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>endurance</td>
<td>Food.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>menace</td>
<td>Answers on a test that you studied for a lot!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>inhabit</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>evident</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Application
Step 1. Choose THREE of the following words.
Step 2. Write each word in a sentence that demonstrates your knowledge of the word. Underline the vocabulary word in the sentence.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>deprived</th>
<th>endurance</th>
<th>evident</th>
<th>inhabit</th>
<th>substantial</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>tend</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1.

2.

3.

Step 3. For ONE sentence, DRAW A PICTURE that helps readers to visualize your sentence. Circle the sentence that goes with your picture.
REMEMBER WHEN…

Let’s see how much we remember about our first set of vocabulary words. We know you can do it!

Complete the chart.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WORD</th>
<th>SYNONYM</th>
<th>ANTONYM</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Basically</td>
<td>Relatively</td>
<td>Thrive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Astounding</td>
<td>Ample</td>
<td>Migrating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change to fit a new situation</td>
<td>Unchanging</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enough</td>
<td>Lacking</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wonderful</td>
<td>Ordinary</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Simply</td>
<td>Complicated or Complex</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Things in an environment</td>
<td>The moon.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moving</td>
<td>Inert, Not Moving</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compared to</td>
<td>Absolute</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grow and be healthy</td>
<td>Deteriorate</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix O - Student Samples of Vocabulary Flashcards

Vocabulary Graphic Organizer

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>word</th>
<th>Participating</th>
<th>definition</th>
<th>to take part in something</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>synonym</td>
<td>Taking part</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>antonym</td>
<td>Not participating</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forms of word</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>word</th>
<th>Exposed</th>
<th>definition</th>
<th>exposed means to uncover or revealed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>synonym</td>
<td>Revealed</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>antonym</td>
<td>Un-revealed</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forms of word</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>word</th>
<th>Alter</th>
<th>definition</th>
<th>You make it different or alter completely by changing it into something else</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>synonym</td>
<td>Change</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>antonym</td>
<td>Correcting</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forms of word</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>word</th>
<th>Accurately</th>
<th>definition</th>
<th>You do it without making a mistake or errors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>synonym</td>
<td>Correctly</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>antonym</td>
<td>Inaccurate</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forms of word</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Pass
A+