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Brittany Rogers

Katie Wolf

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Motivating Students to Become Engaged Lifelong Readers

An Action Research Report

By: Katie Wolf and Brittany Rogers

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Submitted on June 4, 2014

In fulfillment of Final Requirements for the MAED Degree

St. Catherine University

St. Paul, Minnesota

Advisor: Dr. Catherine Kelly

Date: June 4, 2014

Abstract

The intent of our study was to determine the effect of using daily silent reading, with teacher/student conferencing, on our student's enjoyment and motivation for reading. The research study took place at a public elementary school, in second and fifth grade classrooms with 18 and 19 students. The sources of data included a Star Literacy Test, Reading Interest Questionnaire, Teacher/Student Conferencing Log, and Teacher Observation Checklist. The data revealed an increase in the majority of students' reading levels, and in our student's enjoyment of reading. The teacher observations also showed a significant decrease in student off-task behaviors during silent reading time. Therefore, we think silent reading with teacher/student conferencing shows lasting benefits in students' reading abilities and motivation for reading. Due to the purposeful inclusion of silent reading with conferencing, our Action Research Plan demonstrates student growth with silent reading in the elementary classroom.

Before conducting our research, we noticed our students were not performing at their grade level in reading due to lack of motivation and engagement. We concluded this to be an ongoing problem because we are seeing these issues at both the second and fifth grade level. In second grade the students were struggling to maintain reading stamina and had a hard time choosing books at their reading level. With these early readers already lacking an interest in reading, it motivated us to want to change their attitudes and work with them to become lifelong readers. The fifth grade students seemed uninterested in reading for pleasure, unable to understand the importance of choosing books at their appropriate reading level, and the benefits of choosing books from a variety of genres. The purpose of our research is to determine what effect silent reading and changes in instructional strategies has on student motivation and engagement in reading.

In our classrooms, we have found students who are unmotivated and unengaged during silent reading time. In order to increase student motivation and engagement we have integrated new strategies based on the best practices identified in our literature review. As teachers, motivating students to read is a constant struggle at all grade levels, and a problem in many classrooms. Our research in reading emphasizes the importance of strategies, interventions, data, and facts, which can be used to motivate students to become engaged readers inside and outside of school. Using these instructional strategies increases the potential for creating lifelong readers. Student motivation and engagement are correlated to silent reading time in the classroom and teacher/student conferencing (Marshall, 2012). Arrowsmith's (2012) research shows the importance of monitoring students' reading behaviors, giving feedback by conferencing with them, and having students choose self-selected books at their level.

Brozo and Flynt (2008) found a variety of strategies helped motivate students to read. They discussed the importance of creating lifelong readers, and that these students need to be engaged, and have an interest in both reading and learning. In order to accomplish this, Brozo and Flynt (2008) suggest teachers can use the following six principles to help their instructional practices to help motivate and engage their students: (a) elevating self-efficacy; (b) engendering interest in new learning; (c) connecting outside with inside school literacies; (d) making an abundance of interesting texts available; (e) expanding choices and options, and structuring collaboration for motivation.

Towell, (2000) explains several ways teachers could use music to motivate students to read. Towell provides examples of picture books made from songs, picture books written by musicians, books for mood music, and books with musical themes. For example, “Down by the Bay” by Raffi could be used to help children with phonemic awareness or let them create new rhyming words to the music (Towell, 2000). Towell also suggests playing music before reading a story to the students to get them excited about the story (2000). One example would be to play sounds from a rainforest if you were going to read the book “A Walk in the Rainforest” by Kristin Joy Pratt (Towell, 2000). By incorporating music with reading it can help teach those hard to reach students, motivate those students who are not interested in reading, and help struggling readers relate a book to a song.

Keaton, Palmer, Nicholas, & Lake (2007) found positive correlations between promoting literacy in developing readers and using active participation to increase their motivation for reading and writing. These authors researched the question: Will direct

instruction in letter sound associations, blending sounds, and segmenting sounds in words- followed by playful extensions- assist students in identifying letter sounds, developing a sight vocabulary, and increasing the number of correct spelling approximations in writing (Keaton et al., 2007). Keaton successfully gained data about her students and used results to help her teaching practice. These results showed students made exceptional growth in both identifying sounds and increasing the number of correct spelling approximations in writing during the three months of additional direct instruction (Keaton et al., 2007).

Padak & Potenza-Radis (2010), suggest strategies to use when working with students who are not motivated about reading and used a third grade class for their research. The first step in achieving student desire with reading is for teachers to develop a classroom that focuses on purposeful and authentic reading (Padak & Potenza-Radis, 2010). With this, teachers need to get to know their students and be there for them to help them understand the value of reading. The next phase is for teachers to make time in the busy day to encourage students' love for reading. Time is always valuable to teachers, but research shows by making time for students to read can help them immensely. The final key to success for teachers is to include peer-led literature discussion groups, to help support students' reading skills. A few ways to incorporate student discussion groups into the classroom would be to have a whole group discussion with the same text, small group discussion with the same text, or small group discussion with a different text (Padak & Potenza-Radis, 2010).

Al-Hazza, (2010) discussed the problem of students not wanting to read books and instead just flipping through the pages unengaged. The study provides strategies to

include multicultural literature, mainly Middle Eastern, into the classroom to enhance student engagement in reading. Teachers can use this literature to help students learn about the Middle Eastern and other cultures. Our American classrooms are becoming more diverse, and it is important we are accepting this and showing this in our classroom libraries, which provides the students more of a range and interest of reading (Al-Hazza, 2010). Comparing and contrasting are tools teachers use, and by having books from other cultures would give students a chance to see the similarities and differences between these characters and ones they have read about in the past.

Espiritu (2002) emphasizes the importance of classroom environment and the influence it has on literacy learning at any grade level. Every classroom should have age-appropriate children's books, space for small group reading with children, and teachers positively role-modeling appropriate reading behaviors. If not, the teacher should consider making these changes to help meet the needs of the students. To promote a literacy environment, teachers are encouraged to create a warm and inviting child-centered space and establish a "print-rich" classroom with books in all areas. Designating wall space to display children's work encourages students to read each other's work and feel confident about their reading and writing skills (Espiritu, 2002).

Marshall (2012) states balanced literacy instruction may be a new concept for many teachers. Teachers, administrators, and parents have many questions about balanced literacy, which has been around for decades. Balanced literacy is a balance between both whole language and phonics, which are incorporated into a literacy program that aims to guide students toward proficient and lifelong reading. It is a framework for reading instruction and involves reading to students, independent reading,

and reading with students. There are five components of balanced literacy instruction: teacher read alouds, guided reading, shared reading, independent reading, and word study. Many teachers and parents support the possibilities that balanced literacy instruction could bring for students. The balanced literacy approach is a way for teachers to compromise with students' abilities and interests in reading (Marshall, 2012).

Baumann, Hooten, and White (1999) conducted a year-long action research study involving fifth grade students. During the study, two fifth grade teachers and an education professor introduced trade books into their curriculum and used them to teach students a variety of reading comprehension strategies. The teachers' initial concerns included students' difficulty with searching for information in text, interrelating ideas, making generalizations, and understanding complicated information (Baumann et al., 1999). They decided to base their study on three components: a literature-based framework, contextually-based comprehension instruction, and culturally relevant teaching. Using these strategies they were hoping to answer two questions: What are the fifth graders' attitudes towards reading and literature as a result of our program and what is the fifth graders' reading comprehension development as a result of our program? As a result of the study, Baumann et al., (1999) found students reported reading more, and demonstrated enhanced appreciation for reading. Students showed evidence of learning new reading strategies and applying learned comprehension strategies independently. Students were able to talk and write about what they read in a meaningful way. Throughout the project, students were not the only ones learning. The teachers reported they grew as teachers and researchers as well and stated that action research can be very time consuming and hard work, but observing student growth and success are worth it all.

Arrowsmith (2012) states that teachers must continue to find innovative ways to teach students how to read, but also need to promote the why of reading. Three intrinsic motivations for students' reading are: being fully engaged in a good book, reading about topics that interest them, and incorporating meaningful opportunities to talk about books. Motivators for students include building their self-confidence as a reader, introducing a variety of comprehension strategies to help students understand what they are reading, allowing students to make choices for their reading, giving frequent feedback, and connecting reading to their personal interests. Students who are motivated and engaged in their reading increase their comprehension and improve reading skills (Arrowsmith, 2012). This will connect to the students' overall success inside and outside of school.

Dreher (1999) reports that it has been estimated that 90% of what is read by elementary school children is in narrative form. This has created an imbalance between fiction and nonfiction reading in elementary school and a lack of ability with expository or nonfiction text for students. Children should be exposed to nonfiction text through read alouds, self-selecting books, and having a variety of reading materials accessible in the classroom. When reading aloud, teachers should expose children to a variety of texts, which will spark student interest and motivate them to read similar material. During silent reading time, students should read self-selected books and encouraged to read fiction and nonfiction texts. Keeping a reading log is a helpful way to monitor the balance of different types of texts and gives students a sense of accomplishment (Dreher, 1999).

During our six week action research study, we investigated our question within our own classrooms. These rooms consisted of 18 second graders and 19 fifth graders

who were involved in thinking about their silent reading practices and invited into dialogue with their teacher about reading interests and feelings. During our study, we implemented a variety of strategies in hopes of improving our students' motivation and engagement in reading including teacher/student conferences (one-on-one discussions about students' reading progress), book talks, book lists, and helping students choose appropriate books from a variety of genres (Padak, 2010). Also, we had time built into our schedules each day to encourage and support our students' reading, by having class discussions about books, having a variety of texts available that interest our students, and sharing their feelings about the books they are reading. We discovered these strategies to be the most beneficial to help our students see the importance of reading every day and become life-long readers (Padak, 2010).

The question we focused on during our study is: What effect will silent reading with teacher/student conferencing have on student motivation and engagement in second and fifth grade? We hoped we would see an improvement in our students' overall interest and engagement in reading as a result of our interventions.

Research Process

Our first step was to have students complete a reading interest questionnaire (Appendix A). The questionnaire consisted of six short questions referring to students' reading interests. While creating this survey, we wanted all of our students to be able to understand the questions so we used familiar language similar to what we had been using in our classrooms. We gave the same survey to both of our classes in order to gather similar data. The first question we asked our students was their favorite reading genre. We included the following genres for the students to choose from: Realistic Fiction,

Fantasy, Fairy Tales, Scientific Fiction, Mystery, Informational, Historical Fiction, Poetry, or Other. The second question we asked our students was if they preferred reading books in a series, non-series, or both types of books. The third question asked students what their favorite topics were to read about: animals, people, comic books, science, places, or other. The fourth question asked the students to write the title and author of the book they were currently reading. The fifth question asked the students to write what they thought they were best at as a reader. For the sixth and final question, we asked the students if they enjoyed reading by marking yes, no, or sometimes. The results of this questionnaire helped us identify our students' reading interests and what strategies we could use to help motivate these students to be lifelong readers.

Next, we had our students complete a STAR Literacy Test through Accelerated Reader, a computerized reading program used within our district. This test was used as a baseline and post-intervention assessment of students' reading level. STAR is a multiple choice timed test consisting of 34 questions. Once the students complete this test, scores are broken into specific domains. These domains include phonics and word recognition, key ideas and details in literature, craft and structure in literature, range of reading and level of text complexity in literature, key ideas and details in informational text, craft and structure in informational text, range of reading and level of text complexity in informational text, and vocabulary acquisition and use in language. These domains relate to the MN English Language Arts Standards in Reading. Scores from the test also provide students' Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), which is the targeted readability level of books. Students should read books within this range in order to gain the most growth through reading, without the books being too easy or too difficult for the student.

This is the data we chose to use from this Star Literacy Test; however, there are many additional reports that can be used to show our students' strength and weaknesses in reading.

Another part of Accelerated Reader we chose to use with our students for our study was Renaissance Learning, which provides a comprehension quiz for students to take after finishing a book. With this quiz, the students get immediate feedback on the quiz they took. Students and teachers are able to see progress on quizzes passed. We chose to have our students keep a record of their reading comprehension quizzes they passed by recording them on an ongoing reading log (Appendix B). The students were able to take quizzes based on books they were reading at home and at school during silent reading time.

Our students also completed a timed reading fluency check before, during, and after our study. The fluency checks consisted of a one minute "cold" read (a new passage students had not seen before) of a short reading passage. The students' fluency scores reflected how many words were read within the one minute time frame, including mistakes. These checks were given to the students weekly, and increase in difficulty as the year progresses. These fluency checks are an assessment tool used with our reading curriculum. Throughout the six week study, we charted the students' progress to see their improvements in reading fluency over time.

During the six weeks of our study, we completed daily teacher observation notes during our silent reading time to see which students are on task and off-task. Off-task behaviors were also documented to see if students were unable to focus on reading their book, unable to read the entire time frame without looking or walking around the room,

leaving the room for a drink or bathroom break on a regular basis, talking to others, and if they were unable to select a book in a timely manner (not spending more than five minutes choosing a book).

For the study, our students read silently for 20-30 minutes a day 4-5 times a week. After silent reading, students participated in book talks, partner sharing, and discussions about the books they were reading. During their silent reading time, students participated in student/teacher conferences at least once a week (Appendix B). Each week, information about our students' reading skills, type of books being read, and their thoughts and feelings towards reading were recorded in a conference log.

The questionnaire, STAR literacy test, and timed fluency check were repeated at the conclusion of the study to determine any changes in reading interests and proficiency. The Accelerated Reader quizzes were used to track student progress on reading comprehension and determine improvements in selecting a variety of appropriate texts. In the appendix you will find our questionnaire (Appendix A), student Accelerated Reader record sheet (Appendix B), observation checklist (Appendix C), and student/teacher reading conference log (Appendix D).

Analysis of Data

For our action research project, we used several different techniques to collect data to see whether silent reading with teacher/student conferencing has an effect on students' motivation and engagement in reading. The tools we used to monitor our students' progress were the Star Literacy Test, Reading Interest Questionnaire, fluency checks, teacher observation checklist, teacher reading conference log, and student Accelerated Reader record sheet.

The first data collected was from the Star Literacy Test. This test was given to the students the first day of our six week project, and then again on the last day. We used this test throughout the year to analyze how our students are progressing in reading proficiency. There are four different levels the students can be placed into based on their Star Reading score. The lowest to highest scale scores are identified as Urgent Intervention, Intervention, On Watch, and At/Above Benchmark. Before implementing our reading strategies, in second grade there were three students at the Urgent Intervention level, two students at the Intervention level, one student On Watch, and the majority (12) of the students At/Above Benchmark. In fifth grade there were two students in the Urgent Intervention level, three students in Intervention, four students On Watch, and over half (10) of the class At/Above Benchmark before our interventions began. In Figure 1, the data represented shows where students are on the benchmark scale. This scale is taken directly from the Student Diagnostic Report within the Star Reading Enterprise Test.

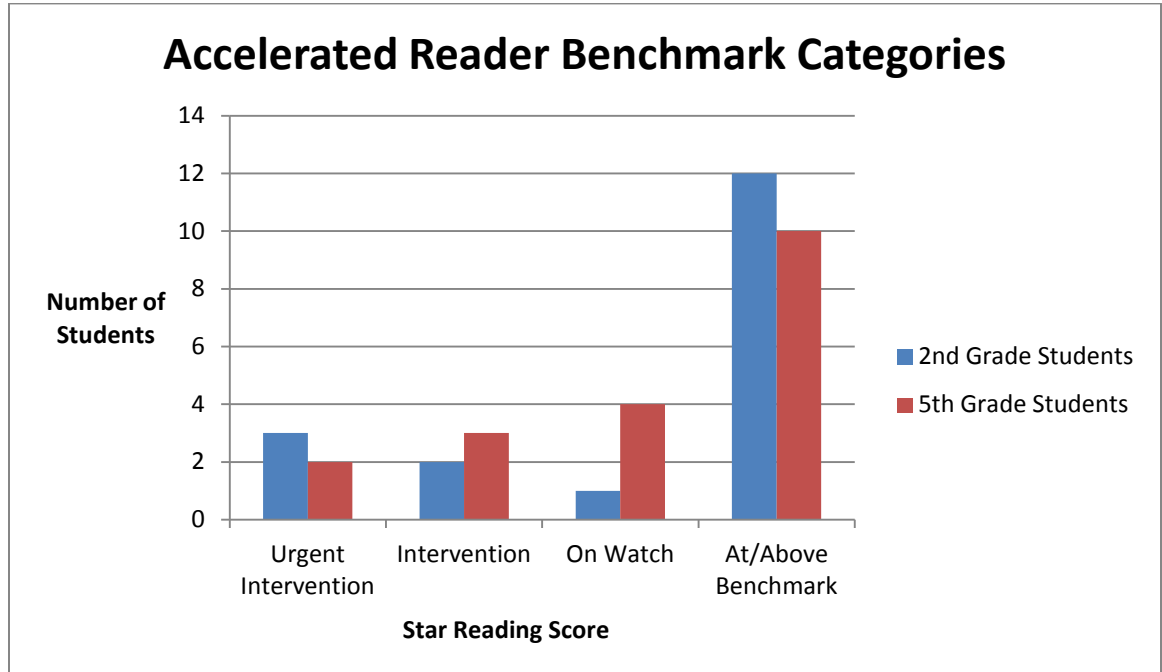


Figure 1. Accelerated Reader Benchmark Assessment Scores for Star Literacy Test Before Reading Interventions

The next data source, the Reading Interest Questionnaire, was used to identify the students’ reading interests. We gave the students this questionnaire before we began our reading interventions aligned with our action research project and again after the interventions. We asked the students several questions based on the types of books they like to read and whether or not they enjoy reading. Before our strategies were implemented, only one student said they did not enjoy reading, six students said they sometimes enjoyed reading, and 12 said they enjoyed reading. In the fifth grade, there were only two students who did not enjoy reading, five students who sometimes enjoyed reading, and 12 enjoyed reading before the reading methods were

put into place.

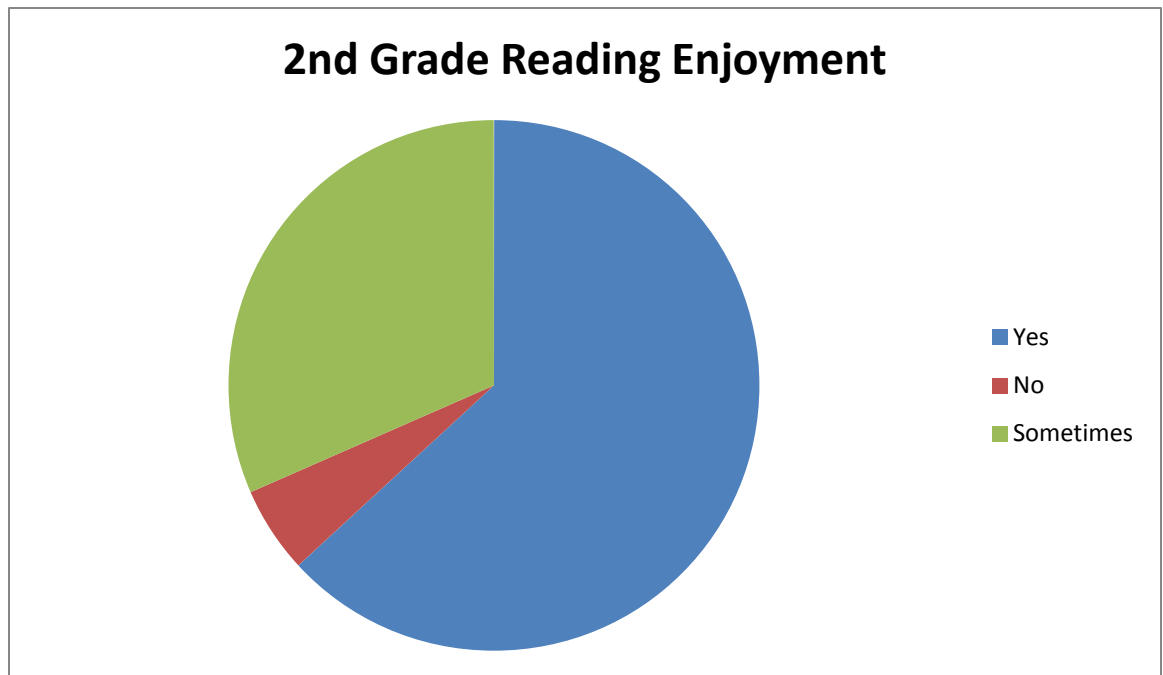


Figure 2. Second Grade Student Interest Questionnaire Results Before Reading Interventions

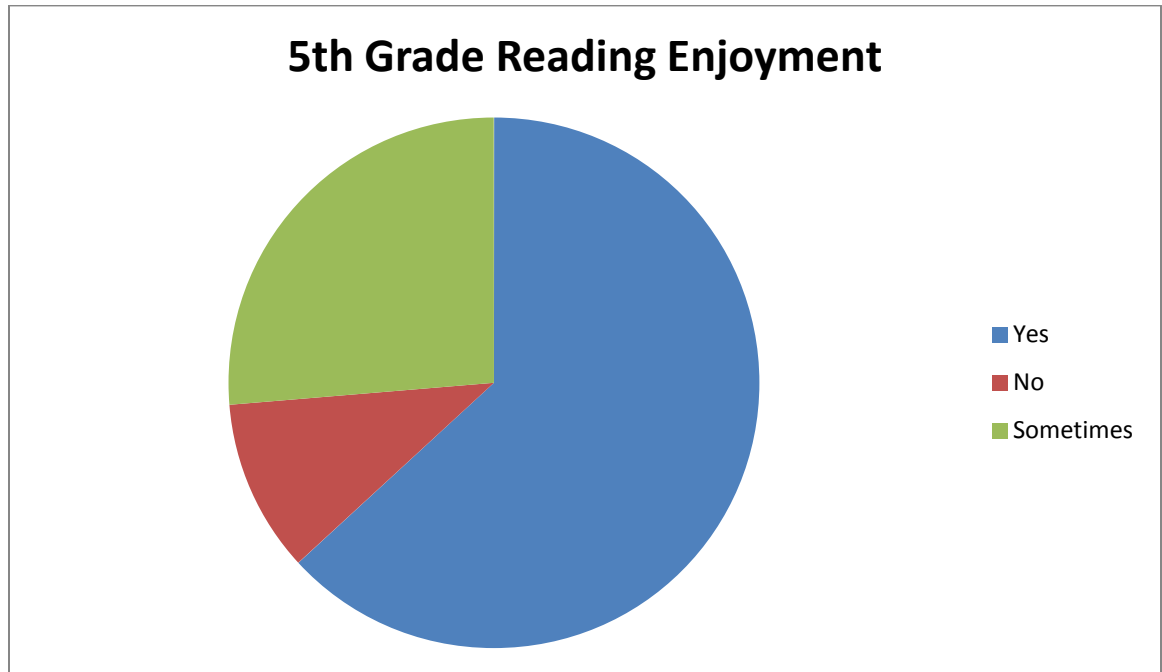


Figure 3. Fifth Grade Student Interest Questionnaire Results Before Reading Interventions

During the six week study, students' off task behavior was tracked. As the study progressed, there was a definite drop in our students' off task behavior. The student behaviors that were observed were students unable to choose a book quickly, students not focused or engaged in reading, students not able to read for the entire 20-30 minutes, students walking around the room or asking to leave, and students looking around the room or talking to others. We chose to focus on the area of students not able to read for the entire 20-30 minutes for our graph to see how our students improved on their reading stamina. Figure 4 shows the results for second and fifth grade off task behaviors during our silent reading time. This information was documented daily using a teacher

observation checklist.

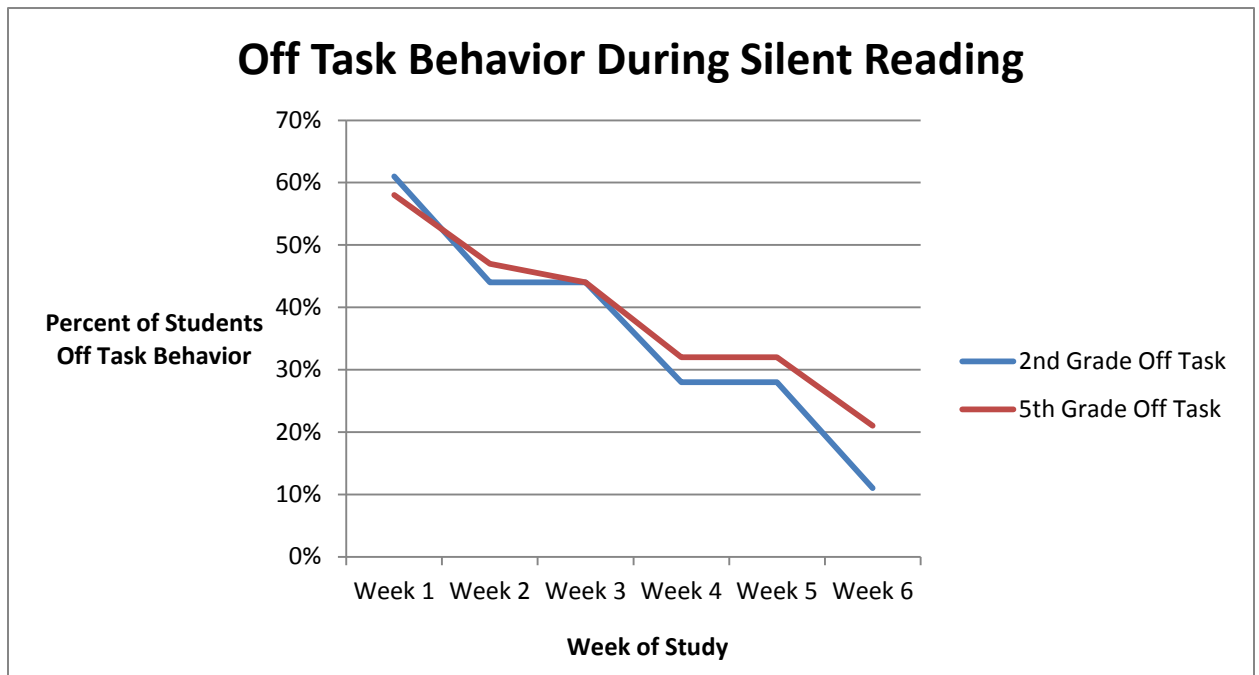


Figure 4. Off Task Student Behavior During Silent Reading Throughout Our Six Week Study

We used our STAR Literacy Test to figure out our students' Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), which gives us our students' reading level. This information is taken from the same Accelerated Reader STAR Literacy Test that also gave us their Benchmark score. Before the interventions, the second grade students' ZPD mean was 3.09, median was 3.15, and mode was 3.15. The fifth grade students' ZPD mean was 4.45, median was 5.3, mode was 3.25 before their interventions started. This information is shown in Figure 5 for second grade, and Figure 6 for fifth grade.

The graphs in Figure 5 and Figure 6 show the students' Zone of Proximal Development after our six week reading interventions were put into place. The results for the second grade students' ZPD mean was 3.37, median was 3.25, mode was 3.55 after their interventions started, which showed improvements. The fifth grade ZPD mean was 5.85, median was 5.7, and mode was 4.65 at the end of the six week study, which showed students made adequate gains in their reading levels.

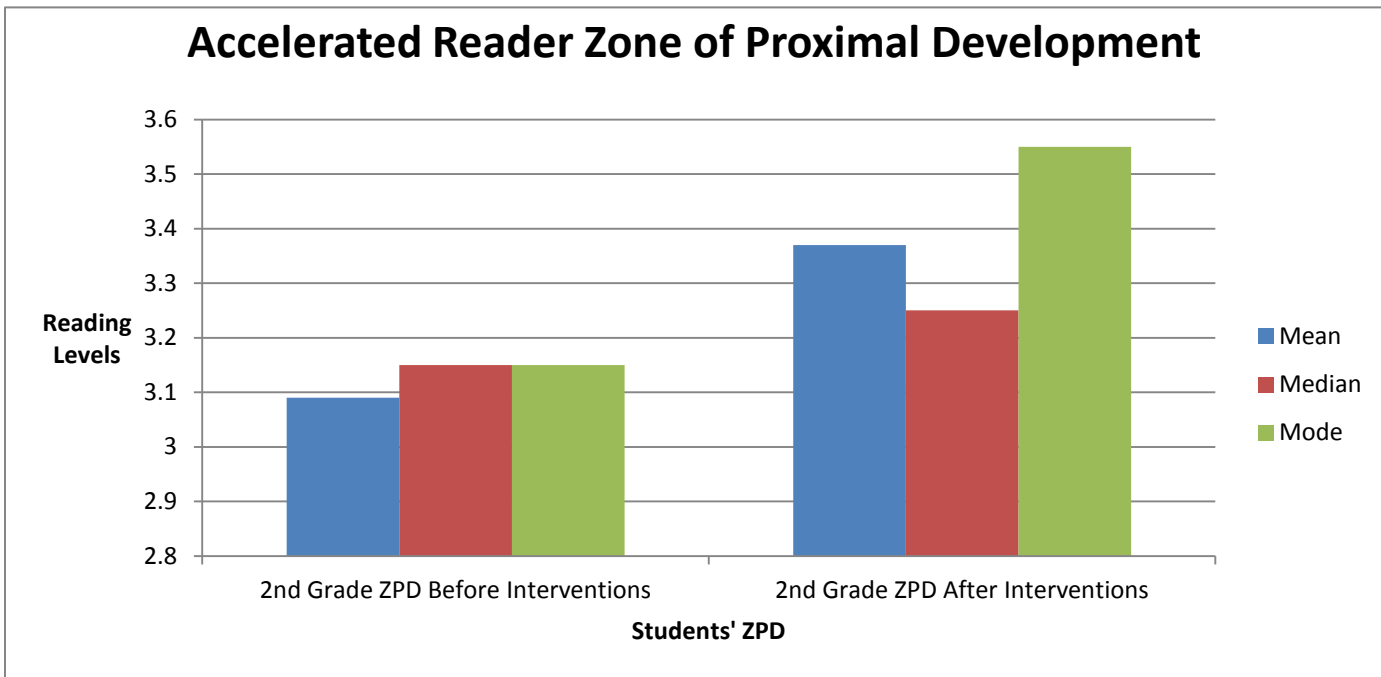


Figure 5. Accelerated Reader Zone of Proximal Developments

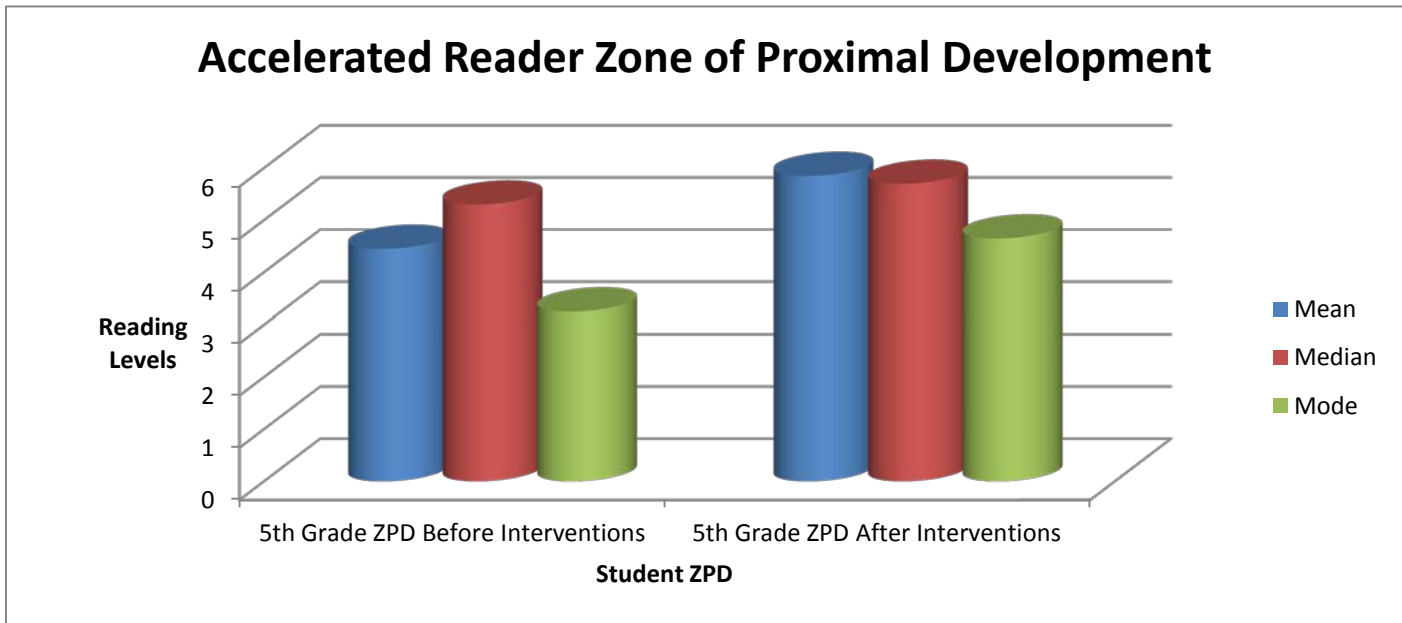


Figure 6. Accelerated Reader Zone of Proximal Developments

After our six week intervention, we had our students take the Accelerated Reader Star Literacy Test again to see if our students' Benchmark score increased. In second grade, 14 out of the 18 students scored in the At/Above Benchmark category after the reading interventions, an increase of 12%. In fifth grade, 13 out of the 19 students scored in the At/Above Benchmark category following the six week intervention study, an increase of 16%. Overall, the majority of our students improved by moving to the At/Above Benchmark category based on the STAR Literacy Test. The information before our reading strategies were implemented can be viewed in Figure1, and Figure 7 shows the data after.

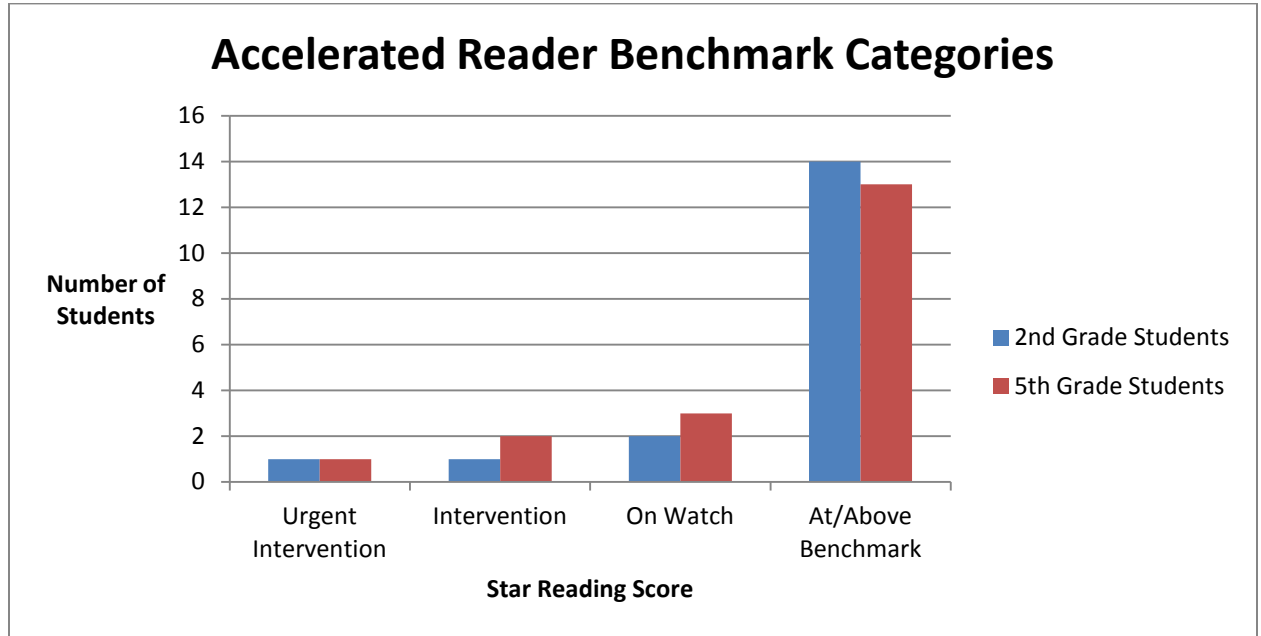


Figure 7. Accelerated Reader Benchmark Assessment Scores for Star Literacy Test
After Reading Interventions

When our reading intervention study concluded, we had our students take the Reading Interest Questionnaire again to see if our students' answers would change or stay the same on whether they enjoyed reading. Our results shown in Figure 8 show 16 students enjoy reading, one student does not enjoy reading, and one student sometimes enjoys reading after the interventions in second grade. In fifth grade, Figure 9 shows that 15 students enjoy reading, one student does not enjoy reading and three sometimes enjoy reading.

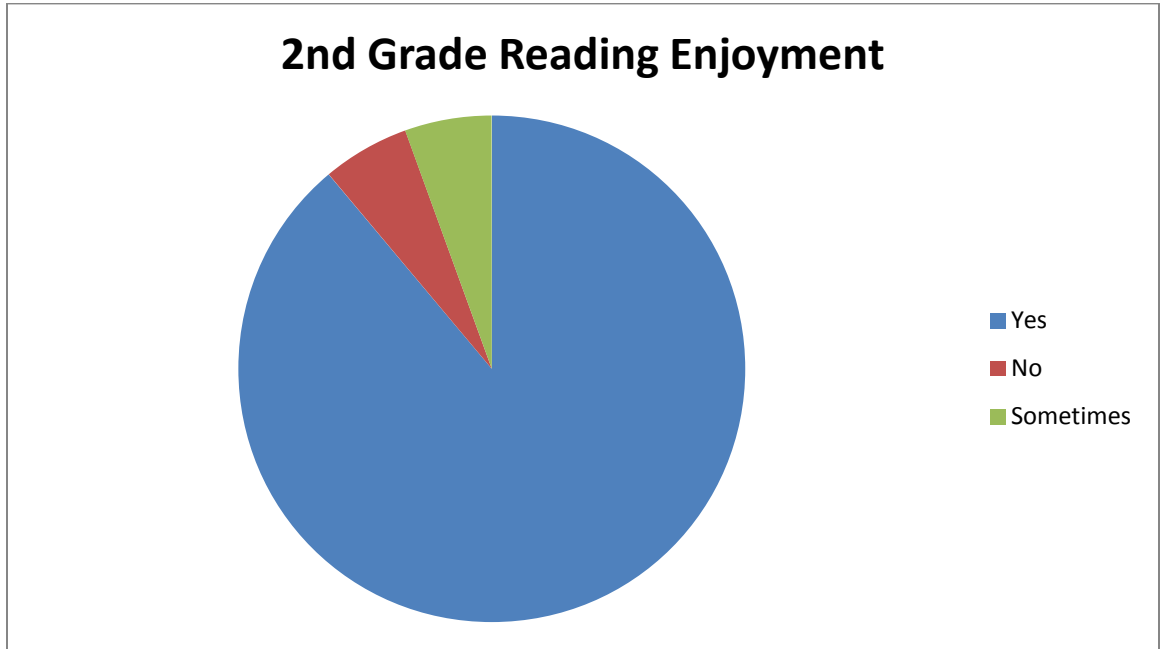


Figure 8. Second Grade Student Interest Questionnaire Results After Reading Interventions

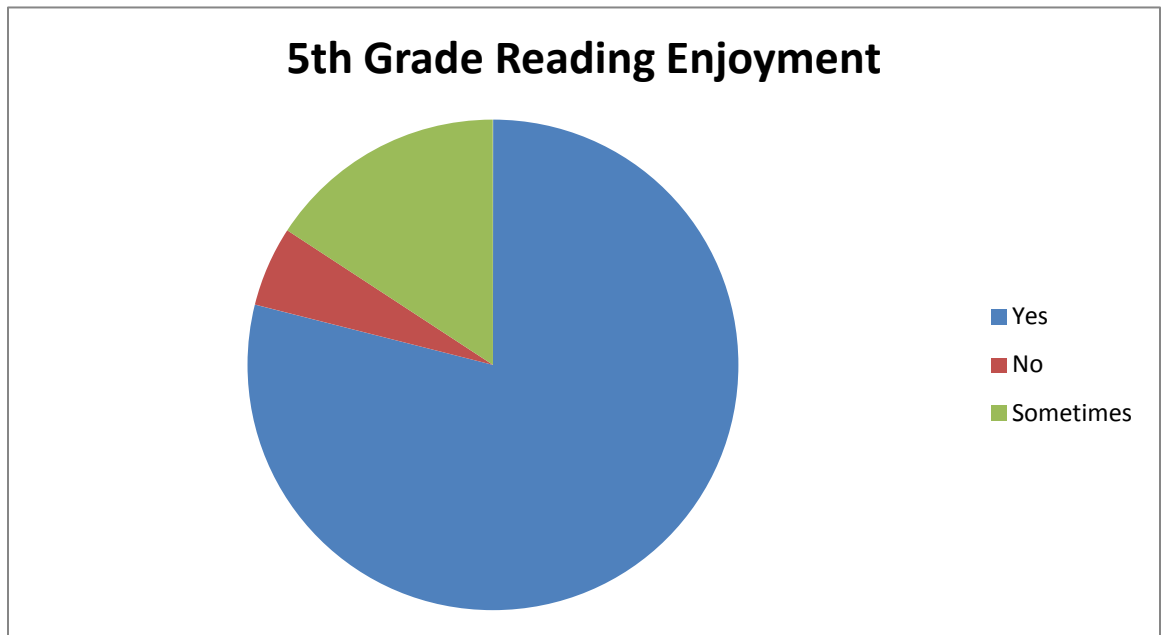


Figure 9. Fifth Grade Student Interest Questionnaire Results After Reading Interventions

In conclusion, each of our data sets shows a positive relationship between student achievement and silent reading with teacher/student conferencing. By having the students take the Accelerated Reader Star Literacy Test before and after our six week reading intervention, we were able to see exactly how each student progressed during this time in their Benchmark category and their Zone of Proximal Development. The Student Interest Questionnaire was also given at the beginning and ending of our study, and for our data we only focused on our students' answers on if they enjoy reading. After our implementation, 89% of the second grade class said they enjoyed reading and 79% of the fifth grade said they enjoyed reading, which goes right along with our objective of having our students motivated and engaged in reading. By graphing our students' off task behavior during the six weeks, we were able to see how the percentage of students' off task decreased over time. By looking at the different charts and graphs, it is easy to see the progress our students made during the six weeks we implemented our action research project reading strategies.

Action Plan

Our research study has shown the benefits of silent reading for 20-30 minutes each day with teacher/student conferencing. When looking at our data results we collected over our six week study, our interventions were proven effective and support this new reading strategy we implemented. By choosing a variety of assessments, we were able to see student growth in a variety of ways. It has encouraged us to continue using these teaching practices to benefit our students' learning.

When looking at our positive results we gained from our action research study, we both can see the benefits of using these reading strategies in the future. Based on our data,

it appears that the majority of students increased their reading levels, increased their reading stamina and time on task during silent reading, and found reading to be more enjoyable. This research project has made us realize that our teaching instruction needs to include time for silent reading and teacher/student conferencing every day. Before this study, we did not understand the importance of giving students a structured reading environment with no interruptions, allowing students to self-select their books, and giving them a chance to share their interests and knowledge about the books they chose.

Our results have inspired us to change our teaching practices by implementing the strategies used in this study at the beginning of the school year, and continuing to monitor each student's success throughout the year. This will allow our students to know and understand the expectations during silent reading time, and feel more comfortable using these reading skills independently. It would be beneficial to see the growth our students would make over the entire school year, and be able to share this information with the students, parents, teachers, and administration. Having this data available throughout the year would give us an opportunity to show parents the importance of reading, and share strategies that can be used at home to support student learning.

There were a few limitations that could have impacted our study, which we would also change in our teaching practices. Our school believes in teaching to the whole child, so we are required to teach the core subjects of Reading and Math and also allow time for Science, Social Studies, Health, Music, Art and Physical Education on a daily basis. With this, our Reading instruction time is limited to 60 minutes so in the past, our silent reading time was the first area to shorten or eliminate. Now that we have seen the evidence to support our interventions, we understand the importance of always allowing

time for silent reading in our daily routine. By implementing this set time for silent reading, our teaching instruction is more student focused and centered directly around the learning goals for each student, rather than whole group instruction and repetitive worksheets.

Since our school has preschool through twelfth grade students all in the same building, our research could have a positive impact on our students' motivation and appreciation for reading. If our data and reading strategies were shared and implemented by our entire staff, we could see possible gains in student learning over their whole school career. By using our common assessment tools, we would be able to monitor students' reading progress throughout their education.

We have discussed several changes we would make with our STAR Literacy Test. The first change we would make is to have our students take the test every month in order to monitor their progress more frequently. We would also like to improve our communication to our students and parents with this information, and make sure we are explaining all of the components of this test to them so they are able to understand what is being assessed. This could also help parents work with their child on specific reading skills at home.

The Reading Questionnaire we used for our study was given to the students before and after our research process. In the future, we would like to give this questionnaire to our students at the beginning, middle, and end of the year. By doing this, we believe we would be able to see how our students' enjoyment and motivation towards reading increases as we are implementing our reading strategies during the school year. The questionnaire would give students the opportunity to share the types of books they

enjoy with us, which would allow us to choose appropriate books for our classroom libraries and activities.

We had our students complete the AR Record Sheet during our study to keep track of the books they were reading and took AR quizzes on. Next year, we will implement the AR Record Sheet at the beginning of the year and check each student's progress at the end of each quarter to make sure they are on track. With this, we could also set individual AR reading goals and have rewards for those students who reach their goal at the end of each quarter for extra motivation.

For future action research investigation, we would like to continue using these reading strategies and implementation of silent reading with teacher/conferencing. One area we believe needs to be incorporated into our study is writing. With the new Common Core State Standards, writing is a key component of the Language Arts requirements. By including writing with silent reading would be one way to give students a focus for their reading, and also help us cover the required standards. This would also be a way for us to measure the students' comprehension on the books they are reading. Incorporating writing would give students a chance to make connections with the reading skills that they are learning in class, and applying them into real life examples.

In conclusion, we have found silent reading with teacher/student conferencing to be very powerful when used in a purposeful way. Having our results come from second and fifth grade, we have seen success at both grade levels. This gives us confidence that any student can grow in their reading skills with the implantation of the strategies we used for our action research study. Through classroom observation, teacher/student

conferencing, and questionnaires we have seen our students' enjoyment for reading increase, which we believe will create life-long readers.

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Appendix A

Reading Interest Questionnaire

1. What are your favorite reading genres? (check all that apply)
 - Realistic Fiction
 - Fantasy
 - Fairy Tales
 - Scientific Fiction
 - Mystery
 - Informational
 - Historical Fiction
 - Poetry
 - Other

2. I prefer to read stories in a series or not a series? (choose one)
 - Series
 - Non-series
 - Both

3. What are your favorite topics to read about? (check all that apply)
 - Animals
 - People
 - Comic books
 - Science
 - Places
 - Other

4. What book are you reading right now?
Title: _____ Author: _____

5. What do you think you are best at as a reader?

6. Do you enjoy reading?
 - Yes
 - No
 - Sometimes

Appendix B

AR Record Sheet

Date	Book Title	Book Author	Quiz Score	Would you recommend this book? Y or N
1.				
2.				
3.				
4.				
5.				
6.				
7.				
8.				
9.				
10.				
11.				
12.				
13.				
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