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# The Effects of Choice on Reading Comprehension in 2nd-3rd Grade

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The Effects of Choice on Reading Comprehension in 2<sup>nd</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> Grade

An Action Research Report

Julie Fraumeni-McBride

The Effects of Choice on Reading Comprehension in 2<sup>nd</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> Grade

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In fulfillment of final requirements for the MAED degree

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### Abstract

Poor literacy rates are the cause of low school performance for children across America. In particular, low income schools continue to struggle with declining literacy rates. Issues with literacy are ultimately attributed to lack of comprehension during reading. This research tested the effects of choice on reading comprehension in 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> grade students at high and low income schools. In addition, students were monitored while reading silently and aloud to see if either had an effect on reading comprehension. Data was collected from 32 students from high and low income schools before, during and after reading in order to determine whether students comprehension levels were higher when they got to choose their reading selection or when they read an assigned reading. Trials were performed while reading silently and then aloud. Results indicated that students had higher comprehension levels when they were given the opportunity to choose their readings and when they were reading silently. Implications of the study suggest that schools can increase their students' comprehension in reading by allowing them to choose books they are interested in and be provided opportunities to read silently.

Children from various racial and socioeconomic backgrounds begin public school Kindergarten in the United States at age five or six. In the lower income areas in Chicago, Illinois, publicly funded pre-school programs are available to families whose income falls at or below the poverty line. Many of the children who come from a low socioeconomic status have difficulty succeeding in early childhood education, mainly because of failure in literacy (Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998; Dearing, Kreider, Simpkins & Weiss, 2006). Reading in the first years of early childhood education is the most important component of the curriculum, particularly in the elementary age groups (Strickland & Riley-Ayers, 2006). If a child is unable to read by elementary school, his or her performance in school is often negatively impacted (Alexander & Entwisle, 1998). Children are instructed in literacy according to the latest research, however literacy rates remain stagnant (Murnane, Sawhill & Snow, 2012). Further research is needed to corroborate which current methods best improve literacy (Sénéchal & Young, 2008). The grade level focused on in this review of the literature is 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> grade. In the study conducted, children were given either three choices or assigned a reading. They were also monitored while reading silently or aloud. Given a choice in reading, children may develop a sense of ownership and have higher comprehension rates when choosing their reading versus being assigned a reading.

## **Background**

The poor literacy rates are attributed to various factors such as income level, one of several factors that cannot adequately be addressed by a school's curriculum (Barnett, 1995). The mechanisms that enable a child to read successfully produce the best indicators of where a curriculum needs to focus. Research presents an array of valuable insights dissecting the important components of reading to teach in order for children to absorb literacy. Barriers to literacy are outlined by Stanovich (1986) in his seminal review of the literature, "Children with

inadequate vocabularies- who read slowly and without enjoyment- read less, and as a result have slower development vocabulary knowledge, which inhibits further growth in reading ability” (p.381). According to Gardiner (2005), reading is a life skill that students must come to enjoy otherwise it can be a major setback for their overall education. Children’s enjoyment of reading has an impact on their success in reading throughout all grade levels and into adulthood. For this reason, it is important to focus on how schools can help improve children’s enjoyment levels in reading during elementary school. This focus could help improve comprehension in literacy. My research project involved testing the effect of choice on children's reading comprehension and enjoyment. This literature review will examine current studies on choice, silent reading versus reading aloud, and measurements of reading comprehension.

### **Choices and Satisfaction**

There have been notable studies conducted related to choice and satisfaction. Iyengar and Lepper (2000), revealed that people are more likely to make a choice when offered a limited number of six choices (or less) rather than a more extensive number of 24 or 30. The study was conducted on various age groups in college. The participants were given topics to choose from for a college essay. A group was given a large number of choices (30) and another group had a small number of choices (six). Participants in this study later reported greater satisfaction with their selections when their original set of options had been limited. Although this study was conducted using college students, it is possible that similar results will be found with other age groups. This research supports the idea that having (reasonable numbers of) choices will improve the likelihood that participants will associate enjoyment with their decision. Having choices creates a feeling of ownership (Iyengar & Lepper, 2000).

A study conducted by Reibstein, Youngbood and Fromkin (1975) suggested similar results. College students were given choices in soft drinks. Those who had been given a greater

selection to choose from expressed higher levels of satisfaction with their choices as opposed to those with no choices. The study proved that having choices increases perceived freedom and therefore increased satisfaction with the participant's selection. Choice is an important and significant factor in individual satisfaction and could lead to further benefits if positivity is associated with choice. "When we give choices to students about their learning, selfdetermination, shared ownership, involvement, and motivation are all enhanced" (Vitto, 2003, p.110).

### **Reading Silently Versus Aloud**

Studies have shown evidence that favorable results exist in reading both silently and aloud. Wiesendanger and Birlem's study (as cited in Chou & Chow, 2000) revealed that nine of the 11 research studies they analyzed on elementary aged children presented evidence that students developed an increase in positive attitudes towards reading in schools with sustained silent reading (SSR). According to Krashen (as cited in Sanden, 2014) silent reading helps improve comprehension skills. The study showed that elementary age students in programs with SSR did as well as or better than students in traditional programs that test reading comprehension. Because the results cited by Sanden (2014) were close to neutral, more research is needed to determine if the SSR caused increased comprehension. The National Reading Panel (as cited in Hasbrouck, 2006) states that there is "insufficient support from empirical research to suggest that independent, silent reading helps students improve comprehension" (p.1).

Studies regarding reading silently (SSR) and reading aloud have conflicting outcomes. Because of the uncertainty in which type of reading is most effective for children's reading comprehension, both variables need to be further studied.

## Measures of Comprehension

Reading is an important part of early childhood curriculum and education. The overall goal of literacy is comprehension. A study by Burns and Snow (1999) revealed that comprehension refers to understanding spoken and written language. Language comprehension skills are the foundation of reading comprehension skills. As early as Kindergarten, teachers monitor students' oral language comprehension skills (Storch & Whitehurst, 2002). Checking children's understanding during and after reading so that they can develop these skills is important (Olofsson & Niedersoe, 1999). The two broad classes of skills that are important for later reading performance are code-related skills and oral language skills (Storch & Whitehurst, 2002; NICHD, 2005; Whitehurst & Lonigan, 1998). Because preschool age children are at the beginning stages of learning these skills, it is important to focusing on their oral language and comprehension. Oral language skills include "receptive and expressive vocabulary, syntactic and semantic knowledge and narrative discourse processes such as memory, comprehension and storytelling" (NICHD, 2005, p. 428). The important skills for the domain of oral language are vocabulary and comprehension. According to Epstein (2007), "reading comprehension improves when oral language in general is better" (p. 31). Hohmann (2005) states that "comprehension is the process of deriving meaning from action, speech, and text by connecting what you are learning to what you already know ... "Children make meaning by assimilating new information into previous understanding" (p. 2). Burns and Snow (1999) claim that comprehension during the preschool years means, "as children move from toddler-hood to school age they should increasingly be able to grasp the meaning of language they hear spoken in everyday conversation, as well as in narrative forms, such as books" (p.35). In order to gauge comprehension, teachers need to know how to measure it. Burns and Snow suggest that comprehension can be measured by monitoring children's reactions to the reading, "They show



this understanding through their questions and comments. When reading a story, they should freely relate information and events in the book to real-life experiences” (p. 35).

### **Conclusion**

The purpose of this literature review was to outline studies that support the major components of my action research project. Choice will be an important variable and perhaps a predictor of student enjoyment and increased level of comprehension in reading (Iyengar & Lepper, 2000). Monitoring children while reading silently and then aloud will help to rule out questions pertaining to impact that reading silently versus aloud has on enjoyment during reading (TNRP, 2006). The four measures (see appendices) used for comprehension will be an important tool to accurately assess student comprehension of the reading (Burns & Snow, 1999). Since enjoyment was projected to be the root to achieving higher levels of comprehension, the variable that instigated this change was giving children a choice, which is associated with greater enjoyment and satisfaction (Iyengar & Lepper, 2000; Reibstein, Youngblood & Fromkin, 1975). In order to eliminate bias, different sample groups will read aloud and silently. It was predicted that giving children choices in reading would lead to higher levels of reported enjoyment in reading. As a result, it was expected that comprehension levels would increase. The research suggests that choice may be an important factor in reading comprehension. This study attempted to discover whether choice has a positive effect on comprehension in 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> grade children in high and low income schools.

### **Methodology**

The study was conducted at two schools; a low income school and high income school in Chicago. Participants were randomly selected within each individual school. The participant’s ages were 8 to 9 years old. The study consisted of 10 males and 11 females at the high income school and 7 females and 4 males at the low income school. Overall, 32 students participated in

this study over a period of six weeks. Students were individually assessed outside of the classroom. Each student was first assigned a reading for which four different evaluations were conducted (see Appendices). After completing the assigned reading and completing the evaluations, students were given three books to choose from and the same evaluations were conducted after reading. For the first three weeks students would read the assigned and choice reading aloud and then the last three weeks of the study the children would also have assigned readings and choice readings that they would read silently. The children overall had a total of 12 readings over the period of the study, six of which were assigned and six of which were choice. Within those readings six were read aloud and six were read silently.

When children were assigned a reading they would be handed the book they were assigned to read and be instructed to read silently or aloud. They were also informed that they could ask any questions or make any comments before, during, or after the readings. As they were reading the researcher would evaluate perceived level of interest, focus, enjoyment and comprehension levels while reading on a scale of 1-10, 1 being the lowest and 10 being the highest (see Appendix C). An additional observation sheet was provided for the researcher to note any questions or comments made by the participant before, during and after the reading (see Appendix B). After completing the reading the participants were given a quiz about what they had read (see appendix D). After taking the quiz they had a series of questions for which they would rank on a scale of 1 to 5 in response to the questions with 1 being 'not at all' and 5 'all the time' (see Appendix A). Following this process, the child would be given three books to choose from to make a selection and the same process would be repeated. After completing the assigned and choice reading along with their assessment, children would be asked which reading they preferred as part of the data collection. Each child would complete this process once over a period of six weeks.

### **Analysis of Data**

The data was collected using test scores, researcher observations, self-assessments and a survey at the end of the study (see Appendices). Test scores were calculated based off of a six question quiz administered at the end of each reading (see Appendix D). The researcher observations were recorded before, during and after reading. The observations were based off of perceived student focus, interest, comprehension and enjoyment. The researcher indicated perceived focus, interest, comprehension and enjoyment levels on a scale of 1 to 10 for each area with 1 being the lowest score and 10 being the highest score (see Appendix C). The researcher also noted any questions or comments made before, during and after reading (see appendix B). Self-assessments were administered after each reading (see Appendix A). Students would rate themselves on a scale of 1 to 5 in response to statements about their interest in reading with 1 meaning “not at all” and 5 meaning “all the time”. They were asked questions relating to their enjoyment during reading, reading aloud, reading silently, and enjoyment related to school. Students were also asked whether they preferred the assigned or choice reading: this was a major indicator used in correlation to the other assessments to gauge whether or not choice had an effect on reading comprehension. Lastly, students were asked questions after completion of the study. These questions pertained to their interest in reading silently or aloud, and investigated what factors help them to read at home such as parent encouragement or amount of books available at home.

The acronym meanings for figures 1-4 and tables 1-3 can be found in Appendix E.

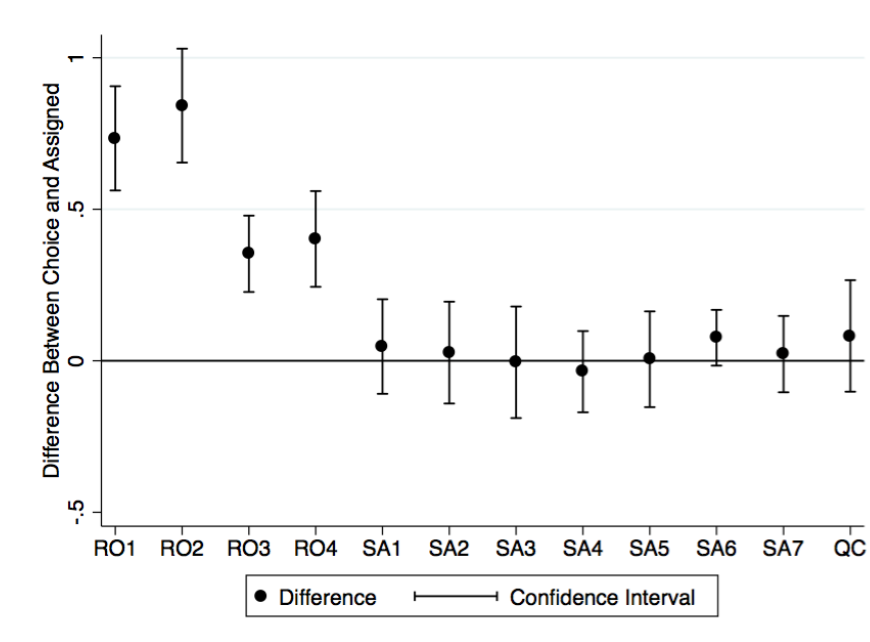


Figure 1. Difference Between Choices and Assigned Reading

Figure 1 looks at the effect of allowing students to choose the book they would like to read versus assigning students the book they will read. The x-axis shows the variables of interest. The y-axis shows the difference between when students get to choose and when they are assigned the book they read. The point of the graph plots the difference in the means for each of the variables between choosing and being assigned. The confidence interval shows the range in which we are 95 percent confident the really difference between the means lays in. If zero is in the confidence interval then the estimate is not statistically significant. If the zero is not in the confidence interval then the estimate is statistically significant. So the difference in the means between choosing and being assigned a book for RO1, RO2, RO3, and RO4 are statistically significant. And for SA1 through QC the difference is not statistically significant.

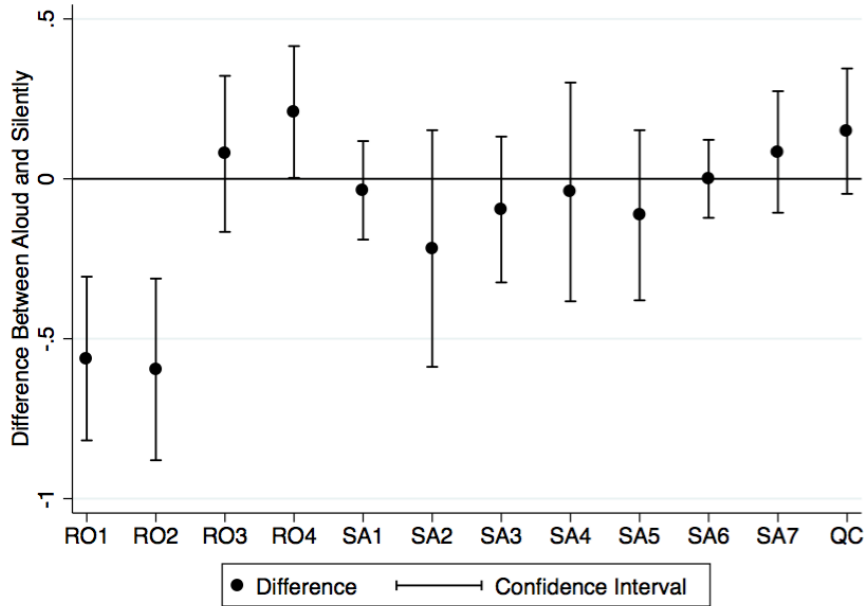


Figure 2. Difference Between Reading Aloud and Silently

Figure 2 looks at the effect of students reading aloud versus silently. The x-axis shows the variables of interest. The y-axis shows the difference between when students read aloud and when they read silently. The point of the graph plots the difference in the means for each of the variables between reading aloud and reading silently. The confidence interval shows the range in which we are 95 percent confident the really difference between the means lays in. If zero is in the confidence interval then the estimate is not statistically significant. If the zero is not in the confidence interval then the estimate is statistically significant. So the difference in the means between reading aloud and silently for RO1, RO2, and RO4 are statistically significant. And for RO3 and SA1 through QC the difference is not statistically significant.

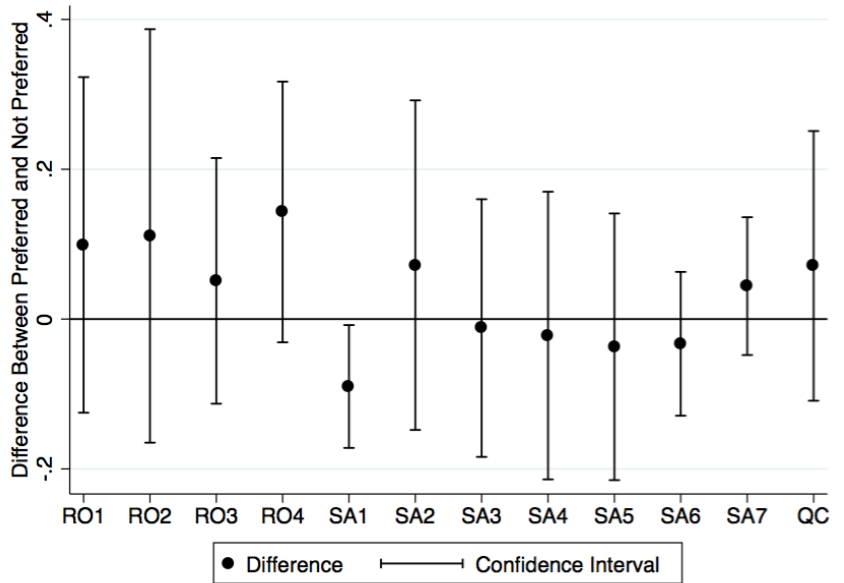


Figure 3. Difference Between Preferred and Not Preferred Reading

Figure 3 looks at the effect of students getting what they preferred (want choice and got choice or want assign and got assign) and not preferred (want choice but got assign or want assign but got choice). The x-axis shows the variables of interest. The y-axis shows the difference between when students got what they preferred and didn't get what they preferred. The point of the graph plots the difference in the means for each of the variables between getting what you preferred and not getting what you preferred. The confidence interval shows the range in which we are 95 percent confident the really difference between the means lays in. If zero is in the confidence interval then the estimate is not statistically significant. If the zero is not in the confidence interval then the estimate is statistically significant. So the difference in the means between choosing and being assigned a book for SA1 is statistically significant. And for all the other variables of interest, the difference is not statistically significant.

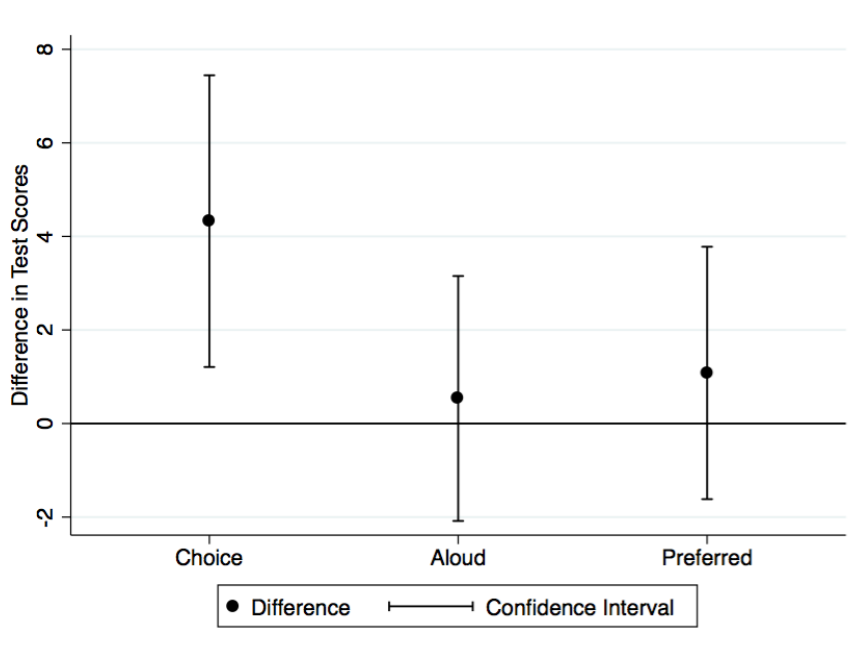


Figure 4. Difference in Test Scores

Figure 4 looks at the effect on test scores of choosing vs assigned, aloud vs silently, and preferred vs. not preferred. The y-axis shows the different in tests scores. On the x-axis, choice represents choice vs assigned, aloud represents aloud vs silent, and preferred vs not preferred. Reading aloud or having your preferred reading type did not statistically significantly effect the difference in student test scores. However, when students got to choose their book they statistically significantly score higher on their test.

The following tables correlate to the results in the figures. The first table gives the same results as figure 1, the second table is the same as figure 2, and the third table is the same as figure 3. The figure 4 gives the results for the tests scores for each of the three tables.

Table 1. Choice vs. Assigned Reading

Variable	Choice	Assigned	Difference	P-Value
testscore	90.386	86.060	4.326	0.009
ro1	7.739	7.005	0.734	0.000
ro2	7.489	6.647	0.842	0.000
ro3	8.283	7.929	0.353	0.000
ro4	8.543	8.141	0.402	0.000
sa1	4.506	4.459	0.047	0.553
sa2	3.250	3.223	0.027	0.747
sa3	4.239	4.245	-0.005	0.953
sa4	2.276	2.312	-0.036	0.601
sa5	3.897	3.891	0.005	0.946
sa6	4.647	4.571	0.076	0.109
sa7	4.234	4.212	0.022	0.733
qc	0.228	0.147	0.082	0.381
Observations	184	184		

Table 1 looks at the effect of allowing students to choose the book they would like to read versus assigning students the book they will read. Column 1 shows the variable of interest. Column 2 shows the mean of the variable of interest when students get to choose the book they want to read. Column 3 shows the mean of the variable of interest when students are assigned the book they will read. Column 4 shows the difference between the column 2 and column 3 (ie. the difference between choosing and being assigned a book). Column 5 shows the p-value for the



difference. If the p-value is below 0.05 then we say the difference between choosing and being assigned is statistically significant at the 95 percent confidence level. So for the first column when students get to choose the book they read they score 4.326 percentage points higher on the test than if they are assigned the book they read. This difference is statistically significant.

Table 2. Reading Silently vs. Aloud

Variable	Read Aloud	Not Read Aloud	Difference	P-Value
testscore	88.490	87.955	0.535	0.685
ro1	7.091	7.653	-0.562	0.000
ro2	6.770	7.366	-0.596	0.000
ro3	8.145	8.067	0.078	0.528
ro4	8.447	8.238	0.209	0.050
sa1	4.464	4.500	-0.036	0.644
sa2	3.127	3.345	-0.218	0.249
sa3	4.194	4.290	-0.096	0.406
sa4	2.274	2.315	-0.041	0.811
sa5	3.837	3.951	-0.114	0.396
sa6	4.609	4.609	0.000	1.000
sa7	4.265	4.181	0.084	0.387
qc	0.262	0.113	0.149	0.140
Observations	184	184		

Table 2 looks at the effect of having students read aloud or silently. Column 1 shows the variable of interest. Column 2 shows the mean of the variable of interest when students read aloud. Column 3 shows the mean of the variable of interest when students read silently. Column 4 shows the difference between the column 2 and column 3 (ie. the difference between reading

aloud or not). Column 5 shows the p-value for the difference. If the p-value is below 0.05 then we say the difference between choosing and being assigned is statistically significant at the 95 percent confidence level. So for the first column when students read aloud they score 0.535 percentage points higher on the test than when they read silently. However, this difference is not statistically significant.

Table 3. Student Preferences

Variable	Preferred	Not Preferred	Difference	P-Value
testscore	88.766	87.685	1.081	0.429
ro1	7.422	7.323	0.099	0.386
ro2	7.124	7.013	0.111	0.430
ro3	8.132	8.081	0.051	0.538
ro4	8.414	8.271	0.143	0.109
sa1	4.437	4.527	-0.090	0.035
sa2	3.272	3.201	0.072	0.520
sa3	4.236	4.248	-0.012	0.891
sa4	2.283	2.305	-0.022	0.820
sa5	3.875	3.913	-0.037	0.678
sa6	4.592	4.625	-0.033	0.497
sa7	4.245	4.201	0.044	0.348
qc	0.223	0.152	0.071	0.437
Observations	183	185		

Table 3 looks at the effect of having students given what they preferred or not (if they are given what they prefer then if they prefer choosing their book they get to choose and if they prefer being assigned then they are assigned). Column 1 shows the variable of interest. Column 2

shows the mean of the variable of interest when students get what they prefer. Column 3 shows the mean of the variable of interest when students don't get what they prefer. Column 4 shows the difference between the column 2 and column. Column 5 shows the p-value for the difference. If the p-value is below 0.05 then we say the difference between choosing and being assigned is statistically significant at the 95 percent confidence level. So for the first column when students get what they prefer they score 1.081 percentage points higher on the test than when they read silently. However, this difference is not statistically significant.

### **Action Plan**

The data that was collected and analyzed shows that when children are given a choice in reading they show higher scores in reading comprehension. The results also show that when children read silently they score higher in reading comprehension. Both high and low income schools were used in collecting data and the results were the same regarding the impact that choice and reading silently had on reading comprehension. Current practices in school literacy programs focus on assigned readings and often times children are put in positions where they are required to read aloud. The research produced from this study indicates that choice and reading silently are significant factors in reading comprehension scores. Because a major component of early childhood education focuses on reading comprehension, children should be given the opportunity to enjoy reading and take ownership in their own learning. This can be done by selecting worthwhile reading options for students to choose from and allowing them time to read independently. Future research is needed on what direct practices might improve phonics instruction and other mechanical aspects of literacy, however the results show a strong indication that comprehension is greatly influenced by the freedom to choose what book to read and by being given opportunities to reading silently.

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## Appendix A

## Enjoyment of Reading Self-Assessment

Students, please complete this assessment discussing your enjoyment of reading. Please make sure to answer each question by circling your choice from the scale. Please be honest, answers will not affect your grade in any way.

Participant: \_\_\_\_\_

	Not at all	A little	Some of the time	Most of the time	All the time
<b>I enjoy reading.</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>I enjoy reading aloud.</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>I enjoy reading silently.</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>It's hard for me to understand what is going on when I read.</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>I am interested in the books that I am assigned to read.</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>I can read well.</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>I enjoy going to school.</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>

Appendix B

Questions and Comments Made (To Measure Comprehension)

Book Choices Presented:

Book Choice Selection:

Participant: \_\_\_\_\_

**Silently Reading**

**Aloud Reading**

Before		
During		
After		

Researcher comments:



Appendix C

Researcher Observation/Journal of Child’s Interest Level During Reading Session

Participant: \_\_\_\_\_

Silently Reading

Reading Aloud

Child’s interest level on a scale of 1-10 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10	Child’s interest level on a scale of 1-10 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
Child’s enjoyment level on a scale of 1-10 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10	Child’s enjoyment level on a scale of 1-10 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
Perception of child’s comprehension level on a scale of 1-10 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10	Perception of child’s comprehension level on a scale of 1-10 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
Child’s focus during reading on scale of 1-10 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10	Child’s focus during reading on scale of 1-10 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
Comments:	Comments

## Appendix D

## SAMPLE READING QUIZ:

Book Title: A Cold Day

1. The story is mostly about...
  - A. a snow storm
  - B. cold weather
  
2. What does the boy do after he feels the tree?
  - A. he feels the fence
  - B. he feels the car
  
3. Which of the following words tells the setting?
  - A. today
  - B. feels
  
4. How does the tree feel?
  - A. warm
  - B. cold
  
5. Listen to this sentence: The door handle is cold.  
What is another word for handle?
  - A. knob
  - B. window

## Appendix E

RO1. Researcher Observation 1. Researcher recorded perception of child's interest level on a scale of 1-10

RO2. Researcher Observation 2. Researcher recorded perception of child's enjoyment level on a scale of 1-10

RO3. Researcher Observation 3. Researcher recorded perception of child's comprehension level on a scale of 1-10

RO4. Researcher Observation 4. Researcher recorded perception of child's focus during reading on a scale of 1-10

SA1. Self-Assessment 1. Child self-assessed statement: I enjoy reading (1-5)

SA2. Self-Assessment 2. Child self-assessed statement: I enjoy reading aloud (1-5)

SA3. Self-Assessment 3. Child self-assessed statement: I enjoy reading silently (1-5)

SA4. Self-Assessment 4. Child self-assessed statement: It's hard for me to understand what is going on when I read (1-5)

SA5. Self-Assessment 5. Child self-assessed statement: I am interested in the books that I am assigned to read (1-5)

SA6. Self-Assessment 6. Child self-assessed statement: I can read well (1-5)

SA7. Self-Assessment 7. Child self-assessed statement: I enjoy going to school (1-5)

Q/C. Questions and Comments. Number of questions or comments made before/during/after reading