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The Correlation Between Close Reading as an Instructional Strategy with Reading Comprehension in Elementary Schools

Daniel Angulo
Dominican University of California

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This thesis, written under the direction of the candidate's thesis advisor and approved by the program chair, has been presented to and accepted by the Department of Education in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science in Education.

Daniel Angulo
Candidate

Elizabeth Truesdell, PhD
Program Chair

Lynn Zimmerman
First Reader

Elizabeth Truesdell, PhD
Second Reader

The Correlation Between Close Reading as an Instructional Strategy with Reading
Comprehension in Elementary Schools

by

Daniel Angulo Villasenor

A culminating thesis submitted to the faculty of Dominican University of California in partial
fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science in Education

Dominican University of California

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Abstract

The purpose of this quantitative study was to analyze the effects of close reading instruction on students' reading comprehension. Close reading is an instructional strategy that allows students to dig deep into the reading and gain a profound understanding of the vocabulary, writing structure and author's message. The study consisted of a total of twenty-one 6th grade students who received close reading as an experimental treatment. The treatment included several components of close reading: essential questions, graphic organizers to compare short non-fiction stories, written analysis of author's point of view/theme and weekly tests. The treatment focused on having students reread, identify evidence from the text and draw inferences to understand the purpose of the reading. The group was monitored as they engaged in reading literature stories in the Wonders-McGraw Hill Reading program over a period of 5 weeks. Results of the study were obtained through a reading comprehension test that was part of the reading program, at the end of each week. The data was transferred into tables and graphs for analysis and discussion of the students' performance.

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Introduction

As summer winds down, a new school year begins. Elementary teachers spend numerous weeks assessing and diagnosing students' reading abilities at the beginning of the school year, but only to find out that students are not at grade level. One of the identified problems for why students are not at grade level in reading is due to the missing, or ineffective delivery of a teaching technique known as close reading. Close reading is a highly effective teaching technique that enforces vocabulary, fluency and reading comprehension. Although close reading has been commonly practiced at the high school and college level, it has yet to be integrated in elementary reading programs.

Summary of Research Methods

The purpose of the research was to study the correlation between close reading and reading comprehension of twenty-one 6th grade students from Anderson Valley Elementary School. The research analyzed the effectiveness of close reading techniques at two various time-periods: during, and after the reading of nonfiction literature stories. The research was conducted by the following sequence: first, students learned about an essential question and engaged in collaborative conversations. Secondly, they built graphic organizers, which identified the author's purpose and story's theme. Thirdly, writing literacy was measured through a writing rubric. The writing focused on a short analysis of two different texts. Finally, vocabulary fluency and comprehension summative assessments were analyzed to conclude the effect of close reading on students' literacy growth.

Statement of Purpose

California high schools and higher education institutions have practiced close reading for countless years. The California Common Core Standards (CACCS) in 2010 mandated new instructional initiatives that required elementary educators to build effective student reading literacy skills. Most recently, effective close reading teaching skills were successfully launched in several elementary language arts programs. Although close reading has not been well-established in all elementaries, it is imperative that close reading instructional strategies continue to be developed in elementary grades. It is fundamental for elementary students to practice close reading skills because it enhances students in gaining: comprehensive analysis, schema, rereading skills and vocabulary buildup, which offers the tools for students to be at grade level in reading.

Close reading stimulates students comprehension and analysis skills by teaching them to exam bodies of text, creating inferences, and initiating critical thinking. Comprehensive analysis enables students to identify author's purpose and find text evidence to support one's opinion. Dr. Douglas Fisher stated in his article, *Close Reading in Elementary Schools*, that teaching close reading required students to: "Identify their purpose for reading, determine the author's purpose for writing the piece, develop schema, understand systems of thought in disciplines," (Fisher, 2012). The stimulation and gains of close reading are vast, and play a significant role in students' literacy.

Close reading also aids students in building literacy skills like schema. Schema is a process which refers to making connections between what students already know to what they are learning. An example is displayed in, *The Mostly True Adventures of Homer P. Figg*, which is a Civil War historical fictional story. The schema process highlights that students have limited

Civil War personal experiences; however by reading the Civil War historical fiction story, students are able to apply what they are learning to what they already know. Schema skills are fundamental for students' reading literacy because it teaches students how to connect foreign concepts and ideas to what they already know.

A third factor of close reading best practice is the activation skill of re-reading. Re-reading builds reading fluency by having students recognize high-frequency words. An example is in reading an excerpt from *Warriors Don't Cry*. In this story, students can have a difficult time understanding words like integration in the first read. However, by revisiting and skimming the readings multiple times, students should become more familiar with the pronunciation and meaning of the words allowing them to read fluently.

Close reading enables students' vocabulary development. Increasing vocabulary is interpreted as having a wide variety of methods to express ideas. However, effective vocabulary instruction is also necessary. Dr. Donald R. Bear lists principles of academic vocabulary instruction as:

- Vocabulary learning is intertwined with concept development
- Vocabulary is learned in context
- Vocabulary is deep and generative

The method of academic vocabulary instruction described by Bear is an essential tool for educators to apply when implementing new concepts. (Bear, 2012).

Close reading offers academic gains, but the gains also play a part when students enter a later competitive workforce environment. Nowadays, quality reading skills are a necessity for students to succeed in their highly demanding academic and workforce environments. In the academic environment close reading guides students to engage in metacognitive skills, which

allow them to understand the purpose for reading. Students also engage with the text and use background knowledge to make connections between their personal lives and new knowledge gained. Rand Reading Study Group determined that identifying the author's purpose is an essential skill for comprehension (Fisher, 2012). The comprehension skill is indeed important for a student's future workforce environment. The book, *Reading for Understanding-Toward an Research Based Design Program in Reading Comprehension*, stated that many service-related jobs currently demand students to use comprehension skills like knowing how to effectively access the internet for information. (Rand Corp, 2002). To prepare students to become competent members of the workforce, effective reading instruction must start in elementary schools.

Effective reading instruction in elementary schools will also help improve California's educational testing results. According to the article, *In National Rankings, California Schools Not Exactly Ahead of the Class*, California scored 69.9/100 points in quality of education, placing it in the 40th place in the nation (Noguchi, 2017). It is indisputable that Californian schools have some restructuring to do inside the classrooms. Analyzing reading test scores can be a step in identifying a problem that causes Californian students to underperform on national exams. In addition, identifying teaching practices that best support students in state testing can help testing scores to rise.

There are several teaching philosophies, yet teachers who practice instructional activities like differentiated instruction, using graphic organizers, incorporating technology and close reading are most effective for building reading literacy in multiple subjects. Teaching is a subjective profession where the effectiveness of the instructional strategy can depend on the teacher. However, countless research shows that engaging all students in close reading activities is important in building reading skills.

Research Question

The study will focus on the following question:

- What are specific benefits from implementing close reading program for reading comprehension?

Theoretical Rationale

The study assumes that close reading instruction is an effective form of teaching practice in elementary schools. The researcher believes that implementing close reading activities like essential questions, graphic organizers and written analysis helps students build critical thinking, engagement in reading and an increase in reading comprehension. The effect of close reading on student's reading comprehension will be measured through a weekly comprehension test. The study will use a quantitative research method and collect data on student's weekly test scores.

Attention to Issues of Equity and Social Justice

The students in the research study were representative of the diversity, levels of reading abilities and English language acquisition of the whole 6th grade class. From the sample group of twenty-one students, nine were Caucasian and twelve were Hispanic. Eight students were female and thirteen were males. The group of students were also a heterogeneous group of low to advance reading levels. Their English proficiency levels were: 10 students were English only, 7 had been reclassified as English Proficient, and 4 were still classified as English Learners.

Literature Review

The Ups and Downs of Close Reading

Author Catherine Snow highlighted in her article, *Close Reading and Far-Reaching Classroom Discussion: Fostering A Vital Connection*, the adversities and advantages students faced in the classroom. Snow claimed that one of the adversities of close reading is that it solely depended on text analysis and drawing inferences. Snow further discussed that this limited students from drawing connections between the readings and the real world. However, she proposed that if close reading was taught correctly, it could fix the lack of reading engagement among students in elementary schools.

Since the 2010 CACCS implementation, teachers were directed to use more close reading strategies in classrooms. Teachers were expected to use more close reading techniques in language arts programs, which they viewed as complex and too rigorous for students. Snow argued that an excessive amount of close reading led to “...student frustration, a decline in motivation to read, potential educational inequities, and reduction in opportunities to learn content” (Snow, 2016). Although the CACCS frightened teachers from utilizing an excessive amount of close reading, Snow argued that it was imperative that instructors not get discouraged from utilizing the instructional strategy in the classrooms. A solution to avoid excessive close reading was to select a variety of lessons, with texts that students would find engaging and meaningful. Snow referred to close reading as the idea of engaging students in analyzing complex text for a deeper understanding. In addition, close reading allowed students to identify key features, draw inferences, and develop connections (Snow, 2016). As Snow stated, close reading provided the tools for students to relate and comprehend complex text. The ultimate goal is to foster thoughtful and active student readers through this strategy.

The usefulness of close reading also depends on the teacher's instructional style. Snow found close reading to be most effective in a controlled instructional environment. Additionally, close reading was positively perceived based on the fact that it had conventional teaching components. A conventional teaching component allows both the instructor and student to engage together in a piece of reading. For example, the K-W-L model assists students by activating gathered background knowledge. The K-W-L model consists of asking students to write, or discuss what they already knew, what they wanted to learn, and what they had learned about a specific topic. This conventional teaching strategy, directs students thinking before they begin to read a text and promotes engagement in close reading.

Different from Snow, close reading opponents suggested that close reading was counterproductive for English language learners. Opponents of Snow continued to argue that close reading was too comprehensive, which can be true, but Snow says that close reading instruction can be done in small groups, as a whole class or one on one. Snow also adds that close reading is beneficial for English language learners because they need to rely on text to answer questions. Cultural reading differences that students have with the text can be prevented by the style of the text-dependent questions teachers ask. Snow viewed close reading as, "a more level playing field". The instructional strategy allows all students to receive an equitable education by providing rigor and modifications.

Snow also understands that "heavy" reliance on close reading can be ineffective. She made four suggestions for conducting close reading.

- First, students had to have story background knowledge to personally connect with the readings. To balance close reading with other activities, students could also engage in collaborative discussions, or graphic organizers which might trigger content vocabulary

before reading and assisting comprehension. Thus students had a clear reading purpose and understanding before immersing themselves in the reading. This process allowed students to be invested and focused.

- Secondly, traditional teaching strategies such as scanning and browsing were powerful tools since it allowed students to rapidly make predictions and activate prior knowledge they may have on the topic. The scanning and browsing technique allowed students to make predictions in the reading. As a result, making predictions was a comprehension strategy that offered students the opportunity to access their learning as they read. Snow warned that if close reading was used unskillfully, teachers were not able to see students “engage deeply with the text [or] enjoy the process” (Snow, 2016).
- Third, text-dependent questions had to go beyond text-based answers. Students drew connections from, “prior knowledge, moral judgment, social norms and other sources of information and analysis...” which teachers also need to teach.
- Fourth, teaching close reading prompted classroom discussion and argumentation. Lastly, teachers were aware that close reading encompassed a variety of skills that benefited the whole class.

Snow used the Research and Development (RAND) Reading Study Group (RRSG) research to support the idea that reading comprehension was dependent on reader skills, text complexity, reading task and socio cultural context. Although close reading was challenging for most students, but primarily for second English learners, she states that teaching:

“Close reading is an excellent technique for probing sentence structure, nuances of word meaning, subtleties of text organization, and the structure of textual arguments. But it is not a technique for building background knowledge, or integrating background

knowledge with the language of the text, which are major bottlenecks for many struggling students” (Snow, 2016).

To further express her point, she used the example of teaching *The Gettysburg Address*, a Civil War speech from Abraham Lincoln, which was a complex topic for students to connect with since they do not have civil war personal background anecdotes. This example was a perfect illustration where a teacher practiced close reading techniques by providing background information and discussion before reading a historical event.

Snow’s purpose was to convince her adversaries that close reading went beyond teaching a basic understanding of a text. Close reading included engaging students with the reading, and therefore Snow highlighted the importance of teachers’ research into the best practices of close reading. Simply put, limiting students from engaging in close reading served as a “lethal mutation” to their learning (Snow, 2016).

It was also important to recognize Snow’s fears that close reading undermines valuable classroom discussion. Since the Common Core Standards were implemented, she recognized the new standards limited the time students’ engaged in group discussion. This was due to relying too much on text for answers or text evidence. She added that “...nothing would kill a good discussion faster than excluding from consideration the sorts of support students might offer for their claims, ranging from personal knowledge to reading of other texts, or from religious or cultural traditions to moral stances” (Snow, 2016). Since both close reading and collaborative conversations were demanding, Snow suggested a balanced between classroom discussion and close reading in order to not undermine this effective technique.

Snow endorsed the idea of teaching close reading in elementary schools. However, she argued that her endorsement was dependent on allowing students to make external connections

to the reading. Through research, practice and effective planning close reading led students to a deeper understanding of complex texts.

Is Close Reading A Benefit for All Students?

Since the state of California invested time and resources on redefining student learning expectations, students have faced new forms of learning, while teachers have engaged in new teaching methods. The Common Core Standards increased the rigor in reading by focusing on college and career readiness. Since close reading was only practiced in junior high and high school, prior to the CaCCS, students in elementary schools had only engaged in basic reading comprehension. As a result of the implementation of close reading in all grades, students started to engage in inference and analysis of text. These types of skills allowed students to develop critical thinking skills by making connections and conclusions. It was educational researcher, Nancy Boyles, who argued that close reading no longer had to wait until the 7th grade, but should start in the younger grades (Boyles, 2013). The *Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC)* simplified the idea of close reading by mentioning that:

“Close, analytic reading stresses engaging with text of sufficient complexity, directly examining meaning thoroughly and methodically, encouraging students to read and re-read deliberately. Directing student attention on the text itself empowers students to understand central ideas and key supporting details. It also enables students to reflect on the meanings of individual words and sentences; the order in which sentences unfold; and the development of ideas over the course of the text, which ultimately leads students to arrive at an understanding of the text as a whole” (PARCC, 2011).

Boyle argued that if this was the method to increase reading comprehension, then it had to be an enforced instructional strategy in schools.

Close reading allowed students to become metacognitive thinkers. By allowing students to analyze their own thinking, close reading guides them to plumb into their own minds and discover nuances in reading such as tone and author's purpose. Snow and Boyle used the study of David Coleman, lead author of *Common Core Standards for the Student Achievement Partners*, to argue that text-dependent questions, while being both inferential and literal, were not enough to support students in their learning. Boyle encouraged teachers to go beyond the expectations by asking students to observe and analyze in order to read and understand. For example, she rephrased a comprehension question in a reading program from: "Why was Miss Funny so scared by Winn-Dixie? Why was she acting all embarrassed?" to a more comprehensive question of, "In this chapter, the author repeated a few phrases like, 'My daddy was a rich man, a very rich man. Why did the author do this? Find more repeated phrases. What effect do these have on the meaning of the story?'" (Boyle, 2013). To prove her point, she stated that open-ended questions allowed students to think critically.

In the same study, Boyle made a list called, *Craft Techniques and Related Questions for Close Reading*, that outlined close reading techniques and possible questions that a teacher could ask their students during close reading instruction. For example, in understanding tone and voice, Boyle mentioned that asking students to describe the tone with one question that allowed them to identify the reading text as informal or formal. Since teachers were natural question thinkers, she suggested that re-phrasing questions did not need to be hard. However, Boyle claimed that teachers had to integrate questions that related to craft such as similes, metaphors, tone and voice, imagery and word choices. This technique allowed teachers to present rigor in reading and aligned their instruction to meet the demands of the Common Core Standards.

Are the Common Core Standards the New Way to Teach?

Rebecca Woodard from the University of Chicago and Sonia Kline from Illinois State University differed; their research claimed that new education policy should focus on curriculum and instruction, teacher education and professional development, program/school leadership, assessment and research. Because of the inequalities in reading achievement among different races and the low performance in reading literacy among all students, the developers of the Common Core Standards, the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) and the National Governors Association, have redesigned the educational standards to address this issue. In 2011, the Department of Education posted a claim that:

State standards and assessments generally do not reflect the knowledge and skills needed for student success in college and careers. Low standards and inadequate academic preparation of high school graduates result in high costs for individuals and the nation. The rigor of standards and assessments varies widely from state to state. Under the accountability system introduced by NCLB, many states have lowered their standards (Woodard, 2015).

Because of the high demands for a literate workforce, it had been important for schools to address student low performance in reading and writing by focusing on academic literacy to bridge the gap between high school, college and career readiness. However, according to the authors, some of the goals of the Common Core Standards may have been implemented in negative or unintended ways.” (Woodard, 2015).

To prove their point, they identified five gaps between the standards and their implementation in the classrooms.

- Gap 1 referred to the little empirical research that had been done on grade level progressions in the creation of the CaCCS (Woodward, 2015).
- Gap 2 referred to the implementation of text complexity in each grade level, although there was little research on how to engage readers with complex texts.
- Gap 3 referred to the different beliefs about how to conduct close reading. CaCCS for ELA had emphasized identifying text evidence rather than accessing prior knowledge or engaging in collaborative conversations.
- Gap 4 referred to writing. There had been an excessive amount of emphasis on non-fiction writing such as persuading, informing and conveying experiences.
- Gap 5 referred to the gap in literacy between accessing and interpreting media resources.

All of the gaps presented challenges of proper implementation in classrooms transitioning into new reading curriculums. Since the CaCCS did not describe how teachers should implement the rigorous program, teachers were left to interpret and implement the standards on their own. As a result, the authors stated that there needed to be policy on the “...use of research-based professional discretion by teachers and administrators to improve instruction in the implementation of the CaCCS for ELA” (Woodard, 2015).

New materials needed to be connected to research-based teaching and learning. In other words, student learning had to be the main drive for implementing new strategies in the classroom like close reading. Research-based instructional practices needed to be the focus for implementing the standards rather than simply compliance. Focus needs to be on thoughtful application of research-based instructional in implementing the CaCCS standards. The new standards had to be seen as goals and learning objectives rather than a menu of instruction. All

teachers had to be supported in implementing the curriculum through professional development and guidance.

Close Reading: Doesn't Need to Happen All the Time

Authors Douglas Fisher and Nancy Frey argued that implementation of close reading in elementary schools had limited research. The authors maintained “the primary objective of a close reading is to afford students with the opportunity to assimilate new textual information with their existing background knowledge and prior experiences to expand their schema”. However, similar to other authors mentioned, they agreed that close reading allowed students to learn to navigate and struggle and persevere with the complex text which in return taught them stamina and persistence (Fisher and Frey, 2012).

Close Reading should only happen with complex texts. Skimming through a newspaper or reading a paragraph in a magazine does not require close reading. The authors mentioned that teachers had to teach students that certain readings were worth analyzing to the bones and deciphering hidden messages from the author. In an investigation done by the authors, they experimented with observing skilled secondary teachers teaching close reading as well as elementary teachers implementing this instructional strategy. After observing 10 secondary teachers, Fisher and Frey determined that five key features for effective close reading were reading:

- short passages
- complex texts
- conducting limited frontloading
- repeated readings
- text-dependent questions.

Based on their observations, secondary students engaged in identifying text evidence, making personal connections and reading at a higher level compared to student's independent reading levels. Students interacted with the text by bookmarking pages, underlining words/phrases and writing notes shadowing interactive engagement with the readings. Students were being taught at a rigorous level, mirroring a similar type of instruction that usually happens at a college level. After the observers met with the teachers, they determined that similar close reading behaviors can happen at the elementary level, but perhaps with some modifications. Unlike at a high school level, reading complex texts out loud is beneficial for lower grade students, even in primary grades. This will allow students to gain an understanding through teacher modeling of reading accuracy, tone and fluency while still accessing complex readings (Fisher and Frey, 2012).

A contentious issue has been whether to frontload students with background information prior to reading complex texts or not. Some have argued that this is particularly beneficial for English learners, but others believe that some texts provide students with the background knowledge needed to understand the text. In agreement, the observers concluded that front loading background information should be thoughtful and limited. Front loading can be particularly helpful in previewing difficult vocabulary words especially if not addressed through context clues. Teachers need to evaluate how much background information their students already have. Doing so will allow the teacher to have students jump into the reading or preview the reading beforehand. Teachers are still trying to learn the ropes of this instructional strategy. It is important to note, however, that regardless of all the arguments presented by teachers, reading comprehension is the ultimate goal for students to achieve reading success at all grade levels.

A Study on Close Reading

In the article, *Student and Teacher Perspectives on a Close Reading Protocol*, authors Douglas Fisher and Nancy Frey described a study they conducted on the perceptions of close reading from both students and teachers. Their study concluded that teachers perceived close reading to be time consuming and complex, whereas students welcomed the strategy as a new method for learning. They stated that the focus of the study was to “...illuminate this dimension as the field moves toward further defining and codifying close reading instruction to elementary and secondary students” (Fisher and Frey, 2014). Fisher and Frey zero in on the theoretical influences that led to adapting close reading. For example, New Criticism theory advocates for readers to make meaning of the text through “efferent reading” and “aesthetic reading.” In these two forms of reading, Fisher quotes Rosenblatt’s transactional theory and mentions that in efferent reading, readers need to analyze and structure, that is synthesize, the information that is being learned. In aesthetic reading, readers need to focus on ideas and feelings that the text tends to evoke. Similar to this theory, Douglas Fisher continues to mention that “feminist and Marxist literary criticisms, as well as postmodern and critical pedagogies, like Rosenblatt...argue that what a reader brings to a text [actually] matters” (Fisher and Frey, 2014). It is with this background knowledge that Fisher presents us with the history behind the emergence of close reading in education.

It is important to mention that Fisher conducts this study through interviews, observations and educational research. He claims, however, that although there has been little empirical research on the effectiveness of close reading, his study concludes that this method is ideal for helping students decipher complicated texts. Since the Common Core Standards for English Language Arts were implemented in schools, teachers have struggled to meet the demands of the

standards. However, standard developers mention that teachers still have wiggle room to use their own creativity while meeting the goals and objectives of the standards.

Similar to close reading, other objectives such as Directed Activities Related to Text (DARTS), Concept-Oriented Reading Instruction (CORI) and Collaborative Reasoning (CR) have aligned to provide students with ways to gain a deeper comprehension of the text. There has been a spike in interest for researching modern methodologies and strategies to better serve students with reading comprehension strategies because of the implementation of the CaCCS.

In exploring student and teacher perceptions on the use of close reading, Fisher and Frey posed questions that helped them pave the way of their research:

- “How have teachers implemented close reading in their classrooms?”
- “What are teachers’ perceptions of the challenges and benefits of this instructional practice?”

The methodology of their research focused on qualitative analysis and phenomenology which seeks “...to understand the meaning, structure, and essence of a lived experience” (Fisher and Frey 2014). Their study consisted of interviewing 45 random teachers, grades 4th through 12th, from four different schools who had received professional development on close reading and had implemented the strategy for at least 6 months in their classrooms. A total of 327 students were selected from 17 different schools. Their data collection consisted of “a semi-structured interview protocol [where] each teacher was interviewed individually” (Fisher and Frey 2014). Questions ranged from asking about the challenges and successes of using close reading to individual concerns about this method. Students were also asked whether close reading was beneficial and/or challenging to them.

Although the focus of the project was to gain the teacher perspectives on their experiences in teaching close reading, the interview also asked teachers about their implementation of the strategy in the classroom. The study findings concluded that both teachers and students had similar views on the effectiveness of close reading. 95.6% of the teachers and 100% of the students agreed that texts that were selected for close reading were interesting. Aligned with this, 86.7% of the teachers agreed that close reading required more effort in planning, whereas 72.5% of the students also thought that it required more academic effort. A student suggested that, “The questions that we get asked when we are reading like this aren’t like those questions that are like the ones in our textbooks. They aren’t easy to answer, but seem worth it somehow. Like answering the questions gets you closer to understanding what’s really going on in the reading.” (Fisher and Frey, 2014). The study concluded that both the teachers and students had overall positive comments about close reading.

In the same study, Fisher and Frey point out that the structure of close reading in the classrooms was dependent on the professional development teachers received in their schools. In selecting material for close reading, most teachers selected texts that were complex and required rereading for better comprehension. A dilemma that most teachers faced, however, was whether or not to scaffold students with background information before starting a text. A teacher commented that, “...the issue of minimal frontloading was problematic for many. ‘I just worried that I’m going to make it too frustrating for my kids who read below grade level.’” In addition, 91.1% of the teachers commented that close reading was a new strategy when encountered in the teacher’s guide to instructional reading materials. An example of a 4th grade teacher implementing close reading in the classroom is as follows: In the story, “Toys! Amazing Stories Behind Some Great Inventions,” the teacher pointed out that the learning objective was to

identify inventions and apply their knowledge to the new concept being learned. In the first read, which students read independently, the teacher asked students to note words and phrases that were confusing to them. Afterwards, students engaged in identifying text evidence that helped them identify the sequence of events that led to the development of the toy. In the third read students focused on identifying character traits that led to the invention of the toy. It is the repeated readings, that Fisher and Frey point out that are instrumental for an effective comprehension and analysis of the story. In addition, of course, to comprehension skills like annotation and essential questions.

100% of the focus groups of students agreed that texts that involved close reading were more interesting compared to their regular reading. Different from other language arts curriculums, teachers stated that they had the job of researching and selecting appropriate texts. A high school teacher noted that selecting a reading piece that was hard but relevant to the students was one of the most challenging parts of implementing this strategy. Fisher and Frey commented that “over half of the teachers interviewed expressed concern and distress about their ability to find appropriate texts for close reading” (Fisher and Frey). A finding from the study revealed that 72.5% of the student focus groups agreed that close reading had high mental demands that left them tired, exhausted or drained. However, 86.7% of the focus students considered close reading to be an effective practice to their learning. A quote from a middle school teacher stated that students “have to break a sweat in class now whereas before they just coasted.”

The research concluded with an overall examination of student and teacher perspectives on close reading. The study results point out an overall sense of positiveness from both the teachers and students in using this instructional strategy. Fisher and Frey summarized their study

as “...students recognizing that close reading was interesting and relevant, and that it required them to do a lot of work,” and “teachers [recognizing] the value of close reading, especially in increasing student responsibility and encouraging students to develop stamina and habits for reading complex texts.” Other findings also included the difficulty of selecting meaningful texts that were worthy of close reading instruction and the challenge of developing text-dependent questions. The authors suggest that teacher preparation programs need to focus on innovative teaching strategies, as well as provide teachers with constructive feedback in using this technique.

Summary of Major Themes

The gathered literature review focused on the effectiveness of close reading as an instructional strategy in reading programs. Since 2010, the California Common Core Standards (CACCS) addressed the need for students in elementary schools to participate in additional rigorous reading instruction. The California State Board of Education, additionally stated that to create skilled writers and fluent readers, students were urged to be proficient in reading fiction and non-fiction texts. The literature review proved close reading to be a teaching strategy that surpassed teaching basic text comprehension. It provided students with opportunities to utilize their critical thinking by analyzing texts, and making meaningful inferences. Through multiple re-readings, students were able to gain other developmental skills such as fluency, word recognition and schema. In all, the reviewed articles and studied samples concluded that close reading supported reading fluency by enabling re-reading skills, improved reading comprehension by analyzing text-dependent questions, and promoted critical thinking through inferencing.

A challenge in close reading was selecting meaningful texts that students found purposeful and worthy of reading. According to the CaCCS, students in sixth grade were to, “read and respond to historically, or culturally significant works of literature that reflect and enhance their studies of history and social science” (California..., 2013). Finding readings that connected with students was a difficult task, especially for schools that had insufficient reading resources, or an outdated reading curriculum. The study also found that teachers who lacked professional close reading training experience, had a difficult time facilitating close reading teaching strategies in the classrooms. Although it was difficult to find engaging close reading course material, close reading offered essential skills for students to practice in their grade level.

Methodology

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to research the effects of close reading instruction on reading comprehension. Essential questions, graphic organizers, re-reading and short written analyses were all close reading components that were used in the study. The study used a quantitative research method that analyzed the effect of close reading on student performance. The research centered on the question: “What are specific benefits from implementing close reading program for reading comprehension?” The purpose of the research was to shine a light on the benefits of close reading instruction in a 6th grade setting.

Description of Sample and Site

The study included twenty-one 6th grade students, who ranged between the ages of 11 and 13. Students attended Anderson Valley Elementary School which is in a rural town, approximately 117 miles north from San Francisco, California. With a student population of 270, and a Title 1 school, 90% of the students qualified for free lunch and 80% were English Learners. The 6th grade students had different English proficiency levels: 10 students were English only, 7 had been reclassified as English Proficient and 4 were still classified as English Learners. The study included 8 females and 13 males. The group of students were also a heterogeneous group of low to advance reading levels. The students in the research study were representative of the diversity, levels of reading abilities and English language acquisition of the whole 6th grade class.

Access and Permission

All students and parents were informed of the purpose of the research. Parents signed a consent form that allowed the researcher to use their student's data in the study (see Appendix). The school principal also approved the research methods and student treatment for this case study.

Data Gathering Strategies

The study followed a one-shot case study experimental design. A group of students were exposed to an experimental treatment of close reading. The group participated in essential questions, graphic organizers, rereading, annotation, written analysis of the texts they read and weekly exams. The effect of close reading in student's learning was measured by a 6-point writing rubric on student's writing literacy and weekly summative comprehension test. The study included multiple independent variables, such as student's interaction with the treatment, interaction of the setting and treatment, student's maturity and diffusion of treatment among the participants. The main dependent variable was the student's performance on the weekly test. Since student performance on the test would reflect the effectiveness of the treatment, the weekly tests directed the data collection.

The study had a 1x1x1 experimental model. The components involved the *Close Reading Companion*, *Your Turn Practice Book*, *Weekly Assessments* and a 6th grade writing rubric from McGraw Hill Education, the same publishers. The study was conducted over a five-week period. The objective of the study was to measure student's reading comprehension after receiving instruction in close reading.

1. The first close reading activity introduced students to an essential question.

Essential questions drove students' responses on graphic organizers and helped students focus on annotations. The essential questions also supported students by extending classroom discussion and connecting the assigned stories with other greater themes.

2. The second close reading activity required students to re-read a non-fiction or fiction story, complete a graphic organizer and identify the author's point of view or theme of the story. The graphic organizer was from the *Your Turn Practice Book* and students worked with their classmates to complete the assignment.
3. After the activity, students drew comparisons in writing following a specific 6-Point writing rubric: students compared two weekly readings and connected the theme or author's point of view to an image or illustration. This was done in the digital version of the *Close Reading Companion*. The activity required students to identify text evidence and support their analytical comparisons of the stories with text evidence. Students receive a 6 if they exceeded expectations; 5 for going beyond the expectations; 4 for meeting expectations; 3 for meeting most expectations; 2 for partially meeting expectations and a 1 for not meeting the expectations.
4. The final component of the study required students to complete a digital weekly reading comprehension assessment.

Experimental Procedures

The study used unit 4, weeks 1-5 of the *Wonders* reading program. The study was conducted over a 5-week period, with a break in between due to spring break. Students learned about an essential question, completed a graphic organizer and identified the author's point of view or theme. Both comprehension skills of theme and author's point of view were part of the unit 4 and alternated during the unit. The unit involved a theme of "Challenges." The big idea was for students to think about the question, "How do people meet challenges and solve problems?" The following table showed the readings and graphic organizers that students completed for each week.

Step 1: Read an essential question and complete a graphic organizer by using the weekly reading texts.

Students worked together to discuss an essential question and complete the graphic organizer. Table 1.1 illustrates the weekly essential questions that connected to the literature readings. The purpose of essential questions were to promote inquiry and discovery in the subject being learned. The essential questions also helped drive the student's responses on the graphic organizers. The purpose of the graphic organizers was to help students organize and simplify information that pertained to that week's comprehension skill.

Table 1.1 5 Week Reading Unit Plan

	Weekly Essential Question	Literature Readings	Comprehension Skill-Graphic Organizer
Unit 4 Week 1	How do people meet environmental challenges?	Years of Dust-The Story of the Dust Bowl by Albert Marrin	Author's Point of View
Unit 4 Week 2	How do people meet personal challenges?	Seeing Things His Own Way by Marty Kaminsky	Author's Point of View
Unit 4 Week 3	When are decisions hard to make?	The Case of the Magic Marker Mischief Maker by Mickey Rangel Mystery	Theme
Unit 4 Week 4	How do people uncover what they have in common?	Home of the Brave	Theme
Unit 4 Week 5	How can we take responsibility?	This is Just to Say	Author's Point of View

Step 2: Compare the weekly literature story with another short story.

This activity required students to use the *Close Reading Companion* and compare the literature story with another short story in a written composition of a summary paragraph of several sentences which was followed by a Six-Point Teaching Rubric. Table 1.2 shows the questions that students needed to answer. The purpose of the writing component was for students to examine and interpret the author's point of view or theme by comparing common readings.

Table 1.2 Close Reading Questions

	Integrate Ideas-Close Reading Question
Unit 4 Week 1	How does the photographer show how people overcome environmental challenges in a similar way as the authors of <i>Years of Dust: The Story of the Dust Bowl</i> and “Erica Fernandez, Environmental Activist”?
Unit 4 Week 2	How does the way the poet and the authors of <i>Seeing Things His Own Way</i> and “Get Fit for Fun” use words and phrases to help you visualize the theme or message?”
Unit 4 Week 3	How are difficult decisions portrayed by the photographer and the authors of the <i>Case of the Magic Marker Mischief Maker</i> and “Dramatic Decisions: Theater Through the Ages”?
Unit 4 Week 4	How are the author’s portrayals of the main characters in <i>Home of the Brave</i> and “Amita’s Tale” similar to the way the people are portrayed in the illustration?
Unit 4 Week 5	How is the way the illustrator shows the theme of taking responsibility similar to the way the poets write about taking responsibility in the poems you read this week?

Students written responses were graded using a 6-point rubric. The rubric listed as Table 1.3 was obtained from the *Wonders* program. The purpose of the rubric was for students to evaluate their own work before turning it in.

Table 1.3

Six-Point Teacher Rubric					
6	5	4	3	2	1
Exceeds Expectations	More than Meets Expectations	Meets Expectations	Meets Most Expectations	Partially Meets Expectations	Does Not Meet Expectations
Focus: Writing is clearly focused on the topic.	Focus: Writing is mostly focused on the topic.	Focus: Writing, in general, is focused on the topic but contains some non-relevant information.	Focus: Writing is somewhat focused on the topic but contains unrelated details.	Focus: Writing has some relation to the topic but contains few relevant details.	Focus: Writing barely addresses the topic. Contains many unrelated details.
Organization: Writing employs an appropriate organizational strategy that is followed throughout.	Organization: Writing employs an organizational strategy, with occasional digressions.	Organization: Writing shows evidence of an organizational strategy though it is not consistently followed.	Organization: Writing attempts to use an organizational strategy but it is not clear or consistent.	Organization: Writing shows little evidence of an organizational strategy.	Organization: Writing has no organizational strategy.
Support: Writing is clearly supported by specific details. The word choice is precise and engaging.	Support: Writing has supporting details and the word choice serves the purpose of the writing but is not very precise.	Support: Writing has some supporting details and predictable word choice.	Support: Writing has few supporting details and the word choice is often simple or unclear.	Support: Writing does not have enough supporting details and the word choice is basic.	Support: Writing has a lack of supporting details and the word choice is limited.
Conventions: Complete sentences are featured. Writing contains few, if any, errors in grammar, usage, and mechanics. A variety of sentence structures is used.	Conventions: Complete sentences are used, though there are a few fragments. Sentences contain a few errors in grammar, usage, and mechanics. A variety of sentence structures is used.	Conventions: Sentences contain some errors in grammar, usage, and mechanics. Sentence structure has some variety.	Conventions: Sentences contain errors in grammar, usage, and mechanics. Sentence structure has some variety.	Conventions: Sentences contain many errors in grammar, usage, and mechanics. Sentence structure is limited.	Conventions: Sentences contain frequent errors in grammar, usage, and mechanics. Writing uses very simple sentence structure.

Step 3: Students will take an online comprehension test.

This was the final component of the methodology. Students read two different articles and answered a multiple-choice test. The tests focused on the understanding of vocabulary, identifying text evidence, and the comprehension skills of identifying author's theme and point of view. This was the main form of measuring student's mastery of those comprehension skills. After students submitted the test, scores were generated, and the students immediately saw their results. A data chart compiled all the students' tests scores.

Ethical Standards:

The study was reviewed and approved by the Dominican University Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Participants (IRBPHP Application, #10672). The researcher gathered all 21 student-parent consent forms and ethically used the student data in the study. Permission to use all instructional materials for the experimental design were granted by the

legal department of Wonders-McGraw Hill (Invoice Number: DAN675150778-1). The Anderson Valley Elementary School Principal also authorized the case study research. This study adheres to the ethical standards of data collection and research.

Findings:

The study concluded with test scores from 21 students. For the purposes of this study, a positive effect is defined as a score of 70% or higher on reading comprehension assessments. Student weekly average scores showed that over a 5-week testing period, there was a positive effect between close reading instruction and reading comprehension assessment results during all five weeks of the study, with the highest effect in 3 and 4. Week 1, 2 and 5 had the lowest weekly average scores. The group had weekly average scores of: 72% in week 1; 73% in week 2; 85% in week 3; 77% in week 4 and 71% in week 5. Five of twenty-one students scored above 70% in all five weeks, seven of twenty-one students scored above 70% in at least 4 weeks and 9 students scored below 70% in two weeks or more. Overall, when the test scores for the five weeks were averaged, 14 out of 21 students achieved an average score of 70% or greater with all 5 tests combined.

Table 1.4 illustrates the student's weekly test scores for five weeks. Scores in yellow represent a passing score of 70% or more for each week and scores in blue represent scores below 70%. Scores in red were not available because either the student was absent or unable to make up the test. Students highlighted in gray scored 70% or more in all five weeks and students highlighted in light yellow scored 70% or more in at least 4 weeks. Students highlighted in light pink scored below 70% in two weeks or more

Table 1.4 Student Weekly Assessment Scores

Students	Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4	Week 5
A	95%	95%	90%	90%	75%
B	80%	90%	90%	90%	90%
C	85%	90%	95%	95%	75%
D	75%	90%	100%	100%	65%
E	70%	70%	95%	80%	80%
F	70%	90%	95%	90%	70%
G	80%	80%	95%	85%	65%
H	70%	80%	90%	80%	60%
I	95%	90%	95%	80%	65%
J	75%	60%	85%	75%	65%
K	75%	65%	100%	80%	80%
L	75%	65%	90%	30%	55%
M	80%	45%	85%	75%	75%
N	60%	65%	75%	70%	90%
O	65%	65%	65%	80%	70%
P	60%	65%	35%	70%	75%
Q	60%	45%	70%	70%	70%
R	60%	55%	90%	50%	65%
S	45%	65%	95%	NA	65%
T	55%	65%	70%	65%	NA
U	75%	90%	85%	NA	55%

Table 1.5 shows the average scores over the 5 week unit. None of the students scored below 60%. Since the students had used the same reading program for two years in a row, most students were familiar with the structure and vocabulary used in the tests. Throughout the school

year, most students had improved in their tests scores. 60% was seen as a great achievement for some students who had consistently received 10%, 20% or even 30%.

Table 1.5 Group Weekly Test Average

Group A Weekly Test Average

Table 1.6 below shows the reading standards in which students received the highest and lowest scores. This information was important as it correlated with the main comprehension skill of the week: theme or the author's point of view. Connecting the passing rate to the individual reading comprehension standard was valuable information since it identified opportunities for re-teaching specific reading skills. In week 1 test scores, for example, the data shows that author's point of view was a difficult skill to master, but determining the central idea of a text was not.

Table 1.6 Standard Analysis

Standards Analysis		
	Highest Scores on Comprehension Standards	Lowest Scores on Comprehension Standards
Week 1	<p>Key Details and RI.6.2 Determine a central idea of a text and how it is conveyed through details; provide a summary of the text distinct from personal opinions or judgments.</p> <p>L.6.4.a Use context (e.g., the overall meaning of a sentence or paragraph; a word's position or function in a sentence) as a clue to the meaning of a word or phrase.</p>	<p>RI.6.6 Determine an author's point of view or purpose in a text and explain how it is conveyed in the text.</p>
Week 2	<p>L.6.5.a and e Language Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English grammar and usage when writing or speaking. a. Ensure that pronouns are in the proper case (subjective, objective, possessive).</p>	<p>RI.6.2 and Key details Determine a central idea of a text and how it is conveyed through particular details; provide a summary of the text distinct from personal opinions or judgments.</p>
Week 3	Word Parts	Point of View
Week 4	<p>L.6.4.c Consult reference materials (e.g., dictionaries, glossaries, thesauruses), both print and digital, to find the pronunciation of a word or determine or clarify its precise meaning or its part of speech.</p>	<p>RL.6.6 Explain how an author develops the point of view of the narrator or speaker in a text.</p>
Week 5	<p>L.6.5.a: Interpret figures of speech (e.g., personification) in context.</p>	<p>Theme and RL 6.2 Determine a theme or central idea of a text and how it is conveyed through particular details; provide a summary of the text distinct from personal opinions or judgments.</p>

Table 1.7 shows the test questions that students missed the most as well as those the students answered correctly. The table shows the structure and different tiers of questions that students were exposed to while taking the test as well as how they connected to the weekly's comprehension skill. In week 1, for example, most students missed a higher order thinking question of inferring about the author's thoughts of life for a modern Inuit. This question showed that students needed more support in inference and how the author's point of view was conveyed in the text.

Table 1.7 Analysis on Test Questions

	Questions Answered Correctly	Questions Missed the Most
Wk 1	Read the sentences from the text. The trickster has some of the characteristics of a hero, but like a coin, the trickster has two sides. For example, sometimes the trickster is a valiant figure. At other times, the trickster changes and acts like a coward. What does valiant mean?	What does the author probably think about the life of the modern Inuit?
Wk 2	Part A: Read the sentence from the text. Rudolph was already known quantity in the world of track. What does the idiom "a known quantity" show about Rudolph?	Part B: Which detail from the section best shows what the author thinks?
Wk 3	Read the sentence from the article. The loans are becoming increasingly popular. The word <i>increasing</i> means "growing." What does increasingly mean?	The prefix <i>-in</i> can mean "not." Which word uses the prefix in the same way as in the word injustice?
Wk 4	Which sentence from the passage best states the author's message?	Part B: Which action from the passage supports the theme?

Wk 5	Which detail from the poem best shows what “a crack of thunder” means?	What point of view is presented at the beginning and end of the poem? What detail from the poem supports each point of view? Drag and drop each point of view and detail to complete the chart.
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Analysis of Themes

The findings of the study concluded close reading to be effective, and to have a positive impact on students’ reading comprehension. From the 21 students, Student N, had the most interesting test results! The test scores showed that that particular student struggled in week 1 with a score of 60% and week 2 with a score of 65%, but showed significant growth in week 3 (75%), Week 4 (70%) and week 5 (90%). This student showed that although they struggled at the beginning of the unit, close reading had a positive effect in his reading comprehension. Overall, 14 out of 21 students had a test score average of 70% or higher, resulting in a positive correlation between close reading and reading comprehension among 6th grade students.

Another significant finding in the research was that close reading was also a challenging task for 6th grade students. The data displayed areas for improvement for both the students and teacher. The data shows that 9 students struggled in week 1 and 2 with tests scores below 70%. To better support struggling students, test questions can be modified and other instructional activities can be used. Instead of assessing students on a weekly basis, summative assessments can be conducted every other week, instead of every week. This will allow students to take a break from the highly demanding tasks of close reading.

Discussion

In addressing the research question, what was the correlation between close reading as a teaching strategy to reading comprehension? the answer was simple. Close reading was an effective form of analyzing texts that allowed students to gain a deeper understanding of what they were reading. Close reading is one of several researched based instructional strategies that allows students to engage in complex text while gaining an in-depth reading comprehension.

One could argue that close reading can be too difficult for English learners or low performing students. On the contrary, others would say that teachers should still include different components of close reading like re-reading, skimming, graphic organizers and engaging in structured classroom discussion with carefully crafted essential questions. In a very similar study, a group of teachers from Columbia University found that implementing close reading as an intervention to failing second grade students had a positive result (Williams, 2016). In their findings, they discovered that some study groups performed better on the posttests and units tests by focusing on close reading during direct instruction time. Their methodology included teaching students multiple text structures while including components like graphic organizers, background knowledge, writing components and content-related activities, which was a similar approach to the activities that students were engaged in this study. Overall, the research and my data suggest that close reading activities can have a significant positive impact in reading comprehension at any grade level.

It is also compelling to mention that other effective teaching strategies for reading comprehension exist. The research, *Effective Reading Programs for the Elementary Grades: A Best Evidence Synthesis*, addresses the concern of how schools could restructure reading

programs in elementary schools to better prepare students in achieving reading literacy. The authors argued that effective reading programs focused on four different elements:

- reading curricula
- instructional technology for beginning reading
- instructional practice programs for beginning reading like phonemic awareness
- combinations of curricula instructional processes

In the research, a study evaluated 63 qualifying reading programs which the researchers determined had the most successful reading programs that engaged students in cooperative learning (Robert, 2009). Cooperative learning involved students in working in small groups while using metacognitive skills. As a result, this produced an enhancement in reading fluency and comprehension by using conceptual vocabulary during collaborative conversations and building on each other's ideas.

Effective reading programs also focused on teaching phonics, phonemic awareness and vocabulary instruction through all grade levels. In primary grades, other factors like pedagogy, integrating curriculum and professional development were also indicators of successful reading programs according to the research. In the upper elementary grades, the researchers determined that reading programs in the upper grades tended to be more diverse with different curricula using different instructional processes. Instructional programs that focused on specific teaching skills (like close reading) as well as cooperative learning were forms that make reading programs effective.

Theoretical Contribution

Comparison of Findings with Existing Studies

This study's findings align with previous research done on teaching close reading in elementary schools. Catherine Snow's research on close reading showed that students who engaged in close reading were able to experience high levels of critical thinking. Since close reading involved text-dependent questions, students were encouraged to reread texts to support their answers with text evidence. Just like in this study, students participated in readings that allowed them to go beyond a basic comprehension of what they read and engage in critical thinking like identifying the author's point of view and theme. Through classroom discussion, students were able to engage in making inferences that were not explicitly stated in the readings, yet supported by some sort of text evidence. Snow applauded the initiative of implementing close reading in the classrooms. She stated that allowing students to struggle in readings was a good thing, but only to a certain extent. My research showed that although the students struggled in close reading, they were able to gain critical thinking skills since most of them performed at an average of 70% or better in the weekly's comprehension test.

Another argument that Snow accepted was that teaching close reading is difficult. A factor that I believe contributed to students doing poorly in the research conducted for this study during week 5 was due to too much close reading. Snow stated that "close reading is a painstaking process that is likely to seem tedious and unmanageable to already demotivated struggling [students]" (Snow, 2013). Therefore, it was important to balance it with other teacher strategies to keep students engaged and motivated in reading. She stated that close reading should be taught in multiple ways like in teaching how to annotate or read to respond to essential questions.

In Douglas Fisher's article, *Close Reading in Elementary Schools*, he mentions that, "close reading must be accompanied by other essential instructional practices that are vital to reading development: interactive read-aloud and shared readings, teacher modeling and think aloud" (Fisher, 2012). Balancing between close reading and other teaching strategies is important. Similar to the students in this study, they also engaged in organizing graphic organizers that allowed them to structure and organize their thinking. This also allowed students to engage in annotation which was something that this study didn't really focus on, but was present during close reading.

Limitations of Study

The limitations of the study were some aspects of the treatment and the timeframe. Although the focus was on essential questions, graphic organizers, writing assignments to show understanding of what was read, comprehension tests and close reading, the treatment could have also centered on the correlation between the inquiry questions and reading comprehension on the assigned texts.

The time frame of the study was a challenge. The use of writing assessment and comprehension tests during multiple weeks could have overwhelmed some of the students and therefore skewed the data in weeks 4 and 5. The researcher also experienced an illness of a severe ear infection caused by a shingles virus that also affected his eye sight for several weeks. This caused him to be absent from the classroom for four days. This caused the routine of close reading activities and weekly assessments to change in week 4.

Implications of the Study

To further the research in this study, I thought it would be interesting to see if there was a correlation between the students in the sample who received close reading treatment and their 2018 test scores in reading the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (SBAC). The SBAC's performance levels were: standard not met, standard nearly met, standard met and standard exceeded. After receiving my student's test scores, it was impressive to learn that of the 21 students in the case study, 16 students scored in the standard met or exceeded range for English Language Arts and four students scored in standard nearly met! One student did not take the SBAC test. From the 7 reclassified students, all students met the state standard for English language arts. The 3 students still classified as English learners scored in standard nearly met resulting in an increase from their 5th grade scores on the same test.

The results were enough to raise other research questions like, what instructional strategies could teachers engage students in to better prepare students to read and understand complex texts for the state tests at the end of the school year? In analyzing the student's 2018 state test scores, it can be argued that close reading had a more significant effect in student's SBAC test scores than it did in the weekly assessments. I believe that after the study and a break in close reading, students felt more comfortable applying their close reading skills when they took the state test 5 weeks later.

Conclusion

As summer vacation comes to a close, Fall semester is soon to start. As teachers start creating lessons plans, it is crucial to implement close reading strategies in all elementary grades. Close reading has been proven to improve students' vocabulary decoding, increase reading fluency and comprehension in high-schools. It is imperative that elementary teachers start practicing close reading strategies earlier in students' education. This would better prepare students to be on grade level reading each year. The literature review addressed the advantages of close reading as well as the adversities. Snow's best arguments illustrated how close reading influences students to engage with and develop a deeper text understanding; however, she also highlighted that there are implications of over practicing close reading such as ignoring collaborative conversations in the classroom. Snow reminds us the close reading instruction needs to be used meaningfully and not all the time.

Early reading literacy is a predictor for academic success. This study intended to shine light on close reading as an effective instructional strategy for reading comprehension. It was important to understand that the earlier this strategy is implemented in elementary schools, the better prepared students will be in higher education. The strategy could be broad, complex and difficult to teach. However, once the teacher understands and experiments with close reading, one would see the powerful, positive impact that it has on their student's reading development.

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Appendix A: IRB Approved Letter

February 8, 2018

Daniel Angulo
50 Acacia Ave.
San Rafael, CA 94901

Dear Daniel:

I have reviewed your proposal entitled *The Correlation of Close Reading as an Instructional Strategy to Reading Literacy in Elementary Schools* submitted to the Dominican University Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Participants (IRBPHP Application, #10672). I am approving it as having met the requirements for minimizing risk and protecting the rights of the participants in your research.

In your final report or paper please indicate that your project was approved by the IRBPHP and indicate the identification number.

I wish you well in your very interesting research effort.

Sincerely,

Randall Hall, Ph.D.
Chair, IRBPHP

Cc: Lynn Zimmerman

Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Participants

Office of Academic Affairs • 50 Acacia Avenue, San Rafael, California 94901-2298 • 415-257-1310 www.dominican.edu

Appendix B: Permission to use Language Arts Materials

Lead Contributor: Bear, Donald
 Title: Wonders Close Reading Companion, Grade 6
 ISBN: 9780021306497
 Edition: 1
 Description of Material: Pages 67-132 (66 Pages Only)

Fee: "Waived"

Purpose of Reproduction

Course: Masters Thesis Research
 School: Dominican University of California
 Professor: Professor Daniel Angulo
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Appendix C: Parent Consent Letter

**ANDERSON VALLEY
ELEMENTARY SCHOOL**

Post Office Box 830
Boonville, California 95415
(707) 895-3010

A California Distinguished School

January 29, 2018

Dear Parents and Families,

This letter is to ask for your permission to allow your student to participate in a research study for Daniel Angulo's master's thesis through Dominican University. The study will focus on analyzing the correlation that close reading, an instructional strategy, has with student's reading comprehension. Your student's name and personal information will be confidential with the exception of the student's individual assignment scores.

Students will use the component of Wonders--Close Reading Companion to participate in the study. In the study, students will engage in rereading, analyzing texts, and comparing them to the weekly readings. Students will then take a weekly exam. The researcher will use the data in order to correlate the effectiveness that close reading has with student's reading comprehension.

There is minimal risk for your student to participate. Student's might notice a slight change of routine or assignments during reading class. The parent may discontinue student participation at any time without penalty or consequence. Parents can inquire comments or questions during the course of the research.

The parent can discontinue the student's participation by contacting Daniel Angulo at 707-684-6423 or the Institutional Board for the Protection of Human Participants at 415-482-3547. Please let me know if you have any questions or concerns.

Sincerely,

Daniel Angulo Villaseñor
6th Grade Teacher
Anderson Valley Elementary School

Parent or Guardian Permission

___ I give permission for my child to participate in the research study.

___ I do not want my child to participate in the research study.

Parent's Name

Student's Name

Parent's Signature

Date