Increasing the Social Studies Reading Comprehension of Middle School Students with Learning Disabilities

Crystal Bryski

Western Governors University

Spring 2009

Abstract

This action research project sets out to identify which component of multi-text instruction is most effective in increasing the reading comprehension level of middle school students with learning disabilities. The research is going to be conducted over a two-week time period during the Spring 2009 with three male middle school students with reading disabilities. All three students are identified with special needs and share the same self-contained US History class. Ordinal data will be gathered to show comparisons and growth of the students' knowledge and narrative data will be collected to describe the students' success with the modified instruction during the unit.

Table of Contents

Introduction

As a new special education teacher, I work with many students with learning disabilities who are not successful in their general education classroom due to a variety of reasons, from lack of exposure to material, to lack of modifications in instructional strategies being used by the teachers. These 7th and 8th grade students with disabilities need to be able to read and proficiently understand what they read. In addition, these students also need to improve their problem solving skills and raise their reading abilities to higher levels than which they currently possess.

Many seasoned general education teachers can become easily frustrated and may appear to give up on students with learning disabilities. However, there is some evidence to suggest that with some modifications to the way lessons are presented in the classrooms, many of these students can be much more successful in general education classrooms. Many times students with learning disabilities are not able to perform as successfully as their non-typical peers due to the difficulty of the textbook material or lesson presentations. I believe this is an unnecessary practice that can be remedied by simply changing the way a lesson is presented in the classroom. Although a student with a disability may not perform at the same level as non-disabled peers, they can increase their performance with intentional and effective instruction.

My own experience has shown me that there is evidence that suggests students with disabilities can be more successful with content specific classroom material when different instructional strategies are used in the classroom. Within hours of my placement in a self-contained 8th grade US History classroom, it became apparent that my students would not be successful if I relied mainly on the textbook for instruction. All three

students have varying degrees of disabilities, but they all share a common deficit in reading and comprehension. Several of the students in my self-contained history class are reading at a 1st or 2nd grade level, a few are reading at a 3rd or 4th grade level, and two students are reading at an emerging level of proficiency. While the degree to which these students struggle with their reading is stratified, however, they all read well-below the 7th and 8th grade level, which is the reading level the textbook material is geared for instruction.

I set out to find an instructional strategy to tackle the sometimes daunting subject of US History and help the students with disabilities find success in the classroom. I discovered a strategy with which I was not familiar, multi-text instruction, where students are exposed to a variety of information in a variety of different ways to assist in increasing their understanding and comprehension. I felt that this would be a good opportunity for my students, who had already demonstrated their lack of success with the textbook material in terms of not being able to read the words and in turn, not being able to comprehend the information being presented.

I wanted to know whether using a multi-text instructional strategy would increase the students' comprehension of the US Civil War unit material in the self-contained classroom because I believed that modifying the instructional approach would benefit the students. However, with four different components linked to the multi-text strategy, I also wanted to know which component of this strategy would give my students the most success in terms of increased comprehension of material. Would they be more successful with the lessons targeting their auditory learning, lessons targeting their visual learning,

lessons where primary documents were the center of focus, or with the lessons that involved kinesthetic activities?

Problem Statement

Students in the 7th and 8th grade need to be able to read and proficiently understand what has been written. These students need problem solving skills and reading abilities at much higher levels than which they are currently functioning.

Students	Reading Comprehension	Reading Apps.—Setting	Reading Apps.—Plot	Reading Apps.—Compare/Contrast
7th Grade	59% Correct	40% Correct	23% Correct	30% Correct
	41% Wrong	60% Wrong	77% Wrong	70% Wrong
7th Grade Special Ed.	46% Correct	21% Correct	17% Correct	21% Correct
	54% Wrong	79% Wrong	83% Wrong	79% Wrong
8th Grade	47% Correct	N/A	N/A	32% Correct
	53% Wrong			68% Wrong
8th Grade Special Ed.	35% Correct	N/A	N/A	30% Correct
	65% Wrong			70% Wrong

Source: Discovery Education Assessment (2009)

Currently the seventh and eighth grade students at my middle school are performing below average. As the data in the above table indicates, this reading problem plagues not only the special education students; it is a problem for the entire student body. The reading comprehension and compare/contrast abilities are difficult areas for both the 7th and 8th grade students however, as the data shows, identifying plot and setting is a tremendous struggle for the 7th grade students in particular. Unfortunately the

assessment does not identify the performance of the 8th grade students in the identification of setting and plot, and no data was reported in those areas.

This data derived from an online assessment the students completed in late December 2008 indicates that 7th and 8th grade students struggle in many of the same areas and helps me as a teacher know where to focus my instruction. What the data indicated was the need for increased instruction for all students, especially the special education students, as they did perform on a lower level overall.

The desired performance target, as mandated by the Ohio Department of Education, aims for 80.6% proficiency for the 7th grade students in reading and 74.9% proficiency for the 8th grade students in reading—regardless of any disabilities the students may have. The table below indicates the current statistics of the 7th and 8th grade students— both as a student body, as an economically disadvantaged sub-group, and as an IEP sub-group.

	Student Body	Off Target	Economically Disadvantaged	Off Target	IEP sub-group	Off Target
7th Grade	88 students—72.7% proficient	-7.9	40 students—75% proficient	-5.6	21 students—47.6% proficient	-33.0
8th Grade	112 students—71.4% proficient	-3.5	61 students—62.3% proficient	-12.6	24 students—29.2% Proficient	-45.7

Source: Ohio Department of Education (2008)

As this data indicates, there is sufficient need for improvement in these reading proficiency scores. While the overall student body shows room for improvement, it is the special education students where the greatest discrepancy in scores is identified. The 7th grade IEP students' reading levels are 33% below average and the 8th grade IEP students are 45.7% below average in their reading abilities. The drawback to this data is the fact that reading scores derived from a traditional paper-based assessment were reported as a whole, while the online Discovery Education Assessments break down reading into separate areas of performance to further pinpoint specified areas of discrepancy.

The state department of education is not the only watch-group to take notice of our 7th and 8th grade students' reading deficiencies. My district has held several meetings addressing the need for greater reading improvements of our students and has set a building wide goal of reaching a proficient score for all students in reading as indicated on the annual Ohio report card. We have discussed and implemented different methods and strategies to improve our reading scores building wide, as reading instruction is an area that my district is dedicated to improving so that our students can improve their comprehension skills, communication skills, and higher-level thinking skills.

The middle school students with learning disabilities need to increase their reading comprehension abilities. The issues they have with their understanding of material, problem solving skills, communication and application stems from their inability to comprehend reading material. I believe that the utilization of a modified instructional method, such as the multi-text strategy, will benefit these students who have traditionally demonstrated below-average abilities in terms of reading comprehension.

Literature Review

The Art of Reading Instruction

Introduction

Webster's Dictionary defines the verb *read* as an ability *…to look at characters or words with understanding; …to attribute (a meaning, explanation, etc…) to what is read,* and the noun *reading* is defined as the *act of one who reads* (2003). The noun *comprehension* is defined as *the ability to understand* (2003). What the dictionary fails to define, however, is the method by which reading comprehension is taught. For many individuals the ability to read and understand what has been read is taken for granted, along with the knowledge by which these individuals were taught these skills in the first place. These methods, which aim to adequately and successfully teach individuals to read and understand, have been issues of debate for almost 100 years. While conducting research for this project, I found an article that cited research on this issue dating back to the 1920's (Griesbach, 1993).

As a middle school special education teacher, I too have struggled with the best method by which to instruct my students in the art of reading comprehension. My students have a variety of deficiencies in the area of reading, ranging from word recognition to reading comprehension. These deficiencies, without exception, tend to spill over and influence their success in all academic areas—causing stress and frustration for both students and teachers. Students experience increased frustration when they are unable to read and understand the material and teachers experience increased frustration when they lack the necessary tools needed to help their students having trouble.

Webster (2003) defines <u>*success*</u> as *the achievement of something intended or desired*. It is my belief that with the correct instructional method, each and every student can experience success in all academic areas where reading comprehension plays a major role in achievement. What, however, constitutes as the "correct" instructional method by which to teach this important skill is still a matter of debate. If, however, we as educators want our students to experience success in the classroom, it may be more beneficial for those students, who, at the middle school level, have still not mastered the art of reading and comprehension, to remain open to the idea of utilizing multi-sensory reading instruction.

Fisher and Frey (2008) believe that if the expectation for all students is success, they first need to be able to use what they learn in reading to assign understanding to new material long after they leave the education environment. It is imperative that teachers "give students supports that they can hold onto" as they move out of the classroom and into the real-world (Fisher & Frey, 2008). Unless these students leave school with an ability to comprehend the written word, their chances of success will be greatly compromised.

With today's focus on content standards and yearly achievement testing, the attention to the deficiencies students possess is of primary concern on a continuing basis. It is essential to students' learning that the inadequate reading instruction be repaired in an attempt to raise the test scores of these students. The negative connotations that exist as a result of unsatisfactory test results make the responsibilities of teachers an even greater struggle. School districts today are graded on performance and when performance is favorable they are in turn rewarded with funding—all of which becomes the

responsibility of teachers in terms of raising the performance levels of the students in the classrooms.

"Educators face increasing pressure to achieve better outcomes for all students." In 1991 the "National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) indicated that only 27 percent of 315 eighth-grade students were able to write well-developed stories" (Simmons, et al, 1993, p3). In 1997, Biggins noted the alarming inability of recent high school graduates to complete application forms. It is ironic that these students are able to graduate with high school diplomas—after completing what has been determined to be a rigorous series of instruction spanning 13 years of these students' lifetime; yet these graduates are unable to adequately complete paperwork to obtain employment.

The purpose of this paper will be to review a small portion of the opinions, research, and information available in relation to this highly debatable topic that continues to plague teachers nationwide---How do I teach my students to understand what they read?

Why is this important?

Armstrong (2004) believes that reading requires an ability to see the words with our visual spatial intelligence. In order to assign a meaning to the words, students, therefore, need to be able to visualize the information to gain a clear understanding. Those students with a strong visual spatial intelligence are more likely to have improved reading comprehension abilities as a result (Armstrong, 2004). Consequently, students who do not have a well-developed visual spatial intelligence may be more likely to have difficulty understanding the material they read.

Teaching reading comprehension is a challenging task that is “difficult to define, problematic to teach, and almost impossible to access” (Stinnet, 2009, p 59). However, this challenging task is important because, as Tregenza states, “understanding what we read is at the heart of the reading process” (2008, p 24). When a student does not understand what he or she is reading, then reading becomes an activity without purpose. If a student has to struggle to gain an understanding of the text , reading in turn, is reduced to a taxing chore the student does not find enjoyable or rewarding (Tregenza, 2008).

Individuals with reading problems are not new phenomena. What is changing, however, is today’s society. It has been estimated that 20% of today’s students will “encounter serious reading difficulty or reading disability” and another 20% “will have reading difficulties so severe” that their enjoyment of reading is compromised (Simmons, Kame’enui, Good, Harn, & Braun, 2000, p5). With this knowledge then, the idea that these workers (up to 40% of our population) can survive with minimal reading and comprehension skills is obsolete in our present day world.

Our students need to be able to compete on a larger more complex global scale, something evident in the complexity and diversity of today’s classrooms (Simmons, Kame’enui, Dickson, Chard, Gunn, & Baker, 1993). In the typical American classroom of today, the growing number of students, including those with disabilities, may not acquire the basic, fundamental, academic skills and strategies. Coupled with growing class sizes and reduced instructional support, teachers are finding it more difficult to address the complex needs of their students (Kame’enui, 1998). Educators know and acknowledge that all students need to be proficient in their ability to read and

comprehend the English language, whether or not these areas are being adequately addressed in the classrooms is debatable.

Today's students need problem solving skills and reading abilities at a level higher than almost half of today's graduates are achieving. They also require an ability to effectively communicate in both the oral and written English language, an area seriously lacking in today's society. The "diverse learning needs of students in today's classrooms require a more complete understanding of the instructional and curricular factors" that influence their learning (Simmons, et al, 1993, p3). Much of these readers' difficulties stem not from decoding and comprehending literal information, but rather in taking their thinking to a higher level and applying that information to the material being presented (Biggins, 1997).

Business leaders are not the only section of society seeing an alarming decline in the educational readiness of today's students. Governors nationwide met as early as 1996 with representatives from 47 corporations in an effort to necessitate the need for higher standards (Biggins, 1997). The debate for reform and increased accountability has since continued with the beginning of the 21st Century. The call to "close the achievement gap for poor and minority students" as well as the request for educators to "improve teaching and learning" has been consistent for the last decade (Kirschner, 2004, p194).

Stephens (1993) found that 8th grade learning disabled (LD) students in rural South Carolina face many of the same reading difficulties that my LD 8th grade students face in rural Ohio. These students had weak decoding abilities, trouble finding word meaning, and difficulty in reference usage (1993, p 16). Another major concern was the

LD students' reduced ability to find the main idea, make inferences, locate details, and analyze literature (Stephens, 1993). Overall, this lack of reading proficiency made it hard for the LD students to pass the state achievement exams, which were reading-based assessments administered to all 8th grade students.

Unfortunately, the problems Stephens cited in rural South Carolina in 1993 are still relevant in my rural Ohio middle school today in 2009. After completing the 2008 reading achievement test, my district's seventh grade students with disabilities (today's 8th grade students) averaged 47.6% proficient, while my district's 8th grade students with disabilities (today's 9th grade students) averaged 29.2% proficient (Ohio Department of Education, 2008). According to a report released in 2009 by the Ohio Department of Education's (ODE), the average proficiency score achieved on the reading achievement test taken in 2008 by all 8th grade Ohio students with specific learning disabilities was 42.4%, compared to the 85.5% proficiency score achieved by Ohio's 8th grade students without disabilities (2009). Overall, the students with disabilities scored 43.1% lower than their typical peers statewide—a substantial difference which could be improved through modified reading instruction in the classroom.

Massey and Heafner (2004) see the role that middle school and high school teachers play in the classroom as not much different from the roles teachers at the primary level fulfill. These researchers feel that "all middle and high school teachers should be teachers of reading" (2004, p 26). Reading and content area instruction is linked together and, unfortunately, teachers at the secondary level often follow the belief that their instruction should only focus on the content because their students should already know how to read (Massey & Heafner, 2004).

What then is the message we wish to send our students at the secondary level? Are we ready to tell our students that just because they never learned to read at the primary level they will not be given the same opportunities for success as their peers who did acquire this critical skill? Are we ready to tell these students that we will let them struggle and if necessary continue to fall behind and possibly even fail because teaching a student how to read is the job of primary teachers not secondary teachers? I do not think any responsible educator can intentionally send this message to any student, although we are silently stating these beliefs when we fail to take the necessary steps to alleviate these misguided practices of the past. If these students have to read to understand the content then teaching students how to read becomes the responsibility of all teachers, regardless of whether they are "primary" teachers or "secondary" teachers.

Factors that influence

In 1998 the Portland Multnomah Progress Board (PMPB) documented the variations in language acquisition experienced by children on all levels of the economic spectrum. The board found that children living in white collar families hear an average 2100 words per hour, while children living in the homes of working-class families are exposed to 1200 words per hour (PMPB, 1998). In comparison, children in economically disadvantaged families are only hearing 600 words per hour, a significantly lower number still (PMPB, 1998). Consequently, the board cited that by the age of four years, these economically disadvantaged children have lost exposure to 13 million words over the course of their language development (PMPB, 1998). This significant lack of exposure may in turn greatly impact these children's ability to read and comprehend material when they reach a formal educational setting.

Students who are lacking a positive learning environment at home may find it harder to develop reading skills in the classroom (Buschick, Shipton, Winner, & Wise, 2007). Typically, students who come from low-income households, where there is little focus given to education and reading, may not hold these skills in priority. These could also be families who do not utilize the local library on a regular basis and have a limited or even nonexistent supply of reading materials at home (Buschick, et al, 2007).

Motivation is also a strong influence in the success students experience with reading comprehension, "which may be the result of demographics, culture, and the socio-economic status of the community they live in" (Buschick, et al, 2007, p20). Gable, Kaiser, Long, and Roemer (2007) believe that a student's ability to read and comprehend the material is directly related to one's motivation. Overall, the harder it is to motivate students to take an interest in reading, the harder it will be to increase their reading comprehension as well (Buschick, et al, 2007).

Another factor of influence is dependent on whether the students are being instructed at the primary level, middle school/adolescent level, or even into adulthood, as this will greatly influence the approaches taken with reading instruction. According to Biggins and Sainz, by the time students reach 4th grade "there are too many words to try and memorize and still operate independently at appropriate grade level" (1997, p9). Therefore the methods by which older students are taught to read should obviously be approached differently than when teaching younger students where the focus tends to be centered on pronunciation skills rather than comprehension skills.

Teachers at the secondary level tend to take one of two approaches to classroom instruction where reading comprehension is crucial to success (Massey & Heafner, 2004). The first approach, according to Massey and Heafner, that many teachers adopt is to "spoon-feed the text" to their students by reading the material aloud or summarizing the information for the students (2004, p 26). The second approach teachers adopt is simply assigning pages in the textbook to be read and not offering assistance to the students (Massey & Heafner, 2004). Both of these approaches, while common practice in middle school social studies classrooms, are results of teachers not knowing how to help their students further develop the skills and strategies that are necessary for reading comprehension (Massey & Heafner, 2004).

As a middle school social studies teacher, who teaches students with disabilities, I see the reliance on these "techniques" as instruction on a daily basis. Unfortunately, I am guilty of the "spoon-feeding," especially in my self-contained classroom. I rationalize this practice because I find the classroom textbook too hard for my learning disabled students to read, let alone comprehend. As a co-teacher in an inclusion classroom, I am aware of the practice of assigning the reading of textbook material without further support being offered in social studies classrooms with the typical students as well.

The influence of state funding, national and state curriculum, and assessment standards play as big a role in teaching and learning as do publishers and family structures (Kame'enui, 1998). Urban and rural districts with limited funding will find it harder to implement costly remediation programs than suburban districts with middle and high-income status. However, this ties into the idea of whether or not effective remediation programs need to be costly. Is it an attainable goal to reach the same

instructional results in all districts regardless of location and funding? Simmons, Kame'enui, Good, Harn, Cole, and Braun propose that with a Schoolwide Reading Improvement program where all teachers approach the subject of instruction with the same instructional methods to obtain similar results for all students in any school and or district nationwide (Simmons, et al, 2000).

An important question plaguing educators is the issue of time. How far behind are the students who need instruction, and how much time do educators have to instruct them? For many educators the school day is simply not long enough to focus on quality instruction for all learners. The idea that students with different levels of ability will receive the same amount of quality instruction is usually not attainable within the time frame offered for each class. Students receive equal minutes of instruction in so many areas of learning, but with so many students experiencing reading and comprehension deficiencies it may be more beneficial to increase reading instruction and remediation during the school day. Simmons, Kame'enui, Good, Harn, Cole, and Braun agree with increased reading periods for students as well. In their report released in 2000 the need to allocate resources to create the extra reading time was part of the focus. However, their does not seem to be a "magic" number as to how long this increased instruction should be, as every student is unique and may need more or less time to correct their reading deficiencies.

Best Practices

What constitutes as the best method to instruct students in the art of reading? Is there a supreme method of instruction that will enhance and improve students' ability to

read? Over the last twenty years several authors have attempted to highlight what they believe to be the best method for instructing students to read. Those highlights will be reviewed in this section.

In 1989 Liberman, Shankweiler, and Liberman took the position that in order for students to be properly educated in reading they had to somewhat master the alphabetic principle. This principle, according to these researchers, is an awareness of the internal phonological structure of the words of the language. Liberman, Shankweiler, and Liberman found that beginning learners with weaknesses in phonological awareness had directly related failures in reading and writing.

Liberman, Shankweiler, and Liberman (1989) also found that these learners had problems with their short-term memory. This "working memory" functions on the ability to gain access to phonological structures and then uses it to give meaning to linguistic structures. The studies found that students who were poor readers also had deficient short-term memory. The working memory of the poor readers was being "overloaded" because of phonological processing deficits. Perhaps even more interesting was the idea that these students who could not pronounce a word, could in fact, correctly describe the object in question (e.g. volcano/tornado) (1989, p 6).

Another study released in 1993 by Simmons, Kame'enui, Dickson, Chard, Gunn, and Baker examined the need for integrating reading and writing instruction. The researchers noted that when reading and writing classes were taught together the learners had a "greater variety of reasoning operations" than when the classes were taught separately. The evidence also suggested that writing was more developed with integration

and the benefits could be documented for all students “with and without learning disabilities.” It is important to note that unlike Liberman who favored one method of reading instruction, Simmons, Kame’enui, Dickson, Chard, Gunn, and Baker propose five areas of instructional focus—big ideas, strategic integration, conspicuous strategies, mediated scaffolding, and judicious review (1993).

In 1997 Biggins and Sainz promoted the ESTRI (Easy Steps to Reading Independence) method of instruction. This method enables students with limited reading ability and non-readers to begin reading immediately, without the prerequisite of knowing sight words. Students are taught to use their listening and oral communication skills to learn how to read and write. For example, students are able to read pictures, charts, and graphs to answer higher level questions. (What’s the main idea? What does the picture show? What are the supporting details?...) The analogy was made that if a doctor will not operate without reviewing an x-ray (i.e. picture) then why is it wrong to think students cannot read without pictures (Biggins & Sainz, 1997)?

In 1998 Kame’enui proposed the use of a School-Wide Intervention Model (SIM) of reading instruction with primary students the intervention was more beneficial. In this model students are instructed in the areas of phonological awareness, alphabetic understanding, and automaticity with the code. Reading instruction is the primary focus at the early grade levels, in an attempt to greatly improve the reading ability of these students. Through proper monitoring and collaboration, Kame’enui found that the results were highly achievable in the education of all students.

In 1999 Hill also took a look at phonetic instruction as a "pre-requisite" for reading success. Hill takes issue with the belief that reading success is only attainable by proper phonemic awareness in students. The research Hill conducted indicated that students, who are taught to read only through the phonics system, do not promote reading success. In fact she believes that

> Reading is the process of globally constructing meaning through dynamic interaction between the reader's prior knowledge, the information suggested by the written language on the paper, and the context of the reading situation itself…reading is not merely the acquisition of mechanics or text deciphering.

According to Hill (1999), taking a "constructivist, holistic approach to the teaching of reading" is necessary to help students "love to read with understanding" (p 10-11).

In 2000 McCulloch proposed that teaching basic language arts skills within a "whole" language arts program would bring the best results to students. McCulloch takes issue with the belief that teachers who pass out, pick up, grade, and subsequently send these worksheets home with students are somehow providing reading instruction. This "one-pronged approach," as McCulloch states, is only benefiting 70% of learners. The remaining 30% of students who learn through auditory or kinesthetic instruction are being discriminated against. McCulloch sees the "whole" language method of instruction as benefiting all learners, not just those programmed to understand worksheets (2000, p 6-7).

Simmons, Kame'enui, Good, Harn, Cole, and Braun released another report in 2000 documenting more instructional reading methods. This time the group proposed the

need for children to develop and become proficient in the "big ideas of phonemic awareness, alphabetic understanding, and automaticity with the code." The best way to develop reading proficiency, according to the researchers, is to engage in early systematic explicit instruction. The research suggests that when students are instructed through the integration of an alphabetic writing system coupled with the implementation of this system into schools and districts, results in reading improvement will be evident (2000).

Kirschner took a different approach when highlighting the best practice for reading instruction in 2004. Kirschner, along with five language arts teachers in Michigan, were able to write a middle school curriculum that was aligned with the standards of the Michigan Curriculum Framework (MCF). The curriculum focused on five areas of literacy instruction—speaking, listening, reading, writing, and viewing. The challenge, however, was in implementing instruction into the separate courses of reading and English. Ultimately the challenge was a success and the students who had once been "nonreaders" were "transformed…into a community of readers" (2004, p 202).

Massey and Heafner (2004) take the approach that teachers, particularly middle school social studies teachers, should use a scaffold approach in the classroom. They believe that using a Scaffolded Reading Experience (SRE) in conjunction with content area instruction allows for a more organized framework of reading instruction. In return, students are better able to accomplish a task that may be out of reach through traditional, non-supported instruction because the entire block of information is being broken into smaller pieces the students are better able to comprehend (2004, p 26).

In 2007 a report issued by the What Works Clearinghouse on the benefits of the Wilson Reading System was released. The Wilson Reading System (WRS) is a program

> Designed to teach phonemic awareness, alphabetic principles (sound-symbol relationships), word study, spelling, sight word instruction, fluency, vocabulary, oral expressive language development, and comprehension.

This multi-sensory method of instruction was designed for students in 2nd grade or higher and according to the report is found to have potentially positive effects in alphabetic principles. Although no concrete effects were found to be influenced in the fluency and comprehension fields, the study did note that these areas were not adequately tested (2007).

Spellman feels that students who are diagnosed with ADHD usually benefit from the simple accommodation of extended time (2009). Her study, conducted in Chicago, IL, found that ADHD students' comprehension scores increased when they were allowed extra time to complete assessments. This is a good strategy for students with disabilities, such as ADHD, however, the study does not focus on the students with disabilities who may have more serious deficiencies than extended time can alleviate.

Fisher and Frey (2008) believe that teachers need to support their students to do well in the classroom and beyond. They believe the best support system teachers can offer their students is to model the thinking they will need to utilize in real-life situations, provide access to the academic language they will experience, offer opportunities for peer collaboration, and use guided instructional practices in the classroom (2008, p 34). The benefits of such a practice will be evident when students are able to imitate the same

behaviors when they are reading complex texts in future settings (Fisher & Frey, 2008). With enough modeling and practice, students will be able to increase their comprehension through the use of various cognitive strategies (Fisher & Frey, 2008).

In 2009 Pruisner released a report asking for the adoption of a new model of instruction called TEP (Teacher Education Program). Since the launch of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) in 2002, school districts nationwide rushed to adopt the Reading First Progam endorsed by the federal government. This instructional model is comprised of instruction that focuses on phonics, phonemic awareness, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension (Pruisner, 2009, p 42). The bones behind this focus came from the two common beliefs that students should be instructed through either a skills-based model, a major component of the Read First model, or a comprehension-based model that focused on a whole-language approach (Pruisner, 2009, p 42).

By merging the two models together, a third model is created—the stage model (Pruisner, 2009). This model has been gaining popularity because it combines instruction in skills and strategies to lead students to reading proficiency and ultimately, reading comprehension (Pruisner, 2009, p 42). Overall, the goal of TEP is to provide struggling readers with instruction that helps them grow their knowledge base to obtain reading comprehension that can be utilized across all grade levels—elementary to secondary (Pruisner, 2009). Unfortunately, Pruisner does not elaborate on how far behind these struggling readers can fall to gain the most benefit from this instructional model.

In 1994 Hartman and Hartman released a report encouraging teachers to use multi-text materials with classroom reading instruction. They acknowledge that students

have been taught to read singularly, for example one story, one chapter, one paragraph, without realizing or appreciating how multiple texts are related, and want to give reading a larger purpose. Hartman and Hartman believe that when students are instructed through multiple texts they will gain a greater understanding of the overall concepts and ideas that are being represented, hence resulting in better reading comprehension (1994).

"Educators in content-area classrooms need to implement the same key practices that work in reading classrooms" (Ivey, 2002). Teachers can utilize reading strategies to help their students organize and retrieve information. These strategies can include graphic organizers, utilization of word walls, vocabulary building strategies such as structural analysis, and proper use of graphic organizers to help the students make sense of the reading material being presented. Another instructional technique is exposing students to a multi-text classroom. "Students in a multitext classroom are also more likely to read with understanding because they are not limited to one particular text that they might find inaccessible" (Ivey, 2002).

The multi-text instructional technique is perhaps the promising at the middle school level. With the use of multi-texts in the classroom, students' "focus of study" is shifted to "concepts rather than the content of a particular book" (Ivey, 2002). This helps students gain a more "in-depth sense of the subject matter from reading many texts on the same topic" (Ivey, 2002). These materials, which can include journals, photo-essays, picture books, primary-source documents…, can also be formatted for the different reading levels found inside a diverse classroom of students.

Barriers to instruction

While refreshing as it may be to have access to a multitude of instructional strategies, there are in fact several barriers to this instruction. According to Liberman, Shankweiler, and Liberman, reading deficiencies are a direct result when students are not properly instructed as to how our alphabet works. They acknowledge that for 75% of students, the ability to pick up the alphabetic principle without explicit instruction is possible. However, for the group (20-25%) of students who possess phonological weaknesses, the absence of proper phonological instruction would cement them into a sight-word reading stage. Liberman, Shankweiler, and Liberman believe that the best practice for reading instruction is not evident in the "whole language" programs she sees as being "disastrous," but rather within alphabetic/phonological instruction (1989).

The idea of focusing solely on decoding skills is often the norm in terms of reading instruction at the primary level (Massey & Heafner, 2004). However, this practice can be disastrous because decoding does not guarantee that the students comprehend the words. In fact, Massey and Heafner believe that "many students who can read fluently are unable to comprehend the words that they read" (2004, p 26).

Simmons, Kame'enui, Good, Harn, Cole, and Braun identified another barrier with the "common misconception" that with the identification and adoption of commercial based programs, intervention has somehow been determined. They point out that "core intervention" includes time for reading, implementation, and monitoring of progress. This integration of assessment and instruction is essential to effective special education ideals (Simmons, et al, 2000).

Biggins and Sainz point out several barriers, the first being found in standardized testing. While these assessments identify areas of weakness in students, they provide little information for improving the students' instruction and learning. The second barrier, according to Biggins, Sainz, and Hill, is in phonics instruction itself. Biggins and Sainz believe that this kind of instruction is systematic and not open to interpretation and discussion, unlike whole language instruction where students have continued support in many subject areas and contexts (1997). Hill sees a barrier to instruction when focus is placed on phonemic awareness in an attempt to provide a "quick-fix for reading difficulties rather than invest in the necessary teacher training for competent, high-level, holistic teaching strategies" (1999, p 11). The third barrier, according to Biggins and Sainz, is the need for increased dialogue among public officials, business people, and educators alike. These individuals need to discuss what skills students will need to be successful adults who contribute to their communities, because our requirements of a half-century ago have changed dramatically with our new global, highly technological society of the present. Without this dialogue students will not gain the necessary instruction they deserve (1997).

Mastropieri, Scruggs, Mohler, Beranek, Spencer, Boon, and Talbott (1997) have identified another barrier in the reduction of reading instruction at the secondary level of schooling. They find that "as students with mild disabilities" move from elementary to secondary school, "they receive less and less" classroom time devoted to reading instruction (1997, p 25). The researchers feel that this important skill not being addressed is "necessary to success in school," especially in a special education setting where effective reading instruction is a challenge (1997, p 25).

Another potential hindrance to instruction is the issue of how well the material in the classroom appeals to the interests of the students using the information. Often times, teachers find that the material in the classroom is outdated and does not hold the interests of the students (Buschick, et al, 2007). Holding the attention of middle school students is even harder because of the variation in interests that are represented at this age level (Buschick, et al, 2007). Middle school students generally lack interest and motivation in reading and many of the students that share a classroom do not share the ability to read on the same level (Buschick, et al, 2007). Ultimately, however, the bottom line the teachers face is the availability of funds to produce updated material through the district, picking up the expense to purchase new, or utilizing what is available (Buschick, et al, 2007). However, Stinnet cautions that the textbook is "truly meant to be a resource," not the sole form of instruction used to replace the teacher (2009, p 63).

Perhaps the greatest challenge facing today's teachers is the task of meeting the needs of all students in the classroom (Scharlach, 2008). The focus of instruction tends to be geared at helping those students who struggle with reading, although, Scharlach cautions that as teachers our responsibility lies with improving the reading achievement of all students, not just those who are behind (2008). One or two groups cannot be forgotten for the sake of another.

Gable, Kaiser, Long, and Roemer (2007) support this belief as well. They too acknowledge the placement of students below grade-level, at grade-level, and above grade-level in one classroom and the challenges teachers face trying to teach them all. These researchers suggest that teachers utilize multi-level texts to appropriately instruct all students in the classroom at their level of ability.

Conclusion

My focus as a middle school special education teacher is to help my students learn to comprehend what they are reading. What, however, constitutes as the best method by which to teach my students how to understand what is being read is as challenging as the group of students in my classroom. I have non-readers and low-level readers alike who rely on me to help them make sense of the social studies material being presented every day. I acknowledge that the textbook is often times too challenging for reading, let alone comprehension, so I do use the information as a resource, not the sole form of instruction.

The method I believe will provide the most success for students in my classroom is the multi-text instructional model. This system, in my opinion, seems to offer the best well-rounded approach to reading comprehension education. I believe a system of instruction where students are exposed to a variety of information in a multi-text environment will be more beneficial to my students than focusing all attention on one method of instruction where standard textbook information is the key ingredient.

The Problem

Students in the 7th and 8th grade need to be able to read and proficiently understand what has been written. These students need problem solving skills and reading abilities at much higher levels than which they are currently able to perform. These students also need to be able to effectively communicate both orally and in written form to demonstrate higher level thinking skills and the application of information.

Research Design and Approach

I plan on using an action research methodology to measure which components of multi-text instruction my 7th and 8th grade students with disabilities will experience the most reading comprehension. By exposing students to a multi-text instructional unit they are, "more likely to read with understanding because they are not limited to one particular text that they might find inaccessible" (Ivey, 2002, p21).

The multi-text instructional technique is perhaps the promising at the middle school level. With the use of multi-texts in the classroom, students' "focus of study" is shifted to "concepts rather than the content of on particular book" (Ivey, p21). This helps students gain a more "in-depth sense of the subject matter from reading many texts on the same topic" (Ivey, p21). These materials, which can include journals, photo-essays, picture books, primary-source documents…, can also be formatted for the different reading levels found inside a diverse classroom of students.

Rationale for the Research Approach

I have chosen this research approach because I feel that is the best method for measuring the effectiveness of modified reading instruction with junior high learning disabled students. As the researcher and teacher I will be able to actively participate in this study and make changes if necessary. I will also be able to gather statistical and narrative data on a first-hand basis in an effort to prove the effectiveness of such instruction. In effect I want to improve my teaching and the learning of my students at the same time and an action research approach is the most beneficial approach to help me reach my goal.

Role and Bias as the Researcher

My role as the researcher will be to teach the Civil War unit with multi-text instruction and measure the extent to which that instruction increased reading comprehension scores for my students with reading disabilities. I will take on the role of data collector and analyst with this project as well. It will be my responsibility to gather the data and in turn analyze and interpret the information to prove how effective multi-text instruction is at increasing reading comprehension scores of students with disabilities.

Bias which may surface involves my knowledge of how the students learn and how that knowledge may affect my lesson design to accommodate those strengths. I have been teaching these students all year and have learned to accommodate their different learning styles in an effort to help them become more successful in their studies. With my end goal of wanting to help my students be successful, I have taken steps to try and alleviate this bias. I have designed lessons that address the content and reading instruction through a multi-text design, but have allowed for modifications and adaptations for the students with disabilities when necessary.

Sampling Techniques

Participants for this research will be non random. Participants will be chosen based on disability and placement. Two 8^{th} grade students and one 7^{th} grade student with learning disabilities will be chosen for the multi-text instruction. This is a purposeful choice, as these are my students who share the same daily self-contained history class that I teach.

Target Audience

The three students chosen for this research are all 14 year old male students who have specific learning disabilities. Students A and B are currently reading at a third to fourth grade level and the student C is currently reading at an emerging level. Students B and C are in 8th grade and student A is in the 7th grade, however, they all share the same self-contained history class on a daily basis. The students whose comprehension is being analyzed are in a special education, self-contained classroom. This is a permanent "pull-out" model where the students are removed from the rest of their peers for separate non-inclusion instruction because of the severity of their disability makes it unrealistic to receive an appropriate education with their non-disabled peers. There are no other students to which this group can be compared therefore a comparison or control group will not be used.

Hypothesis

As this is an action research project, I do not have a hypothesis. Rather, I will attempt to answer the following questions. To what extent will multi-text instruction improve my students with disabilities reading comprehension during a Civil War instructional unit? Which of the interventions used most effectively increased the ability of the learning disabled students to answer comprehension questions?

I want to know whether using a multi-text instructional strategy will increase the students' comprehension of the US Civil War unit material in the self-contained classroom because I believe that modifying the instructional approach would benefit the students. However, with four different components linked to the multi-text strategy, I

also want to know which component of this strategy will give my students the most success in terms of increased comprehension of material. Will they be more successful with the lessons targeting their auditory learning, lessons targeting their visual learning, lessons where primary documents are the center of focus, or with the lessons that involve kinesthetic activities?

Data Collection Methods

The first method through which data will be collected will be both a pre and post test to compare growth in knowledge of the material. The second and third methods of collection will be the students' work samples and a teacher observation checklist that will be completed as the students are engaged in their multi-text learning. In effect, I will be analyzing the data to determine the amount of information gained by the students in correlation to different components of the multi-text instruction. I will be measuring whether the students learned more information from one component as compared to another throughout the entire unit.

Instruments Used for Data Collection

The instruments that will be used for the pre and post test collection are a teacher-made content area test. These items will yield quantitative data to be used in determining how much growth the students made from their baseline to the end of the unit. I will also use a teacher-generated observation checklist that rates student engagement in the various components of the multi-text lessons and student work samples (e.g. Venn diagram and story map) to identify which lessons were the most successful in terms of student comprehension. The checklist will yield quantitative data on a scale of 0-2, '0' for no

involvement, ‘1’ for minimal involvement, and ‘2’ for maximum involvement. The narrative data will be qualitative and will be used in relation to the quantitative data to search for a common theme of interest, involvement, and performance.

Description of Data

The ordinal data from the pre-test will be used to determine a baseline of student knowledge. The post-test ordinal data will be used in comparison with the pre-test data to determine how much growth the students experienced as a result of the multi-text strategy. The scores will be compared against each other to measure how much growth the students experienced by the end of the unit. Each student will be scored individually and compared against each other, as these students are all members of a special education, self-contained classroom and will not be compared to any other classroom or group of students. This data will be represented to show how much growth in comprehension the students achieved.

The data collected through the observation checklist will also be represented numerically through a pre-determined rating scale (0-2) that measures how involved the students were in the different components of the multi-text lessons. The checklist will ask three questions, (Did the student remain on task? Did the student seem interested in the lesson? Did the student participate in the classroom discussions?), and will be completed for each student a total of five times. The maximum score one student can receive will be ‘10’ and the lowest possible score will be ‘0’.

Finally, the data collected through the students’ work samples will be a narrative description that will serve as an analysis of the responses the students generated from the

lessons. The narrative data from three work-samples (geographical map, story map, and economic compare/contrast) will explain how well the students completed the task, how much prompting and cueing was provided, and an overall description of how the students' answers looked in terms of neat v. sloppy.

Research Procedure

My plan is to give my students a pre-test to determine their overall level of knowledge before any formal instruction on the Civil War has begun. I will then begin instruction on the Civil War using the modified multi-text instructional unit and data collection methods provided in the appendices. This instruction will take approximately two weeks to complete. After individual components of the instruction are completed I will collect the data through the identified methods outlined in the previous instrument section. The performance objectives of this instructional unit have been outlined below.

1. Given five comprehension questions on President Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation, the student will be able to answer four questions correctly.
2. Given a map of the United States, the student will be able to identify "slave" states and "free" states 4 out of 5 times.
3. Given a poem written during the Civil War era, the student will be able to identify the poem's main idea in a multiple choice format.
4. Given a picture of Confederate soldiers and Union soldiers, the student will be able to compare and contrast the two pictures using a Venn diagram.

5. Given a reading passage on the Civil War, the student will be able to generate ideas for a story map after hearing the passage read aloud.

I used Dick and Carey's (2005) five instructional components coupled with the Teaching for Understanding design theory to create this unit. I arranged my lessons using Dick and Carey's (2005) suggested format, but found it beneficial to generate the bulk of my lessons using the teaching for understanding design. I first set out to generate my topics about the Civil War material and then looked at what I felt the students needed to understand within these topics. The next step I tackled was how to teach the material I wanted my students to understand, a challenging task at times. The final step was deciding how I would assess my students' understanding of the material, another challenging yet beneficial step because I can offer my students feedback and reflection on an ongoing basis.

When I was designing my lessons, I utilized Gardner's Multiple Intelligences for my instructional strategy. I wanted to design lessons that would appeal to a variety of senses because I wanted my students to internalize the knowledge for use with future classroom assessments and state exams. My lessons are designed to incorporate linguistic—oral reading activities, auditory—active listening, spatial—analysis of photographs, kinesthetic—creating a study guide map, interpersonal—historical document reflection, and intrapersonal learning—collaboration with peers, for the students understanding. I believe that if students are exposed to material and information through a multi-sensual experience then they will develop a deeper understanding of the content (Brualdi, 1996).

The activities used in these lessons are closely tied to Gardner's Multiple Intelligences instructional strategy. The students who participate in the lessons I have

created will be given the opportunity to navigate the Internet—kinesthetic, linguistic and spatial intelligences, collaborate with their peers—intrapersonal intelligence, create usable study guides, such as maps—kinesthetic, linguistic and spatial intelligences, analyze historical photos—spatial intelligences, develop a deeper understanding of a primary historical document—interpersonal intelligence, and receive teacher feedback on an ongoing basis. The lessons are designed with the students in mind; therefore opportunities to strengthen or improve their linguistic, auditory, spatial, kinesthetic, interpersonal and intrapersonal learning are given precedence (Brualdi, 1996).

The assessments I designed to measure the performance objectives are both classroom activities and independent assessments for students to complete. There are a variety of assessments including multiple choice questions, map identification, critical thinking responses, and graphic organizers. Again, the purpose behind the variety of assessments ties into Gardner's Multiple Intelligences theory of design. I want my students to be immersed in these lessons with as many senses as possible to help them obtain a deeper understanding of the material.

The lessons, activities and instruction that accompany my Civil War unit allow the needs of the learning disabled special populations to be met. I have incorporated the use of technology into the lessons to assist the students who have reading and writing deficiencies. I have also designed my lessons to allow teachers to modify, model, and scaffold the activities, assignments and instruction for students who are learning disabled and may need these requirements in the classroom. Students are always given the opportunity to demonstrate their success before the lesson can continue to the next piece of material. Most importantly, this unit was designed to allow for individualization,

meaning that changes can be made at an as-needed, individual level both in an inclusion and self-contained setting.

The purpose of this action research project was to determine how effective multi-text instruction was at increasing the reading comprehension of middle school students with learning disabilities. The project was conducted in an effort to answer the following questions. To what extent will multi-text instruction improve my students with disabilities reading comprehension during a Civil War instructional unit? Which of the interventions used most effectively increased the ability of the learning disabled students to answer comprehension questions?

I wanted to know whether using a multi-text instructional strategy would increase the students' comprehension of the US Civil War unit material in the self-contained classroom because I believed that modifying the instructional approach would benefit the students. However, with four different components linked to the multi-text strategy, I also wanted to know which component of this strategy would give my students the most success in terms of increased comprehension of material. Would they be more successful with the lessons targeting their auditory learning, lessons targeting their visual learning, lessons where primary documents were the center of focus, or with the lessons that involved kinesthetic activities?

Five individual lessons were created to implement the multi-text modified instructional strategy. Before any instruction began, the students were all given a pre-test to establish a baseline. Following the modified instruction the students completed a post-

test to establish how much growth was made from the beginning to the end of the experiment.

During the first lesson I read a fictional, story, picture book to the students. Following the reading, the students were asked to create a story map that summarized the information presented in the book. This story map activity focused on utilizing the students' linguistic, auditory, and visual intelligences to complete the task, as they were required to listen to the story, look at the pictures, and then provide a short summary.

The second lesson centered upon using the Internet to navigate interactive Civil War maps. When the students finished their exploration they were then given a blank map which they were asked to label and then color to identify Free states, Border States, and slave states. This activity involved the use of kinesthetic and visual intelligences to complete accurately.

The third lesson the students were exposed to involved the use of Civil War photographs. Students were shown a series of photographs from the Civil War period that depicted Union soldiers and Confederate soldiers. After spending time analyzing the photos, the students were then asked to complete a Venn diagram where they compared and contrasted the different photos. This activity's main focus was on the visual intelligences.

The fourth lesson the students experienced was the reading of the poem, *O' Captain,* by Walt Whitman. The students read this poem together as a class and then began the activity of figuring out what the poem was talking about. This activity required

the students to use their intrapersonal skills as they needed to collaborate with their peers in an effort to gain a better understanding of the poem's meaning.

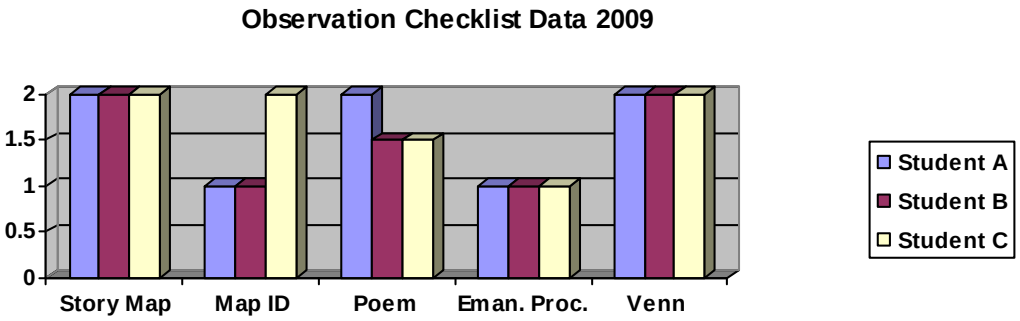
The fifth and final lesson focused on the Emancipation Proclamation, a primary historical document reflection. The students were presented a copy of the Emancipation Proclamation in their textbooks, which they read and then tried to reflect upon. This activity required the use of the students' interpersonal skills in an effort to analyze the primary historical document.

While the lessons were being implemented both quantitative and qualitative data was collected. Quantitative data was obtained from the pre and post test scores as well as an observation checklist that I completed while the students were engaged in the lessons and activities. Qualitative data was collected in the form of narratives that I created by analyzing three separate work samples provided by each of the three students participating in the study.

The quantitative data obtained from both pre and post test scores shows that Student A scored 25% higher on the post test, Student B scored 10% higher on the post test, and Student C scored 50% higher on the post test. The quantitative data supported by the observation checklists shows that Student A scored 8/10 points, Student B scored 7.5/10 points, and Student C scored 8.5/10 points. The data in the observation checklist only referred to the students' participation and on-task behavior with all five lessons.

Further analysis of the checklist data indicates that Student A averaged a score of 1 (minimal involvement) on the map identification and the emancipation proclamation activities, and a score of 2 (maximum involvement) on the story map, poem, and Venn diagram activities. Student B averaged a score of 1 on the map identification and

emancipation proclamation activities and a score of 2 on the story map and Venn diagram activities. Student B averaged a score of 1.5 on the poem activity. Finally, Student C scored an average 2 on the map identification, story map, and Venn diagram activities and a score of 1 on the emancipation proclamation activity. Student C scored an average 1.5 on the poem activity.



The qualitative data provided by the narratives I created after analyzing the student work samples supports the quantitative data obtained through the observation checklist. The qualitative data shows that all of Student A's work was neat in appearance. The data also shows that Student A was able to complete the story map and Venn diagram activity with limited prompting, however, this student needed constant prompting and cueing to complete the geographical map assignment.

The qualitative data shows that while most of the work samples completed by Student B were neat in appearance, the story map activity was a bit sloppy looking. The data also shows that Student B was able to complete the story map and Venn diagram activities with limited prompting, but did require constant prompting to complete the geographical map activity.

The qualitative data analyzed from Student C's work samples show that all three work samples were neat in appearance. The data also shows that Student C needed limited prompting to complete the Venn diagram and story map activity; however, this student required no prompting to complete the geographical map activity.

The quantitative and qualitative data analysis shows that all three students were able to participate in the five modified lessons and each student experienced an increase in knowledge. These three data sources are also supporting that while all three students were able to complete all of the activities, some lessons were more successful than others. The triangulation of data is also indicating that Student C, who experienced the largest gains of 50%, required the least amount of prompting, provided neat and legible work samples, and maintained interest and participation with the more lessons than Students A and B. The data triangulation also indicates that Student B, who required the most prompting, turned in a sloppy work sample and had the lowest participation and interest in the lessons had the least amount of increased knowledge, at only 10%.

When looking at the five lessons presented to the students in separate components, it quickly becomes apparent that all three students had trouble with the interpersonal component. When asked to investigate the primary historical document of the Emancipation Proclamation, all three the students had trouble staying focused and on-task. I think this happened because the vocabulary used in this document is vastly different from the vocabulary we use in today's modern world. This becomes even more important when acknowledging the reading deficiencies each of these students possess. It stands to reason that if a student has trouble reading and understanding modern-day

vocabulary, an unfamiliar and often times more complex vocabulary of the past becomes even more difficult to understand.

Another interesting finding the data shows is that three activities required the students' use of visual skills. Each of the three students did well with the story map activity that required visual, linguistic and auditory skills and they did well with the photo activity that required visual and intrapersonal skills. However, the map activity that required both visual and kinesthetic skills was difficult for both Students' A and B to complete without constant prompting. Student C, on the other hand, did not require any prompting to finish the task. This finding leads me to believe that the kinesthetic element may have decreased the Students' A and B motivation and or interest to complete the activity. It would be necessary to further investigate this possibility, however, because I am unable to accurately determine the reasoning behind this finding.

The data is showing that Student C, the individual with the lowest reading ability in the group of participants, received the highest scores with the multi-text instructional strategy. This finding may be related to Student C's success with the visual and intrapersonal components of the modified instruction. I believe this happened because this student is such low level reading abilities. I think he has learned to strengthen his visual, auditory, kinesthetic, and intrapersonal skills in an effort to compensate for his inability to read. In turn, this compensation technique had equipped this student with alternative skills to help him understand what is going on in the lesson without reading the words.

This experimental project, according to the data, supports my belief that the multi-text instructional strategy does help students with learning disabilities increase their reading comprehension. The data also supports the fact that the visual, auditory, and intrapersonal components of the modified instruction helped the students with learning disabilities find the most success. In the end, the students were able to participate in all five lessons; however, the extent to which they found success was influenced by their individual strengths and weaknesses.

It is important to keep in mind the limitations of this research project. The students involved in this modified curriculum are students with moderate learning disabilities. Because of the nature of their disabilities they are secluded from the mainstream classroom where the more typically functioning students are assigned. The results that were obtained may seem minimal in terms of typically functioning students, however, for these self-contained learning disabled students the results are both appropriate and positive.

To gain a better perspective of how students with mild learning disabilities would perform with this modified curriculum a study addressing this area would need to be conducted. This study in no way makes any attempt to indicate that all students with learning disabilities will find success utilizing this method of instruction, however, this study did indicate that the students with moderate learning disabilities were successful.

Another limitation that needs clarification is that only three students with learning disabilities participated in this study. With more students participating in the study there would have been more data to collect. It would have furthered my study to have had the

opportunity to implement this study and collect data from both typical and non-typical students as well. This increase in data, in turn, may have led to a different outcome of results.

I must also acknowledge that this study was conducted over a short, two-week period of time. I believe that if I had conducted this study over an entire grading period, or even an entire school year I would have gained much better data. Conducting a study over an extended amount of time would have allowed me the opportunity to analyze more assignments and observe my students classroom participation much more thoroughly.

Overall, this study implies that the modified multi-text instructional strategy worked. In the future I believe that I will continue to utilize this strategy in the classroom, especially in my history classroom. I will also share my findings with fellow colleagues in an effort to promote the use of this technique in other classrooms with both typical and non-typical students.

References

Armstrong, T. (2004). Making the words roar. *Educational Leadership*, 78-81.

Biggins, C. M.; Sainz, J. (1997). Easy steps to reading independence (ESTRI), 2-12. (ED409525) Retrieved October 10, 2008 from http://www.eric.ed.gov

Brualdi, A.C. (September, 1996). Multiple intelligences: Gardner's theory. Published in *ERIC Digest.* Retrieved on December 29, 2008 from www.ericdigests.org/1998-1/multiple.htm

Buschick, M. E., Shipton, T. A., Winner, L. M., & Wise, M. D. (2007). Increasing reading comprehension in elementary and middle school students through the use of multiple intelligences, 1-95. (ED498926). Retrieved April 2, 2009 from http://www.eric.ed.gov

Dick, W., Carey, L., & Carey, J. O. (2005). The systematic design of instruction (6th ed.). Allyn & Bacon. ISBN-0-205-41274-2.

Discovery Education Assessment Objectives and Subskills Report (2009). *Pymatuning Valley Middle School Grade 7 and 8 Reading/Language Arts.*

Fisher, D., Frey, N. (2008). Releasing responsibility. *Educational Leadership*, 66(3), 32-37.

Gable, K. A., Kaiser, K. L., Long, J. K., & Roemer, J. L. (2007). Improving reading comprehension and fluency through the use of guided reading (ED496377). Retrieved April 2, 2009 from http://www.eric.ed.gov

Griesbach, G. (1993). Dyslexia: its history, etiology, and treatment, 2-14. (ED358409) Retrieved October 10, 2008 from http://www.eric.ed.gov

Hartman, J. A., & Hartman, D. K. (1994). Arranging multi-text reading experiences that expand the readers' role, 1-26. (ED376435) Retrieved April 6, 2009 from http://www.eric.ed.gov

Hill, S. (1999). A study of the knowledge of phonics, phonemic awareness, and developmental spelling ability in primary non-readers, 2-13. (ED4359830). Retrieved October 10, 2008 from http://www.eric.ed.gov

Ivey, G. (November, 2002). Getting Started: Manageable literacy practices. *Educational Leadership.*

Kame'enui, E. J.; Simmons, D. C. (1998). Beyond effective practice to schools as host environments: Building and sustaining a school-wide intervention model in beginning reading. *OSSC Bulletin,* 41(3). (ED418403) Retrieved October 10, 2008 from http://eric.ed.gov

Kirschner, B. M. (2004). Working with curriculum standards to build a community of readers in a culture of non-readers. *Educational Horizons,* 82 (3), *194-202.* (EJ684796) Retrieved October 10, 2008 from http://www.eric.ed.gov

Liberman, I. Y., Shankweiler, D., Liberman, A. M. (1989). The alphabetic principle and learning to read, 1-34. (ED427291) Retrieved October 10, 2008 from http://eric.ed.gov

Massey, D. D., & Heafner, T. L. (2004). Promoting reading comprehension in social studies. *International Reading Association,* 10, 26-40.

Mastropieri, M. A., Scruggs, T., Mohler, L., Beranek, M., Spencer, V., Boon, R. T. & Talbott, E. (1997). Best practices in promoting reading comprehension in students with learning disabilities. *Remedial and Special Education,* 18(4*),* 19-27.

McCulloch, M. T. (2000). Which builds stronger language skills—workbooks or direct instruction? Will teachers spend their time dispensing consumable worksheets or imparting skills through direct instruction? 1-8 (ED439402) Retrieved October 10, 2008 from http://www.eric.ed.gov

Ohio Department of Education (2009). *ODE Data Warehouse Reports 2007-2008*. Retrieved on April 27, 2009 from http://ode.state-oh.us

Ohio Department of Education (2008). *2008 AYP Summary for Pymatuning Valley Middle School*.

Pruisner, P. (2009). Moving beyond No Child Left Behind with the merged model for reading instruction. *Tech Trends,* 53(2), 41-47.

Scharlach, T. D. (2008). START comprehending: Students and teachers actively reading text. *Reading Teacher,* 62(1), 20-31.

Simmons, D. C., Kame'enui, E. J., Good, R. H., Harn, B. A., Cole, C., & Braun, D. (2000). Building, implementing, and sustaining a beginning reading model: School by school and lessons learned. *OSSC Bulletin,* 43(3), *3-33.* (ED443080) Retrieved October 10, 2008 from http://www.eric.ed.gov

Simmons, D. C., Kame'enui, E. J., Dickson, S., Chard, D., Gunn, B., & Baker, S. (1993). Integrating narrative reading comprehension and writing instruction for all learners, 2-19 (ED365943). Retrieved October 10, 2008 from http://www.eric.ed.gov

Spellman, M. (February, 2009). Extra test-taking time boosts reading comprehension for adolescents with ADHD. *Neuropsychiatry Reviews*, 10(2), 10.

Stephens, M. A. (1993). Developing and implementing a curriculum and instructional program to improve reading achievement of middle-grade students with learning disabilities in a rural school district, 1-136. (ED359492) Retrieved April 6, 2009 from http://www.eric.ed.gov

Stinnet, M. (2009). Research in reading. *Illinois Reading Council Journal*, 37(2), 59-64.

Tregenza, J., Lewis, M. (December, 2008). Beyond simple comprehension. *Literacy Today*, *57*, 24-26.

Webster's Dictionary for home, school, and office new, revised, and expanded edition. (2003). USA: Kappa Books.

Wilson Reading System [R] What Works Clearinghouse Intervention Report. (2007). *Institute of Education Sciences*. (ED497727) Retrieved October 10, 2008 from http://www.eric.ed.gov