

CLOSE READING COMPLEX GRADE-LEVEL TEXT DIFFERENCES IN  
READING COMPREHENSION FOR THIRD-GRADE STUDENTS IN TITLE I  
SCHOOLS

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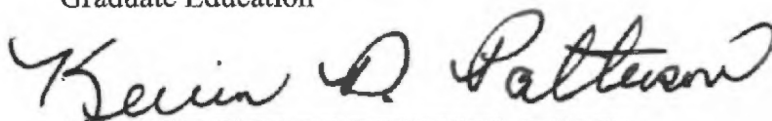
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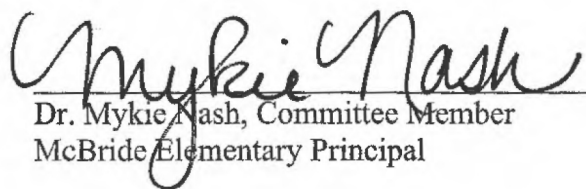
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CLOSE READING COMPLEX GRADE-LEVEL TEXT DIFFERENCES IN READING  
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A Dissertation  
Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of  
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In partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

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By

Jennifer Allie, B.S., M.S., Ed. Spec.

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2023

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## ABSTRACT

In today's era of high stakes testing, increased expectations for student achievement, and demands for schools to prepare students for life beyond public education, schools are feeling the pressure to improve reading comprehension and proficiency levels for all learners. This includes students who come from economically challenged backgrounds and areas that may create barriers to learning. This research is based on the theoretical framework of scaffolding and the gradual release of responsibility model. The review of literature includes examinations of the work done by Peter Gallagher, Douglas Fisher, Nancy Frey, and Richard Allington who credit both scaffolding and the gradual release of responsibility model as effective practices when teaching reading comprehension to students. Many researchers further indicate that this method of instruction may assist educators as they search for effective methods of instruction. This researcher examines the differences in reading comprehension as measured by the Missouri Assessment Program (MAP) between schools that use close reading as a component of reading instruction and schools that do not use close reading. A statistical analysis of third grade Communication Arts MAP percentages for the 2018-19 and 2020-21 school years was completed using an independent samples *t*-test.

## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

Twenty-three percent of students reading below grade level at the end of third grade drop out of high school (Hernandez, 2011). While many of these students were placed in reading interventions to focus on improving reading achievement, these interventions are not always successful in accelerating students fast enough to be reading on grade level by the end of third grade (U.S. Department of Education, 2018). Educators were faced with daily challenges as they found ways to meet the needs of these at-risk students. Teachers and school leaders were under immense pressure to fill the achievement gaps of these students (Keith, 2018), not only to ensure their success, but also to improve the school's overall achievement levels. Nineteen states have mandated retention laws in place for students who do not reach a specified level of reading proficiency by the end of third grade (Hwang & Duke, 2020).

To ensure students are successful readers and able to master the skills and strategies they need for reading achievement, educators paid close attention to their literacy instruction. Clear and explicit instruction was in place and educators relied on constant monitoring and feedback from students as they determined their level of support (Keith, 2018). When students were not successful and did not reach the mastery level, instruction had to be adjusted, scaffolding needed to increase, and additional supports were put in place (Wanzek et al., 2018). These supports came in the form of additional modeling or reteaching using a different method of delivery within the classroom as a Tier I support (Anderson, 2019).

Tier I classroom instruction should be researched based (Michigan Department of Education, n.d.; RTI Action Network, n.d.). Adequate, evidence-based Tier I instruction can eliminate inappropriate instruction as the cause for struggling readers (RTI Action Network, n.d.). Academic progress can be delayed if students do not have access to strong Tier I instruction (Michigan Department of Education, n.d.). While many researchers have studied close reading and the impact this has on reading comprehension, there is limited research on how close reading impacts students in high poverty, Title I schools where students already have educational disadvantages (Milner et al., 2017).

In Chapter One, the researcher presents the problem statement regarding close reading in Title I schools. The study examined third-grade Missouri Assessment Program (MAP) Communication Arts scores at Title I schools that used close reading as a component of reading instruction as compared to schools that did not use close reading as a component of reading instruction. The theoretical framework of the study was based on Vygotsky's scaffolding theory (Margolis, 2020) as well as Pearson and Gallagher's gradual release of responsibility theory (Anderson, 2019). Chapter One detailed the problem statement and purpose of the study as well as an explanation of the research questions that were used to guide the study. The theories of scaffolding and gradual release of responsibility are analyzed in detail. Finally, the other components of Chapter One will include the null hypotheses, limitations, delimitations, assumptions, design controls, and definitions of key terms.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The researcher viewed the current theories on literacy instruction that guide literacy instruction through Vygotsky's (1978) scaffolding theory (Margolis, 2020) as

well as Pearson and Gallagher's gradual release of responsibility model (Fisher & Frey, 2021). Acquiring foundational literacy skills is essential for students (Stanley et al., 2018). At an early age, students are exposed to literacy through oral language and printed literature and take on an awareness of letters and sounds, words, and sentence formation. Literacy instruction evolves as students progress through school and the shift changes from decoding practice to deepening comprehension. Because students start school with varying levels of literacy abilities and learn at different rates, teachers are faced with the tough task of altering instruction and differentiating to meet the needs of every student in their classroom. As a result, teachers must scaffold their level of support to an appropriate level for each student (Tomlinson et al., 2003). The researcher chose scaffolding and gradual release of responsibility model to guide the study because both theories have evidence based research to support the use of these practices as a means to support reading comprehension.

### ***Scaffolding***

Scaffolding refers to the process by which a teacher or more expert learner adds support for students to enhance their learning so they can master tasks so new knowledge can be constructed (Sinadinovic et al., 2018). According to Vygotsky (1978), this support should be within the learner's zone of proximal development, the zone where the learner is close to becoming an expert at something but still requires some guidance and support (Webb et al., 2019). Scaffolding allows a learner to achieve a goal that is beyond their unassisted efforts (Heilman, 2018). Educators must pose questions that raise the thinking challenge and elaborate on the knowledge the learner already possesses (Govindasamy & Kwe, 2020). Incomplete or wrong concepts will be challenged or

corrected through scaffolding (Sinadinovic et al., 2018). Personal experiences through new background knowledge or hands-on learning support students as they make meaning from new knowledge (Whaley et al., 2019). The goal is to remove the scaffolds or supports to allow the learner to achieve total independence and mastery of the task.

Scaffolding facilitates student independence by providing a supportive environment that allows students to receive needed support that is temporary. The support should be removed once the student has reached independence (Salem, 2017). Students acquire more confidence and capability in a task or concept as they gradually develop toward independence (Shoaib Ahmed Malik, 2017). Unfortunately, there is no recipe or set of guidelines as to when the scaffold is removed; the instructor should know when and how to remove support (Shoaib Ahmed Malik, 2017). The amount of scaffolding and the type of support will vary for each student and teachers must use formative data and observations to know when the scaffolding is no longer necessary (Anderson, 2019). Educators must gradually release the responsibility to the learner and enable them to find success independently. When students increase their knowledge base and use strategies that have been modeled through scaffolding, they can self-regulate their learning (Nash, 2010). Students feel more optimistic about their educational journey because they encountered a challenge themselves. This has a positive impact on student motivation and learning performance (Hasan & Karim, 2019). They did not listen to a lecture about it or read about it in a book (Rahmat et al., 2020). Students' cognitive potential is exposed to learning or acquiring new skills (Hasan & Karim, 2019). This leads to mastery at levels higher than the student's current cognitive function (Heilman, 2018).

### ***Gradual Release of Responsibility***

Multiple researchers agree that learners are successful when learning follows the process of teacher modeling with explicit instruction (McVee et al., 2019), followed by guided practice, and ending with independent practice (Anderson, 2019; Webb et al., 2019). This gradual release of responsibility framework enables students to successfully reach things out of their level of independence over time with support and scaffolding (McVee et al., 2019). This model was first introduced by Pearson and Gallagher in 1983 as a way to guide comprehension strategy instruction (Anderson, 2019). There are a few variations of the gradual release of responsibility (GRR) model, but all endorse the initial suggestions from Pearson and Gallagher, which support students beginning with a high degree of teacher support that is gradually released as students progress (Falk & McNamara, 2018). This process has spanned decades and increases in use and support daily (McVee et al., 2019).

This model or framework recommends that teachers begin by clearly explaining the strategy. Learners need explicit and clear information to understand how it is used before they learn more about it (McVee et al., 2019). Next, experienced educators should model the strategy for the learner. The use of think-alouds is an important part of this step so the learners can see and hear the process by which they should be obtaining the new materials. As educators model think-alouds the use of naming metacognitive processes is key as this helps students see how to use this important cognitive approach (Fisher & Frey, 2021). The educator will then engage students in guided practice. Students need experience and practice to fully master the new skill or task. Meaningful, real-life situations help create an authentic learning approach that

supports learners (Noskova et al., 2021). Scaffolding is important during this step as the educator monitors the students' learning and responds to their needs to guide them closer to mastery (Danley, 2018). This means the educator may need to model or demonstrate in another way if the learner is slower to reach mastery. Finally, students will take on the learning on their own as they move into independent practice (McVee et al., 2019). At this stage, most if not all of the scaffolds or support are removed, and the learners begin transferring the new knowledge to multiple learning experiences (Anderson, 2019).

Educators must recognize that the gradual release of responsibility is not linear. Students will move back and forth between the components as they master new skills, strategies, and standards (Webb et al., 2019). Gradual release may occur quickly for some students and slowly for others and it may occur quickly for an individual student with one standard and slower for another standard. Educators should always be monitoring the mastery level of students and make adjustments accordingly (McVee et al., 2019). When providing scaffolds and support, educators should begin with a low level of support and keep adding to what they have provided if students are not successful. Providing too much support or a higher level of scaffolding than the student needs does not allow the learner to take ownership of the learning and use the skills and strategies they know to master the new learning (Shoaib Ahmed Malik, 2017).

### **Problem Statement**

Drawing from Vygotsky's theory of scaffolding (Margolis, 2020) as well as Pearson and Gallagher's gradual release of responsibility model (Fisher & Frey, 2021), the researcher sought to determine the differences in third-grade students' MAP Communication Art scores in Title I schools. Data were compared between schools that

used close reading as a component of reading instruction and schools that did not use close reading as a component of reading instruction. Data were then analyzed by the researcher to determine if a significant difference occurred between schools that used close reading and schools that did not use close reading.

Twenty-three percent of students reading below grade level at the end of third-grade drop out of high school (Hernandez, 2011). Over the last two decades, nearly 30 states have adopted laws regarding reading benchmarks and student retention in third grade. These laws either require or suggest retention if students do not meet identified benchmark scores on standardized reading assessments (DellaVecchia, 2020). The laws, developed over concern for literacy achievement in students, created unintended consequences. DellaVecchia (2020) noted that students that are retained are consistently more likely to drop out of school than non-retained students. Eighty-eight percent of students that did not receive a high school diploma were struggling readers in third grade (Weyer & Casares, 2019). Children with reading abilities or children that are at risk in elementary grades frequently fall behind and are below grade level if they do not receive interventions or supplemental support (Bratsch-Hines et al., 2020). Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), which was adopted in 1965, provides federal funds to state and local agencies as a way to increase funding to students living in poverty. The goal is to break the cycle of poverty (Rodas, 2019). Children born into poverty may also experience a lack of school readiness, which can lead to later cognitive problems (Bouchrika, 2022). Struggling readers are being placed in reading interventions where the focus is reading text on their identified instructional level (Torgesen, 2005). These levels are far below the students' current grade level. Students are not

receiving instruction using grade-level text during interventions. This type of instruction only allows students to succeed using texts below grade level. For students to accelerate at a rate fast enough to perform at grade level according to grade-level benchmark assessments, instruction using grade-level text may be necessary (Brooke, 2017). Close reading of a complex text is an instructional practice teachers can implement that will allow them to scaffold support at the level the student needs (Kerkhoff & Spires, 2015). The problem is that the literature has not fully addressed studies of Title I schools that use close reading as a component of reading instruction by analyzing third-grade MAP Communication Arts scores.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this quantitative, causal-comparative study was to test the theories of scaffolding and gradual release by comparing Communication Arts school building MAP scores of third-grade students that were instructed using close reading to students that were not instructed using close reading in Title I schools. A causal-comparative study was used so the researcher could observe differences between existing groups (Frey, 2018). In this case, the groups were students that were instructed using close reading and students that were not instructed using close reading.

The Common Core State Standards adopted in 2009 included standards that required students to read and comprehend text that was complex beginning in second grade. Students were being exposed to language and topics that were unfamiliar in complex texts. Teachers had to increase levels of support and provide more scaffolding for students to successfully read and comprehend texts. Close reading was a way for teachers to show students how to tackle complex texts and allow them opportunities to

practice this high level of comprehension (Lapp et al., 2015). The research questions determined the design of the study along with the types of data that were used. The data determined the effectiveness of close reading for third-grade students in Title I school buildings as measured by MAP scores.

### **Research Questions**

**RQ1:** What is the difference in proficient and advanced Communication Arts Missouri Assessment Program (MAP) scores of third-grade students in Title I schools engaging in close reading of complex grade-level text as part of their reading instruction compared to third-grade students not engaging in close reading practices as measured by MAP scores in the 2018-2019 school year?

**RQ2:** What is the difference in proficient and advanced Communication Arts Missouri Assessment Program (MAP) scores of third-grade students in Title I schools engaging in close reading of complex grade-level text as part of their reading instruction compared to third-grade students not engaging in close reading practices as measured by MAP scores in the 2020-2021 school year?

### **Null Hypotheses**

**H<sub>01</sub>:** There will be no statistical difference between the reading comprehension level of third-grade students in Title I schools engaging in close reading of complex grade-level text as part of their reading instruction compared to third-grade students not engaging in close reading practices as measured by Missouri Assessment Program (MAP) scores in the 2018-2019 school year.

**H<sub>02</sub>:** There will be no statistical difference between the reading comprehension level of third-grade students in Title I schools engaging in close reading of complex

grade-level text as part of their reading instruction compared to third-grade students not engaging in close reading practices as measured by Missouri Assessment Program (MAP) scores in the 2020-2021 school year.

### **Significance of the Study**

Students that are not proficient readers by the end of third grade are at risk of not completing high school. Twenty-three percent of students reading below grade level at the end of third grade drop out of high school (Hernandez, 2011). Eighty-eight percent of students that did not receive a high school diploma were struggling readers in third grade (Weyer & Casares, 2019). These data support the reasons why it is important to ensure all students are reading at a proficient level by the end of third grade.

In Title I schools, students are already at risk for school failure. Students living in poverty may not have the educational benefits of students living in higher income households (Milner et al., 2017). Children born into poverty face significant challenges (Bouchrika, 2022) and are often academically disadvantaged (Milner et al., 2017). These students have a lack of school readiness, which often leads to cognitive problems (Bouchrika, 2022). Title I programs in schools are intended to close the gaps for these students living in poverty and provide them with opportunities to meet academic standards including reading at a proficient level.

Close reading is a practice educators are using as an instructional tool to deepen comprehension (Fisher et al., 2012). Close reading allows readers to closely read and comprehend complex text (Baker & McEnery, 2017). Readers first focus on what the text said or its literal meaning (Fisher, n.d.). Then readers begin to think about what the text did not explicitly say by annotating (Baker & McEnery, 2017) and engaging in a

discussion of the text (Snow & O'Connor, 2013). These annotations and discussions are guided by teachers with specific questions to support students in reaching a higher level of thinking and analysis (Baker & McEnery, 2017). Thinking about texts through discussions is a form of scaffolding that supports the gradual release of responsibility model (Webb et al., 2019). This scaffold assists in the complex task of reading comprehension by allowing the learner to elaborate on the knowledge they already possess (Govindasamy & Kwe, 2020). While many researchers have studied close reading and the impact this has on reading comprehension, there is limited research on how close reading impacts students in high poverty, Title I schools where students already have educational disadvantages (Milner et al., 2017). This study is significant as it will add research to the area of Tier 1 instruction and could impact how schools plan instruction for students living in high poverty areas that are already at-risk of dropping out of school.

### **Definition of Key Terms**

**Close reading.** This type of reading instruction is defined as offering a high level of teacher support of more challenging texts as a way for students to deepen their understanding of the text by focusing on specific patterns or details. It follows the practice of examining the text, rereading the text, making observations about the text, and annotating the text (Ensley & Rodriguez, 2019).

**Complex text.** Complex text is defined as text that explores Lexile level, story structure, illustrations, point of view, vocabulary, language, theme, and textual knowledge as a means of comprehension. Text can have varying levels of complexity based on how deeply it examines each of these areas (Witte, 2016).

**Reading comprehension.** Reading comprehension is the complex task of using word decoding and linguistic comprehension and requires the use of word reading, working memory, inferences, vocabulary, and prior knowledge (Elleman & Oslund, 2019).

**Struggling readers.** Struggling readers are defined as low achievers with reading difficulties in word study, decoding, fluency, vocabulary, comprehension, or a combination of these (Wanzek et al., 2018).

**Title I.** Provides financial assistance to local state agencies and schools with high numbers or percentages of children in low-income families to ensure children meet the challenges of state academic standards (U.S. Department of Education, 2018).

### **Limitations**

This study was limited by the following factors:

- The number of Title I school buildings in Missouri.
- The number of school buildings that used close reading.
- The amount of professional development teachers have received in close reading.
- The accuracy of the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) published MAP data.
- The reliability of MAP as a measure of achievement.

### **Delimitations**

This study was delimited by the following factors:

- Public school buildings in Missouri.
- Title I school buildings in Missouri.

- School buildings that used close reading instruction.
- Third-grade students in Missouri public schools.
- MAP data as a measure of achievement.
- Buildings outside of Missouri were not considered.
- Data reports for the 2018-19 and 2020-21 school years.
- Data report for 2019-20 was not used.

### **Assumptions**

The researcher made the following assumptions:

1. The participating teachers would follow all of the steps of close reading and implement them with fidelity.
2. Teachers had formal training in close reading.
3. Students receiving close reading instruction would receive weekly instruction with this practice.
4. All achievement scores were accurately recorded and available through DESE's website.
5. The results will generalize to a similar population the researcher was studying, which would make the results of this study useful for that population.

### **Design Controls**

This study was a causal-comparative study of differences in close reading in complex grade-level text as part of reading instruction for students in Title I schools and students that did not receive instruction in close reading of complex grade-level text as part of reading instruction. Causal-comparative studies are conducted to examine potential causes for observed differences among groups where experimental manipulation

may be prohibited or unethical (Fulmer, 2018). Data were collected from MAP data of third-grade students. Third-grade students were chosen because that was the first grade level that participated in MAP testing. The data were examined for the differences in achievement levels of students receiving close reading instruction as part of reading instruction and were compared to achievement levels of students that did not receive close reading as part of reading instruction. The independent variable was defined as close reading included as a component of reading instruction. The dependent variable was defined as reading comprehension as measured by MAP scores.

To limit the control to a specific population the researcher selected multiple criteria for the study. Within that criterion, there were areas the researcher was not able to control. These limitations may have impacted the results of the study. The first limitation the researcher could not control was the number of Title I schools in Missouri. The DESE (2016) defined Title I schools as those with 40% or more of its students living in poverty. Another area the researcher could not control was the school buildings that used close reading as part of their reading curriculum as this was not a practice all buildings were required to include. Furthermore, the researcher was limited by the amount of training teachers within those buildings had in close reading. The accuracy of MAP scores as reported on the DESE website was another area where the researcher did not have control. The final area that contributed to the limitations of this study was the reliability and validity of MAP scores as a measure of reading comprehension. The researcher utilized the MAP Technical Reports from 2019 and 2021 to check for the reliability and validity of MAP data. All of these areas contributed to the limitations of the study and were not areas the researcher could control when conducting research.

To better control the delimitations of this study the researcher examined one grade level of students, third-grade students. The researcher also chose to narrow the focus to students that were enrolled in Title I public elementary schools in Missouri. This allowed the researcher to examine students that had similar characteristics across multiple school buildings. The researcher ensured that student confidentiality was maintained by using no identifiable information for the school building, classroom teacher, or student population. All data used in this study were public data. The data were examined to determine a difference between buildings that used close reading and buildings that did not use close reading. To avoid bias, the researcher used existing data from school building profiles from Missouri DESE. The scores were provided by Missouri DESE. Buildings were randomly chosen based upon survey results rather than buildings being hand-picked by the researcher in order to further eliminate bias. Since data were not available for the 2019-2020 school year due to the mandated shutdowns from the Missouri governor during the Covid-19 pandemic, the researcher chose to use data from the 2018-2019 and 2020-2021 school years. It was not identified in the study which buildings the researcher collected data from in order to protect confidentiality and eliminate bias.

### **Summary**

Educators face challenges daily when it comes to teaching students how to read (Shanahan, 2017). They are tasked with providing appropriate reading instruction for students to read and comprehend complex grade-level text. If students are not successful after initial instruction, adjustments must be made and additional support may be needed (Allington, 1994). The purpose of this quantitative, causal-comparative study was to test

the theories of scaffolding and gradual release by comparing third-grade students that were instructed using close reading to students that were not instructed using close reading in Title I schools. This study addressed scaffolding support through the gradual release of responsibility framework and how educators utilize close reading as an appropriate level of support for students in Title I schools. This study will address the gap in literature that exists regarding close reading and the impact it has on reading comprehension for third-grade students in Title I schools.

Chapter Two will include the literature review organized theoretically beginning with scaffolding and the gradual release of responsibility model, with additional analysis of struggling readers, Title I, close reading, reading comprehension, reading assessments, and third-grade students. The exploration of struggling readers includes the rationale, screening process, and placement in interventions. The literature review focused on Title I including screening and identification, placement, progress monitoring, and evaluating effectiveness. The close reading literature review included research to explain this practice as well as an overview of the phases. The reading comprehension literature review defined reading comprehension, explained areas that impact reading comprehension, examined how background knowledge affects reading comprehension, expounded on current research, and described the theoretical models of reading comprehension. The reading assessments literature review explained the types of assessments and expanded on commercial and informal reading assessments as well as high-stakes testing. The final section, third-grade students, expanded on reading requirements and characteristics specific to students of that age.

The third chapter of this study focused on the methodology being used including the participants, sample selection, research setting and design, instruments used to collect data, procedures, and data analysis. Chapter Four included the presentation of the data that were collected during the study, a review of data organization, and the reporting and analysis of the findings of the study. Chapter Five included a summary of the findings, conclusion, implications for practice, and recommendations for further research.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **Introduction**

The purpose of this quantitative, causal-comparative study was to test the theories of scaffolding and gradual release by comparing Communication Arts school building MAP scores of third-grade students that were instructed using close reading to students that were not instructed using close reading in Title I schools. Educators are faced with the daily challenge of teaching kids how to read. Literacy instruction is a complex task that includes teaching skills, strategies, and content combined with teachers' flexibility and adaptability in daily decision-making and interactions with students (Paige et al., 2021). Even though a strong emphasis has been placed on reading and writing in classrooms, elementary classrooms in particular, 64% of fourth-grade students were reading below grade level in 2017 according to the national Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), the only nationwide assessment of reading data (EAB Global, Inc., 2019). Reading proficiency in third grade is a major predictor of high school graduation (Rasinski et al., 2017). Previous research conducted by NAEP in 2012 showed that 37% of fourth-grade students and 39% of eighth-grade students were reading at least one grade level behind grade-level proficiency benchmarks (Rasinski et al., 2017). In 2022, The Nation's Report Card reported that 32% of fourth-grade students in public schools were at or above reading proficiency level as measured by NAEP. Of the 52 states and jurisdictions reported, eight states scored about the nation, 37 were not significantly different from the nation and seven were lower than the nation.

The review of the literature of this study is made up of seven major topics: theoretical framework including scaffolding and gradual release of responsibility, struggling readers, Title I, close reading, reading comprehension, reading assessments, and third-grade students. The first section focuses on scaffolding and the gradual release of responsibility model: scaffolding contingencies, types of scaffolding, and scaffolding critiques, and the development and adaptations of the gradual release of responsibility model. The second section focuses on struggling readers: rationale, screening process, and placement in interventions. The third section focuses on Title I including requirements and implementations in school. The fourth section focuses on close reading: research to explain this practice as well as an overview of the phases. The fifth section, reading comprehension, will define reading comprehension components, explain the comprehension process, and expand on theories of reading comprehension. The sixth section focuses on reading assessments and expands on commercial and informal reading assessments as well as high-stakes testing. The final section, third-grade students, expands on reading requirements and characteristics specific to students of that age. This study will address the gap in literature that exists regarding close reading and the impact it has on reading comprehension for third-grade students in Title I schools.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The researcher viewed the current theories on literacy instruction that guide literacy instruction through Vygotsky's (1978) scaffolding theory (Margolis, 2020) as well as Pearson and Gallagher's gradual release of responsibility model (Fisher & Frey, 2021). The researcher will expand upon these theories in the following sections.

Throughout Chapter Two the research will integrate these theories into the research done in other areas.

### ***Scaffolding***

Scaffolding refers to the process by which a teacher or more expert learner adds support for students to enhance their learning so they can master tasks so new knowledge can be constructed (Sinadinovic et al., 2018). Learners can carry out tasks or achieve goals beyond their unassisted efforts through scaffolding (Reynolds & Daniel, 2017). Scaffolding is used to support learners as they learn new materials (Mikita et al., 2019). Teachers make contingent decisions as they provide scaffolding to students. These decisions include when to give help known as temporal contingency, how much help to give or instructional contingency, and what to emphasize known as domain contingency (Reynolds & Daniel, 2017).

Instructional contingency is defined by how much information to provide learners while scaffolding (Mikita et al., 2019). When using instructional scaffolding, educators may provide additional information to a reader that has made an unsuccessful word-solving attempt if a student is not moving closer to solving the word. Mikita et al. (2019) noted the amount of information provided would then decrease as the learner moves closer to solving the word. As learners have difficulty, teachers should increase the amount of support provided and when learners have success, the support should be decreased (Reynolds & Daniel, 2017).

Domain contingency relates to the decisions educators make about what information should be focused on when providing scaffolded support (Mikita et al., 2019). When students are solving words to read, they focus on many sources of

information including meaning, structure, and visual information. Educators must prompt students to use a neglected source of information when they are unsuccessful at solving a word. In a study conducted by Rodgers (2017), it was found that teachers whose students had higher outcomes were 8 times more likely to be domain contingent than teachers whose students had lower outcomes. Without adjusting help when learners encounter difficulty, frustration is created.

Instructional settings are likely to contain a mix of scaffolding including planned and interactional scaffolding (Reynolds & Daniel, 2017). Planned scaffolding occurs through lesson plans and curricular tools that are determined before a student begins learning. This may be through instructional texts and computer programs. Interactional scaffolding is responsive and in-person. During interactional scaffolding, an expert learner supports a novice learner. Interactional scaffolding is more responsive to student needs (Mikita et al., 2019). Both types of scaffolding are designed to transfer the responsibility of learning from teacher to student and fade support over time (Reynolds & Daniel, 2017).

Some scholars have critiqued the term “scaffolding”, suggesting that it refers to any type of support or instruction (Reynolds & Daniel, 2017). Scaffolding may also be more difficult in areas like comprehension. Decoding is an area where scaffolding may be more successful. Reynolds and Goodwin (2016) noted that while scaffolding may differ from student to student if educators analyze scaffolding and consider the amount of help provided and the type of support given, scaffolding can lead to higher outcomes for learners.

### ***Gradual Release of Responsibility***

The gradual release of responsibility model began in response to the findings of Dolores Dunkin's 1978-1979 study of reading comprehension instruction. This study found that little instruction was happening when students were just completing assignments or question-response activities (McVee et al., 2019). Vygotsky's work in 1978 stated that the sweet spot for learners was the zone of proximal development. This is where learners had the support of a more expert learner to gain independence on something out of their reach (Webb et al., 2019). Using this knowledge, Pearson and Gallagher developed the gradual release of responsibility model due to the recognition of the need for teachers to lead and scaffold instruction while supporting independence (McVee et al., 2019). This instructional approach model for comprehension strategy instruction included explicit instruction, guided practice, and independent practice (Webb et al., 2019).

This model has spanned decades and become an influential and significant model in the field of literacy (McVee et al., 2019). It has evolved and been adapted by other educators and scholars but has kept some of the key concepts through these adaptations including modeling, guided practice, and independent practice. Over time, two primary implementations of the gradual release of responsibility model have evolved (Webb et al., 2019). The first implementation is linear. With this implementation, the teacher leads students through an I do, we do, you do format. The goal is to complete this format in a single lesson. McVee et al. (2019) reported that one variation of this format is the addition of the coloration (we do together) zone, which occurs in between we do and you

do phases. In this phase, the more knowledgeable person fostering independence is a fellow student rather than a teacher.

In another adaptation of the gradual release of responsibility model, educators believe students can do complex things without initial modeling or explicit instruction. This adaptation abandons the “I do, we do, you do” format and creates a format that is not linear (Webb et al., 2019). This format allows learners to try a new skill first while the teacher observes. The teacher then models what students have not mastered and supports the learners as they move towards independence and mastery of the skill (McVee et al., 2019). This format is grounded in the importance of teacher observation, feedback, assessment, and decision-making (Webb et al., 2019) and requires teachers to be flexible (McVee et al., 2019).

The gradual release of responsibility model should not be viewed as a lesson plan that educators follow, but rather as a scaffold as teachers create independence of new skills and materials with learners (Webb et al., 2019). Using this format, educators should withdraw scaffolds over time to allow students to take on more responsibility for their learning (McVee et al., 2019). This model has been widely used and published in other works over the years. Webb et al. (2019) noted that while no one format of the gradual release of responsibility model fits all learners, it is important for the format to remain responsive to be useful for instruction.

### **Struggling Readers**

Identifying struggling readers and providing intensive interventions is an important task for educators (Wanzek et al., 2018). Without proper interventions, struggling readers will continue to lack the necessary reading skills to develop into

adequate readers able to comprehend and decode text (Allington, 1994). Current reading achievement is the best predictor for future reading success (Torgesen, 2005). Children with reading abilities or children that are at risk in elementary grades frequently fall behind and are below grade level if they do not receive interventions or supplemental support (Bratsch-Hines et al., 2020; Wanzek et al., 2018).). Difficulties with reading can be categorized into three different areas. The first one is difficulty with decoding, which may be dyslexia (Duke & Cartwright, 2021). All students with dyslexia cannot effectively decode words. Their oral language skills play an important part in their ability to successfully comprehend written text (Nation, 2019). The second one is difficulty with listening comprehension called hyperlexia. The third and final one is difficulty with both. Students who are considered proficient readers will demonstrate high skills in both decoding and comprehension (Duke & Cartwright, 2021). As students progress through elementary school and enter middle school, motivation and reading self-efficacy plummet. This is the case even with proficient readers, but even more disastrous for struggling readers. This can be tragic for students in upper grades as students become less inclined to read as they reach middle school and high school (Snow & O'Connor, 2013). Fourth grade is a critical grade as students at this level begin shifting from learning to read to reading to learn (Coch, 2021; Wanzek et al., 2018).). Educators must consistently assess and monitor the progress of students to successfully provide the most relevant instruction for all students. Proper scaffolding and support must be in place to progress students through the gradual release of responsibility as they learn new materials (Anderson, 2019). The responsibility should shift from teacher to learner through modeling, guided practice, and independent practice as students acquire new knowledge

about how to read (Hall et al., 2021; Wanzek et al., 2018).). Since reading is a complex process, comprehension can be broken into smaller tasks including finding the main idea of texts, identifying text structures, summarizing, and inferring unknown words as a way to scaffold the comprehension of text (Webb et al., 2019). As students decode, scaffolding occurs contingently (Reynolds & Daniel, 2017).

Researchers agree that early screening and identification can be a solution to the ever-growing challenge of reducing the number of struggling readers in schools (Rock, 2018; Torgesen, 2005). Screening can begin as early as kindergarten and should include measures of phonemic awareness including sound comparisons, phonemic segmentation, and phoneme blending as well as tests to check for knowledge of letter names and sounds. These assessments can be administered by anyone familiar with the tests. No special training is required (Torgesen, 2005). Lower phonological awareness and vocabulary knowledge, which are developed with early readers, are two factors associated with poor reading outcomes for elementary students (Bratsch-Hines et al., 2020). Students that do not develop strong reading skills in primary grades will most likely continue to have difficulty in later grades. Phonics practice improves read word and nonword reading fluency in poor readers (Coch, 2021). Many reading difficulties can be prevented with early reading interventions (Wanzek et al., 2018). Classroom reading instruction alone does not necessarily result in effective, self-regulated reading behaviors for students (Mežek et al., 2022).

Screening assessments should be used to determine which students may be at risk of failing to meet reading achievement benchmarks. This screening should begin as early as kindergarten. At-risk students will then be identified and interventions and additional

support can begin. Teachers must make adjustments to the instruction before a gap in learning occurs (Rock, 2018). Differentiated instruction that is targeted to specific student needs might help these students become proficient readers (Bratsch-Hines et al., 2020). Planned scaffolding or scaffolding through lesson plans or curricular tools may occur at this time. Educators may use instructional texts, packaged reading curriculums, or computer programs to support learners as they move toward independence (Reynolds & Daniel, 2017).

Wanzek et al. (2018) reported that once students fall behind in terms of reading growth and development, they require intensive interventions to accelerate them back to acceptable reading levels. The research of Wanzek et al. (2018) supported that low levels of reading achievement predict low levels of reading achievement even with intensive Tier 2 interventions. Simply rereading a text does not automatically improve comprehension. Monitoring and shifting of strategies through teacher feedback and support are required (Mežek et al., 2022) as responsibility shifts from teacher to learner (Hall et al., 2021). Reading interventions provided in primary grades that focus on phonological awareness, rapid naming, fluency, and the alphabetic principle are reported to have higher impacts on reading success than interventions implemented in upper elementary and secondary grades (Wanzek et al., 2018). Reading fluency may be especially hard to fully restore due to the vast amount of time the student spent struggling to successfully read (Allington, 1994). Fluency is an important reading skill as it is viewed as the coordination of all reading processes and subskills and is the bridge between word recognition and reading comprehension (Meisinger et al., 2022). All readers use multiple strategies when reading. Good readers use strategies that have been

modeled more effectively and are aware of processing and comprehension difficulties and how to address them (Mežek et al., 2022). Teachers use modeling to make cognitive processes visible to students by explaining strategies used for comprehension. This explicit instruction is the first stage of the gradual release of responsibility model (Webb et al., 2019). Teachers collect data on individuals to plan scaffolded support for problem-solving (Mikita et al., 2019). Scaffolding will increase or decrease based on whether a student is far from solving a word or close (Mikita et al., 2019).

Research reported by Donegan and Wanzek (2021) showed that interventions focusing on foundational skills including phonemic awareness, phonics, word recognition, and fluency may be needed for students reading below grade level. Explicit, systematic instruction in foundational word reading skills along with some instruction on meaning is found to have positive impacts on reading achievement (Donegan & Wanzek, 2021; Roberts et al., 2022). This foundational word reading skills instruction should include learning the alphabetic principle, phonological awareness, phonics, and reading fluency. Reading interventions that include these components can reduce the number of children that are reading below grade level to around 5%-7%. Students make the shift from observation to emulation (demonstration of skill with feedback), to independent demonstration and eventually self-regulation as they acquire and master new skills (Mežek et al., 2022). This type of instruction aligns with the gradual release of responsibility model of, I do, we do, you do (Webb et al., 2019).

Response to Intervention (RTI) is a multitier system of support designed to support students who have been identified as struggling readers and are considered at risk for failing to read or not developing into readers that can successfully read and

comprehend grade-level text (Harlacher, 2016; Rock, 2018). A successful RTI program is based on five key components including screening, monitoring progress; Tier 1 instruction that is differentiated; Tier 2 small group instruction; and Tier 3 intensive, individualized interventions (Rock, 2018; Thomas et al., 2020). Tier 1 support is what is provided to all students through classroom instruction with differentiation occurring when needed to meet the needs of individual students and diverse learners (Stentiford et al., 2018). Explicit classroom instruction is one way to provide scaffolded support as a way to support the gradual release of responsibility model (Webb et al., 2019). Because scaffolding demands individualization, educators should vary scaffolding between students within a single lesson to foster independence (McVee et al., 2019).

Thomas et al. (2020) reported on some causes of failure in RTI. One of the causes is the lack of support structure from the school building. District evaluation of the RTI framework that is not properly developed for implementation is another cause for failure (Thomas et al., 2020). Many formal methods of evaluating and monitoring a district's RTI model are available for districts (Arias-Gundín & García, 2021). Staff skills and attitudes are another cause of RTI failure in schools (Thomas et al., 2020). Decision-making using problem-solving teams, scheduling conflicts, and involving students in the process are additional reasons cited as being the cause of RTI failure in schools. Nilvius et al. (2021) also cited the lack of specificity in assessment, the quality and implementation of interventions, research-based practices being implemented with fidelity, and the lack of validity as areas of criticism and concern for RTI programs.

Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), which was adopted in 1965, provides federal funds to state and local agencies as a way to increase

funding to students living in poverty. The goal is to break the cycle of poverty (Rodas, 2019). Students that are deemed eligible for Title I funds are supposed to get more funding. This funding is ideally used to create small class sizes, support additional instructional time, and fund programs that can help close achievement gaps. The research from Rodas (2019) supports the finding that more experienced teachers transfer to a school with higher salary scales and less experienced teachers are teaching in low-income schools. Rodas also found that teacher effectiveness increases during the first 5 to 7 years of teaching.

Over 56,000 public schools in the United States use Title I funds to support 26 million. Of these 26 million children, 58% were in kindergarten through fifth grade (Torgesen et al., 2018). While these students are often categorized as disadvantaged, advantages can be achieved for these students with proper instruction supported by professional learning for teachers (Shanahan, 2017).

Some researchers argue that creating positive learning conditions for students living in poverty is enough to help close the gaps (Berman et al., 2018; Watts, 2022). A study completed by Berman et al. (2018) showed that improved building conditions and safety for students had a positive impact on student performance. Watts (2022) also cited some ways educators can help close achievement gaps including ensuring students' basic needs are met, providing students with opportunities to practice making good choices and fostering creativity. The researcher will focus on the gaps in literature regarding Title I students and what academic improvements may be needed to help close achievement gaps for reading.

## **Title I**

Title I is the oldest and largest federally funded program for elementary and secondary schools (Clark, 2019). The purpose is to provide supplemental funding to help academically disadvantaged children receive high-quality education (Cascio & Reber, 2013; Clark, 2019). The educational support provided through Title I funding must be in addition to state funding, not in place of state funding. It is meant to increase achievement and close gaps for students living in poverty and provide these students with increased opportunities to meet state academic standards that may be challenging (Bouchrika, 2022; Clark, 2019).

Title I started as part of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 during President Lyndon B. Johnson's War on Poverty. It has been reauthorized over the years, most recently in 2015 as part of the Every Student Succeeds Act (Rodas, 2019; Entin, 2021). After the Covid-19 outbreak in 2020, President Joe Biden's administration increased Title I funding as part of the American Rescue Plan Act (Entin, 2021). This provided schools with an additional \$122 billion with the goal aimed at helping students recover from the learning loss of school closures during the Covid-19 pandemic (Jordan & DiMarco, 2022).

Children born into poverty face significant challenges (Bouchrika, 2022; Webb et al., 2019). These challenges impact academic, physical, and social development and can lead to poor outcomes. Children born into poverty may have limited language development as well as face food insecurities. They may also experience a lack of school readiness, which can lead to later cognitive problems (Bouchrika, 2022; Webb et al., 2019). It is estimated that 6 million students are living in poverty (Clark, 2019).

Comprehension is a complex task that may be more challenging for students with cognitive problems (Webb et al., 2019). Proper scaffolding makes cognitive processes visible for learners and can support the gradual release of responsibility method of learning as students progress from early to proficient learners. Martin (2022) defined three types of scaffolding that may support learners that are reading below grade level including verbal scaffolding, planned scaffolding, and interactional scaffolding. Students acquire more confidence and capability in a task or concept as they gradually develop toward independence (Shoaib Ahmed Malik, 2017).

To receive Title I funding, families must be living at 130% of the federal poverty line or below. These students will receive free lunches at school. Families that are living at 185% or below the poverty line will also receive federal funding in the form of reduced lunches (U.S. Department of Agriculture, 2023). In 2010 President Barack Obama added another eligibility option through the Healthy Hunger-Free Kids Act. The Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) states that if 40% of students within a school are directly identified as being eligible for free lunch the entire school is eligible for compensatory federal funding (Kenney et al., 2020). Thousands of schools meet this criterion nationwide and are identified as being schoolwide Title I (Clark, 2019).

Title I federal funding received by school buildings must be used on research-based strategies focused on increasing student achievement (National Center for Education Statistics, 2019). This may include focusing on ways to improve curriculum, instructional activities, counseling services, parental involvement, increasing staff, reducing class sizes, preschool programs, and after-school or summer programs (Clark, 2019). Although there are no set guidelines for how school buildings disseminate the

funds, parental involvement must be part of the plan and funding allocation (National Center for Education Statistics, 2019). Schools may use it to focus on specific subjects such as reading and math, non-instructional supports including attendance incentives and behavior supports, or school-wide interventions (Pearson, 2019) that could allow schools to increase scaffolding. Scaffolded support will help students achieve goals beyond their unassisted efforts (Heilman, 2018). In the case of Title I students, this could bridge the gap for students who are at risk of falling behind and provide the additional instructional support they need (Clark, 2019). The scaffolded supports could provide structure, function as a tool, extend the learners' range, allow learners to accomplish tasks otherwise considered impossible, help ensure learner success, motivate learners, reduce learner frustration, and help learners accept increased responsibility (Heilman, 2018). School buildings that are identified as schoolwide Title I must conduct a comprehensive needs assessment annually that includes an improvement plan to continue receiving funds. An annual review of the effectiveness of the program must also be conducted by a local educational authority (LEA) for the school. This plan must be developed with input from parents, community members, teachers, administrators, school staff, and students (Clark, 2019).

### **Close Reading**

Over the past 10 years, there has been a stronger emphasis placed on reading and understanding texts at a deeper level of comprehension (Paul, 2018). Since the Common Core State Standards for English were implemented in schools, teachers have struggled to meet the demands of the standards. The standards required students to analyze and comprehend both fiction and nonfiction complex texts using text evidence to support

thinking (Angulo, 2019). The Common Core State Standards placed a greater emphasis on reading informational texts in classrooms than had previously been in place (Angulo, 2019; Boudreaux-Johnson et al., 2017). Close reading is a practice educators are using as an instructional tool to deepen comprehension (Fisher et al., 2012). Reading comprehension plays an imperative role in lifelong learning as reading comprehension skills are needed at all educational levels and school subjects (Özdemir & Akyol, 2019). Close reading allows readers to notice things in a complex text (Angulo, 2019) while thinking and drawing out inferences to make meaning. Close reading allows for a slow and careful examination of a multitude of text elements (Angulo, 2019; Jarvie, 2021). Since students are uncovering meaning on their own, this practice allows students from all backgrounds to interpret the text in their way (Paddle & Woollett, 2020). Knowledge deepens through social interactions between children and educators. As the text is comprehended and assimilation occurs, schematic development occurs (Donovan et al., 2020). Meaningful analysis of a text is an important aspect students need for comprehension. This practice has been widely overlooked in the era of high-stakes testing (Shelton & Brooks, 2019).

According to Fisher and Frey (2012), close reading has two main purposes. The first purpose is to provide students with background knowledge. This will, in turn, build up their schema. Teachers should consider how much background knowledge students already have when frontloading new text before close reading (Angulo, 2019; Fisher & Frey, 2012). The second purpose creates reading skills that will transfer into other texts as they build up their ability to successfully interact with and comprehend detailed text. While The simple view of reading (SVR) emphasizes the importance of decoding to

support reading comprehension (Duke & Cartwright, 2021), other researchers note the most significant reading strategies that students need to comprehend text include vocabulary, overall understanding of a text, and grammar (Enyew & Melesse, 2018; Fisher & Frey, 2012). Students also need to gain an understanding of writing structure and the author's message, which can be obtained through close reading (Angulo, 2019). Fisher and Frey along with other researchers (Ross, 2015; Victor, 2017) argued that these skills are necessary for students to become successful readers with passages and texts that are more complex.

Close reading is most effective with shorter texts that require deeper analysis to uncover the meaning (Fisher & Frey, 2020). These shorter texts will require students to examine, discuss and evaluate. Fisher and Frey have identified five key features for effective close reading including short passages, complex texts, conducting limited frontloading, repeated readings, and text-dependent questions (Angulo, 2019). Teachers should support students by showing them how to uncover the meaning, but should not tell students what to think as they are reading. Scaffolds that allow educators to provide an appropriate level of support while still encouraging students to raise their thinking and elaborate the knowledge the student already possesses along with prompts should be used to assist students with answering questions about the text and engaging in discussions with peers (Govindasamy & Kwe, 2020). These discussions are an integral part of the students' deeper understanding of the meaning of the text (Aragón, 2018). A variety of scaffolds can be used by educators including verbal scaffolding, planned scaffolding, and interactional scaffolding. Verbal scaffolding is the process of carrying out a task that is beyond the students' unassisted efforts. Planned scaffolding is when the educator

incorporates a scaffold into the lesson plan using curriculum resources or tools.

Interactional scaffolding is responsive, in-person scaffolding, where the educator notices a difficulty and provides an unplanned, in-the-moment additional layer of support (Martin, 2022).

Fisher and Frey (2020) stated that close reading has an outlined structure that should be followed by educators. Researchers agree that following this structure is most effective when implementing this instructional practice (Ensley & Rodriguez, 2019; Fisher & Frey, 2020). Close reading involves multiple readings of the same text. The first phase involves getting students ready for close reading of a complex text (Baker & McEnery, 2017; Fisher & Frey, 2020). Before reading a text, teachers must be aware of how much front-loading they are using. Teachers should monitor this and minimize the amount of front-loading to allow students the independence of working through problems as they arise when they are reading (Paddle & Woollett, 2020). Students should think about what they are about to read to develop strong questioning techniques (Baker & McEnery, 2017; Fisher & Frey, 2020). After the first reading of the text students should focus on what the text said. This looks at the literal level of comprehension and directs students to answer questions that can easily be found within the text (Fisher, n.d.). These types of questions could focus on the general understanding of the text including key details, the author's purpose or message, and the setting. Students should get the gist of the text after the initial reading with this focus on the literal meaning. Students will begin annotating by using Post-its or notecards to write down their initial thoughts after reading in this phase with the support of guided questions provided by the teacher. These questions should be higher level including analysis, synthesis, evaluation, and creation of

new understandings (Baker & McEnery, 2017). Teachers should keep students in this phase long enough for them to develop a rich understanding of the text, but not linger so long that it becomes repetitious (Fisher, n.d.).

The second phase focuses on the structure of the text (Fisher & Frey, 2020). Students will evaluate words and phrases and focus on vocabulary. Teachers may specifically direct students to words that have different meanings or symbolize something other than the literal meaning within the text (Baker & McEnery, 2017). They should also begin to examine aspects of the author's craft including literary devices, narration, and genres. Teachers should guide students as they explore the format and structural elements the author used as they begin to develop a deeper understanding of the text's framework (Fisher & Frey, 2020). Strong teacher modeling is a key component of this phase. Teachers may use think-alouds, turn and talk, and reciprocal questioning to guide students through their learning (Baker & McEnery, 2017; Fisher & Frey, 2020). At this point, students may begin to understand the intentionality of writing and their writing may begin improving as a result (Fisher & Frey, 2020). Graphic organizers may also be used to arrange information students are acquiring (Baker & McEnery, 2017).

As students move into the third phase they will now focus on the meaning of the text. Students will begin to make inferences about the deeper themes and intentions of the author (Fisher & Frey, 2020). Making comparisons across texts and synthesizing information is another key aspect of this phase (Fisher & Frey, 2015). Students will begin concluding what the text is saying and using text evidence to support their conclusions (Fisher & Frey, 2020). As students look closer, dive deeper, and think more critically about texts, they are working within their zone of proximal development. This

challenging experience will strengthen students' reading abilities while experiencing success (Baker & McEney, 2017; Fisher & Frey, 2020).

The final phase asks students to think about what the text inspires them to do after reading it and comprehending it. At this point, students can begin experimenting with using the text as a model for their writing (Fisher & Frey, 2020). Explicit instruction along with extensive opportunities to apply learning in authentic reading and writing situations are vital components of effective reading instruction (Hwang & Duke, 2020). Students may also use text analysis as a basis for further research questions. Writing after acquiring new knowledge provides students with an opportunity to assimilate the new knowledge into the child's existing schema, therefore allowing the new knowledge to transfer (Donovan et al., 2020). Teachers may ask students to propose their extension task based on their interpretation of the text (Fisher & Frey, 2015). Baker and McEney (2017) noted that students will also engage in writing activities about the text during this phase. This process allows students to look closer and dive deeper into the text while using evidence-based arguments and explanations to support thinking. During this final phase, it is important for teachers not to limit students' possibilities or experiences (Baker & McEney, 2017).

One component of close reading is annotating (Angulo, 2019; Victor, 2017). Annotating is when students mark a text to interact with it as a form of comprehension (Lloyd et al., 2022). Annotating enables the reader to deliberately interact with the text to improve comprehension by enhancing the readers' understanding of the text. The reader may be able to recall the text with ease through their reactions to the text's annotations (Eastern Washington University, 2021). Annotating has many benefits including keeping

track of key ideas and details, assisting students with organizing their thoughts and questions, and encouraging students to draw conclusions and make inferences as they read (Lloyd et al., 2022). It also keeps students engaged with the text (Boudreaux-Johnson et al., 2017) and can help students successfully summarize a text (Eastern Washington University, 2021). As students read the text, they should annotate by underlining key or central ideas, circling words or phrases that are confusing, and writing notes in the student's own words on the page (Fisher & Frey, 2015). Once teachers have modeled this process for students, they can use this as a comprehension tool for close reading so they can easily refer back to their annotations as they reread the text. This gradual release of responsibility framework enables students to successfully reach things out of their level of independence, including reading comprehension, over time with support and scaffolding (Anderson, 2019; Webb et al., 2019). Annotating can provide students with a place they can refer back to the text for future use (Eastern Washington University, 2021).

One possible consequence of using close reading in classrooms could be moving away from classroom discussions (Snow & O'Connor, 2013). Snow and O'Connor (2013) further explained that close reading focuses heavily on the readers' individual experience with a text. During the four phases described above, there is no time set aside for discussions. During classroom discussions, students can learn from listening to peers and arguing viewpoints about text (Snow & O'Connor, 2013). Students are encouraged to offer claims, share personal knowledge and experiences, and discuss cultural and religious beliefs during classroom discussions (Snow & O'Connor, 2013). Thinking about texts through discussions is a form of scaffolding that supports the gradual release

of responsibility model (Webb et al., 2019). This scaffold assists in the complex task of reading comprehension by allowing the learner to elaborate on the knowledge they already possess (Govindasamy & Kwe, 2020).

Close reading opponents suggest that close reading can be counterproductive, especially for English language learners (Angulo, 2019). Students may have cultural reading differences from the texts they encounter, which may not allow background knowledge to support their understanding. Close reading does not address one of the most important reasons readers struggle, which is a lack of familiarity with the key vocabulary found in the text along with limited background knowledge (Snow & O'Connor, 2013). The direct and inferential mediation model (DIME) theory of reading instruction states that the strongest indicator of reading comprehension success is vocabulary (Biemiller & Slonim, 2001) which contradicts close reading. Angulo (2019) noted that educators must balance close reading with other reading strategies to keep students engaged and motivated to read, especially when encountering complex texts that are used for close reading. Close reading is a tedious process that takes time and may be demotivating to students that are already struggling (Snow & O'Connor, 2013). Educators must consider the educational reform that derived from the adoption of the Common Core State Standards and be aware of how a strong focus on this type of instruction can swing the educational pendulum to an extreme and unproductive emphasis on autonomous text interpretation that comes from close reading.

### **Reading Comprehension**

Elleman and Oslund (2019) stated that reading comprehension is one of the most complex activities in which humans engage. It is the complex task of using word

decoding and linguistic comprehension and requires the use of word reading, working memory, inferences, vocabulary, and prior knowledge (Elleman & Oslund, 2019).

Constructing meaning from text is the purpose of reading (Smith et al., 2021). As people read, they form a mental model of the written text (Dahl et al., 2021). Dahl et al. (2021) explained that these mental models include information explicitly stated within the text as well as inferences the reader uses to make a connection to personal background knowledge and previous experiences. People read for various reasons including for pleasure and personal interest, to learn new information, or to participate in society (Mullins & Martin, 2019). Decades of research have been conducted on reading comprehension, yet it remains an area of stagnant growth in adolescent learners in the United States (Elleman & Oslund, 2019). As of 2019, 19 states in the United States of America have laws in place mandating the retention of third-grade students that are not reading proficiently as measured by given standards. This excludes students who are exempt from retention (Hwang & Duke, 2020).

Successful reading experiences for students are a result of supportive, scaffolded reading instruction from educators (Rasinski et al., 2017). The most frequently cited model for teaching comprehension instruction is the gradual release of responsibility model (Brevik, 2019). According to Brevik, since the 1980s research has supported this model. Brevik (2019) stated that in the gradual release of responsibility model, scaffolding fades over time. Scaffolding also varies across lessons and between students, allowing students to gain the appropriate amount of support for each lesson.

### ***Components of Comprehension***

Vaughn and Fletcher (2021) stated that there is not a single study published that is conclusive in establishing the evidence about how children learn to read. Instead, studies over time give us additional evidence to increase our understanding of how students learn to read. Since reading comprehension is an important prerequisite for learning (ter Beek et al., 2018), multiple studies allow educators to examine the reliability of knowledge gained to help students learn to read (Vaughn & Fletcher, 2021).

Researchers agree that reading is a twofold process that involves decoding and linguistic comprehension (Elleman & Oslund, 2019; Smith et al., 2021). Other researchers consider reading comprehension to be a third factor in the process of reading (Kang & Shin, 2019). Decoding is the ability to recognize individual written words (Smith et al., 2021) and is sometimes referred to as sounding out words. It can be measured through nonsense word reading (Nation, 2019). Linguistic comprehension is the process of interpreting words with connected discourse (Smith et al., 2021). Researchers also agree that reading comprehension, including decoding, should begin at an early age (Duke et al., 2021; Smith et al., 2021). Decoding is most critical in the early stages (Smith et al., 2021) and comprehension is largely dependent on sufficient word decoding abilities (Nilvius et al., 2021). Käsper et al. (2018) stated that by third grade, students are expected to have mastered decoding skills so reading can then shift to more complex reading tasks including vocabulary and comprehension. Successful reading comprehension must have input from a word recognition system that identifies words quickly and accurately (Nation, 2019). Ninety percent of the words in the text must be understood by students to successfully comprehend them (Käsper et al., 2018).

Foundational skills that support decoding should include phonological awareness, print awareness, phonics, and word recognition (Duke et al., 2021). Readers must have sufficiently developed orthographic, phonological, and semantic word knowledge as part of early foundational reading skills to achieve reading comprehension (Lawrence et al., 2021).

According to Duke and Cartwright (2021), vocabulary is one component of word recognition. There are many words in the English language that have multiple pronunciations. When readers have a lot of knowledge of word recognition and vocabulary, they can identify the correct pronunciation of words and can successfully self-monitor to make sure it makes sense in the text (Duke & Cartwright, 2021). Reading comprehension is supported by basic word reading skills as well as automatic word recognition (Steinle et al., 2022). Koch and Spörer (2017) stated that educators should focus on teaching reading strategies to promote successful reading comprehension. Summarizing and asking questions are specific ways educators can teach and assess reading comprehension for students (Koch & Spörer, 2017). Using think-aloud is one way educators can gather information about how a reader comprehends text. Think-aloud requires a reader to talk out loud about whatever comes to mind as soon as they have read a text (Dahl et al., 2021).

The research from Duke et al. (2021) stated that other areas have an impact on reading comprehension including understanding text features and structures. Volume reading, discussion, and analysis of text and writing also support comprehension. An increase in reading volume means more time to practice and apply reading skills taught to students (Duke et al., 2021). The more time students spend reading, the more likely they

will be to improve reading foundational skills (Rasinski et al., 2017). Accuracy and fluency must be achieved for reading comprehension to be successful (Smith et al., 2021); however, comprehension is not automatic even when fluency is strong. Fluency, defined as reading with speed, accuracy, and appropriate expression (Steinle et al., 2022), helps readers by building an accurate base of understanding text (Duke et al., 2021). Fluency is a critical component of reading success (Steinle et al., 2022). Decoding and word recognition are important components of fluency (Duke et al., 2021). Slow, labored reading due to poor word recognition skills causes students to exhaust all of their mental energy on decoding and takes away from time spent comprehending the text (Steinle et al., 2022). Fluency is the bridge between word recognition and comprehension, meaning that once children can decode and recognize words, they are then able to read and comprehend them in a text (Duke & Cartwright, 2021). Reading interventions that focus on fluency will result in improved fluency and comprehension for students (Rasinski et al., 2017). To be fluent readers, readers must have knowledge of how written text works including rules and patterns of punctuation (Duke & Cartwright, 2021). Readers can devote more cognitive attention to comprehension when they can read words with automaticity (Duke et al., 2021). There is also a strong relationship between vocabulary and students' ability to read at their level (Lawrence et al., 2021).

Background knowledge and prior experiences also affect reading comprehension for learners (Smith et al., 2021). Prior knowledge and beliefs guide students' interpretation, understanding, and working memory of the text they are encountering (Kikas et al., 2021). Smith et al. (2021) noted that during the process of reading when students encounter new text, the text becomes integrated into their prior knowledge.

Students then use their related schema from background knowledge and previous experiences and combine that with the text base they are currently holding in their working memory. The text base then integrates with the readers' preexisting schema that is in their long-term memory to form text meaning (Smith et al., 2021). Students use the newly acquired information from the text to make semantic connections and build mental representations. This information is then used to answer questions about the text after reading (Kikas et al., 2021). If students have limited background knowledge or experiences, they may be unable to integrate the text base and form meaning. This can lead to an inability to recall accurate information from the text or recognize differences in characters (Smith et al., 2021). Kikas et al. (2021) stated that students with limited background knowledge and experiences have to remember more new information than students with a wide range of background knowledge and experiences. Students with a wide range of background knowledge and experiences do not have as much new information to process. When there is more new information to process, this causes the students to have weaker comprehension due to working memory overload (Kikas et al., 2021). Readers with a large amount of background knowledge perform better with texts that do not specifically include all the necessary information to comprehend. Students can make inferences to comprehend these types of texts (Spencer et al., 2019). Kang and Shin (2019) noted that students that have weak reading comprehension are found to have problems with decoding, a lack of fluency when reading, or deficits in their ability to comprehend higher level skills including inferences. One-half of struggling readers have both basic skill deficits and language comprehension deficits.

### ***Comprehension Process***

The Progress in International Reading Literacy Study showed that a fourth grader's typical process of comprehending written text follows four steps (Mullins & Martin, 2019). The first step is to retrieve what the text explicitly states. The reader must be able to quickly retrieve words, phrases, and sentences within the text. Readers will also begin to think about the main idea of the text during this step. The second step is when the reader begins to make inferences. The reader will begin to think about what the text did not explicitly state. During this step, the reader moves beyond the surface level of the text and begins to resolve gaps in the meaning of the text. The reader will look beyond the words, phrases, and sentences and make connections to other texts or experiences. The reader may think about the reasons for the characters' actions, explain relationships between characters, and identify which parts of the text may be most useful for a given purpose. The third step involves interpreting and integrating ideas and information. Readers begin to think about the global meanings of text during this step. The reader begins to make sense of the author's intent and develops a complete understanding of the text during this step. The reader will continue to make connections to other texts and experiences, but may also begin to contrast information to discern the overall message. The final step for comprehension is when the reader evaluates and critiques the content and text elements. During this step, the reader shifts from just constructing meaning to critically considering the text itself. The reader may step away from the text to process and think critically about the meaning. The reader may confirm or refute the information from the text, consider an author's point of view, judge how well the text provided information, or evaluate how likely the events of the story might be

to occur (Mullins & Martin, 2019). Skilled readers are highly active. They are strategic and engaged in the reading process and will use their executive skills to successfully decode and comprehend written text (Duke & Cartwright, 2021).

According to research from Elleman and Oslund (2019), stagnant growth in the reading comprehension skills of students in the United States has occurred over the past few decades, despite ongoing research in this area. Nineteen percent of 15-year-olds scored below Level 2 (of 6 levels) on comprehension assessments that asked them to explicitly state information such as recognizing the main idea of a text. Ten percent of students the same age scored at a Level 5 or higher when asked to deeply embed text information by reflecting, evaluating, and interpreting tasks of unfamiliar topics (Elleman & Oslund, 2019). Kang and Shin (2019) stated that by the time students reach Grade 4, they have shifted from learning to read to reading to learn. Students must be able to successfully comprehend essays and information reading to acquire new content-specific knowledge (Kang & Shin, 2019). Middle school readers who are at risk are most likely lagging in comprehension rather than decoding (Dahl et al., 2021).

### ***Theories of Reading Instruction***

As research continues in the area of reading comprehension, there have been a few theoretical models proposed. Each of these models focuses on ways to improve reading comprehension for learners (Elleman & Oslund, 2019). The researcher will explain four of them in this section of the literature review. The models that will be explained are the SVR, DIME, construction integration (CI), and the RAND reading model.

The SVR agrees with researchers that reading comprehension is the combination of decoding (the ability to read isolated words quickly, accurately, and silently) and comprehension, both listening and linguistic (Duke & Cartwright, 2021). This model states that once decoding is proficient and fully developed, linguistic comprehension is a better indicator of reading comprehension. This model does not explain the subcomponents of language or the cognitive processes that are underlying factors in successful reading comprehension (Elleman & Oslund, 2019). The importance of decoding is emphasized with this model (Duke & Cartwright, 2021). Reynolds and Daniel (2017) identified decoding as an area where scaffolding is an easier process for educators than comprehension due to the complexity of comprehension. The SVR model further explains reading comprehension as being a makeup of the following components: word reading ability, working memory, inference generation, comprehension monitoring, vocabulary, and prior knowledge (Elleman & Oslund, 2019). Educators using this theory would include all of those components in their reading instruction but the focus would be on decoding first and then comprehending (Duke & Cartwright, 2021) as educators shift responsibility from the teacher to the learner (Hall et al., 2021).

The DIME states that the strongest indicator of reading comprehension success is vocabulary. Children acquire two to eight new vocabulary words a day (Biemiller & Slonim, 2001). Learners acquire vocabulary words at a rapid rate. Young children entering kindergarten whose parents have read them one book a day will hear 290,000 more words by age 5 than students whose parents do not read to them daily (Logan et al., 2019). The DIME theory also states that inference-making and background knowledge have strong effects on reading comprehension for learners (Elleman & Oslund, 2019).

For the gradual release of responsibility model to be most effective, teachers must discover what background knowledge students already have and can do with text and then enter the gradual release model at the level that is most responsive to the learner's needs. This means some texts will require explicit instruction and modeling, while others will not (Webb et al., 2019).

The third reading comprehension theory that has been proposed due to ongoing research is CI. This model states that as learners acquire new knowledge in the construction phase, the information from the text that is related to prior knowledge is automatically activated. This means that background knowledge is a key component for successful reading comprehension. The reader then moves to the integration phase where the activated knowledge spreads through the working memory (Elleman & Oslund, 2019). As readers gain independence and responsibility shifts from the teacher to the learner (Hall et al., 2021), educators need to prepare readers to continue to develop and independently use reading strategies as they encounter more demanding tasks in a text (Mikita et al., 2019). The gradual release of responsibility model is a way for teachers to apprentice students toward a deeper understanding of text independently (Webb et al., 2019).

The final theory, the RAND reading model, states that comprehension involves constructing meaning through interactions with written language. This model further explains that readers may have an easier time comprehending or understanding the text that is of a familiar topic. When readers encounter text from unfamiliar topics comprehension may diminish (Elleman & Oslund, 2019). Similar to the CI model, this theory places a high emphasis on the importance of background knowledge and

experiences for learners. Educators can provide verbal, planned, and interactional scaffolds when students need additional support to adequately comprehend text (Martin, 2022). These scaffolds, along with background knowledge, aid in the complex text of reading comprehension (Webb et al., 2019).

The science of reading has determined that explicit instruction may be the key to instructional success due to the beneficial outcomes for students (Vaughn & Fletcher, 2021). The explicit instruction that is essential for students that struggle to read and write includes modeling new skills, giving students ample practice with feedback, and providing structured opportunities for students to review and practice. ter Beek et al. (2018) noted that struggling readers benefit most from reading practice combined with instructional support. Explicit instruction from the perspective of the science of reading is teacher-driven and intentional (Vaughn & Fletcher, 2021). Individual student needs are the focus and educators use judgment gained from scaffolded support to make decisions as students gain independence while completing tasks.

There are five main components of explicit instruction including segmenting complex skills into manageable tasks, using modeling or think-aloud, using prompts and fading supports to promote engagement, providing feedback and purposeful practice, and connecting explicit instruction to other facets of instructional design (Vaughn & Fletcher, 2021). Segmenting complex skills into manageable tasks allows learners to master individual tasks or skills one by one through support from the teacher and gradually acquire the knowledge to complete more complex tasks. Modeling allows teachers to use think-alouds to provide explanations of the processes so students can use this skill as they reproduce and apply the same practice. Mariage et al. (2020) stated that teachers should

create reading opportunities for students that make thinking about text visible to effectively engage with text demands. Vaughn and Fletcher (2021) described using prompts and fading supports to promote engagement as teachers using the gradual release of responsibility method to reduce cues and supports to allow students to successfully perform complex tasks without scaffolds and support from the teacher. Providing feedback that is clear and directly related to the task will allow students to know where adjustments need to be made. Creating purposeful practice opportunities allows educators to gradually increase the difficulty of tasks as students gain independence and require less scaffolding and support (Vaughn & Fletcher, 2021). Educators that have access to scaffolds and provide students with this explicit instruction have success in creating more proficient readers (Mariage et al., 2020).

### **Reading Assessments**

The No Child Left Behind legislation that was adopted in 2001 mandated annual testing of reading for students in third through eighth grades (Paris & Hoffman, 2004). In 2012, the United States spent \$1.7 billion on assessments (Liebfreund et al., 2022). This money was used on professional development for teachers, technology to implement assessments, and instructional time devoted to implementation. Schools have implemented informal reading assessments that are classroom designed including observations, anecdotal notes, informal inventories, and work samples (Paris & Hoffman, 2004). These assessments are found to have a more positive effect on students, teachers, and administrators and are used most often by educators. Standardized and commercialized assessments have a more positive effect on administrators and are used least often. Paris and Hoffman (2004) reported on a study conducted by the Center for

Improvement of Early Reading Achievement (CIERA) that examined 148 commercial reading tests. Word knowledge was assessed in 50% of the tests and sound and symbol concepts were assessed in 65% of them. Literacy and language concepts were assessed in 90% of the tests, while comprehension was only assessed in 24% of the tests.

One widely used commercial assessment is Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS). Scheffel et al. (2012) reported that DIBELS assesses 3 of the 5 big ideas of early literacy including phonological awareness, alphabetic principle, and fluency with connected text. Phonological awareness is assessed through initial sound fluency, or the student's ability to identify and produce the initial sounds in a given word. Students are also asked to segment phonemes and produce initial sounds in a word. The alphabetic principle is assessed through nonsense word fluency. Students must have knowledge of letter-sound correspondences as well as the ability to blend letters to form unfamiliar or nonsense words. Fluency with connected text is assessed through oral reading fluency, which assesses the number of correct words read in one minute (Scheffel et al., 2012) as well as students' processing speed of print (Morris et al., 2018). Scores from oral reading fluencies have been used in primary grades as a benchmark for student accountability (Morris et al., 2018). Assessments that include oral reading fluency measures have been strong indicators of student performance on high-stakes testing (Liebfreund et al., 2022). DIBELS authors claim the subtests are reliable predictors of reading achievement and could be used to identify students in need of interventions and for tracking student progress (Scheffel et al., 2012). DIBELS is also used in schools to provide end-of-the-year grade-level reading data. Scheffel et al. (2012) reported that critics of the DIBELS fluency assessment do not feel the data are accurate because oral

reading fluency does not assess comprehension and fluency involves both decoding and comprehension.

Informal reading assessments should be used by educators to determine instructional placement as well as identify the strengths and weaknesses of students (Morris et al., 2018). Assessment data should be used to generate instructional plans, differentiate instruction, and place students in reading interventions when needed (Liebfreund et al., 2022). The goal of these reading interventions was to increase the amount of time practicing reading (Morris et al., 2018). Targeted interventions can be planned using qualitative and quantitative data from informal assessments (Munger et al., 2014).

One informal reading assessment that educators have used is informal reading inventories that consist of graded passages (Morris et al., 2018). The purpose of these passages is to determine a student's independent or easy reading level, instructional reading level (ideal for learning), and frustration level, which is too difficult. This type of assessment was introduced by Belts in 1946 (Morris et al., 2018). When an instructional level is found, educators then provide the necessary amount of reading practice for students at the determined level. Morris et al. (2018) reported that timed word recognition assessments have also been used by educators. This is assessed through word lists organized by grade level. This assessment can be an accurate predictor of reading success as word recognition and comprehension share attentional resources in reading.

High-stakes assessments are often challenged by reading specialists due to the validity of the scores (Paris & Hoffman, 2004). The focus of these assessments is reading comprehension. During RTI, students may make gains in isolated skills that support

early reading such as phonemic awareness and decoding, but not make measurable growth in reading comprehension (Liebfreund et al., 2022). These assessments have been found to hurt teacher morale as much classroom time is spent on test preparation (Paris & Hoffman, 2004). Low-performing schools may be tempted to cheat to achieve at higher levels.

### **Third-Grade Students**

Over the last two decades, nearly 30 states have adopted laws regarding reading benchmarks and student retention in third grade. These laws either require or suggest retention if students do not meet identified benchmark scores on standardized reading assessments (DellaVecchia, 2020). The laws, developed over concern for literacy achievement in students, created unintended consequences. DellaVecchia (2020) noted that students that are retained are consistently more likely to drop out of school than non-retained students. Educators should focus on instructional practices and interventions over retention as those practices are more effective in improving student achievement. Assessment data should be used to create instructional plans for students (Liebfreund et al., 2022). This data should be paired with effective instruction including interventions that are matched to individual students based on the data collected to promote student success.

By third grade, students are expected to have mastered decoding skills (Käsper et al., 2018). Reading then shifts to a more complex text where vocabulary and comprehension expanded. Students are progressing into reading for understanding at this stage (Dahl et al., 2021). Primary students that can segment and blend morphemic units are found to be more successful readers and are better at spelling words than students

without this ability (Wolter & Pike, 2015). Students are motivated to read based on interest. The more students want to read, the more they will comprehend and understand as they encounter text (Käsper et al., 2018). DellaVecchia (2020) reported that educators should give learners ample exposure to high-interest reading materials.

### **Summary**

The purpose of this quantitative, causal-comparative study was to test the theories of scaffolding and gradual release by comparing Communication Arts school building MAP scores of third-grade students that were instructed using close reading to students that were not instructed using close reading in Title I schools. A causal-comparative study was used so the researcher could observe differences between existing groups (Frey, 2018). In this case, the groups were students that were instructed using close reading and students that were not instructed using close reading. While many studies have been conducted on close reading to investigate the impact this reading strategy has on reading comprehension, none have been conducted that look specifically at Title I students who live in poverty and have many disadvantages. MAP scores were chosen as a way to measure reading comprehension since they are easily accessible and can be kept confidential.

Sixty-four percent of fourth-grade students were reading below grade level in 2017 according to NAEP, the only nationwide assessment of reading data (EAB Global, Inc., 2019). The problem being investigated in this study was why struggling readers are not accelerating at a rate that allows them to catch up to their peers and successfully read and comprehend grade-level text as measured by grade-level reading benchmarks. Struggling readers are being placed in reading interventions where the

focus is reading text on their identified instructional level (Torgesen, 2005). These levels are far below the students' current grade level. Students are not receiving instruction using grade-level text during interventions. This type of instruction only allows students to succeed using texts below grade level. For students to accelerate at a rate fast enough to perform at grade level according to grade-level benchmark assessments, instruction using grade-level text may be necessary (Brooke, 2017). Close reading of a complex text is an instructional practice teachers can implement that will allow them to scaffold support at the level the student needs (Kerkhoff & Spires, 2015). The researcher will focus on studying close reading and the impact that has on struggling readers in Title I schools. The results of this study could impact how educators plan instruction in order to close achievement gaps for these students. There is a lack of research in this area.

Chapter Three of this study focused on the methodology being used including the participants, sample selection, research setting and design, the instrument used to collect data, procedures, and data analysis. Chapter Four included the presentation of the data that were collected during the study, a review of data organization, and the reporting and analysis of the findings of the study. Chapter Five included a summary of the findings, conclusion, implications for practice, and recommendations for further research.

## CHAPTER THREE

### METHODOLOGY

#### Introduction

One of the most unnatural things we teach children to do is to read (Ogden, 2020). Just as unnatural for educators is learning how to teach reading (Crawford & Reidel, 2022). Teachers must know how to teach decoding, fluency, and comprehension as well as obtain knowledge in phonological awareness, phonetics, morphology, and semantics to successfully teach kids to read (Hikida et al., 2019). Helping students learn to read remains an issue of continuous research and growth in education (Crawford & Reidel, 2022). Despite ongoing efforts to gain new knowledge about how to best teach kids to read, 23% of students reading below grade level at the end of third grade drop out of high school (Hernandez, 2011). Children born into poverty face significant challenges. These challenges impact academic, physical, and social development and can lead to poor outcomes (Bouchrika, 2022). Despite being born into poverty, students are expected to read at a proficient level. Over the past 10 years, there has been a stronger emphasis placed on reading and understanding texts at a deeper level of comprehension (Paul, 2018).

This study looked at the difference between achievement scores in communication arts for schools that used close reading as part of their reading program and schools that did not use close reading. This study related to the theories of scaffolding and gradual release of responsibility looked at how these theories that are driving forces within the framework of close reading extended to reading achievement to students. In the state of Missouri, the MAP is the current standardized method of

measuring academic achievement. This study determined if there was a statistically significant difference between MAP proficient and advanced percentages for third-grade students in the state of Missouri in schools that used close reading as part of their reading instruction and schools that did not use close reading. This chapter focused on the methodology being used including the participants, sample selection, research setting and design, the instrument used to collect data, procedures, and data analysis.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this quantitative, causal-comparative study was to test the theories of scaffolding and gradual release by comparing Communication Arts school building MAP scores of third-grade students that were instructed using close reading to students that were not instructed using close reading in Title I schools. A causal-comparative study was used so the researcher could observe differences between existing groups (Frey, 2018). In this case, the groups were students that were instructed using close reading and students that were not instructed using close reading.

The Common Core State Standards adopted in 2009 included standards that required students to read and comprehend text that was complex beginning in second grade. Students were being exposed to language and topics that were unfamiliar in complex texts. Teachers had to increase levels of support and provide more scaffolding for students to successfully read and comprehend texts. Close reading was a way for teachers to show students how to tackle complex texts and allow them opportunities to practice this high level of comprehension (Lapp et al., 2015).

The results of this study could determine if close reading would be an effective component of reading interventions as a way to improve student achievement. If close

reading is effective in reading instruction for students in Title I schools, the study could then show that this type of instruction would be appropriate in reading instruction. The research questions determined the design of the study along with the types of data that were used. The data determined the effectiveness of close reading for third-grade students in Title I school buildings as measured by MAP scores.

### **Research Questions**

RQ1: What is the difference in proficient and advanced Communication Arts Missouri Assessment Program (MAP) scores of third-grade students in Title I schools engaging in close reading of complex grade-level text as part of their reading instruction compared to third-grade students not engaging in close reading practices as measured by MAP scores in the 2018-2019 school year?

RQ2: What is the difference in proficient and advanced Communication Arts Missouri Assessment Program (MAP) scores of third-grade students in Title I schools engaging in close reading of complex grade-level text as part of their reading instruction compared to third-grade students not engaging in close reading practices as measured by MAP scores in the 2020-2021 school year?

### **Null Hypotheses**

H<sub>01</sub>: There will be no statistical difference between the reading comprehension level of third-grade students in Title I schools engaging in close reading of complex grade-level text as part of their reading instruction compared to third-grade students not engaging in close reading practices as measured by Missouri Assessment Program (MAP) scores in the 2018-2019 school year.

**H<sub>0</sub>2:** There will be no statistical difference between the reading comprehension level of third-grade students in Title I schools engaging in close reading of complex grade-level text as part of their reading instruction compared to third-grade students not engaging in close reading practices as measured by Missouri Assessment Program (MAP) scores in the 2020-2021 school year.

### **Participants**

The participants in this study were third-grade students in the state of Missouri. Students attended public school buildings identified as school-wide Title I, meaning at least 50% of the students in the school were identified as meeting the criteria to receive Title I federally funded services. These students participated in the MAP statewide assessment at the end of third grade. Buildings that were not identified as school-wide Title I were excluded from this study. In the state of Missouri, there were 114 counties and 516 school buildings. Geographic regions in Missouri included rural, urban, and suburban school buildings. There were nine Regional Professional Development Centers in Missouri (Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, n.d.), and the researcher chose buildings from every district to represent the variety of third-grade students in Missouri. The school buildings researched in the study were limited to 102 school buildings that were public schools with third-grade classrooms. Fifty-one of the selected schools used close reading and 51 of the selected schools did not use close reading. Schools used in the study represented a variety of geographic regions as well as population, education level of the community, income, population, and household income.

## **Selection and Sampling**

In this study, MAP student achievement data for communication arts, based on the sum of students scoring in proficient and advanced, were utilized for third-grade students enrolled in Missouri public school buildings identified as being schoolwide Title I for the following school years: 2018-2019 and 2020-2021. The researcher collected a sampling of students through a survey that was sent to all 516 Missouri school buildings with third-grade students that, through confirmation from the survey, utilized close reading as a component of reading instruction for the identified school years. Random sampling could not be used but instead, purposive sampling occurred to obtain data that aligned with the purpose of the study. Purposive sampling was used to improve the rigor of the study as well as improve the trustworthiness of the data obtained and results (Campbell et al., 2020). Using the independent samples *t* test with a power of 0.8 and alpha of .05 with a medium effect size of .5 the study needed 51 participants in each group (total of 102) using a G\*power calculator (Faul et al., 2007). Once schools that used close reading were identified the researcher used a random selection to narrow the focus to 102 schools. Of the 102 schools, 51 of the schools used close reading and 51 of the schools did not use close reading. Third-grade students in the identified schools received regular instruction using close reading of complex grade-level text as a way to improve reading comprehension.

The Missouri DESE open access database housed all of the information for Missouri schools in a public database. This made a total population sample feasible. Student Communication Arts percentages on the MAP tests were located on this open database and the data were used for this study. Ethical standards were upheld without

any personally identifiable data being used by utilizing data housed on the open database. Student achievement percentages in the levels of proficient and advanced were gathered and analyzed to see if a difference existed between Missouri Title I schools that used close reading as part of regular reading instruction and those that did not use close reading. To compare schools that used closed reading to those that did not, independent sample *t* tests were conducted (Mishra et al., 2019). The independent samples *t* tests measured whether the mean or average of third-grade students achieving levels of proficient and advanced on the MAP Communication Arts assessment for schools using close reading was different from schools that did not use close reading.

### **Research Setting**

The research setting included Missouri public third-grade classrooms in school-wide Title I buildings. There are nine Regional Professional Development Centers in Missouri (Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, n.d.), and the researcher chose schools from every district to represent the variety of third-grade students in Missouri. The school buildings researched in the study were limited to 102 school buildings that were public schools with third-grade classrooms. Third-grade students were chosen because that is the first-grade level that participates in MAP testing. Fifty-one of the selected schools used close reading and 51 of the selected schools did not use close reading. Schools used in the study represented a variety of geographic regions as well as population, education level of the community, income, population, and household income.

According to the DESE of the nearly 64,00 third-grade students that participated in the MAP statewide assessment at the conclusion of the year, 41.9% scored proficient

or advanced in 2021. In 2019, 48.8% scored proficient or advanced. In Missouri, according to DESE, the percentage of students receiving free and reduced lunch aid represents approximately 50% of the student population over the last 3 years. Students living in poverty may not have the educational benefits of students not living in poverty and may be harder to obtain proficient benchmarks in school (Calder, 2019). Children born into poverty face significant challenges. These challenges impact academic, physical, and social development and can lead to poor outcomes. They may also experience a lack of school readiness, which can lead to later cognitive problems (Bouchrika, 2022). It is estimated that 6 million students are living in poverty (Clark, 2019) and half of all school-aged children, approximately 25 million, receive some Title I funding (National Center for Education Statistics, 2019).

### **Research Design**

A quantitative, causal-comparative study to compare the results of Communication Arts scores on the MAP for third-grade students in Title I and non-Title I funded schools was conducted. The causal-comparative method of research established an association between variables, which may indicate a true cause-and-effect relation occurred between variables of third-grade students in Title I and non-Title I funded schools. To best answer the research questions, a causal-comparative study was utilized to identify the association between the dependent and independent variables by exploring the relationship between conditions and outcomes by identifying configurations of necessary and sufficient conditions for an outcome (Hanckel et al., 2021). The study used Communication Arts MAP scores for the dependent variable. MAP assessment data had already been collected for third-grade students and schools had been identified as being

schoolwide Title I. This study was nonexperimental due to the variables not being manipulated (Reio, 2016).

Through the use of the survey, schools had also been identified as using close reading as part of reading instruction or not. In this study, MAP assessments had already been completed. The dependent variable of student percentages in proficient or advanced was compared to the independent variable of schools using close reading as part of reading instruction or not to determine whether a significant difference existed (Asenahabi, 2019). A research design of nonexperimental design best fit this quantitative causal-comparative study as there was no manipulation of variables regarding close reading and the conditions of the participants being third-grade students in Title I schools.

### **Instrumentation**

An online survey using Google Forms was sent to principals in Missouri to ask if the school building utilized close reading as a component of reading instruction in third-grade classrooms. Reminders were sent to principals after one week and then again after two weeks to ensure school leaders were responding so data collection could begin. The data collected included MAP scores for Communication Arts of third-grade students. Data were gathered from the Missouri DESE's open-access database. Since these data are public information, it was not necessary to obtain permission from individual school buildings to conduct research. However, Southwest Baptist University provided permission to conduct the study through the RRB process. The use of public MAP data was thorough since every public school building in the state of Missouri was required to participate in MAP assessments according to grade-level requirements established by MODESE. The Missouri DESE and the MAP test provider, Data Recognition

Corporation (DRC), had aligned the assessments to the Missouri Learning Standards and established cut scores for each proficiency level for all grade levels.

According to the Spring 2019 MAP Grade Level Assessment Technical Report, the assessment was evaluated for reliability using Cronbach's coefficient alpha (Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2019). The values ranged from 0 to 1, with values closer to 1 meaning higher reliability. Coefficient values at or above 0.8 are considered acceptable for tests of moderate lengths, such as MAP. The Cronbach's alpha score for the spring 2019 Communication Arts MAP assessment for third grade was 0.92, which was in the acceptable range for reliability. This technical report is located in Appendix A. The Communication Arts MAP assessment was not administered in 2020 due to the mandated shutdowns during the COVID-19 pandemic. The Cronbach's alpha score for the Spring 2021 Communication Arts MAP assessment for third grade was 0.86, which was also in the acceptable range for reliability. This technical report is located in Appendix B. In the Spring 2019 MAP Grade Level Assessment Technical Report it is stated that Grade 3 Form B had an eigenvalue for the first component of 9.60 with 19.6% of variance explained and the second component had an eigenvalue of 1.63 with 3.32% of variance explained. This technical report is located in Appendix C. In the Spring 2021 MAP Grade Level Assessment Technical Report it is stated that Grade 3 Form B had an eigenvalue for the first component of 9.87 with 21.46% of variance explained and the second component had an eigenvalue of 1.54 with 3.35 percent of variance explained. This technical report is located in Appendix D.

The MAP assessment consists of multiple styles of questions including selected responses, constructed responses, and writing tasks as well as performance events. The

Communication Arts assessment for third-grade students is made up of three sessions that include all question types. MODESE has resources and training available for school buildings to use to prepare students for this assessment. There are also online tools available for student practice along with test tutorials and practice forms. Test examiners are required to receive training before administering the assessment (Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2023).

### **Procedures**

Southwest Baptist University dissertation guidelines required approval from the RRB to be granted to ensure all participants are protected before conducting any research. Permission was granted by the RRB in the spring of 2023. Once the researcher received approval from the RRB the process of participant recruitment and data collection started. The survey to identify which schools' data were used was executed under the guidelines of Southwest Baptist University regarding protecting human participants.

The survey that was emailed to all public elementary school leaders in the state of Missouri asked school leaders to identify if their schools used close reading as a component of their reading instruction. The email is located in Appendix E. The email contained a survey for school leaders to complete. The survey (Appendix F) also asked the building to identify if they were school-wide Title I. The survey indicated that buildings that were identified as ones that could be utilized for the study were given informed consent to the researcher by completing the survey. If the school leader indicated that they were not identified as school-wide Title I, the researcher dismissed their school as one that could be utilized for the study. Schools that answered yes to being identified as school-wide Title I were then chosen and placed into two groups on an

Excel spreadsheet by the researcher. The first group was schools that stated they did use close reading and the second group was the schools that stated they did not use close reading. The researcher ensured that every region in the state of Missouri had schools chosen for the study.

Data from Missouri school buildings were retrieved from the Missouri DESE's open-access database and recorded in an Excel spreadsheet. These data were stored on a password-protected computer that could only be accessed by the researcher.

Communication arts percentages for students that were advanced and proficient in third grade were extracted and entered into the spreadsheet. Data were organized by school year and school building. Schools were separated according to the dependent variable, the use of close reading. Once all data were extracted and entered, multiple independent samples  $t$  tests were performed to reject or fail to reject the null hypotheses. Data were stored and collected for 5 years and then destroyed by the researcher.

### **Data Analysis**

Once data were collected, an independent samples  $t$  test was conducted using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) statistics software to analyze the data. Independent samples  $t$  tests are used to compare the means between two unrelated groups on the same dependent variable. For this test, the independent variable was whether or not schools used close reading. The dependent variable was the sum of proficient and advanced percentages of third-grade MAP communication arts scores. The researcher used percentages of third-grade students in the state of Missouri who achieved proficient or advanced on the Communication Arts MAP test to analyze the identified research questions with the SPSS statistics tool. A descriptive statistics analysis was performed to

summarize the sample and measures. The independent samples *t* test was performed to compare the means in percentages of proficient and advanced achievement in schools that were using close reading and schools that were not using close reading. The independent samples *t* test assisted the researcher in determining the reliability of the data by determining the variance between both schools that used close reading and schools that did not use close reading.

As data were entered, schools using close reading received a value of 1 on the Excel spreadsheet. Schools not using close reading received a value of 0. To analyze the data in the SPSS statistics software, the means of the groups were compared.

Laerd Statistics (2018) stated that there are six assumptions necessary to be considered when conducting an independent samples *t* test. Assumption 1 was addressed as dependent variables were measured on a continuous scale. Assumption 2 was met as this study consisted of two categorical, independent groups. The groups were the schools that used close reading and those that did not. Assumption 3 was met in this study as there was the independence of observations, meaning schools either used close reading or did not. Schools could not participate in both groups. Assumptions 4, 5, and 6 were tested utilizing SPSS statistics software. Assumption 4 addressed whether or not the dependent variable, MAP proficiency scores, caused any outliers. Outliers can unjustifiably influence the assumptions and results. Outliers were analyzed for statistical implications related to the research goals of the study. Assumption 5 was addressed using the Shapiro-Wilk test of normality. Tests of normality determine whether the data collected follow a normal distribution and if there is a normal distribution of data. If the significance is greater than .05 that means the distribution of data was normal. A

significance value of less than .05 means there was not a normal distribution of data, therefore failing to reject the null. Assumption 6 focused on the homogeneity of variances as well as the normality of the distribution of data. Unequal groups can contribute more to the total variance. The groups created in this study were equal.

The researcher assumed the null hypotheses were correct until evidence to reject or fail to reject the null hypotheses was found. The probability of finding a difference between groups if a difference did exist was represented by the power of 0.8. A standard alpha level of .05 meant the researcher may reject the null hypothesis if the difference in means occurred in less than 5% of the population (Taber, 2017). After running the independent samples *t* test for each of the two research questions, the researcher reported the differences in the means and the effect size of the independent variables including schools that used close reading and schools that did not use close reading as aligned to student proficient and advanced percentages on the MAP test during the 2018-2019 and 2020-2021 school years.

### **Summary**

The purpose of this quantitative, causal-comparative study was to test the theories of scaffolding and gradual release by comparing Communication Arts school building MAP scores of third-grade students that were instructed using close reading to students that were not instructed using close reading in Title I schools. A causal-comparative study was used so the researcher could observe differences between existing groups (Frey, 2018). In this case, the groups were students that were instructed using close reading and students that were not instructed using close reading. The null hypothesis was that there was no statistical difference between the achievement level of third-grade

students in Title I schools engaging in close reading of the complex grade-level text as part of their reading instruction compared to third-grade students not engaged in close reading practices as measured by MAP scores for the 2018-2019 school year. The second null hypothesis stated there was no statistical difference between the reading comprehension level of third-grade students in Title I schools engaging in close reading of the complex grade-level text as part of their reading instruction compared to third-grade students not engaged in close reading practices as measured by MAP scores for the 2020-21 school year. Chapter Four included the presentation of the data that were collected during the study, a review of data organization, and the reporting and analysis of the findings of the study. Chapter Five included a summary of the findings, conclusion, implications for practice, and recommendations for further research.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

#### **Introduction**

Schools across the nation seek to improve reading achievement for students to meet the demand of state- and federal-mandated learning standards including understanding text at a deeper level of comprehension (Paul, 2018), while also ensuring students have a great chance of graduating from high school (Hernandez, 2011). Elleman and Oslund (2019) stated that reading comprehension is one of the most complex activities in which humans engage. Decades of research have been conducted on reading comprehension, yet it remains an area of stagnant growth in adolescent learners in the United States. Struggling readers are placed in interventions where the focus is reading text on their identified instructional level (Torgesen, 2005). Expert learners can add support through scaffolding as a way to enhance students' learning so new knowledge can be constructed (Sinadinovic et al., 2018) as students learn new materials (Mikita et al., 2019). Students can successfully reach things out of their level of independence over time with scaffolding and support (McVee et al., 2019). Releasing the level of support over time is known as the gradual release of responsibility model (Falk & McNamara, 2018). This differentiated instruction that is targeted to specific student needs helps at-risk students become proficient readers (Bratsch-Hines et al., 2020). Close reading is a practice that supports students as they notice things in complex text (Angulo, 2019). Successful reading experiences for students are a result of supportive, scaffolded reading instruction from educators (Rasinski et al., 2017).

In Chapter One, the researcher provided a brief overview of the theories of scaffolding and the gradual release of responsibility model. Chapter Two reviewed literature surrounding the topics of reading comprehension including a deeper look at scaffolding and the gradual release of responsibility model as well as reviewing struggling readers, Title I, close reading, reading comprehension; including the components of comprehension, comprehension process, and theories of reading instruction, reading assessments, and third-grade students. In Chapter Three, the researcher detailed the methodology utilized in the study. Chapter Four will provide an analysis of the data aligned to the identified research questions.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this quantitative, causal-comparative study was to test the theories of scaffolding and gradual release by comparing Communication Arts school building MAP scores of third-grade students that were instructed using close reading to students that were not instructed using close reading in Title I schools. A causal-comparative study was used so the researcher could observe differences between existing groups (Frey, 2018). In this case, the groups were students that were instructed using close reading and students that were not instructed using close reading. The null hypothesis was that there was no statistical difference between the achievement level of third-grade students in Title I schools engaging in close reading of the complex grade-level text as part of their reading instruction compared to third-grade students not engaged in close reading practices as measured by MAP scores for the 2018-2019 school year. The second null hypothesis stated there was no statistical difference between the reading comprehension level of third-grade students in Title I schools engaging in close reading

of the complex grade-level text as part of their reading instruction compared to third-grade students not engaged in close reading practices as measured by MAP scores for the 2020-2021 school year. Chapter Four included the presentation of the data that were collected during the study, a review of data organization, and the reporting and analysis of the findings of the study. Chapter Five included a summary of the findings, conclusion, implications for practice, and recommendations for further research.

### **Research Questions**

RQ1: What is the difference in proficient and advanced Communication Arts Missouri Assessment Program (MAP) scores of third-grade students in Title I schools engaging in close reading of complex grade-level text as part of their reading instruction compared to third-grade students not engaging in close reading practices as measured by MAP scores in the 2018-2019 school year?

RQ2: What is the difference in proficient and advanced Communication Arts Missouri Assessment Program (MAP) scores of third-grade students in Title I schools engaging in close reading of complex grade-level text as part of their reading instruction compared to third-grade students not engaging in close reading practices as measured by MAP scores in the 2020-2021 school year?

### **Null Hypotheses**

H<sub>01</sub>: There will be no statistical difference between the reading comprehension level of third-grade students in Title I schools engaging in close reading of complex grade-level text as part of their reading instruction compared to third-grade students not engaging in close reading practices as measured by Missouri Assessment Program (MAP) scores in the 2018-2019 school year.

**H<sub>0</sub>2:** There will be no statistical difference between the reading comprehension level of third-grade students in Title I schools engaging in close reading of complex grade-level text as part of their reading instruction compared to third-grade students not engaging in close reading practices as measured by Missouri Assessment Program (MAP) scores in the 2020-2021 school year.

Each research question and related null hypothesis was investigated through analysis of quantitative ex post facto data using the SPSS statistics tool. The independent-samples *t* test was utilized to compare the means in percentages of proficient and advanced achievement in schools who were not using close reading as part of their reading instruction. Cohen's *d* was calculated to determine the standardized difference between the means. Interpretation of Cohen's *d* can be cautiously interpreted using the effect size of 0.2 as a small effect size, 0.5 as a medium effect size, and 0.8 as a large effect size (Schäfer & Schwarz, 2019).

### **Data Analysis and Findings**

The researcher used percentages of third-grade students in Title I schools in the state of Missouri who achieved proficient and advanced on the MAP test in Communication Arts during the 2018-2019 and 2020-2021 school years to analyze the identified research questions with the SPSS statistics tool. The researcher used these data statistics in addition to the identification of being a Title I school to report the means and standard deviations of achievement percentages for schools that implemented close reading as part of reading instruction and schools that did not use close reading as part of reading instruction. Collection of data was achieved through publicly available district and school data on the DESE website. Excel was utilized to filter data for achievement

percentages on the 2018-2019 and 2020-2021 Communication Arts MAP test for third-grade students. The independent-samples  $t$  test was utilized to compare the means in percentages of proficient and advanced achievement in schools that were using close reading as part of reading instruction and schools that were not using close reading as part of reading instruction. The independent-samples  $t$  test assisted the researcher in determining the reliability of the data by determining the variance both between the schools that were and were not using close reading as part of reading instruction. There were several assumptions that needed to be met for validity in results through SPSS statistics. Measurement of the dependent variable must occur on a continuous scale (i.e., percentage of proficient and advanced). The independent variable included two groups independent of each other. For this study, using close reading as part of reading instruction and not using close reading as part of reading instruction served as the two groups independent of each other. Independence of observations had to be maintained. In this study, schools were not placed in both the using close reading and not using close reading groups. There should have been no significant outliers and there should have been a normal distribution of assessment percentages. Finally, a homogeneity of variances should have been present, meaning there should have been an equal spread of scores across the means. The researcher accepted the null hypotheses until evidence to reject or fail to reject the null hypotheses was found. The probability of finding a difference between groups if a difference exists was represented by a power of 0.8. A standard alpha level of 0.5 meant the researcher could reject the null hypotheses if the difference in means occurred in less than 5% of the population (Taber, 2017). After running the independent samples  $t$  test for each of the research questions, the researcher

reported the differences in the means of the independent variables including schools that used close reading as part of reading instruction and schools that did not use close reading as part of reading instruction as aligned to student proficient and advanced percentages on the MAP Communication Arts test during the 2018-2019 and 2020-2021 school years. Cohen's  $d$  was calculated to determine the standardized difference between the means. Interpretation of Cohen's  $d$  could be cautiously interpreted using the effect size of 0.2 as a small effect, 0.5 as a medium effect, and 0.8 as a large effect (Schäfer & Schwarz, 2019).

### **Samples**

The researcher collected a sampling of students through a survey that was sent to all 516 Missouri school buildings with third-grade students that, through confirmation from the survey, utilized close reading as a component of reading instruction for the identified school years. Random sampling could not be used but instead, purposive sampling occurred to obtain data that aligned with the purpose of the study. Purposive sampling was used to improve the rigor of the study as well as improve the trustworthiness of the data obtained and results (Campbell et al., 2020). In order to determine the population of schools included in the purposive sample, schools that were using close reading as part of reading instruction were placed in one group. The second group was made up of schools that were not using close reading as part of reading instruction. The researcher received 162 responses from the survey. Twenty-four schools were dismissed due to not being identified as Title I. Sixty-two schools stated they did use close reading as part of reading instruction during the 2018-2019 school year and 72 districts said they did for the 2020-2021 school year. Sixty-four districts said they

did not use close reading as part of reading instruction during the 2018-2019 school year and 54 said no for the 2020-2021 school year. Fifty-one districts were randomly chosen from each list by placing the schools into an Excel spreadsheet and using the random sort feature in order to obtain the sample size needed for the purpose of this research.

### **Demographics**

The researcher used post ex facto data publicly available on the DESE website to collect data for the public schools in the state of Missouri. One hundred two schools were used in the study. School districts that were not identified as Title I schools, as well as private and charter schools were not used in this study. Only Missouri public schools that served third-grade students and participated in the MAP Communication Arts test were used in this study. Data extracted from DESE's open access database were then put into SPSS and analyzed to determine the difference between proficient and advanced academic performance as determined by the MAP Communication Arts scores in schools that used close reading as part of reading instruction and schools that did not use close reading as part of reading instruction.

### **Data Cleaning**

School districts identified as charter, parochial, and private schools were removed from this study. Schools that did not serve students in third grade were also removed from the study. The researcher then removed schools that said no when asked if they were identified as Title I on the survey sent to building administrators from the study. The researcher randomly selected 51 schools that used close reading as part of reading instruction for the 2018-2019 school year as well selecting 51 schools that used close reading as part of reading instruction for the 2020-2021 school year. Fifty-one schools

that did not use close reading as part of reading instruction for the 2018-2019 school year were also randomly selected along with 51 schools that did not use close reading as part of reading instruction during the 2020-2021 school year. Once lists were compiled, data from the 2019 and 2021 MAP Communication Arts test for third-grade students was acquired from the DESE website. Data included the percentage of students who achieved proficient and advanced on the MAP test for each given year.

## **Findings**

### ***Research Question 1***

What is the difference in proficient and advanced Communication Arts Missouri Assessment Program (MAP) scores of third-grade students in Title I schools engaging in close reading of complex grade-level text as part of their reading instruction compared to third-grade students not engaging in close reading practices as measured by MAP scores in the 2018-2019 school year?

### ***Null Hypothesis 1***

There will be no statistical difference between the reading comprehension level of third-grade students in Title I schools engaging in close reading of complex grade-level text as part of their reading instruction compared to third-grade students not engaging in close reading practices as measured by Missouri Assessment Program (MAP) scores in the 2018-2019 school year.

Table I presents the MAP Communication Arts mean and standard deviation for the 2018-2019 school year for third-grade students in schools that did use close reading as part of reading instruction and schools that did not use close reading as part of reading instruction.

**Table 1***MAP Communication Arts Scores 2019-2019*

Group	<i>N</i>	Mean	Standard Deviation	Standard Error Mean
No close reading	51	44.74	13.39	1.87
Close reading	51	47.61	13.26	1.85

The proficient and advanced percentages for Communication Arts scores of schools that used close reading for the 2018-2019 school year ( $M = 47.61$ ,  $SD = 13.26$ ) were greater than the proficient and advanced percentages for Communication Arts scores of schools that did not use close reading for the 2018-2019 school year ( $M = 44.74$ ,  $SD = 13.39$ ).

Table 2 presents an analysis of the data presented to answer Research Question 1. There were 51 schools that did implement close reading as part of their reading instruction in 2018-2019 and 51 schools that did not implement close reading as part of their reading program. An independent samples  $t$  test was run to determine if there were differences in proficient and advanced percentages on the third-grade MAP Communication Arts assessment.

**Table 2***Independent Samples t test MAP Communication Arts 2018-2019*

					95% Confidence Interval of the Difference		
	$t$	$df$	Sig. (two-sided p)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
Equal variances not assumed	-1.087	99.989	0.279	-2.871	2.640	-8.108	2.367

Levene's test for equality of variances tested the assumption that the variances in achievement scores within the two groups were approximately equal. Levene's test with a significance of greater than .05 indicated that equal variance within the group was assumed and there was no statistical difference between the variances of the groups. The proficient and advanced percentages were greater for schools that used close reading than the schools that did not use close reading. The two-sided  $p$  difference for the two groups was 0.279, which was not significantly different ( $p > .05$ ). A small effect size existed with Cohen's  $d = 0.17$ . There were 51 schools that used close reading and 51 schools that did not use close reading. An independent-samples  $t$  test was run to determine if there were differences in reading comprehension scores for third-grade students between the schools that used close reading and the schools that did not use close reading. There were no outliers in the data, as assessed by inspection of a boxplot. There was homogeneity of variances, as assessed by Levene's test for equality of variances ( $p = .279$ ). Reading comprehension was higher for third-grade students in schools that did use close reading ( $M = 47.61$ ,  $SD = 13.26$ ) than schools that did not use close reading ( $M = 44.74$ ,  $SD = 13.39$ ), a statistically significant difference,  $M = 2.87$ , 95% CI [-8.10, 2.36],  $t(99) = -1.087$ ,  $p = .027$ . Thus, the null hypothesis for Research Question 1 ( $H_01$ ) failed to be rejected.

### ***Research Question 2***

What is the difference in proficient and advanced Communication Arts Missouri Assessment Program (MAP) scores of third-grade students in Title I schools engaging in close reading of complex grade-level text as part of their reading instruction compared to

third-grade students not engaging in close reading practices as measured by MAP scores in the 2020-2021 school year?

***Null Hypothesis 2***

There will be no statistical difference between the reading comprehension level of third-grade students in Title I schools engaging in close reading of complex grade-level text as part of their reading instruction compared to third-grade students not engaging in close reading practices as measured by Missouri Assessment Program (MAP) scores in the 2020-2021 school year.

Table 3 presents the MAP Communication Arts mean and standard deviation for the 2020-2021 school year for third-grade students in schools that did use close reading as part of reading instruction and schools that did not use close reading as part of reading instruction.

**Table 3**

*MAP Communication Arts Scores 2020-2021*

Group	<i>N</i>	Mean	Standard Deviation	Standard Error Mean
No close reading	51	38.79	12.14	1.70
Close reading	51	42.48	13.80	1.93

The proficient and advanced percentages for Communication Arts scores of schools that used close reading for the 2020-2021 school year ( $M = 42.48$ ,  $SD = 13.80$ ) were greater than the proficient and advanced percentages for Communication Arts scores of schools that did not use close reading for the 2020-2021 school year ( $M = 38.79$ ,  $SD = 12.14$ ).

Table 4 presents an analysis of the data presented to answer Research Question 2. There were 51 schools that did implement close reading as part of their reading instruction in 2020-2021 and 51 schools that did not implement close reading as part of their reading program. An independent samples *t* test was run to determine if there were differences in proficient and advanced percentages on the third-grade MAP Communication Arts assessment.

**Table 4**

*Independent Samples t test MAP Communication Arts 2020-2021*

					95% Confidence Interval of the Difference		
	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	Sig. (two-sided <i>p</i> )	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
Equal variances not assumed	-1.431	98.409	0.156	-3.684	2.574	-8.792	1.423

Levene's test for equality of variances tested the assumption that the variances in achievement scores within the two groups were approximately equal. Levene's test with a significance of greater than .05 indicated that equal variance within the group were assumed and there was no statistical difference between the variances of the groups. The proficient and advanced percentages were greater for schools that used close reading than the schools that did not use close reading. The two-sided *p* difference for the two groups was 0.156, which was not significantly different ( $p > .05$ ). A small effect size existed with Cohen's  $d = 0.10$ . There were 51 schools that did use close reading and 51 schools that did not use close reading. An independent-samples *t* test was run to determine if there were differences in reading comprehension scores for third-grade students between

the schools that used close reading and the schools that did not use close reading. There were no outliers in the data, as assessed by inspection of a boxplot. There was homogeneity of variances, as assessed by Levene's test for equality of variances ( $p = .156$ ). Reading comprehension was higher for third-grade students in schools that did use close reading ( $M = 42.48, SD = 13.80$ ) than schools that did not use close reading ( $M = 38.79, SD = 12.14$ ), a statistically significant difference,  $M = 3.69, 95\% CI [-8.79, 1.42], t(98) = -1.432, p = .015$ . Thus, the null hypothesis for Research Question 2 ( $H_02$ ) failed to be rejected.

### **Summary**

The statistical analysis and findings of this study explored the differences in third-grade MAP Communication Arts proficient and advanced percentages for 2018-2019 and 2020-2021 between schools that did use close reading as part of reading instruction and schools that did not use close reading. Two research questions were researched, and data were collected. After data collection and analysis, two null hypotheses failed to be rejected.

**H<sub>01</sub>:** There is no statistical difference between the reading comprehension level of third-grade students in Title I schools engaging in close reading of complex grade-level text as part of their reading instruction compared to third-grade students not engaging in close reading practices as measured by Missouri Assessment Program (MAP) scores in the 2018-2019 school year.

**H<sub>02</sub>:** There is no statistical difference between the reading comprehension level of third-grade students in Title I schools engaging in close reading of complex grade-level text as part of their reading instruction compared to third-grade students not engaging in

close reading practices as measured by Missouri Assessment Program (MAP) scores in the 2020-2021 school year.

This chapter included the research questions, null hypotheses, data analysis and findings, sampling, demographics of the study, data cleaning, and findings. Based on the information collected throughout this chapter, Chapter Five presents a summary of the causal-comparative study and includes conclusions and recommendations aligned to the review of literature from Chapter Two.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### **Introduction**

Schools across the nation seek to improve reading achievement for students to meet the demand of state- and federal-mandated learning standards including understanding text at a deeper level of comprehension (Paul, 2018), while also ensuring students have a great chance of graduating from high school (Hernandez, 2011). Elleman and Oslund (2019) stated that reading comprehension is one of the most complex activities in which humans engage and is a prerequisite for learning (ter Beek et al., 2018). Decades of research have been conducted on reading comprehension, yet it remains an area of stagnant growth in adolescent learners in the United States (Elleman & Oslund, 2019). Expert learners can add support through scaffolding to enhance students' learning so new knowledge can be constructed (Sinadinovic et al., 2018) as students learn new materials (Mikita et al., 2019). Students can successfully reach things out of their level of independence over time with scaffolding and support (McVee et al., 2019). Releasing the level of support over time is known as the gradual release of responsibility model (Falk & McNamara, 2018). This is the most frequently cited model for teaching reading comprehension (Brevik, 2019). This differentiated instruction that is targeted to specific student needs helps at-risk students become proficient readers (Bratsch-Hines et al., 2020). Close reading is a practice that supports students as they notice things in complex text (Angulo, 2019). Successful reading experiences for students are a result of supportive, scaffolded reading instruction from educators (Rasinski et al., 2017).

## **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this quantitative, causal-comparative study was to test the theories of scaffolding and gradual release by comparing Communication Arts school building MAP scores of third-grade students that were instructed using close reading to students that were not instructed using close reading in Title I schools. A causal-comparative study was used so the researcher could observe differences between existing groups (Frey, 2018). In this case, the groups were students that were instructed using close reading and students that were not instructed using close reading. The null hypothesis was that there was no statistical difference between the achievement level of third-grade students in Title I schools engaging in close reading of the complex grade-level text as part of their reading instruction compared to third-grade students not engaged in close reading practices as measured by MAP scores for the 2018-2019 school year. The second null hypothesis stated there was no statistical difference between the reading comprehension level of third-grade students in Title I schools engaging in close reading of the complex grade-level text as part of their reading instruction compared to third-grade students not engaged in close reading practices as measured by MAP scores for the 2020-2021 school year. Chapter Four included the presentation of the data that were collected during the study, a review of data organization, and the reporting and analysis of the findings of the study. Chapter Five included a summary of the findings, conclusion, implications for practice, and recommendations for further research.

## **Research Questions**

RQ1: What is the difference in proficient and advanced Communication Arts Missouri Assessment Program (MAP) scores of third-grade students in Title I schools

engaging in close reading of complex grade-level text as part of their reading instruction compared to third-grade students not engaging in close reading practices as measured by MAP scores in the 2018-2019 school year?

RQ2: What is the difference in proficient and advanced Communication Arts Missouri Assessment Program (MAP) scores of third-grade students in Title I schools engaging in close reading of complex grade-level text as part of their reading instruction compared to third-grade students not engaging in close reading practices as measured by MAP scores in the 2020-2021 school year?

### **Null Hypotheses**

H<sub>01</sub>: There will be no statistical difference between the reading comprehension level of third-grade students in Title I schools engaging in close reading of complex grade-level text as part of their reading instruction compared to third-grade students not engaging in close reading practices as measured by Missouri Assessment Program (MAP) scores in the 2018-2019 school year.

H<sub>02</sub>: There will be no statistical difference between the reading comprehension level of third-grade students in Title I schools engaging in close reading of complex grade-level text as part of their reading instruction compared to third-grade students not engaging in close reading practices as measured by Missouri Assessment Program (MAP) scores in the 2020-2021 school year.

### **Limitations**

I was limited by many factors in this study. This included the number of Title I school buildings in Missouri, the number of schools that used close reading, and the amount of professional development teachers had received in close reading. Another

limitation was the reliability of MAP as a measure of achievement in reading comprehension and the accuracy of the published MAP data on DESE's website. I had to send the survey to schools leaders twice in order to find enough schools that were identified as Title I and used close reading in order to collect enough data for the research. When collecting data I was trusting the accuracy of published data in order to draw conclusions.

### **Delimitations**

I chose to limit the study to public schools in Missouri that were identified as Title I and used close reading. Another limitation chosen by the researcher was using MAP data for third-grade students. I chose to collect data from 2019 and 2021 since the MAP test was not administered in 2020 due to the Covid-19 pandemic that caused schools to shut down for several months. Limiting the study to these areas allowed me to focus on a small sample of students to make comparisons. These students had common characteristics that made comparisons equal. The findings of this research could transfer to other grades and similar conclusions could be drawn about close reading.

### **Summary of Findings**

I used the independent samples *t* test to analyze data aligned to the research questions to compare the differences between the means of proficient and advanced students in schools that did use close reading as part of their reading instruction and schools that did not use close reading as part of their reading instruction as measured by Communication Arts MAP scores for third-grade students. Reading comprehension was higher for third-grade students in schools that did use close reading ( $M = 47.61$ ,  $SD = 13.26$ ) than schools that did not use close reading ( $M = 44.74$ ,  $SD = 13.39$ ), a statistically

significant difference,  $M = 2.87$ , 95% CI [-8.10, 2.36],  $t(99) = -1.087$ ,  $p = .027$ . Thus, the null hypothesis for Research Question 1 ( $H_01$ ) failed to be rejected. Reading comprehension was higher for third-grade students in schools that did use close reading ( $M = 42.48$ ,  $SD = 13.80$ ) than schools that did not use close reading ( $M = 38.79$ ,  $SD = 12.14$ ), a statistically significant difference,  $M = 3.69$ , 95% CI [-8.79, 1.42],  $t(98) = -1.432$ ,  $p = .015$ . Thus, the null hypothesis for Research Question 2 ( $H_02$ ) failed to be rejected. Data indicated there was not a statistically significant difference in Communication Arts scores for third-grade students between schools that did use close reading and schools that did not use close reading. Utilization of Cohen's  $d$  to determine effect size indicated a small effect size of .17 in 2019 and .10 for 2021. The results were not considered statistically significant, therefore the researcher was not able to determine if scaffolding and the gradual release of responsibility lead to an increase in academic achievement when close reading is used with students as part of reading instruction.

The researcher found an overall decrease in Communication Arts MAP scores from 2019 to 2021. The Covid-19 outbreak in 2020 forced schools across the state to close and instruction was interrupted for students. Schools had to make up a lot of ground when they reopened in the fall of 2020. Some schools were using hybrid schedules that included part-time virtual instruction. This could have had an impact on decreased MAP scores for schools. Schools that used close reading had a decrease in the mean of 5.13. For schools that did not use close reading, the mean decreased by 5.95. Therefore, schools that did not use close reading saw a larger decrease in the mean Communication Arts MAP score for proficient and advanced students than schools that did use close reading. Since this research was limited to the use of MAP data as a means

for measuring reading comprehension, there was no other way to measure the impact close reading has on reading comprehension and the researcher had to consider MAP scores to be valid and accurate data. This led me to believe the use of close reading can have a positive impact on student achievement over several years. Meaningful analysis of text is an important part of reading comprehension (Shelton & Brooks, 2019). The purpose of close reading is to create reading skills that will transfer into other texts as learners build up their ability to successfully interact with and comprehend detailed text (Angulo, 2019).

### **Discussion of Findings**

While examining the differences in proficient and advanced percentages of students that did use close reading as part of reading instruction and schools that did not use close reading, no statistically significant differences were noted, and the null hypotheses failed to be rejected. While no statistically significant differences were identified, it is important to notice the differences in means for the groups in both 2019 and 2021. In both years the means of the groups that used close reading were higher for proficient and advanced students. These differences, while not statistically significant, lead the researcher to believe that the implementation of close reading as part of reading instruction may have a positive impact on reading comprehension. However, this statement cannot be made with absolute certainty and the overall results of this study are inconclusive.

Effect size is another indicator that may be created using close reading as part of reading instruction. Analysis of the data indicates a small effect size for both years of data collection for this research. The small effect size of .17 in 2019 and .10 in 2021 from

schools that used close reading as part of reading instruction shows that close reading has a possible positive effect on student learning. This provides some additional support for the belief that close reading can have a positive impact on student achievement regarding reading comprehension. When considering both the means of proficient and advanced students using MAP data and the effect size from using close reading, I cannot conclude that using close reading will have a positive impact on student achievement and specifically on reading comprehension. The results of this study were inconclusive. The research shows that close reading may have a positive impact on reading comprehension, although there was not a statistically significant difference in the group that used close reading and the group that did not use close reading.

Rasinski et al. (2017) stated that supported, scaffolded reading instruction leads to successful reading experiences for students. Brevik (2019) stated that the gradual release of responsibility model is the most frequently cited model for teaching comprehension. The gradual release of responsibility model has been supported since the 1980s. Using the model, scaffolding fades over time, varies, and allows learners to gain the appropriate amount of support needed. As readers analyze complex text during close reading, support is given from educators using scaffolding and the gradual release of responsibility model. I examined the theories of scaffolding and the gradual release of responsibility model as used in close reading. The research conducted in this study provides evidence that using close reading with scaffolding and the gradual release of responsibility may increase student achievement by improving reading comprehension as shown through the difference in means for schools that used close reading versus schools that did not use close reading. While there was not a statistically significant difference

found between the groups, the higher mean could support close reading being a practice that can increase student achievement in reading comprehension.

The theories of scaffolding and the gradual release of responsibility model that guided this study were supported through the research findings, even though there was not a statistically significant difference in the groups of schools using close reading and the schools not using close reading. Reading comprehension models of instruction examined by the researcher in the review of literature were also supported through the findings of this research. All the reading comprehension models examined state the importance of teacher modeling followed by a release of responsibility to the learner (Elleman & Oslund, 2019; Hall et al., 2021). Educators should prepare students to develop independent reading strategies as they encounter more demanding tasks in texts (Mikita et al., 2019). Reading strategies and skills that were identified as essential for reading comprehension in the models examined included making inferences, prior knowledge, vocabulary, and comprehension monitoring (Biemiller & Slonim, 2001; Elleman & Oslund, 2019). These models demonstrate the importance of using the practice of scaffolding and the gradual release of responsibility model through close reading that develops background knowledge as students are supported through making inferences, discovering new vocabulary, and unpacking complex text to strengthen their working memory. The results of this research study show that using close reading may have a positive impact on student achievement as shown by higher means in proficient and advanced students by analyzing MAP data and a small effect for both 2019 and 2021. A study conducted by Angulo in 2019 also examined the correlation between close reading and reading comprehension. In this study students showed a steady increase in

reading comprehension scores on a multiple-choice assessment taken after reading passages. This study took place over a 5-week timeframe. During that time students were instructed using close reading strategies as defined by Fisher and Frey (2012). This increase in reading comprehension scores was similar to the higher means in the numbers of students scoring proficient and advanced on the MAP test seen in my study from schools that used close reading.

When analyzing the results of my study, I discovered that my findings align with previous studies including those of Snow and O'Connor (2013) and Angulo (2019). Both studies uncovered evidence supporting the use of close reading to improve reading comprehension. While Snow and O'Connor discussed the implications close reading may have on students due to limited classroom discussions and background experiences with complex text, Angulo noted the importance of students uncovering things on their own as they unpack complex text during close reading even without prior knowledge and background experiences. My study adds to the body of research surrounding close reading by providing research surrounding students that are already at risk of reading failure due to socioeconomic disadvantages that can often have a negative impact on reading success. The findings, while examining a unique group of learners, support studies such as Snow and O'Connor's and Angulo's, which both showed positive results with close reading despite the perceived implications from this type of instruction.

I uncovered results that were not anticipated when the study started. When sending out surveys to school leaders I was expecting to find a larger number of schools that did not use close reading than schools that did use close reading. As current research has evolved over the last 5 to 10 years, a larger focus on phonemic awareness, phonics,

and decoding has been placed on reading instruction. It was my belief that school districts would move away from practices like close reading to focus on current research practices including phonemic awareness, phonics, and decoding. I found that of the school leaders that completed the survey, more were using close reading than were not using close reading as part of reading instruction. The survey had to be sent to schools multiple times in order to locate enough districts not using close reading to complete the research. I had to randomly select districts that were using close reading to collect data from 51 schools. This was due to the number of Title I schools using close reading that completed the survey being greater than 51, which was the required number for the research to accurately find a statistically significant difference. As reading instruction research continues to change and evolve, districts may in fact move away from practices like close reading and implement decodable texts into instruction. While decodable texts will support instruction aligned to phonemic awareness and phonics, these types of texts often are lacking in strong comprehension. A stronger focus on these types of texts could lead to a shift in reading comprehension for students. School districts should be aware of studies that provide evidence supporting close reading (Anguls, 2019; Snow & O'Connor, 2013) when choosing reading curriculum materials.

### **Implications**

The findings of this study are inconclusive in supporting the importance of the use of scaffolding through the gradual release of responsibility model as implemented in close reading since the results were not statistically significant. The data collected in this study provide evidence to support the statement that close reading may have a positive impact on student achievement as it pertains to reading comprehension since there was a

higher mean in MAP scores for schools that used close reading. While the research did not find statistically significant differences in schools that used close reading and schools that did not use close reading, the means for advanced and proficient students was higher for both 2019 and 2021 in schools that did use close reading. Educators can draw conclusions using this research to show that close reading is a practice that may lead to increased academic achievement in reading comprehension. This is further supported with the small effect size shown in 2019 of .17 and in 2021 of .10. Data collected in this study were inconsistent in showing the impact of close reading on reading comprehension, however, since the results were not statistically significant but both 2019 and 2021 showed higher means for schools that used close reading and a small effect size for both years. Shelton and Brooks (2019) stated that the practice of close reading is widely overlooked in the era of high-stakes testing.

Since reading comprehension plays an imperative role in lifelong learning as reading comprehension skills are needed at all educational levels and school subjects (Özdemir & Akyol, 2019), educators must create learning experiences in the classroom that support positive academic achievement in reading comprehension. Reading comprehension is a prerequisite for learning (ter Beek et al., 2018) and the use of scaffolding during reading instruction can lead to higher outcomes for learners (Reynolds & Goodwin, 2016). This statement is supported with the higher means in MAP scores for schools that used close reading in 2019 and 2021. The gradual release of responsibility model is a significant model in the field of literacy (McVee et al., 2019). The data collected in this study support these theories as being important, effective

practices in improving reading comprehension for learners and leading to greater student achievement as it pertains to reading comprehension.

The reading comprehension instruction models that were examined in the review of literature all note the importance of building background knowledge, increasing vocabulary, making inferences, and examining complex text to increase reading comprehension (Daniel, 2017; Elleman & Oslund, 2019). These reading practices are all components of close reading through scaffolding and the gradual release of responsibility model. Close reading is a practice educators should consider using as an instructional tool to deepen comprehension (Fisher et al., 2012). The small effect sizes of .17 in 2019 and .10 in 2021 further support that close reading is an effective practice to increase reading comprehension and reading achievement for students. While the effect size was small for both years, it did show that close reading has a positive effect on student achievement in the area of reading comprehension.

The findings from this study could have an impact on educators and administrators in the field of education as they work to improve reading comprehension for students to ensure success and increase the number of students that graduate high school. The stronger emphasis placed on reading and understanding texts at a deeper level of comprehension (Paul, 2018) due to the implementation of the Common Core State Standards for English has caused teachers to struggle to meet the demands of the standards. The standards required students to analyze and comprehend both fiction and nonfiction complex texts using text evidence to support thinking (Angulo, 2019). The Common Core State Standards placed a greater emphasis on reading informational texts in classrooms than had previously been in place (Angulo, 2019; Boudreaux-Johnson et

al., 2017). This study showed there was not a statistically significant difference in schools that use close reading versus schools that do not use close reading. However, educators and administrators can still use the information from this study to examine how close reading can impact reading comprehension. The mean for the number of students that scored advanced or proficient on MAP in both 2019 and 2021 was greater for schools that used close reading than schools that did not use close reading. Furthermore, the small effect sizes from both 2019 and 2021 support the use of close reading. While the evidence did not show a large effect size of 0.4, a small effect size still shows the practice may be effective. Educators can use this data to support the need for using close reading as part of reading instruction for students but should consider additional means of reading instruction to support close reading to achieve a larger effect size in reading comprehension. Close reading alone is not enough to support successful reading comprehension for learners.

The information from this study will only be useful if shared with educators and administrators that oversee curriculum decisions for schools. This research publication will serve as a means for disseminating these findings. The data collected for this research would be a piece of evidence educational decision makers would want to examine when deciding what components of reading instruction to implement. The results of this research would be valuable to any educator working to improve reading comprehension for students. This would include educators across multiple grade levels including elementary, middle school, and high, as well as across many subjects including science and social studies as reading comprehension is an important prerequisite for all learning (ter Beek et al., 2018). The findings of this study showed that implementing

close reading as part of reading instruction did not have a negative impact on reading comprehension for students. Therefore, the research recommends educators consider using close reading as part of reading instruction.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

Building on this study, the next phase of research could include more in-depth study reading comprehension in relation to the implementation of close reading. This study focused on schools that were identified as schoolwide Title I. Future studies could expand to a broader reach and include schools that are not identified as schoolwide Title I. By including data from a broader range of schools this could provide additional information to measure the significance of close reading as measured through reading comprehension.

Additionally, expanding the research to other grades within the state of Missouri could increase the knowledge base for the differences that may occur at other grade levels when close reading is implemented as part of reading instruction. This study focused on third grade as that was identified as a pivotal age for reading comprehension in relation to school success. Researchers could examine data from fourth, fifth, sixth, seventh, or eighth grades individually, or include data across a multitude of grades that participate in MAP testing.

Future studies could also focus on further analysis of close reading and the differences in implementation levels within schools. For this study school districts were identified as either using close reading or not using close reading. Research could be conducted on how often it is used in classrooms. Data could be analyzed for districts that use close reading daily versus a few times a week.

Another possible study that could be considered in the future is the level of professional development teachers who are using close reading. Since close reading is designed to follow a specified format, data could be collected on the amount of professional development teachers receive during close reading implementation. Data could be analyzed and compared to see if professional development improves student achievement when close reading is used regularly in a school.

### **Conclusion**

Educators continue to search for ways to improve reading achievement for students to ensure student success and prevent dropout for students reading below grade level at the end of third grade (Hernandez, 2011). Nineteen states have mandated laws in place for students who do not reach a specified level of reading proficiency by the end of third grade (Hwang & Duke, 2020). The laws, developed over concern for literacy achievement in students, created unintended consequences. DellaVecchia (2020) noted that students that are retained are consistently more likely to drop out of school than non-retained students. Eighty-eight percent of students that did not receive a high school diploma were struggling readers in third grade (Weyer & Casares, 2019). Teachers and school leaders are under immense pressure to fill the achievement gaps of struggling students (Keith, 2018), not only to ensure their success, but also to improve the school's overall achievement levels.

Scaffolding and the gradual release of responsibility model are practices that are both used as ways to improve student achievement, especially in reading (Brevik, 2019; Shelton & Brooks, 2019). While research exists to show the effectiveness of this practice in reading instruction, there is little quantitative research to study the effectiveness of

scaffolding and the gradual release of responsibility model as used in close reading and the impact that has on reading comprehension for students in Title I schools. Children born into poverty face significant challenges (Bouchrika, 2022; Webb et al., 2019). These challenges impact academic, physical, and social development and can lead to poor outcomes. Comprehension is a complex task that may be more challenging for students with cognitive problems (Webb et al., 2019). Proper scaffolding makes cognitive processes visible for learners and can support the gradual release of responsibility method of learning as students progress from early to proficient learners.

Overall, the results of the data collected in this quantitative study were not found to be statistically significant and were, therefore, inconclusive. The review of literature supporting scaffolding and the gradual release of responsibility model leads me to believe that the increase in student achievement as measured by Communication Arts MAP scores in 2019 and 2021 along with the small effect size shown in both years may be a result of close reading being used as part of reading instruction. However, since the results were not statistically significant, this statement cannot be made with absolute certainty.

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## Appendix A

### Spring 2019 MAP Grade-Level Assessment Technical Report Part 1

Grade and Form	Reporting Category	Number of Items	Number of Score Points	N Count	Mean	Standard Deviation	Cronbach's Alpha	SEM
3A	1	23	26	30,964	13.92	5.58	0.84	2.23
3A	2	7	8	30,956	5.47	2.04	0.65	1.20
3A	3	12	14	30,956	9.20	2.85	0.73	1.47
3A	4	8	8	30,952	5.10	2.13	0.69	1.18
3B	1	24	26	35,192	13.85	5.37	0.83	2.24
3B	2	6	8	35,192	4.41	1.89	0.51	1.32
3B	3	11	14	35,192	9.61	2.88	0.71	1.54
3B	4	8	8	35,184	5.06	2.08	0.67	1.20
4A01	1	20	26	5,332	14.94	5.35	0.83	2.22
4A01	2	7	8	5,333	5.19	1.79	0.56	1.18
4A01	3	7	14	5,333	8.70	2.90	0.75	1.44
4A01	4	8	8	5,332	5.22	2.09	0.70	1.15
4A05	1	20	26	5,280	15.06	5.27	0.82	2.23
4A05	2	7	8	5,278	5.20	1.78	0.56	1.18
4A05	3	7	14	5,278	8.46	2.54	0.76	1.23
4A05	4	8	8	5,279	5.28	2.09	0.70	1.15
4A09	1	20	26	5,323	14.82	5.28	0.82	2.23
4A09	2	7	8	5,322	5.19	1.80	0.57	1.19
4A09	3	7	14	5,322	8.04	2.72	0.77	1.30
4A09	4	8	8	5,322	5.27	2.05	0.68	1.16
4A13	1	20	26	7,950	14.79	5.29	0.82	2.23
4A13	2	7	8	7,949	5.16	1.80	0.57	1.18
4A13	3	7	14	7,949	8.35	2.45	0.75	1.22
4A13	4	8	8	7,948	5.21	2.09	0.69	1.16
4A17	1	20	26	7,981	14.95	5.32	0.83	2.22
4A17	2	7	8	7,979	5.19	1.80	0.57	1.18
4A17	3	7	14	7,979	8.49	2.22	0.74	1.30
4A17	4	8	8	7,977	5.26	2.07	0.69	1.15
4B04	1	21	26	9,570	13.70	5.86	0.85	2.29
4B04	2	7	8	9,566	5.25	1.73	0.56	1.14
4B04	3	7	14	9,566	7.34	2.57	0.76	1.27
4B04	4	7	8	9,562	4.04	2.12	0.62	1.30
4B06	1	21	26	5,298	15.05	5.83	0.85	2.27
4B06	2	7	8	5,297	5.54	1.60	0.52	1.12
4B06	3	7	14	5,297	8.04	2.47	0.73	1.28
4B06	4	7	8	5,298	4.54	2.11	0.61	1.32
4B10	1	21	26	5,285	15.05	5.89	0.85	2.26
4B10	2	7	8	5,285	5.58	1.61	0.53	1.10
4B10	3	7	14	5,285	8.91	2.38	0.75	1.19
4B10	4	7	8	5,285	4.58	2.10	0.60	1.32
4B14	1	21	26	5,298	15.08	5.85	0.85	2.26
4B14	2	7	8	5,297	5.54	1.63	0.54	1.11
4B14	3	7	14	5,297	8.77	2.52	0.74	1.30
4B14	4	7	8	5,297	4.64	2.11	0.61	1.32

## Appendix B

### Spring 2019 MAP Grade-Level Assessment Technical Report Part 2

Grade and Form	Components	Eigenvalue	Percentage of Variance Explained	Cumulative Percentage of Variance Explained
3A	First	10.55	21.11	21.11
3A	Second	1.66	3.33	24.43
3A	Ratio (First/Second)	6.35		
3B	First	9.60	19.60	19.60
3B	Second	1.63	3.32	22.92
3B	Ration (First/Second)	5.90		
4A01	First	9.82	23.37	23.37
4A01	Second	1.43	3.40	26.77
4A01	Ration (First/Second)	6.88		
4A05	First	9.66	23.00	23.00
4A05	Second	1.48	3.51	26.52
4A05	Ration (First/Second)	6.55		
4A09	First	9.66	23.00	23.00
4A09	Second	1.47	3.49	26.49
4A09	Ration (First/Second)	6.59		
4A13	First	9.53	22.70	22.70
4A13	Second	1.49	3.54	26.24
4A13	Ration (First/Second)	6.40		
4A17	First	9.53	22.70	22.70
4A17	Second	1.50	3.57	26.28
4A17	Ration (First/Second)	6.35		
4B04	First	9.40	22.38	22.38
4B04	Second	1.49	3.55	25.93
4B04	Ration (First/Second)	6.31		
4B06	First	9.24	22.00	22.00
4B06	Second	1.46	3.48	25.48
4B06	Ration (First/Second)	6.33		
4B10	First	9.37	22.30	22.30
4B10	Second	1.58	3.65	25.95
4B10	Ration (First/Second)	6.12		
4B14	First	9.26	22.04	22.04
4B14	Second	1.65	3.92	25.96
4B14	Ration (First/Second)	5.62		
4B18	First	9.40	22.39	22.39
4B18	Second	1.49	3.55	25.94
4B18	Ration (First/Second)	6.31		
4BM4	First	9.37	22.30	22.30
4BM4	Second	1.45	3.45	25.75
4BM4	Ration (First/Second)	6.47		

## Appendix C

### Spring 2021 MAP Grade-Level Assessment Technical Report Part 1

Grade and Form	Reporting Category	Number of Items	Number of Score Points	<i>N</i> Count	Mean	Standard Deviation	Cronbach's Alpha	SEM
3B	1	23	23	60,995	13.75	6.09	0.86	2.29
3B	2	6	8	60,973	4.26	2.04	0.62	1.25
3B	3	10	14	60,973	8.55	2.75	0.64	1.64
3B	4	7	8	60,956	4.32	1.99	0.59	1.28
4B	1	17	26	61,659	14.29	5.16	0.80	2.29
4B	2	7	8	61,632	4.89	1.90	0.60	1.20
4B	3	7	14	61,632	8.85	2.68	0.78	1.27
4B	4	7	8	61,615	4.95	2.27	0.70	1.25

## Appendix D

### Spring 2021 MAP Grade-Level Assessment Technical Report Part 2

Grade and Form	Components	Eigenvalue	Percentage of Variance Explained	Cumulative Percentage of Variance Explained
3B	First	9.97	21.46	21.46
3B	Second	1.54	3.35	24.81
3B	Ration (First/Second)	6.41		
4B	First	9.03	23.75	23.75
4B	Second	1.54	4.05	27.80
4B	Ration (First/Second)	5.86		

## Appendix E

### Survey to school administrators

To: Public school leaders in Missouri,

I am a doctoral student at Southwest Baptist University. I am conducting research on the use of close reading as part of reading programs in Title I schools. I have included a four-question survey that will assist with me with my research. Answering this survey will help me gather the information I need to complete my dissertation. Even if your school does not use close reading answering these questions are still of great value to me. Please let me know if you have any questions. Thank you for assisting me with my research.

Sincerely,

Jennifer Allie

**Appendix F**

## Close reading survey

To: Public school leaders in Missouri,

I would like to thank you for taking the time to assist with my research. Without your help it would not be possible to help future students. Your survey responses will be confidential and all data collected will remain anonymous.

In this study the researcher will learn about the relationship between close reading and reading comprehension of third-grade students in the state of Missouri in school-wide Title I schools.

Thank you again for your help. I appreciate it.

Jennifer Allie

## CLOSE READING SURVEY

Does your school building use close reading as a component of reading instruction for third-grade students?  _____ Yes  _____ No
Did your school building use close reading as a component of reading instruction for third-grade students during the 2018-19 school year?  _____ Yes  _____ No
Did your school building use close reading as a component of reading instruction for third-grade students during the 2020-21 school year?

<input type="checkbox"/> Yes
<input type="checkbox"/> No
Is your school building identified as school-wide Title I?
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes
<input type="checkbox"/> No