The Effects of Comprehension Through Close Reading

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Abstract
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The Effects of Comprehension Through Close Reading

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Abstract

The ability for students to comprehend what is being read is an essential skill that is necessary for success in academics and career readiness. It is crucial that each student knows how to read and derive meaning from a text. This study examines the question: how can close reading a text be used to improve students’ comprehension? Audio recordings, discussions, and interviews proved differences between the students’ comprehension of a text through a close read and a general reading strategy. The findings showed improvement in the students’ understanding of a text and provides implications that the teachers should evolve instructional practices to meet the needs of the common core and allow for students to become confident in reading harder texts.
The Effects of Comprehension Through Close Reading

In order for students to be successful in today’s society it is crucial that students know how to read (Gables, 2008). The ability to read is no longer an option but rather an expectation of all students throughout their career in order to be literate and successful in their community. However, being able to comprehend what is being read is an essential skill that many students are struggling with according to Ness (2011). With the new shift in what students are expected to know and what they will need to know to strive to America’s ever changing global economy New York State has recently adapted the Common Core Learning Standards. New York is one of 45 states that have adapted the initiative. The standards have been adapted by the state to provide the districts, administrators, teachers and students a consistent, clear understanding of what students are expected to learn and will provide clear goals and expectations for the preparation of their future (Fisher & Frey, 2012). The standards are designed to be robust and relevant to the real world, reflecting the knowledge that is necessary for students to be successful in college and in their career. The purpose of the implementation of the common core learning standards is to help students be fully prepared for their future.

The common core standards adaptations have been made in the areas of English Language Arts with a big push for teachers to provide students with a more rigorous reading instruction. Many adolescent students are becoming more and more behind grade level in their reading level and it has been understood that an extensive reading instruction program needs to be implemented as early as possible (Fisher & Frey, 2012). Through the shifts in the common core it has been suggested that a strategy known as “close reading” should be a part of the schools curriculum in all subject areas. Through the common core standards the reading instruction is laid out like a “staircase” and as students go through each grade level the texts become more
rigorous and increases in complexity for them to be ready for the demands of their college and career. The rigorous reading has presented students who opportunities to gain a deeper understanding however it has been concluded that many students do not know how to analyze and evaluate a informational, complex text. The close reading strategy allows the students to look at the different text elements and text structures to correctly identify the purpose for reading, what the meaning is, and what the main idea could be. Furthermore the strategy will provide students a reading that will have students build knowledge, gain insights, explore possibilities and broaden their perspectives. The reading instruction through the common core also addresses the issue of reading comprehension (Fisher & Frey, 2012). In the real word, everyday the students will be comprehending. Whether through reading a book or their job, the act of understanding is what makes them strive. Through the new common core shifts while the students are advancing in grade level they are gaining deeper understandings of what they read each time. The students are being asked to read a variety of texts and being able to comprehend texts and apply what they are learning to their community is essential for their success.

While reading, there are two different types of comprehension, literal and inferential. Literal comprehension is what the students gain from the information that is explicitly stated by the author. For students to gain inferential comprehension they must think abstractly (Tracy, 1994). Abstract reasoning requires the students to make inferences, provide analysis, make evaluations and draw conclusions. It requires the reader to draw upon prior knowledge and make connections to gain the meaning and think within the text what the author is trying to convey and what the purpose is for reading the selected text (Logsdon, 2013). Both types of comprehension require that the reader have adequate processing and working memory skills, which enable them to take in new information, identify and categorize it, merge it with previously learned
information, and respond.

Reading comprehension requires the students to acquire concrete skills include vocabulary, main idea, fact or opinion, sequencing, following directions and reading for details. Students who are able to comprehend what they are reading verify that what they are reading makes sense and if not use strategies to comprehend the text when it stops making. Students who are struggling to comprehend the same text need to be provided with strategies that work best for their learning style to help them gain the meaning.

This topic is extremely significant as the number of students who are struggling in reading has been steadily increasing in American schools according to Ness (2011). For many students, comprehending a text is difficult, even more for struggling readers. Close reading goes beyond reading and asking questions about the details of the text. The text being a piece of writing whether it is a picture book, a few stanzas from an article, a poem, or a short story that is nonfiction and complex that the students can analyze and evaluate it piece by piece. (Fisher & Frey, 2012). In many cases, when students get to middle school, they are required to read complex texts and think abstractly about what they are reading and without having knowledge in knowing how to carefully analyze the text they will not find the deeper understanding.

By doing a close reading, students are able to delve deeper into a text and analyze, interpret, and infer using a variety of literacy skills. While students closely read, they are understanding the purpose for reading that text. Developing what the purpose is for reading will happen by learning how to look for the different meanings the author conveys and how the ideas in a text are interconnected. The students are formulating questions and seeking answers to those questions. They are also being asked more text-dependent questions that challenge the students
both literal and inferential comprehension. When they close read they are able to see what it offers, encounter things that are fundamental for future success in college and career readiness.

In close reading, students can see the authors thinking by re-examining the passage and recognizing particular things in a text to ask themselves What does this quote mean?, Why is the event happening?, and How does it effect understanding of detail? By asking a series of more rigorous analytical questions students can find the purpose of what and why they are reading and will derive deeper meaning and understanding.

Under these premises, the following research was performed to further analyze students reading comprehension. Given that knowing how to read and understand a text is essential for success, how does the close reading strategy affect the text comprehension of informational, complex texts for students? Text comprehension differs for each student. Research was done in Bark, New York (pseudonym) with one student. Through surveys, the students’ written work, and audio tape recordings it was found that there is a distinct difference in the students’ text comprehension during a close reading. The results call for teachers to evolve their instructional practices to meet the needs of the common core learning standards and that of the individual students.

**Theoretical Framework**

Before I begin to discuss the complexities of literacy instruction through informational and complex literature, I will express the definition of literacy. It is important that every child is literate, yet often times many will confuse what being literate means. Literacy is a multi faceted term. One that encompasses the students to be able to read, write, listen, and speak. It is important for every student to have the ability of being literate but it has become even more complicated with the multiple literacies that students are required to be immersed in. It is the
ability in which students use their knowledge to interact with the oral written language (Kucer, 2009). Literacy is a term where there is not only one definition, it evolves overtime and for anyone to become literate, it must be done through understanding and comprehension of how the use of multiple literacies will affect the acquisition of literacy.

Students acquire literacy through their primary and secondary discourses (Gee, 2001). Discourse is the way in which people are identifying oneself and their use of language through thinking, acting and developing meaning (Gee). People are born into their primary discourse. It is what you acquire in the home. One will acquire language by the language they are immersed in and the experiences they have encountered. The students primary discourse has a big role in the way the students are able to read and comprehend a text. What the students see, hear and are exposed to will be a part of their understanding and how they will come to understand a text to comprehend it. The student’s primary discourse has an effect on the student’s comprehension of a text because each student has different knowledge on the known world and what they bring to the text and how they are able to determine and examine the text and make multiple meanings from the authors purpose may be difficult based on how the students are able to connect with the text.

The students will be more successful readers and writers if they are initially taught to manipulate texts and look for the deeper meaning. The theory that will inform and guide my study is the sociocultural theory based around the students’ reaction to the literacy events in the classroom which are the social interactions that will create the identity of the student as a reader. The sociocultural theory is driven by Vygotsky’s (2003) belief that cognitive developmental processes, and learning processes, are products of our society and culture. It is in their environment through which a child learns to associate meanings and will acquire the foundation
of reading and the comprehension of a text. Children verbalize most things, especially while facing a situation, which is difficult. They make use of verbal communication, to find a solution. Through close reading, the students are having discussions with their peers and their teachers and are working together to find the deeper meaning and main idea of a text. Through the interactions and exposure to literature and the close reading strategy in the classroom the student will become a strong reader, one that the teacher encourages through the learning environment that is provided to them.

When students are literate and are strong readers, writers and decoders they are able to manipulate texts and decode them in ways where they are a part of the text and can understand the message. To become literate students must think critically about what they are reading (Kucer, 2009). Students must critique, analyze, and evaluate the authors reasoning for writing the written word. Students must interact and engage with the text by thinking about and interpreting about the text looking specifically at the text elements and structures and the authors use of language to be able to understanding and determine the goal for reading. Reading is goal directed and how you accomplished that goal is the key factor in how much the students will understand about the text. The students can think about what they want to learn and what the goal is for reading and analyzing a text but what needs to be considered is how or what needs to be done for the purpose of reading will be fulfilled.

There is strong evidence that reading occurs when children learn and acquire language through their cognitive development, which aligns with Piaget’s theory of cognitive development (Cartwright, 2002). It has been determined through this theory that “the act of reading can be conceptualized as the coordination of many types of processes, including phonological and semantic processes into an overall system” (Cartwright, 2012, p. 56). Students use many
processes to be able to put words and sentences together to create an understanding. Reading is a complex process and it requires that students process multiple aspects concurrently such as the way the words are pronounced, written and visually understood. The way that students are able to simultaneously use their cognitive processes to decode and determine meaning is a measure on what they will be able to comprehend.

**Research Question**

Given that being literate is an essential skill in the students’ success in college and career readiness, this action research project examines, how can close reading a text be used to improve students’ comprehension of an informational complex text?

**Literature Review**

In order to complete an action research study, it is imperative that previous research is reviewed and analyzed. The topic that I have chosen to research for my literature review is that of reading comprehension, specifically why reading comprehension is vital in students’ academic success and career readiness and what strategies can be the most effective for students to derive some understanding. When students can comprehend what they are reading, they are able to make meaning of what the writer is trying to convey and make use of that information whether it is author’s purpose, text structure, or story elements. Reading is the most essential skill for success in schools and society. Reading is embedded in all aspects of life, and it is the foundation for how people interact with the world. Reading comprehension is an interactive process between the reader and the text and how the reader interprets the writers’ use of language will determine what meaning they will derive from that particular piece of writing.
This topic is extremely significant as the number of students in schools who struggle with reading comprehension have increased significantly. Many students struggle with comprehension because they do not have the vocabulary necessary in understanding the text. In order to understand the text the reader must be able to comprehend the vocabulary used in the piece of writing. If the individual words do not make sense, then the overall story will not either. Comprehension does not just happen rather it requires effort. Readers must internally and purposefully work to create meaning from what they read. Many students will glance at the text and get discouraged from continuing on. Comprehension involves much more than just reading the words from left to right. It involves using strategies to understand the text and knowing when and what strategies to use. Students need to be actively thinking and monitoring what is being read. To further understand the texts, students also need to engage in meaningful discussions. In this literature review, an examination of three distinct themes will be unveiled. For the first theme, I will be discussing how students will be building understanding through comprehension. Specifically, why comprehension is important in students’ academic success and what happens when students are able to fully comprehend a text. Second, I will be investigating the importance of reading strategies to increase comprehension. I will be stating why during-reading strategies are vital in assisting the students’ comprehension of the text. Lastly, I will continue to build upon this knowledge by examining close reading as an effective comprehension strategy and how this strategy is taught when teaching students how to comprehend complex texts.

**Building Understanding Through Comprehension**

Student comprehension of text has been the topic of many discussions of teachers for many years. What gets misconstrued is the term reading and the term comprehension. Many believe that reading and comprehension is one term. In fact, reading and comprehension are two
different processes that when combined into one, is how a student will be an effective reader. Reading is defined as a complex, active process that requires students to adjust to the reading goal and process multiple aspects of print (Cartwright, 2012). Reading is a process of problem solving in which the reader works to make sense of a text not just from the words and sentences on the page, but also from the ideas, memories, and knowledge evoked by those words and sentences. Similarly, comprehension is when a student constructs meaning from reading the text (Henderson & Buskist, 2011). Students are gaining comprehension when they are learning something new or to identifying the author’s viewpoint. When we put both processes together, the students begin to develop reading comprehension. Ness (2011) completed a study and has claimed that reading comprehension “involves recalling information from text, extracting themes, engaging in higher order thinking skills, constructing a mental picture of text, and understanding text structure,” (p. 98). When the students are reading for comprehension, they are reading to find the meaning. The students are recognizing what facts help them understand what the main idea of the text what, what the author’s purpose was, and why the text structure is the way it is. Additionally, in a study by Yang (2006), it was observed that readers utilized reading strategies and comprehension monitoring strategies to assist in them reading and interpreting the text to gain reading comprehension. Reading comprehension takes time to develop; it is not a concept that can be taught and mastered in one lesson. It is a skill that gets developed throughout a student’s entire academic career. Comparatively, once a student comprehends a text that does not mean that they can comprehend everything (Hill, 2011). Students may be able to comprehend a text but they may not have been able to comprehend the task that was given to them for the purpose of reading. Ness (2011) had stated in her study “Each time a student tackles a text that increases in complexity, the need for instruction escalates,” (p. 43). When
students are reading the constant is the fact that they will comprehend, however the variable is the text. Each text offers a different idea or perspective, a different focus, and each text selected should include the skill that the students are practicing and then the next one will build off of that. But the need for additional instruction should not be ignored. When the students are reading, there is one key factor in understanding what is being read, and that is the reader.

One of the biggest factors in a student learning how to comprehend a text is the reader. The reader is what makes the text come to life. Until the reader explores the pages of a book, that book will simply be a collection of words on the page. Fisher, Frey, & Lapp (2012) have maintained that “when reading any passage, a student builds meaning in collaboration with the author. Until that occurs, an assessment of a text’s complexity is not yet fully realized. The reader is a key ingredient in this formula,” (p.77). To derive any understanding of the text the reader must be engaged with what they are reading. What is being read was meaning that was made from the author and the student must interact with the author in order for a transaction of meaning to take place. When the students are engaged in the reading process, they will be more motivated to want to read and have lots of practice with reading the same text or texts they are interested in (Shanahan, Fisher, & Frey, 2012). The more students read and the more instruction the teachers give them on how to comprehend a text, the reader will develop a stronger sense of where to pause in sentences. Students will also learn how to group words and recognize where voices will change based on a variety of emotions, attitudes or different characters. Moreover, the readers must decode the symbols to be able to make sense of the text; students must interact and engage with the text by bringing their own experiences to the words (Beers and Probst, 2013). By interacting and engaging, students are having a conversation with the author. In addition, the reader needs to decide whether they agree or reject the author’s viewpoint backing
it up with evidence why. In addition, Beers and Probst have concluded that the most complex factor in reading and the complexity of the text is the transaction that happens between the reader and the text. Who picks up and reads the text matters. A text can have many layers of meaning as well as complications in the structure. This factor may make the text extremely difficult for one reader but enjoyment for the other reader. When the reader is aware of what they are reading and why they are reading, the comprehension of the text will happen. When a reader decides to read, there is a commitment that was made between them and the author, and it is up to the reader how successful they want to be in the interpretation of what is read through their determination to succeed.

When students comprehend a text there are three levels that they can possibly reach to deepen their level of understanding. In a study completed by Alonzo, Basaraba, Tindal, and Carriveau (2009), it is suggested that the three levels of comprehension: literal, inferential, and evaluative. The researchers wanted to determine how the levels are different in terms of their difficulty. The questions that were asked were based on characters traits, story problems, main idea and casual inferential and evaluative questions. The students were given a text to read and a ten question assessment after. It was found that literal comprehension was the easiest for the students to answer and inferential and evaluative reading comprehension were more challenging for the students. In comparison, Hansen and Pearson (1983) completed a study in which they devised two strategies to improve students’ inferential comprehension. Each strategy encouraged the student’s inferential thinking and how they can go about asking inference questions while reading. As a result, it was found that due to the lack of teaching inference to students, the students had a hard time answering inferential questions. Frequently, classroom instruction does not provide opportunities for students to use their inferencing skills. Instead of being taught to
learn textual information by relating it to something they already know, they are taught to learn new information. The gap between the student’s literal and inferential comprehension performance could be narrowed if the inferential tasks received more emphasis in instruction. Inferential questions ask the students to access known knowledge and engage in metacognitive thinking according to Fisher et al. (2012). Thinking about ones thinking is critical when students are pairing the known with the unknown. In addition, evaluative questioning will ask the readers to make critical judgments of the text while requiring them to take in their own viewpoints and past experiences (Hansen and Pearson, 1983). In order for students to be able to answer inferential questions they must be able to provide examples explicitly stated from the text; for students to answer evaluative questions and make critical judgments on the text students have to understand how to access their background knowledge in connection with their knowledge and what they are understanding from the text. The three levels of comprehension build upon one another although, the text that is chosen for the students to read is essential in the students level of understanding. When the students are reading and comprehending a text, it is critical that students use a variety of strategies to move beyond just the literal comprehension but also begin to infer and evaluate and reconsider the author’s voice in the text. Students need to do more than just think about the words on the page. They need to begin to look critically at the author’s voice and determine what it means and through the specific text structure, students can look for the main ideas to enhance understanding.

No matter which text is chosen to read, there will always be students at different levels of comprehending. According to Henderson & Buskist (2011), we cannot teach comprehension as an invisible process that will automatically take place in the head of the reader. Comprehension will vary based on the experiences of the reader and educators cannot expect that every student
will bring in the same level of understanding. Regardless, what teachers can do is promote the act of reading comprehension in ways that will engage the students to understand but also have the students consider what they have learned from the text and transfer that to other texts to enhance their literacy understanding. In comparison there was research completed by Bishop, Reyes, and Pflaum (2006) where the students constructed drawings to recall what they remembered from the text. The study determined that the students’ drawings showed a great deal of variety in comprehension strategies. The researchers broke it into three categories of strategies: Problem solving, supported reading, and global reading. When the students are problem solvers they are paying attention to what they are reading while also adjusting their reading rate and reading slow to visualize the text itself. Similarly, in a study completed by Baumann, Seifert-Kessell, & Jones (1992), it was determined that through teacher led modeling, students paraphrased the text information, took notes and revisited previous read material. Each student used their prior knowledge to make text predictions, skim the text and use context clues, text structures and features to comprehend the text. Moreover, Bishop, Reyes and Phlaum (2006) stated that “true comprehension and subsequent reading engagement requires more than cognition; it means entering textual worlds, maintaining a balance between engrossment and critical distance, and formulating one’s own responses to various dilemmas in text” (p. 66).

Comprehension is more than reading and thinking about reading, it is about looking at the text through a critical lens. Putting your views into the story and creating a response based off of evaluations and critiques from the students own understanding and meaning that was derived. Comprehension can occur for any student however the text that is chosen is a key factor to how well the students will understand.

Every student has a different level of understanding and their own way that they learn.
The way students approach a text will in large part be affected by where they are in the level of comprehension. This is why when choosing the text there are many factors that teachers will need to consider. What students are expected to do with the text impacts the type of texts that will be appropriate for the students to read. The Common Core Standards are about increasing the rigor in reading. The standards are a set of skills that are intended to set thinking goals for students performance based on what is required for success (Fisher & Frey, 2012).

What educators now have to do is teach the students how to comprehend a complex rigorous text. The Common Core Standards does not expect the students to read rigorous material on their own without any guidance at first. The standards are asking that the students be exposed and encounter texts that are complex and learn to notice what is confusing and ask to receive instruction (Fisher et al. 2012). More skilled readers will be able to evaluate the text in more meaningful ways than a less successful reader. In a study by Van der Schoot, Vasbinder, Horsley, and Van Lieshout (2008) it was examined through reading strategies how the students reading comprehension could increase. It was found that there was a big variation between the active readers and the passive readers. Furthermore, van der Schoot et al. stated the “active readers are described as readers who consciously construct meaning from a text and are flexible in the use of reading strategies” (p. 219). The more successful readers are cautious while they are reading. These readers notice and note the evidence and facts that will lead them to the objective but in a deeper manner. The more successful readers are understanding the author’s purpose and are able to dissect the text structure and answer questions at the inferential or evaluative level more independently than the passive readers. Similarly, in a study by Nation, Cocksey, Taylor, and Bishop (2010), active readers need to become proficient at two sets of skills, if they are to become skilled readers, including, “how to recognize or decipher words from print, and they also
need to learn how to comprehend the message the words convey” (p. 1031). Once the students are able to decode the words and decipher the meaning they are better able to examine, determine, go beyond the text and begin to analyze and critique the author’s central idea. Skillful readers will know their purpose for reading and will ask good questions and make predictions based on their background knowledge (Henderson & Buskist, 2011). In comparison the less successful readers read more selectively, focusing on and rereading those parts of the texts more relevant to their goal. The less successful readers will read words and sentences at age appropriate levels but have difficulty understanding the text (Nation et. al, 2010). Furthermore, it was determined that the less skillful readers may read less and also benefit less from their reading experiences. The students with poor comprehension will rely more on the teacher’s instruction and less likely dive into the text and start gaining new knowledge. In addition, the poor readers will focus only on what was asked of them and nothing more than that. Therefore, the readers will be impacted as they grow older and there will be continuous weakness in the areas of vocabulary and comprehension.

There are many things that good readers will do while reading a text to ensure their understanding. Research has broken what students do while reading in three different ways: before reading, during reading, and after reading (Henderson & Busekist, 2011). Using strategies at all times while reading will assist in the students gaining more comprehension. In a study by Smolkin and Donovan (2001), results showed that although before reading strategies are beneficial the strategies that were used during reading increased students reading comprehension the most. During the reading the students interacted with the text and connect the new information with what is already known through text talk. Similarly, in a study completed by Edmonds, Vaughn, Wexler, Reutebuch, Cable, Tackett, and Schnakenberg (2009), it was found
that the students who were good readers were reading the words accurately, noting the structure and organization of the text and monitoring their understanding while reading through predictions and summaries of the text. While students are reading, good readers will also activate strategies unconsciously and automatically and monitor their understanding from what they are thinking. Furthermore, good readers will also visualize and continue to ask questions as something interests them to know more. They will reject, support or refining the predictions that were made while reading. When students complete the reading, good readers summarize, synthesize, and write about what they read. Good and skilled readers are interested, motivated, and engaged. Furthermore, a study was completed by McKeown, Beck, and Blake (2009) and the research was how comprehension instruction approaches were designed implemented to the students. As a result, the comprehension strategies that were created increased the student’s comprehension and through the strategies the readers were able to develop the skills and the persistence to achieve their purpose and goals for the objective of the reading. To ensure that all students can become skillful/good readers then teachers must be aware of their own comprehension processes and the different types of engagement that will either promote or diminish their own understanding.

The Importance of Reading Strategies to Increase Comprehension

Reading is a thinking process. Effective readers know that when they read, what they read is supposed to make sense. They monitor their understanding, questioning, thinking about, and reflecting on the ideas and information in the text. Some students get stuck just reading a text without using any strategies. Students can get lost in the words, the text structure and features or just can’t see the big picture (Dymock, 2005). Reading strategies gives the students opportunities to talk, show, enact, and represent ideas so that the unknown can then become the
known. Having a student complete a comprehension strategy before, during or after reading encourages them to be actively engaged in the text and thinking while reading.

One such instructional technique is through classroom discussion. Reading comprehension is a collaborative process and is known for its primary medium of instruction and plays a key role in socializing intelligence in the classroom (Wolf, Crosson, & Resnick, 2005). Class discussions offer students opportunities to test their ideas and opinions against the ideas and opinions of their peers. Students bring to the discussion unique social and cultural values, background experiences, and prior knowledge and assumptions. Through the interactions, learners incorporate ways of thinking and behaving that foster the knowledge, skills, and dispositions needed to support transfer to other situations that require independent problem solving. In the context of discussion, students make public their perspectives on issues arising from the text, consider alternative perspectives proposed by peers, and attempt to reconcile conflicts among opposing points of view. In a study completed by Wolf et. al. (2005), teacher and students engaged in a dialogue and what were looked at were the characteristics of the teacher’s talk to facilitate a rigorous discussion about the text. It was found active participation in the talk is key factor in determining not only the amount of rigor the lesson will bring but also their understanding of the text. Additionally in a study by Murphy, Soter, Wilkinson and Hennessey (2009), different discussion approaches were examined on students’ high-level comprehension of text. The researchers looked at the effects of discussion on measures of teacher/student talk and on individual student comprehension and critical thinking and reasoning outcomes. It was found that through discussions about and around text enhances students’ comprehension, thinking, and reasoning. Furthermore it was determined that classroom discussions about the text were highly effective at promoting students’ literal and inferential
comprehension (2009). In the same manner, there was a study completed through interactive read aloud and classroom discussion. Wiseman (2011) examined how students comprehension could be affected through student and teacher talk during reading. It was determined that meaning of the text was constructed through the classroom discussions. Through the discussions the students responded to text in ways that built on their strengths and understanding as well as pushing each other by extending their ideas was initially said (Wolf et al., 2005). When the teacher and students have a discussion about the text and engage in dialogue and the teacher models an interaction that focuses on supporting the students to deepen their understanding of text, it gives the students an opportunity to practice the strategies that gives them confidence and are effective while they are reading. Ultimately, the students take responsibility to develop into independent readers and thinkers.

In addition to student led discussion, explicitly teaching expository texts is another instructional approach that is a successful reading strategy. Most learning from reading will depend on the ability to read and understand expository text (Armbruster, Anderson, & Ostertag, 1987). Students have more difficulty understanding expository text due to a number of factors, insufficient prior knowledge, lack of interest, lack of motivation or lack of knowledge about the text organization and features. There is a struggle for students in identifying the gist and deciphering the important facts from the unimportant facts. Taylor and Beach (1984) studied the effects of instruction on expository texts. Through this the researchers wanted to see if expository text structure can facilitate students emerging awareness and use of the structure and if it can improve their reading comprehension. As a result reading instruction focusing on text structure can improve students recall. The students were able to use the organization of ideas in the text to help them form a “gist” of the text. Similarly, there was a study completed by
Armbruster et al. (1987) and they wanted to examine how expository text structure could affect their ability to understand a text. It was studied how the students could not only recognize the problem/solution structure but to use it in their written summaries of what they have read. It was determined that through an expository text and direct instruction of the text structure, the students were able to write and find the gist of the passage and were able to write a more detailed response to a prompt. Through reading strategies of expository texts, the students were able to identify the main point of the passage and their reading comprehension increased. Moreover, a third study was done on reading strategies of expository texts. Berkowitz (1986) wanted to determine if given specific strategies, if students would be able to recall main ideas from the text and if the students could use the strategies effectively. As a result the different reading strategies that were used helped students focus on the text structure which facilitated greater recall of the important facts. As it can be seen, through the studies that examined reading strategies of expository texts, with the implementation of strategies while the students are reading, the readers who were able to identify the author’s structure were able to recall the “gist” as well as what facts were going to help find the meaning. Improving students’ abilities to recall main ideas is important from content area instruction. Expository materials are complex and for students to best dissect the text, the use of reading strategies will help with the barrier.

Readers may encounter any number of roadblocks in the path to comprehension. Reading strategies provide the means to tackle complex problems in more efficient ways and, with practice, the strategies lead to skills that become automatic and quick over time. In the reading comprehension domain, there is abundant evidence that reading strategies improve reading comprehension. Reading strategies are essential, not only to being successful at comprehension, but to overcome reading problems and becoming a better reader and comprehensive learner.
Close Reading as an Effective Comprehension Strategy

Many educators have been asking themselves, what it means to be literate in the 21st century and how they can adapt what they are teaching to ensure that each student in their class can become literate in a century with a variety of new literacies. With the recent changes in the State Standards and the implementation of the Common Core Learning Standards there is more of a push and an emphasis on text questions, rigor and text complexity of informational texts. Students are now asked to read closely and determine central ideas of the text, but what exactly is close reading? Close reading is a strategy described by Beers and Probst (2013) where the teacher will bring the text and the reader close together. It suggests that through close reading of informational texts students will examine the specific text and notice the elements of the text that are surprising, confusing, contradictory, or any facts that will support the objective of the lesson. Cummins (2013) has similarly stated that while the students are closely reading they are engaging with the text determining which ideas are most important and seeing how the ideas fit together logically to convey the authors central ideas or themes.

Furthermore, Fisher and Frey (2012) describe close reading as “students examining the deep structures of a text and this includes the way the text is organized, the precision of its vocabulary to advance concepts, and its key details, arguments, and inferential meaning” (p. 179). Examining the text structures will assist in providing the students with the opportunity to connect and uncover the layers of meaning that the author wants the reader to see (Boyles, 2012). In this process, the students are reflecting on the meaning of individual words and sentences and are monitoring and assessing their thinking. Similarly, Cummins (2013) argued that by considering the weight of the meaning of particular phrases or sentences in a text the students will begin to see how all of the details fit together to support the authors central idea(s). Once the
students are able to find evidence of the central ideas or themes and are able to describe why that
evidence is significant to the meaning, the students will then be able to critique the author’s ideas
thereby moving into deeper thinking of the text (Cummins). Such skills are essential for the
students to prepare to live in a complex world where they are continuously exposed with
information that they will need to understand in order to be active in their community.

Since close reading has recently been adapted and created by New York State and the
Common Core some school districts have yet to embed this strategy into their ELA curriculum,
however, for the districts that have, many of them have seen a drastic change in how students
derive meaning from a text (Cummins, 2013). For the districts who have used close reading as a
strategy and have had positive results have implemented it into the schools reading program and
have offered professional developments on how to do a close read. Furthermore many schools
have purchased more complex and nonfiction short texts for the teachers to use during a close
reading lesson. Conversely, many current researchers of close reading have yet to see instruction
where students read closely with the text (Boyles, 2012). The current teaching/ past teaching of
reading comprehension had put a lot of emphasis on personal connections and the preteaching
began to dominate the teaching and testing of comprehension and leaving the text itself a distant
memory (Cummins, 2013). Moreover, “Teaching reading as a set of thinking strategies too
often left readers with the notion that the text was simply a launching point for their musings,
images that popped into their heads, and random questions that, in the end, did little to enhance
their understanding of the text,” (Boyles, 2013, p.45). Having a discussion about the students
prior experiences and background knowledge, will always be beneficial for the students to
develop reading comprehension, however it cannot take the texts place for text based answers for
the students to make inferences and challenge themselves. Activation alone does not expand
knowledge. Comparatively, Brown and Kappes (2012) argue that many students are not taught how to read appropriately and complex texts independently and with precision. Fisher et al have discussed the common core and have determined that

The Common Core explicitly describes a set of reading and analytic abilities that can only be developed through regular practice and feedback, such as by interpreting words and phrases as they are used in a text, analyzing the structure of a text, and explaining how an author reasons and uses evidence (Shanahan, 2013). The students will be unable to comprehend a complex text without continuous practice in learning how to interpret the author’s point of view and what to look for to help in finding the evidence that will support the given objective. With more practice of close reading students will be able to accelerate and deepen their own learning.

To understand texts during Close Reading readers will need to attend to both their own experience and the experience that the author is conveying. Meaning is created not purely and simply from the words on the page, but from the transaction with those words that takes place in the readers mind (Beers & Probst, 2013). For the readers to deeply engage with the text the students need to have knowledge about the text going into it. Teachers need to know their students well in order to be able to gage how much background knowledge students have or don’t have and then decipher to extend which background knowledge should be provided to ensure the students will comprehend the text (Brown & Kappes, 2012). Brown and Kappes further argue that there has been research done and it has been found that:

there is a reciprocal relationship between background knowledge and comprehension.

An individual with significant knowledge about a topic uses that knowledge to build a coherent representation of what the text says. A knowledgeable reader needs to only update his or her preexisting situation with the new information presented in the text,
while a reader who lacks background knowledge on the text is less able to build an accurate representation of what the text means. (p. 3)

Every student will bring different knowledge to the close read. Some students will come in with more knowledge and experience than other students. The knowledge that the students bring will affect the amount that the students are able to comprehend; however even with this discrepancy, the students will all be reading the same text, and it is what the teacher decides to teach to ensure their students have enough context and background to access the text. For students to have the knowledge to access the text the teachers can teach what is necessary either through prior instruction or pre reading activities. When close reading is being taught in the lesson there is no more anticipatory set or preteaching to the students what they are about to read. There is a discussion about what the focus will be for that lesson but the students then dive right into reading silently. When preteaching happens, most of the time all the students are remembering is the conversation between them and the teacher. When the reading of the text is complete, the answers that the teacher will receive will be less based off of evidence from the text but from the paraphrasing of the facts from the beginning of the lesson (Fisher et. al, 2012). Through preteaching students will only remember what was taught through the anticipatory set rather what was read and the activity that was completed. Brown and Kappes (2012) have concluded that:

If a teacher feels the need to deliver content from the text rather than allow the students to discover the content independently and through text dependent questions and discussion, then either the text is not appropriate for a Close Reading lesson or the teacher does not believe his or her students are ready for the rigor that Close Reading of complex text demands. (p. 3)
One of the purposes of close reading is for the students to learn how to become independent readers. The structure of close reading creates a series of steps that promotes the students independent thinking and learning. If the teachers teach them the text before the students are exposed to the text, it defeats the purpose of their exploration and engagement with the text. Moreover, when it’s more teacher directed, it will not give the students the opportunity to discover the layers of the text structure and meaning. In addition, Cummins (2013) has argued that there are two types of knowledge students need to activate to read informational texts successfully. The first is knowledge that is related to the subject or topic and the second is the structural knowledge that is related to the organization and features of informational texts. (Beers & Probst, 2013) If the students have the knowledge related to the content and knows how to use the knowledge, then the comprehension of a text is possible. Similarly, Beers and Probst (2013) have stated that “we know that the resources students bring to a text affects their understanding… we leave it to [the teachers] to know when the text offers adequate information so that additional background knowledge is not needed” (p. 36). Close reading is not a strategy that eliminates the understanding that prior knowledge and background should not be taken into consideration before reading a text. If there is knowledge that needs to be done before giving the students a close read, then the teacher can do that in advance for the students to be given the opportunity to connect new text information with their existing background knowledge and prior knowledge to expand their schema.

When teaching, teachers need to know when and how to make use of close reading in strengthening students’ reading, furthering students’ independence, and deepening their reading comprehension. Knowing how to go about engaging with informational complex texts and making sure the readers fully attends to the act of reading are essential in discovering the deeper
meaning of what is being read. Not every piece of writing that the students are exposed to can be used as a text for a close read. Furthermore, Fisher and Frey (2012) have examined the notion that “there’s reason to do a close reading of an easily understood and simply organized piece of text,” (p. 180). If the students are able to easily dive into a book and know within a few minutes what the author’s purpose is for writing and are able to quickly pull evidence to explain their reasoning for what they found the meaning to be, then there is no reason to do a close read with that text. Close reads are meant to be challenging. Brown and Kappes (2012) argue that “all students have the chance to productively struggle with complex texts” (p. 2) With the Common Core shifts, it is expected that the students are going to be challenged while they are reading. Understanding informational, complex texts will be tough at first, but the continuous practice with close reading will then ease that challenge. The close reading strategy has been adapted as an effective during reading strategy that encourages the students to be critical thinkers of the rigorous texts that are read, therefore texts that are less rigorous that can be easily understood should not be done as a close read. Once the students examine what it means to close read and are taught how to become fully immersed in texts to analyze the openness and the constraints offered by the text there will be an understanding that certain texts are worth that level of attention.

Educators who have heard of the close reading strategy have been skeptical to implement into their daily ELA lessons (Fisher & Frey, 2012). There are many features of a close reading lesson that is different than what many are used to teaching. These features of close reading are what makes it rigorous and demanding, however the end result when taught effectively, is success. The features of the lesson will vary depending on the content under consideration, the place in the curriculum, and the goals of the particular lesson, however many of the close reading
lessons will share the same attributes (Brown & Kappes, 2012). One of the features of close reads is the use of short texts. By reading short texts the students are able to apply new skills and strategies through multiple readings of the text. Boyles (2013) has claimed that:

Most teachers subscribe to the belief that when students can read longer text, that’s what they should read. Although we don’t want to abandon longer texts, we should recognize that studying short is especially helpful if we want to enable students with a wide range of reading levels to practice closely reading demanding texts. (p. 2)

When the students are learning a process such as close reading and searching for the recurring themes, reading a short text will allow them to dissect the text structure and elements in one lesson, versus a long passage that would take days or weeks to find the deeper meaning. The short texts will give room for the teachers to teach their students the skills for interrogating the ideas in a text (Fisher & Frey, 2012).

A second feature of close reading is the kinds of questions that are asked about the text. Close Reading focuses on text dependent questions. Text dependent questions are questions to which the answers can be found directly from evidence in the reading (Beers & Probst, 2013). With the shifts in common core, students are asked know to explain what they know any why. To follow through with the standards students are required to provide evidence of their answer and that evidence comes from the text, meaning the questions need to be correlated with what the students are reading in that text. In comparison Cummins (2013) has claimed “Now students must depend solely on the text to answer the question, setting aside their own thoughts about the situation,” (p. 39). Reading instruction has always had an emphasis on making connections to the text, specifically text to self, text to text, and text to world. With close reading the questions that are asked are text based evidence questions. Comparatively Fisher and Frey (2012) have asserted
that “text based questions require the students to provide evidence from the text in their responses, as in the case of Right There, Think and Search, and Author and You questions as part of the Question-Answer-Relationship,” (p. 181). The questions allows the students to determine what evidence in the text is significant in deciphering what the central idea and the meaning is as well as seeing how all of the structures and elements are connected and relate to how the author wants the reader to interpret the writing. Such questions are to assist in building the student’s capacity for independently comprehending a text. The questions that are asked during a close reading lesson are a sequence of questions that will lead the students and encourage them to look deeply into a text (Boyles, 2012). Teachers are great at asking questions about what the author is saying but they are entirely missing anything that is related to craft and structure. Conversely, Beers and Probst (2013) worry that too much of a focus on text dependent questions may create teacher dependent students. That the questions would suggest that a teacher has crafted the questions and already know the answers and the lesson will turn scripted. One way to go about avoiding teacher dependent students and focusing on student led instruction is teaching the students to ask the questions (Beers & Probst, 2013). If teachers begin to craft the questions and the lesson does become scripted, then the students understanding will be affected in a negative way. Moreover, Boyles (2012) has concluded that teachers should:

coach students to ask themselves four basic questions as they reflect on a specific portion of any text, even the shortest: What is the author telling me here?, Are there any hard or important words?, What does the author want me to understand? And How does the author play with the language to add to the meaning?.(p. 40)

When students ask questions that are aimed towards the meaning of the text and are able to do that effectively, then students will eventually be able to read and pursue the meaning of a piece
of writing independently. In addition, Brown and Kappes (2012) have claimed that “in order to bring the close reading strategy to life, teachers will need to deepen their understanding of text dependent questions—how they are constructed and how they are intentionally crafted to support the careful examination of text called from Close Reading,” (p. 4). The questions that are asked are essential in the examination of the text. The questions will be the deciding factor what the students are going to examine and how they are going to determine the text structures and themes. Learning what questions that should be posed during a lesson is the key in understanding the focus of the lesson and how deep the students will engage and look at the text. Similarly, Beers and Probst (2013) have stated that as students assume more of the responsibility for their learning and give them ownership for the work they are completing. Students who learn to ask themselves good text based questions are reading with a discerning eye of a careful reader. When students take on the responsibility of creating text based questions, the discussion between the teacher and the student becomes more student driven and focuses on what the students are learning and what they are finding and uncovering beneath all of the layers of the text structure which, as a result is when deep comprehension will begin to happen.

One feature that is equally as important as teaching through a short passage and text dependent questions is the annotation of the text. During close reading students are writing all over the piece of writing. Boyles (2012) has maintained that “authors play with words to get you to see a text their way,” (p. 41). When an author writes he purposefully uses certain elements and structures with certain language to pose to the reader what he wants them to learn or interpret. Furthermore, during close reading students are underlining important phrases or sentences, circling unknown words, and are writing notes in the margins (Fisher & Frey, 2012). In doing this, the teachers use this as an assessment, and if they are starring a confusing section then the
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teacher knows and can spot it, and if there’s a pattern then its known that, that part needs to be revisited and discussed and model how to decode what’s confusing. While students are annotating they are dissecting the layers of the text, finding what they feel the author wants them to grasp. By annotating the students are showing their understanding while they are reading, which will enhance their understanding of the authors purpose.

Finding the purpose for reading will further enhance students understanding of the text, however before students begin reading it must be understood what their purpose for reading is. Students will be more apt to fail at close reading if they begin to read a text with either no purpose at all or reading just to find out about a certain topic (Cummins, 2013). The students must set a purpose that is meaningful enough for them to spend the time and energy annotating and finding evidence to support the central claim. Furthermore, Gallop (2009) has stated “when we read, we tend to see what we expect to have been written- what we expect that author to write, what we expect an author like that to write, and what we expect from that sort of book. (p. 15). When students already expect what they are going to read, they are going to find what they have already come to known. Similarly, Weber, Nelson & Schofield (2012) have maintained that there are four purposes that students read for: summary, authors craft, vocabulary acquisition, and test preparation. The ability to have a meaningful purpose is a major building block in understanding and being able to critically examine the authors words setting aside any preconceptions and judgments. When students set a meaningful purpose, it promotes learning and thus the means of what will be read will be content that will be something that wasn’t known before.

With the number of informational texts published for schools increasing as much as it is, the complexity of texts is more accessible and useful for instruction and student learning. By
reading complex texts students are able to practice and experience looking for meaning through a critical lens. The strategy of close reading provides the students with a way to look deeply into a text and find the meaning. Through the text structures and features the students are looking for the evidence that will help them find the central idea and the author’s purpose. Close reading practices give the students a chance to critically examine the text thoroughly and make judgments based on their understanding of what they read versus the author’s voice. By reading a text closely students will be able to derive meaning and understanding through interacting and engaging with the author’s use of language and as a result the students will be successful readers.

**Conclusion**

Reading is a multifaceted process that develops only with practice. Reading comprehension is what allows the reader to interact with the text in a meaningful way. It’s the bridge from passive reading to active reading. Reading comprehension is the crucial link to effective reading. Beginning readers, as well as more advanced readers, must understand that the ultimate goal of reading is comprehension. Since comprehension is the reason for reading, text comprehension should be emphasized using a variety of strategies before, during and after reading. Reading informational, complex text is a challenge and understanding how does not occur automatically, however through practice students will be more engaged and interactive with the text to derive meaning. Once students recognize that reading is a process of making sense out of text, or constructing meaning they will be more focused and motivated to not only use strategies while reading but also determine the evidence in the text that connects to the objective of the lesson. Through the use of reading strategies students will be able to build upon their level of understanding. The students will be able to recall facts that were explicitly stated and then will read between the lines to critically analyze the author’s voice. Each reader brings
something different to the text and how each student approaches the text is important in the comprehension process.

Due to the common core adaptions and demands, close reading of informational, complex texts is the new shift for teaching reading. During close reading the students are being asked questions that require the students to use evidence from the text to support their responses, to defend opinions and to find the deeper meaning. Close reading provides the students to dive right into the text by reading first alone and then rereading to gain more insight into the authors purpose. Through rereading the students are breaking down the text piece by piece. The attention is being drawn to the most critical elements of the text and will encourage them to understand and analyze the author’s words.
Method

Context

Research for this study took place at a rather large school district in Bark, New York (pseudonym). The New York State District Report Card for the 2010-2011 academic school year indicates that a total of 5,439 students were enrolled in the district, from Pre-Kindergarten through 12th grade. The student demographics within the 2010-2011 school year was made up of 68% Caucasian, 16% African American, 5% Hispanic or Latino, 10% Asian or Native Hawaiian, and 1% Multiracial. Of this population, 27% of the students were eligible for free or reduced lunch. Given the population of the districts community, the students are split into five elementary schools, two middle schools, and two high schools.

The research for this study occurred at one of the middle schools, which is comprised of students in grades six through grade eight. During the 2010-2011 school year, the middle school had a total enrollment of 490 students. The average class size was approximately twenty students, Additionally; there are currently two self-contained special education classrooms within the middle school. This study occurred within one of the two self-contained classrooms. The classroom is an 8:1:2 setting. This specific classroom has a total of eight students, one special education teacher, one teaching assistant, one 1:1 classroom aide, and one paraprofessional. Of the eight students, two are female and six are male. Moreover, the classroom demographics are as follows: six students who are Caucasian, one student who is of native decent and one that is African American. The grade level that is represented in the classroom is eighth grade.

Participants
Student

The participant for this study will include one student within the self-contained classroom. Bobby (pseudonym) is a 12-year-old 6th grader who has ADHD came from a low socioeconomic background and is eligible for free or reduced lunch at school. Bobby has an IEP and is significantly behind the sixth grade curriculum expectations in regards to academics and requires extra time to process verbal demands. As a result, in this particular classroom, Bobby receives both small group and one-to-one, modified instruction in the areas of literacy, mathematics, science, social studies and all encore classes throughout the school day. He is provided with a small structured classroom setting to support his learning development. Bobby demonstrates difficulty working independently and requires adult support to stay on task. He is able to understand classroom expectations and is successful in completing his homework. He is a highly distractible student who is sensitive to interfere with his learning. Reading is one of Bobby’s strengths in relation to other academic subjects. He is able to decode words at a high level and has a strong sight word vocabulary, however struggles at comprehending a text. He also will know to go back into a text and seek out relevant information to help him in understanding the text. Bobby is a respectful student who likes school and participates in all classroom activities.

Teacher

Miss Andrews (a pseudonym) has been teaching for many years. This year is Miss Andrews’s sixth year teaching at the middle school where the study occurred. Miss Andrews received her Bachelor’s degree in 2005 and is certified to teach all subject areas for grades one through nine as well as a Master’s degree in literacy education grades birth through sixth in 2013. Before
teaching in this classroom Miss Andrews taught at Moo Middle School as a long-term substitute in a 12-1-1 classroom.

**Researcher Stance**

I am currently a graduate student at St. John Fisher College working towards a Master’s degree in Literacy Education, Birth through grade 12. I presently have a Bachelor’s degree in Early Childhood/ Childhood and Special Education Birth through sixth grade. As a researcher in this study, I acted as an active participant observer. I actively engaged in teaching while at the same time observing and monitoring the effects of [my] teaching and will adjust the instruction accordingly (Mills, 2011). In acting as an active participant observer, I will be able to remain actively engaged while observing the outcomes of [my] teaching (Mills). As a result, I will be able to analyze the data that will be collected and decipher how I can approach the lessons within the study to enhance the instruction of the students and provide better data for my research question.

**Methods**

During this study, I collected both qualitative and quantitative data to examine the effects of comprehension through the close reading strategy. I specifically examined how using this specific strategy can affect and to what degree the comprehension of a complex text versus the use of other reading strategies. For the purpose of collecting comparative data, the student was provided with multiple reading strategies with the comprehension acting as the independent variable. The study took place over the course of five sessions total, each approximately thirty minutes in length.
During the course of this study, the strategies that were chosen to test for reading comprehension focused specifically on the author’s purpose and the main idea of the text. In order to gauge any academic gains made by students throughout the study, the first session was spent distributing a pre-assessment to the student who participated. The student was given a text and was asked to read through it and explain what they think the author’s purpose was for writing the text as well as the main idea. At the beginning of the first session, the student was given a model by the researcher on how to read and think about the author’s purpose and main idea. The student was also taught how to mark up the text and make notes in the margins that may lead him to the goal for reading.

Throughout each session, the student was given a new text to read and analyze. The student was given a set of questions to answer based on evidence from the text to help determine the purpose for reading which was author’s purpose and main idea. Each session I presented the student with a different close reading strategy in order to gather more detailed comparative data. During the last session, the student was given one final text to see how he could analyze and evaluate the text to come to the author’s purpose and main idea.

**Quality and Credibility of Research**

When completing any type of action research, it is important to understand what a study’s quality and credibility is for the protection of the participants. In order for that to occur Mills (2011) has looked into the work of Guba (1981) and has determined that credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability as essential components of a research study’s trustworthiness and value. In understanding this, these four components have been thoroughly examined and put into place within the current research to ensure the trustworthiness and
validity. When the four components were included into this study, I ensured that the data I collected and the strategies that I used are of value to my research question and have presented its trustworthiness and validity clearly.

Mills (2011) has defined credibility as a “researcher’s ability to take into account the complexities that present themselves in a study and to deal with patterns that are not easily explained” (p. 104). To make sure that the credibility is present throughout the research of my study I practiced triangulation. Triangulation, according to Mills is when a researcher plans and implements a “variety of data sources and different methods with one another in order to cross check data” (p. 104). Research should not rely on any single source of data and data should be collected in many ways to support the results and answer the research questions effectively with more evidence. I triangulated this study through the collection and use of experiential, enquiring and examination data. I was actively observing the students in his use of the close reading strategies while reading, collecting descriptive field notes on the student’s annotations and behaviors, collecting pre and post assessment data of this new strategy and audio recordings of the student’s discussions on reading are all various data collection methods that was implemented through the duration of this study.

Similarly to credibility, I also ensured transferability in my research on close reading. Transferability has been defined by Mills (2011) as “researchers’ beliefs that everything they study is context bound” and that the goal of their work is not to develop “truth” statements that can be generalized to larger groups of people” (p. 104). In order to ensure transferability in this study, I collected detailed descriptive data, which will allow for comparisons of this study to other contexts where the transfer may be contemplated. While collecting detailed descriptive data specific to the context of my study on close reading strategies, I developed detailed
descriptions of the context for the sole purpose that “others then, may make judgments about fittingness with other contexts possible” (Mills, p. 104).

In addition, dependability is yet another component of a study that will make sure that what is being completed is valid and trustworthy. Dependability refers specifically to the “stability of the data collected throughout the research” (Mills, 2011, p. 104). In order for myself to ensure dependability in my study, I overlapped my data collection methods through the practice of triangulation. As I previously stated, I used observation, student discussions and the collection of student’s annotation data on their comprehension throughout the course of this study. In implementing three different methods of data collection, the weaknesses of one and the strengths of another can further the quality of the study and also will provide added strength of their stability as well as the study’s validity and trustworthiness (Mills).

Lastly, I ensured that confirmability is present throughout the course of my study. Mills (2011) defines confirmability as the “neutrality or objectivity of the data that has been collected” (p. 105). Triangulation processes that are present within my study can help to ensure the component of confirmability. In using a variety of different data sources, and different methods I was able to cross check the data results by comparing them with one another (Mills). Correspondingly, I practiced reflexivity by writing down reflections throughout my data collection at each meeting with the participants. In doing so, I was able to “reveal [if any] underlying assumptions or biases” that cause [me] to formulate a set of questions or findings in a particular way” (Mills, p. 105). Through the process of meeting each criteria, I believe the data that was collected throughout this qualitative study was to be trustworthy, and as a result it offered valid insight into close reading as an effective strategy to help increase students comprehension of informational complex texts.
Informed Consent and Protecting the Right of the Participants

Before beginning my research, I asked for parental permission from the parents of the student who will be involved in this study. I also needed an informed accent form from the student. I provided each parent with a permission form that explained the purpose of the study and asked for their permission and signature to perform research. I explained to the student the purpose of the study as well as what I would be asking him to do. I informed the parents and the students that all names were changed to pseudonyms and any tape recording would be deleted and removed to protect their identity and ensure anonymity.

Data Collection

As I previously discussed for this study, I collected three different types of data to fulfill the purpose of triangulation. Data was collected from the student, teacher, and through interviews, field notes, discussions, and reading strategy assessments. All of the pieces of assessment were interconnected. All of the pieces of data were carefully selected to fulfill the purpose of the study and be able to give data to the researcher that will hopefully answer the research question.

The initial interview with the student helped narrow the reading strategies that were going to be used in the study. Information was collected from the student about how he viewed himself as a reader and what he thought he strengths and weaknesses were. The interview (Appendix A) included questions that helped gain perspective into which pre assessment to use in testing the student’s engagement with the text and his comprehension.

The next form of my data collection was the field notes that I took as an active participant. I wrote down notes on what I saw in regards to student motivation, independence and how he completed his annotations of the reading and the answers that will be given in
regards to the reading to see where his comprehension lies. Furthermore I also wrote down notes on the students’ discussions that were had after the reading was completed. I kept a record of my own thoughts through each of the session as a means of reflection and synthesis on the student’s reading abilities.

In addition, I collected pre and post assessment data from the student that participated in the research to gauge any academic growth made throughout the study. To have the student complete the tasks effectively and for the purpose of triangulation I presented the participant with four different reading comprehension strategies (Appendix B). One of the strategies was a general reading comprehension strategy and the other three strategies were different strategies to engage with while completing a close read. I first presented the participant with a non-close reading strategy to analyze his comprehension and then we moved on to the three close reading strategies.

After analyzing the data from the pre assessments, I presented Bobby with the first close reading strategy. I asked him what contrast and contradictions meant and what clues in the text would help us find the answer to the characters conflict. Bobby was assessed through discussions on his ability to identify the contrasts and contradictions in the text and how he made predictions or an inference about the plot and the conflict.

Second, Bobby was presented with a close reading strategy focusing on tough questions. Through this strategy Bobby examined and recognized the questions and/or problem the character is going through. During reading the researcher stopped at certain points and encouraged Bobby to think further into the story about the conflict and was asked questions about any ideas he has about what will happen later in the text.
Lastly, I presented Bobby with what is called the memory moment strategy. Bobby was determining while reading when the characters in the text remember something from the past and how that can often play an important role telling the reading more about that character. Through discussions Bobby was asked about the character through text evidence.

In addition to the discussions and reading strategies, the student was assessed on how he marked up the readings. When he underlined, circled and made notes in the margins. Additionally, if Bobby annotated the reading I took detailed field notes on what he noticed and noted on his paper. After compiling all the detailed field notes, I then audio recorded the discussion on reading through the strategy that the participant used at that given session. I asked the student brief questions and then had a discussion with one another to find the main idea and the author’s purpose, remembering the details and providing evidence from the text. The participant was assessed on his ability to comprehend a complex text and how his comprehension may have changed due to the variety of reading comprehension strategies that were presented.

The last part of the data collection was the interview with the teacher (Appendix C). Information was collected from the teacher on her views of close reading and how the common core has affected her instructional practices. The interview included questions that helped the researcher gain perspective on the common core and how the six shifts has affected the teachers day to day instruction, planning, and assessing.

Data Analysis

After collecting the data, I began to analyze to look for commonalities across the sources. Taking my field notes, student surveys, the student’s interviews, and the audio recordings, I began to look for common themes among the discussions. In particular, I focused on the discussions with the student and what knowledge he has about the importance of reading and
reading comprehension and how he comprehended a text through a close read. These focal points were developed from the research I had done previously and the focus of the research question. I hoped to gain a greater understanding of the English Language Arts common core by studying one of the shifts of close reading. To know how much the student gained from a close read, his comprehension was evaluated based on discussions with the researcher, and answers to questions about the text.

The student surveys were analyzed and coded according to categories and then put into themes. The student frequently expressed that he comprehends more with books that he is interested in and if there is no interest he doesn’t want to read. The student identified favorite books and reasons why he prefers to read those books and what is complicated for him while he is reading. While coding the data, I compared the findings to the work done by Fisher, Frey, & Lapp (2012) who all formed research about the need for the reader (in this case the student) being engaged with the text and part of that is the interest level of the reader.

Similarly, the student’s level of comprehension was coded in the audio recordings and the student interviews. The student was given the opportunity to express their knowledge on what they do while they are reading, how they go about understanding what they are reading and how they think they are able to understand the text. Within the audio recordings I also analyzed the data of the discussions and found evidence on deeper comprehension. The student was asked questions that go beyond basic comprehension of what they remembered. The student’s responses reflected upon text features and details.

In addition, this data started to show contrary evidence when using triangulation to support teacher and students views about close reading. This discovery helped to code the data and show contradictions of the teacher’s views on the benefits of close readings versus the NYS
commissioners decision to adapt the common core to the curriculum including close reading. Beers and Probst (2013) mentions that there is a disconnect between what NYS is saying, specifically about text dependent questions and what needs to be considered about the questions that are asked during a close read.

The student’s comprehension of a text is distinctly different in comparison between a during reading comprehension strategy and close reading. The data produced the following themes: reading skills as a determinant of an increase or decrease in comprehension, close reading showing differences in the student’s understanding and comprehension of a text, and teacher instruction of close reading.

**Findings and Discussion**

The purpose of this study was to determine whether or not completing a close read with a informational complex text would effect a students and if so, in what ways. In completing the research and carefully cross-examining the data that has been presented, a few themes had developed. The themes of reading strategies during a close read that effects comprehension, using close reading to understand and comprehend a text and teacher perception of the instruction of close reading were prevalent. The following quantitative and qualitative data collected can be used to support the effects completing a close reading will have on students comprehension.

The initial research that was done was a pre assessment through a concept map reading strategy to test the ability on how well the student could comprehend an informational complex text. The student was given a reading and five comprehension questions. Out of the five comprehension questions this student scored a two. The comprehension questions tested the student’s knowledge on main events as well as the text features. The student’s proficiency in
comprehension with this assessment could be the cause of the topic of the particular text and there may be a need of a more multifaceted approach. After the first assessment, I explicitly taught the student how he would complete a close read. Through the close reading strategy the student’s comprehension increased by scoring a five out of six questions correctly. This particular day I had to do a lot of probing to get the student to complete the work. According to Guthrie and Wigfield (2000) reading motivation is based on “the individual’s personal goals, values, and beliefs with regard to the topics, processes, and outcomes of reading (p. 405). With Bobby’s motivation to read this particular text in mind this could not only be one of the reasons why the student struggled in text comprehension, perhaps the student could not make meaning from the text or saw a clear purpose and was unable to comprehend.

In order to strengthen the pre assessment data, the data was placed side by side with the data from the close reads that were completed when the student took a closer look of the text.

Table I

Students Comprehension of Reading Strategies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>General Reading Strategy</th>
<th>Comprehension Questions Asked</th>
<th>Number Answered Correctly</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Concept Maps (Pre Assessment)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Close Reading Strategy</th>
<th># of mark ups made</th>
<th># of Text Dependent Questions Correct</th>
<th># of important words</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aha Moment (Pre Assessment)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5/6</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contrasts &amp; Contradictions</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4/5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tough Questions</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5/6</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Memory Moment</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6/6</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Looking at the findings there could be a connection through the pre assessments that were given and the increase in text comprehension during close readings. This table provides an insight to how Bobby interacted with the text. Table I provides the data that determined the level
of comprehension Bobby had with the text through the given strategy. The general reading strategy that was used in the study was a concept map. Through the concept map Bobby was given five comprehension questions and he correctly answered two of them. This score has provided evidence that with this strategy Bobby was unable to recall text details. According to Joeseph (2002), many students feel that concept mapping is a difficult task and could benefit from reading a text differently. Following the pre assessment of the concept map, Bobby completed a pre assessment through a close read of a text. The number of marks ups means the number of notes that Bobby made in the margins. In the first strategy (the Aha moment), Bobby made five mark ups. He then was asked six questions that were text dependent and he answered five of them correctly. The words that he circled that are essential in making connections between the new knowledge and the known information to find the main idea and purpose of the text. In the close reading pre assessment, Bobby circled five important words. The positive results may be because Bobby found this strategy useful and beneficial and saw the connection with the text. According to Beers and Probst (2013), students have success with the Aha moment strategy because this strategy helps them better understand how the characters actions are related to the conflict.

The next strategy that Bobby was presented with was the Contrasts and Contradictions. Using this strategy, Bobby made four mark ups in the text and out of five text dependent questions, he correctly answered four. Bobby also circled six important words. The improvement in the data through this close reading strategy could be because Bobby is able to gain more of an understanding through completing the strategy and examining the characters through text evidence. Beers and Probst (2013) have found that the contrasts and contradictions strategy
assists readers in recognizing the characters development, internal conflict and the relationship between the setting and the plot.

Bobby was later presented with the Tough Question strategy where he made seven mark ups in the text, and out of six text dependent questions, he answered five of them correctly and further circled eight important words. The last strategy was the Memory Moment Strategy, and this strategy was Bobby’s post assessment. Bobby made eight mark ups in the text and out of six text dependent questions, he answered all six correctly and circled nine important words. The success that Bobby had with this strategy could have been because Bobby stopped periodically and reflect what was happening in the text. His understandings were shown when he made eight mark ups and circled nine important words. Beers and Probst (2013) have expressed that when that when the character asks a question and the reader pauses and wonders about it, it helps the reader identify and recognize the importance of the moment and will lead them in gaining a deeper understanding.

Based on the student work and discussions, all of the strategies that was presented to the student for him to use during a close read of a text benefited the student by improving his comprehension. The data provided (Table 1) shows the student was able to comprehend a text more thoroughly during a close reading than by using a during reading strategy. The depth of understanding through a close read could be because through a close reading the students are reading smaller sections of the text and are closely interpreting what the author is writing about. According to Boyles (2012), the authors play with words to get you to see a text their way. When an author writes he purposefully uses certain elements and structures with certain language to pose to the reader what he wants them to learn or interpret. By using the close reading strategy during reading this student identified and examined the author’s use of language.
Reading Strategies During a Close Read That Effects Comprehension

Some readers are often flustered when it comes time to comprehend a text. New texts are often daunting and overwhelming, and students may lack the strategies necessary to understand such complex texts. By using specific reading strategies during a close read and having students continuously practice looking for deeper meaning and learning how to analyze and discover text evidence that supports the objective for the lessons, many students are able to remember what they read.

The best way for students to complete a close read is through the use and support of multiple strategies, specifically a strategy that will fit with the plot and character actions of the text. The strategies that are used during a close read will affect the level of understanding and the amount of meaning that the student will gain. The strategies purpose is to focus on certain elements of the text and is the reason for why certain strategies work better for certain objectives. For the purpose of this study the strategies where chosen to support the objective I had for Bobby as well as the text elements and features.

The data shows a distinct difference between the reading strategies that Bobby used and his level of understanding. As I have explained in Table I, the use of reading strategies during a close read is beneficial to students such as Bobby. Through a discussion that Bobby and I had, he was asked if while he reads does he use any reading strategies and he expressed “I usually use what the teachers give me but I know that the strategies will help me understand the text better than if I didn’t use them” (Student Interview, March 3, 2013). Through this response, Bobby may be realizing that he understands comprehension of a text is important reading is a self-regulated process and with a reading strategy he will gain the deeper understanding by remembering what happened. When Bobby is using a reading strategy to support his reading, he
is taking ownership for what he is reading. McNamara (2009) has found that reading strategies are essential not only to successful comprehension, but to overcoming reading problems and becoming a better reader and comprehender. When Bobby used the reading strategy during a close read, he became a successful reader by using the strategy to help him organize what he is thinking and support him in comprehending the text.

Similarly, Bobby had stated that “When I read I use the strategy to help me think about what I am already thinking so I can remember the story better ” (Student Interview, March 3, 2013). Bobby shows that he understands there is a deeper meaning to the text. He also acknowledges that reading takes thought. According to McNamara (2009), in order to use a strategy, the readers must be somewhat aware of their level of understanding. The data supports that Bobby understands the importance of his understanding and his thinking while he is reading to be able to derive the meaning.

Moreover Bobby was asked about the strategies he used during the close reading he had completed. He stated that “I understand that I am supposed to find the deeper meaning and highlighting helps me focus on the important details but the strategies helped me decide what I needed to look for when I went back to reread” (Student Interview, March 15, 2013). Fisher and Frey (2012) have maintained that during close reading students are underlining important phrases or sentences, circling unknown words, and are writing notes in the margins. Through Bobby’s own annotations of the text he was able to dissect the layers of the text, finding what he thinks the author wants him to grasp and showed his understanding of the reading and was gaining more proficiency in his reading.

Data from the student surveys show that Bobby thinks he is not a good reader. Through discussions when Bobby was asked if he thinks he is a good reader and can comprehend what he
reads he stated “I don’t know” (Student Interview, March 3, 2013). When asked why he further states “I usually have a hard time answering the questions my teacher asks me” (Student Interview, March 3, 2013). The student surveys and student interviews were completed before the pre assessments, and this data provides the idea that Bobby’s perception, as a reader is weak. Bobby’s perceptions as a reader may be weak because he thinks he has been an unsuccessful reader by thinking he doesn’t answer the comprehension questions correctly. Cummins (2013) has claimed “students must depend solely on the text to answer the question, setting aside their own thoughts about the situation” (p.38). Bobby may have thought he doesn’t answer the comprehension questions correctly because in a close read the answers have steered away from making connections to the text and are solely on the evidence that was provided in the text he just read.

However Bobby was asked a similar question after the post assessment of the close read and he stated “I think the reading strategies I used during the close reading has helped me become a better reader and thinker” (Student Interview, March 15, 2013). Bobby is aware that the strategies he uses while he completes a close read are benefitting himself as a reader and are not only giving him more confidence while he is reading but also that he noticed his ideas of understanding take shape. According to Beers and Probst (2013), the reading strategies are to help the students read more closely and organize what they are interpreting the text to be. The strategies are a scaffold to help the students develop the habits, dispositions and skills to become life long learners. Through the close reading strategies Bobby has been able to learn what he needs to do to help him understand the text during a close read and has learned the skills to help him become a better reader.

**Using Close Reading to Understand and Comprehend a Text**
Many students are often frustrated when it is time to discuss and answer questions about the text they have just read. Close reading has shown to make a remarkable improvement for Bobby and the data about to be presented shows a lack of understanding Bobby had when not completing a close read. During the pre-assessment of using the concept map to complete with the reading *Martin Luther King Day* by Linda Lowery, Bobby was stopping in the story and writing down details from the story that did not relate to the main idea or for the purpose of reading (Field Observation Notes, March 3, 2013). Bobby may have been writing down the wrong information because there could be a disconnect between what he thinks he was supposed to do with the instructions he was given or it could be there was not an interest for him because he was unsure what to write down on the concept map to help focus his thinking to read the text. Research has shown that directions or instructions that are not effectively and clearly formulated, it may confuse a number of students and in turn will be taken off task (Hutaglung, 2010). Since Bobby was writing down the wrong information, it could be because the concept map strategy was not self-directed for him and he was not sure how he can organize his thoughts to make sense on what the author's purpose was like he would be able to do during a close reading. On this day, Bobby and the researcher were in the library and he was very distracted with the students that surrounded him at the tables (Field Notes, March 3, 2013). When the distraction was noticed it was evident that Bobby and the researcher needed to switch to a different location before beginning the close reading pre-assessment with the book. When Bobby completed with the text, through the audio recordings of the discussing the text it appeared that Bobby was unable to recall the details that were essential in understanding the text. The lack of retell was expressed when Bobby was asked why we celebrate Martin Luther King Day and his response was “I don’t know because he is famous” (Audio recordings, March 3, 2013). There is a clear
disconnect between the purpose for reading the text and the details the researcher wanted Bobby to see and what Bobby was actually able to grasp from reading the text. Through the discussion Bobby was also asked if the concept map strategy helped him to which he replied “The concept map really confused me. I was unsure what to do what to look for or even where to start with what I was supposed to write down” (Student Interviews, March 3, 2013). Bobby’s confusion provides data that proves completing a close read would benefit him as a reader. According to Beers and Probst (2013), meaning is created not purely and simply from the words on the page, but from the transaction with those words that takes place in the reader’s mind. Bobby was unable to have a transaction with the concept map due to the lack of connection with the strategy and the text. In comparison when Bobby completed a close reading he was able to attend to both his own experience and the experience that the author is conveying which is proven with the scores in Table 1 of his understandings during a close read versus the concept map.

When Bobby began to read the text *Penguins* by Gail Gibbons through the close reading instruction, as the data shows in Table I there was improvement from using the concept map strategy. While reading Bobby was underlining phrases and circling words that would help him understand the meaning of the text (Field Observations, March 3, 2013). Through discussions of the text, there was a clear explanation that Bobby knew what he read about, and he supported his answer with evidence from the text. For instance, when asked what characteristics set penguins aside from other birds his response was “the male guards the female’s single egg in his brood pouch and their feathering on their bodies… I found the answer when the author describes their body shape” (Audio recordings, March 3, 2013). His response may be due to his annotations that he made on what he thought the meaning could be. According to Kain (1998), “when we highlight keywords or phrases that strike the student as surprising or important When we respond
to a text in this way, we not only force ourselves to pay close attention, but we also begin to think with the author about the evidence” (p.1). Through the use of close reading and the Tough Questions strategy Bobby’s understanding of the characteristics of penguins could have been due to his knowledge and comprehension of the way the author use of descriptive language and through the act of close reading. The strategy helped Bobby gain a deeper understanding of the text because he was able to stop throughout the text and ask himself what does this change in character behavior or emotion mean and make me wonder about, what is going on and what will happen next? By Bobby asking himself the questions he was able to interpret and examine the meaning and the purpose of the text.

As cited in earlier findings, Bobby has had a fear of answering comprehension questions with a fear of getting the wrong answer. Through the audio recordings of his second close reading activity of the story True or False: Planets by Melvin & Gilda Berger Bobby answered the comprehension questions with confidence in his voice (Field Observations, March 12, 2013). Bobby was asked what the purpose of reading this book and his response was “what is in the solar system and to learn how the different planets are similar or different from one another and how it affects space. I learned this by circling important facts on the solar system” (Audio recordings, March 12, 2013). Bobby’s answer was correct and he may have reached that answer by the close look he was doing, and the annotations he was marking. Through the annotations and the close reading he was doing. He was able to answer the question correctly because he had the skills to dissect and uncover the layers of meaning within the text to better understand the authors purpose. Cummins (2013) has done research and has determined that the strategy of close reading provides the students with a way to look deeply into a text and find the meaning from the author.
When Bobby was reading *If You Live With the Iroquios* by Ellen Levine he expressed that the main idea “informing the reader about the life of the Iroquois, the traditional life, customs, and their everyday world.” (Audio Recordings, March 10, 2013) Bobby further states “I was drawn to the color on the page which made me want to read and see what the life of the Iroquois was like” (Audio Recordings, March 10, 2013). Bobby may have come to this answer by his interactions he had with the text. He further expresses, “The pictures also helped me in understanding what the author was talking about” (Audio Recordings, March 10, 2013). The text for Bobby came to life when he noticed the colorful pictures. Bobby also found that the questions he was asked helped direct him in his thinking and learning and helped him comprehend more of the text when he says “The questions that I was asked also helped me organize in my head what I was thinking and which important facts I should remember most” (Audio recordings, March 10, 2013). Boyles (2012) expresses that the questions that are asked during a close reading lesson are questions that will lead the students and encourage them to look deeply into a text. Through the questions that he was asked, Bobby could have visualized in his mind what the author was trying to convey and the pictures may have been a crutch to make the connection to the main idea.

**Teacher Perception of the Instruction of Close Reading**

Teachers play a critical role in the students reading experience and how a student will go about comprehending a text and deriving meaning. Miss Andrews has stated in a teacher interview “I think many teachers worry about what the students are going to gain from a close read which is why several of them have not yet implemented it into their daily lessons” (Teacher Interview, March 9, 2013). Miss Andrews may have said this because several teachers believe that the reading curriculum that is currently embedded into their classroom instructions work
well in the students becoming successful readers which could get them to think that close reading is unnecessary. How the students interact and interpret a text is directly related to how the teachers teach the text through a close read, specifically the questions they ask and the engagements that the students can have with the text (Boyles, 2012). She further goes on to express that “close reading seems regimented in a sense where there is limited leeway for students connections an that has always been one of the ways the students engage with the text” (Teacher Interviews, March 6, 2013). The description given by Miss Andrews could explain why Bobby has trouble comprehending a text when he is unable to relate to it and make connections. Research has confirmed having a discussion about the students’ prior experiences and background knowledge, will always be beneficial for the students to develop reading comprehension; however it cannot take the texts place for text based answers for the students to make inferences and challenge themselves (Boyles, 2012).

As cited earlier there is a fear among teachers on how much the students will gain from a close read. What the students will gain is the kinds of questions the teacher asks. Through discussions with Miss Andrews, she further states “for close reading to work teachers need to follow the exemplars and not provide them with too many questions that takes away their independence in interrogating the text” (Teacher Interview, March 9, 2013). If teachers are worried about the effectiveness of close reading and are unsure how to teach close reading, there are exemplars that are resources they can look at or use until they are comfortable enough to create their own close reading lessons. Furthermore, teachers also need to be careful about the questions they ask because the point of close reading is for students to get to where the close read becomes independent and for them to begin to ask their own questions to support the evidence they are finding and if teachers are asking questions that are affecting the students exploration of
the lesson then that will ultimately affect their understanding and success. Research has found that learning what questions that should be posed during a lesson is the key in understanding the focus of the lesson and how deep the students will engage and look at the text. (Fisher & Frey, 2012) Bobby may have had better comprehension of the informational texts because the researcher was asking the right questions.

In close reading, the goal is for the students to assume more of the responsibility for their learning and give them ownership for the work they are completing. Students who learn to ask themselves good text based questions are reading with a discerning eye of a careful reader. Miss Andrews had expressed “I think close reading is interesting in its approach to give the students the chance to take control of what they are learning. I think that once the students practice close reading and learn how to engage with the text and take accurate details notes on evidence that will support what they are reading” (Teacher Interview, March 9, 2013) Miss Andrews could be optimistic about close reading because she realizes that with the shifts in the common core its essential that the students understand how to dissect complex texts. Research has attained that knowing how to go about engaging with informational complex texts and making sure the readers fully attends to the act of reading are essential in discovering the deeper meaning of what is being read (Fisher & Frey, 2012). When the teacher gives the students the skills to decode and think deeper into a text the students will be given the opportunity to examine and determine the deeper meaning and purpose of the text.

**Implications and Conclusions**

Comprehending a text that is informational and complex is an essential skill that student need to learn in order to adapt in a changing society and be successful. Through a close read of
an informational, complex text students’ comprehension is affected by the strategies that are used. Close reading can increase students comprehension by using strategies that support and help them guide their thinking and will deepen their interpretation and understanding. Every student has the ability become literate but it must be done through their understanding and comprehension. When students are literate, they are able to manipulate texts and decode them in ways where they are a part of the text and can understand the message. By reading an informational text closely, students are able to dissect the multiple layers and look for the meaning that will support the evidence that is needed to answer the objective for the lesson. Close reading can be defined as a strategy where the teacher will bring the text and the reader close together. It suggests that through close reading of informational texts students will examine the specific text and notice the elements of the text that are surprising, confusing, contradictory, or any facts that will support the objective of the lesson (Beers and Probst, 2013).

As studies have shown, when using a variety of before, during, and after reading comprehension strategies, the way readers are able to comprehend a text will differ in many ways. Reading comprehension will develop “the construction of the meaning of a written text through a reciprocal interchange of ideas between the reader and the message in a particular text” (Harris & Hodges, 1995, p.2) Harris and Hodges definition of reading comprehension encompasses how the student will derive meaning from the text. Specifically readers derive meaning from text when they engage in intentional, problem solving thinking processes. Each student interacts with the text in a different way bringing their own experiences and will develop their own interpretations. The text comprehension is enhanced when readers actively relate the ideas represented in print to their own knowledge and experiences and construct mental representations in memory. The preceding research found that there was great success for the
student and his understanding of a complex text by completing a close read. Doing a close read proved to be beneficial for the student because he was able to answer several text based answers correctly and annotated the text making notes in the margins that led him to finding the deeper meaning and connecting through the lens of the author.

These findings provide me with the first implication to my study which is that teachers need to be careful when teaching a close read to the students to ensure its effectiveness. For a close read to work teachers must keep in mind what needs to be included in the lesson in order for students to derive a deeper understanding. The text that is chosen needs to be a short text for the purpose of the students being able to apply new skills and strategies through multiple readings of the text. The second thing that needs to be included is text dependent questions where the students are supporting their claim with text support taking right from where they read. The only thing to be careful of is to not create teacher dependent students. The goal is for the students to create their own understanding and meaning by asking their own questions. The teachers should teach them how to ask questions by first modeling it by asking and providing them with text based questions but then gradually give the students the opportunity to try it on their own which will get them to eventually be able to read and pursue the meaning of a piece successfully on their own.

Given what the research tells us about literacy instruction for students through close reading, a student’s comprehension is affected in a positive way when diving beneath the surface layer of a text. The common core learning standards that have been adapted for students to become more effective thinkers, writers, readers and communicators. Doing a close read of a text will give the students the opportunity to reason strategically when they encounter barriers to understanding what they are reading.
Students being involved in what they are reading leads to my second implication in my study which is in teaching a close reading lesson, the teachers must demonstrate how to be engaged with the text by making important markings in the margins and noticing any unknown words or words that are essential in the meaning of the text. The teachers need to explicitly teach the students how to annotate a text, specifically, what to look for which will give them a clue that they should highlight or how to know when to make notes and stop and ask themselves a question. Students need to fully understand how to annotate a text or the annotation will be more confusion. In close reading, it is pivotal that the teachers demonstrate and explicitly teach how to dissect a close reading of an informational text and what should be noted on the reading to give the students the confidence in order for them to carry out the task independently highly effective in enhancing understanding.

My last implication is that teachers need to recognize that the texts are going to be a struggle for the students and to let them struggle. Teachers must know that reading an informational complex text is going to be hard but it’s challenging in a good way. If teachers provided the students with the explicit instruction noted above then the students will know how to complete a lose read and how to annotate that best works for them and will examine the text as best they can and will take their time.

Literature is a powerful medium and through it, children are able to construct messages and make meaning about the content presented. Through close reading, students should be independently determining and examining the story elements and text features to come to an answer of what the author wants them to see. Through the adaptions of the common core, students are now challenged to interpret informational complex texts and derive meaning from the information. As teachers, it is essential that there is an understanding of when the students are
presented with texts that provide them with real world examples there will be an initial level of difficulty until there is practice and constant engagement with the strategy. Picking the right text will determine how much the students will understand. When teachers pick the right short text, the students are able to apply new skills and strategies through multiple readings of the text and allow them to examine the meaning in one lesson versus several lessons. The demands of the common core and what is being implemented in schools to prepare students for success in their future, it is pivotal that students are able to interpret difficult texts and ask questions where they have to provide text evidence that will have them delve within the underlying layers of the text finding the meaning and understanding the information presented.

A limitation for the study is that it was only researched on one student and one teacher. Since the study was on the effects of students comprehension through a close reading and every student learns differently and has different strengths and weaknesses it would be nice to see if I did this again, if the same strategies and instruction worked for the other participants or how that may have changed or been affected. Also, more participants would give more data to determine how the students understanding of close reading could be the same or different.

Since literacy encompasses more than just reading, it includes writing, word study, listening and speaking, for future research on this topic I would want to know how close reading instruction could affect the students writing of the informational text they just read and how the discussions of the texts could help the students become better writers and articulate speakers and responders. I wrap up the study by asking one question and wondering: will this new common core push of rigorous instruction and higher order thinking through close reading instruction benefit all the students or will certain students need the instruction that teachers are now being told to eliminate to start teaching how to closely read?
In conclusion, it is pivotal to note that literacy and text comprehension are social events. The texts that are presented to the students have distinct meanings that can affect the students reading comprehension in many ways. It is essential in today’s educational world that teachers begin to transform their classroom instruction of fiction literature into short informational complex texts to give the students the opportunity to meet the demands of the common core learning standards. As teachers, I want us to continue to think and recognize the new changes being made and act upon the importance of the common core, providing students with a reading experience that will prepare them for their future. Teachers should be adaptable for this change and understand that it is what’s best for their students and to realize that it will take time to adjust to a new reading strategy; however it will be a positive change and each student will become in the end independent readers and thinkers. I also want educators to think about how close reading can fit into your everyday classroom instruction and how each teacher can go about effectively and explicitly teaching the close read for students to be able to become independent readers and thinkers.
References


Appendix A

Student Interview (March 3, 2013)

Questions Asked in the Interview:

1. I want to try and understand how you comprehend a text. What you do and what you think about what you are reading to comprehend the story. Can you tell me how I can understand that?

2. So you use your strategies you were taught to figure out the words?

3. What else do you do to remember what you have read?

4. Does rereading help you remember what happened?

5. What kind of questions?

6. Do you use any reading strategies?

7. Do you know specifically what the strategies are that you use?

8. Do the strategies help you understand better?

9. What do you mean by sometimes?

10. Do you think you are a good reader?

11. Why not?

12. Are the questions your teacher asks hard?

13. So not all the time?

14. What type of questions is hard for you to answer?

15. I am going to give you some strategies to try while you are reading and we can see how you are remember the details in the text. Does that sound good?

16. Feel free to ask me any questions you are having as you read and I will be happy to answer them

17. As we go along we will be having discussions about the text and will be using some of the strategies that you are familiar with

18. Yes you can go right ahead
## Appendix B

### Aha Moment

**Definition:** The character realizes or starts to realize something that changes his or her actions or thinking.

**Text clue:** Characters say “I realized” or “I suddenly knew” or “Now I know why...”

**Question:** What might the character do now?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What did I notice?</th>
<th>What did my partner and I say?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

**Why do you think the author has the character realize this?**
### Aha Moment

**Definition:** The character realizes or starts to realize something that changes his or her actions or thinking.

**Test clue:** Characters say "I realized" or "I suddenly knew" or "Now I know why..."

**Question:** What might the character do now?

<table>
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<tr>
<th>What is the Aha Moment?</th>
<th>What inferences can you make about what the character will do now or think now?</th>
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**Contrasts and Contradictions**

**Definition:** The character acts in a way that is contradictory or unexpected given how he or she usually acts.

**Text Clue:** Author shows feelings or actions the reader hasn’t seen before or doesn’t expect.

**Question:** Why would the character act this way?

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**What are my final thoughts?**

I think the author uses this contrast or contradiction to show the reader . . .
### Contrasts and Contradictions

**Definition:** The character acts in a way that is contradictory or unexpected given how he or she normally acts.

**Text Clue:** Author shows feelings or actions the reader hasn’t seen before or doesn’t expect.

**Question:** Why would a character act this way?

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THE EFFECTS OF COMPREHENSION THROUGH CLOSE READING

### Memory Moment

**“Why Might This Memory Be Important?”**

A memory interrupts the flow of the story, but reveals something important about the character or the plot.

**Look for times when:**
- The character suddenly starts remembering something, even right in the middle of some important event
- A quiet moment when the character thinks back on something from his or her past

**Ask:** “Why might this memory be important?”

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Adaptation by Bernadette Suggett, Olympic Heights High School, Orange County Public Schools, Orlando, Florida.
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Tough Questions

Definition: Character asks a tough question that reveals his or her concern (new context).

Text Clue: Character asks self or another a difficult question.

Questions: What does this question make me wonder about?
What does it tell me about the character?

What did I notice?

What did my partner and I say?

What are my final thoughts?

This question makes me wonder if . . .

Helps me that . . .
### Tough Questions

**Definition:** Character asks a tough question that reveals his or her concerns [inner conflict].

**Text Clue:** Character asks self or another a difficult question.

**Question:** What does this question make me wonder about?

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Appendix C

Teacher Interview (March 9, 2013)

Questions Asked in the Interview

1. I want to ask you a few questions about the new Common Core Learning Standards and the implementation of close reading into the reading curriculum. What is the current program your school district uses?

2. Is there a required instructional approach or is it up to the teacher’s discretion?

3. What does your centers look like?

4. Sounds like you give your students what they need

5. What has the district done to adapt the curriculum for the common core?

6. What has the literacy coach said about the importance of increasing the rigor in reading?

7. Did the topic of close reading get brought up?

8. Did she give any instruction on how to carry out a close reading?

9. What did she say needed to be included in a close reading?

10. What do you think about close reading?

11. What are the benefits you see?

12. Do you have any worry about teaching a close read initially?

13. What do you think about the knowledge the students can gain from a close read?

14. Do you think close reading will work?

15. Can you explain more about the independence piece?

16. What do you think about the close reading approach?

17. Have you implemented close reading into your classroom yet?

18. Excellent! I am curious to see how your students do