Improving the Reading Comprehension of Fifth Grade Students

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An adequate progression of comprehension skills for upper elementary and middle school students is essential for their success in all future educational endeavors. If these students are not given the opportunity to refine these skills before and during middle school, they will experience academic difficulties in all common subjects, and postpone their achievement in high school and possibly college. It is the job of all content area teachers to work on comprehension skills during class time; however, it is the job of the Language Arts teacher to identify students who are at-risk for falling behind. Students who do not qualify for special education services and struggle with reading comprehension in grades 4<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> need to be provided with reading comprehension interventions and strategies that are age appropriate, address their interest and engagement levels, and meet the rigors of their grade level curriculum standards.

In this literature review, various reading comprehension interventions and strategies will be analyzed. Each address the developmental needs of students in grades 4<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup>, but the information contained in this literature review will be utilized particularly for fifth grade students. The two major strategies that will be reviewed are Collaborative Strategic Reading (CSR) and the use of Transactional Reading Strategies (TRS). This literature review will also address the importance of providing these students with age appropriate reading materials and curriculum skills. For example, Ivey and Baker (2004) found that students within these grade levels, who struggle with reading, do not benefit from phonics programs. Better instructional strategies need to be implemented to appeal to their interests, communication styles, and engagement levels.
School and Classroom Context:

The literature review will be utilized for 5th grade students at Monte Vista Elementary School in the Kyrene School District in the Ahwatukee Foothills area in Phoenix, Arizona. The school services upper middle class suburban families. 66% of students who attend this school are white, 17% are Hispanic, 8% are two or more races, 6% are Asian, 3% are African American, 1% are American Indian/Alaska Native, and 0% are Hawaiian Native/Pacific Islander. 15% of the students who attend Monte Vista Elementary in the Kyrene School District are eligible for free or reduced priced lunch program. 3% of students who attend Monte Vista are English Language Learners. The languages of students who attend Monte Vista are the following: Japanese 28%, French 22%, Mandarin 11%, 11% Other Non-Indian, Bengali 6%, English 6%, 6% Filipino, 6% Cambodian, and 6% Spanish.

Monte Vista Elementary School services 453 students in grades PK-5th. The school is one of two schools in the Kyrene district that offers a self-contained gifted program in grades 2-5th. The average class size at Monte Vista is 19 students per each certified teacher. There are three fifth grade teachers and one-fifth grade Self Contained Gifted classroom. The school has a total of 21 grade level teachers (K-5th). The school offers special area courses for students in Art, Music, P.E., and Library. There are two art teachers and two P.E. teachers (one for primary students and one for intermediate students). The school employs one art teacher and one library teacher. This school has one SEI teacher, one Speech and Language Teacher, three resource teachers, one gifted resource teacher, and a school psychologist. The school’s principal is highly rated by parents on GreatSchools.org. I was unable to find information on teacher and administrative turn over; however, based upon GreatSchools.org parent reviews the teachers and
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Administrator are both rated five out of five stars. The average teacher at Monte Vista has 15 years teaching experience (azcentral.com/news/education/schoolscores.php). The ethnicity of all 35 teachers and the principal at the school are listed as white. The PTO and parents are very involved in the school and the school participates with local restaurants and businesses for school activities and fundraisers. Kyrene Monte Vista was rated an A+ school in 2006 by the State of Arizona.

Student test scores at Monte Vista in fifth grade have been above state average for the past three years. In 2013, fifth grade students scored 97% in Reading with the state average being 79%, 90% in Writing with the state average being 56%, and 91% in Math with the state average being 63%. 92 students were tested in the fifth grade during the 2013 standardized testing year. 2013 was a good year for fifth grade in the academic areas tested for AIMS. Each subject saw gains in scores from the previous two academic years. Scores have been on the rise since the 2012 academic school year after dropping during the 2011 academic school year. Within the state Monte Vista ranked 6th out of 1089 schools and is in the 99.4 state percentile. Kyrene Elementary School District is ranked 24th on the “Top School District Ranking” poll within the state of Arizona.

Purpose Statement:

The purpose of this literature review is to explore and solve the leading factors of reading comprehension problems in students who are in fifth grade and attend a suburban upper middle class elementary school. The literature review will discuss different instructional techniques and comprehension strategies that help improve the reading comprehension of struggling 4th-8th grade students, but will be implemented with 5th grade students. Many students begin fifth grade at a
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reading level one to two academic years behind, and without proper interventions they are never able to catch up during the academic rigors and stresses of middle school (6\textsuperscript{th}-8\textsuperscript{th} grade). Once students begin sixth grade the need for strong reading comprehension skills are vital to their success in all their academic courses. Fifth grade teachers must work to develop students independent study skills. This can be accomplished by build their self- checking/monitoring comprehension skills, identifying any reading fluency issues that may be slowing comprehension, and help build the students’ comprehension confidence of more challenging reading material.

**Rationale:**

The immediate problem for fifth grade students who are struggling readers is the negative impact it has on their learning in all core academic subjects. The focus in sixth grade moves towards more advanced reading materials that require deeper comprehension skills. Many teachers at this grade level expect students to be able to focus primarily on the comprehension of presented reading materials and less on reading fluency. In a school that has high performing students some of these readers can be lost in the shuffle, due to the attention that is placed on academic rigor, especially students who were never identified as struggling readers in previous grades. Once students move towards the intermediate grades, if they weren’t identified as problem readers in earlier grades the chance of them being identified in the intermediate grades is lessened, and the further they can fall behind.

The consequences of not addressing these students reading comprehension deficits in a timely manner can be detrimental to their academic success throughout their schooling. Dr. J. David Cooper states,
“The gap between the less able readers and more capable readers continues to widen across grade levels. Therefore, there is a serious need for a reading intervention program, rather than remedial reading programs, to help below-level readers in grades three and above bring their reading up to level.”

The benefits of providing upper elementary and middle school students with the appropriate reading strategies and interventions that meet their needs are astounding. Many students can begin to comprehend reading material at grade level or beyond in a short amount of time, if particular strategies are utilized in a consistent and timely manner. These specific strategies do not employ the use of a phonics program. Unfortunately, some students are given reading material that does not address their fluency needs and it doesn’t enhance their comprehension skills that are relevant to their present learning environment. Ivey and Banks state,

“Although research indicates that phonemic awareness is a good predictor of success with beginning reading, the National Reading Panel's report (2000) found that phonemic awareness training and phonics instruction produce the most benefits for young students, with diminished results for older students. The research summarized in the report indicates that phonics instruction does not significantly boost the reading performance of students with reading difficulties beyond 1st grade, nor does it lead to greater comprehension abilities for older students.”

The National Reading Panel’s research justifies what many educators already know, the needs of beginning readers are different from the needs of established readers who struggle with comprehension. During my student teaching and interning opportunities in 1st-5th grade
classrooms I observed common reading instruction throughout schools and districts in the Phoenix area. The focus throughout third grade was in fluency and “lite” comprehension skills. Teachers spent a great deal of their instructional time and assessments on how well and how fast students could read. The comprehension component that was taught was mostly based upon basal leveled readers that asked few questions that involved an in-depth response, and didn’t assist the teacher or the student in assessing the comprehension of the material. It seemed the thought was, it wasn’t needed yet and that a strong comprehension instructional focus was for the upper elementary grades, or middle school. This is just not true. Students need to be prepared with these critical thinking skills in reading comprehension, prior to upper elementary grades and middle school. Ray Avila stated in his dissertation on the topic of “Reading Strategies for Student Achievement” the following:

“Recent researchers concluded that struggling readers can improve their achievement levels and, therefore, close the achievement gap when educators hold high expectations and implement research-based comprehensive reading intervention programs to support the child’s literacy needs.” (Avila, 2010, pg. 43)

Avila’s conclusion points out the importance of how educators present their expectations and instructional techniques to students who need extra support. If these students’ emotional needs are not addressed along with their academic needs, it can lead to a lack of engagement and progress for the student. Giving a student who is reading at a fourth grade level in sixth grade a basal text or leveled reader they read in fourth grade to better their comprehension, is not beneficial to their growth, nor is utilizing comprehension instructional strategies they experienced in fourth grade as sixth graders. Their needs have changed and need to be facilitated with the proper instructional approach that is conducive to their present educational environment.
Literature Review

This literature review will examine two different instructional strategies for bettering the reading comprehension skills of students in grades 4<sup>th</sup>–8<sup>th</sup>. The first section will discuss the use of Collaborative Strategic Reading. Collaborative Strategic Reading helps teach students comprehension skills while they work together in a group. This teaching technique can be very beneficial in enhancing the engagement of 4<sup>th</sup>–8<sup>th</sup> grade students, because of the social interactions it can provide for this age group. The second section will review the use of Transactional Reading Strategies; for example, fostering learning from text, nurturing response to literature, teaching comprehension strategies, and promoting higher order thinking. Some of the comprehension strategies that are taught using Transactional Reading Strategies include: activating prior knowledge, making predictions, asking questions, summarizing, visualizing, and monitoring reading. The teacher typically teaches these strategies directly, by modeling them for the students, and then as students begin to gain competency with these skills they will begin to be utilize them independently. Transactional Reading Strategies and Collaborative Strategic Reading can be applied together once students are comfortable using the different Transactional Reading Strategies.

The third section of this literature review will examine the importance of providing students in grades 4<sup>th</sup>–8<sup>th</sup> with age appropriate curriculum materials and skills. For students who primarily struggle with reading comprehension, the focus should be on developing those skills, unless the student also struggles with fluency. In that case the teacher should review fluency interventions that also benefit a students comprehension skills, while avoiding the use of phonics programs. As the research that has been reviewed for this topic suggests, this type of instruction is not beneficial for students who struggle with reading comprehension in the intermediate
elementary grades and middle school grades. A different approach must be taken and it must include one that builds the confidence of the reader, while providing them with appropriate challenges that engage them and heighten their interest in reading.

At the end of this literature review there will be a section, which will discuss the implications of utilizing the above-mentioned instructional strategies and interventions. Collaborative Strategic Reading and Transactional Reading Strategies that are employed with age appropriate curriculum materials and resources have shown to be positive for struggling readers in grades 4th-8th. Researchers realized that students of this age needed a different instructional approach to build their self-efficacy skills, academic achievement, engagement, and motivation to read.

**Collaborative Strategic Reading:**

Its developers, Janette K. Klinger and Sharon Vaughn, define Collaborative Strategic Reading (CSR) as “teaching students to use comprehension strategies while working collaboratively”. (Klinger & Vaughn, 1998) The main components of Collaborative Strategic Reading are the following: activating prior knowledge (preview), monitoring understanding (click and clunk), finding the main idea (get the gist), and generating questions and reviewing key ideas (wrap up). CSR has been examined by researchers and shown to be beneficial for intermediate elementary and middle school students since the mid-late 1990’s (Klinger & Vaughn (1998) and Swanson, Gould, Vaughn, Klinger, Leurox, and Solis (2010)). Klinger and Vaughn found that CSR was beneficial to most fourth and eighth grade students in the general education classroom. “CSR benefits on-level students and students with special needs in the general education classroom, it can also be useful in the special education classroom”. (Klinger &
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Vaughn, 1998) With the many uses of CSR in the classroom, teachers can find it to be easy to implement and engaging for their students. Swanson, Gould, Vaughn, Klinger, Leurox, and Solis (2010), found after implementing a full CSR intervention with adolescent students there were dramatic gains in their comprehension scores over two years. They also discovered that “CSR helps students learn specific comprehension strategies associated with enhanced reading comprehension”. (Swanson, Gould, Vaughn, Klinger, Leurox, and Solis, 2010) The benefits CSR delivers for middle school and high school students’ academic achievement and motivation in reading is evident in the research conducted by its developers, supporters, and educators who sought to engage their adolescent students’ reading engagement.

The first research study conducted by Klinger and Vaughn in 1998 worked with intermediate elementary students with the objective of using CSR to improve student achievement and motivation in reading comprehension. Fifth grade teachers implemented the CSR interventions of preview, click and clunk, get the gist, and wrap up while working with their Social Studies text. After utilizing the CSR methods in their Social Studies classes the fifth grade teachers remarked, “Students increased their conceptual learning in ways that engaged students to be more involved while obtaining more knowledge.” (Klinger & Vaughn, 1998) Students’ engagement improved in class and they “made valuable gains on reading achievement tests that covered Social Studies curriculum standards.” (Klinger & Vaughn, 1998) The study was conducted within one subject area using a textbook, so it is difficult to tell if these students would have been able to utilize the skills that are employed during CSR collaborations independently while reading a different text. The teachers that participated in the study also volunteered to try CSR in their classrooms within a Social Studies context and to follow its implementation in only that setting, which doesn’t allow the reviewer to examine the uses of
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CSR in different subjects or learning activities. More resources and in depth lesson information on the study would have been helpful, rather than just describing how to use the different interventions within textbook material; however, the study also points out that this type of strategy can be helpful in engaging students and motivating students to participate in class content areas that can sometimes come off as less than exciting, when read aloud and lectured only by the teacher. This method would be much more effective to struggling readers, and they would be more engaged in the lesson because of the one-on-one time with their peers.

In the last study that was reviewed on the effectiveness of CSR, Swanson, Gould, Vaughn, Klinger, Leurox, and Solis (2010), found over ten years later that the benefits of this instructional method with struggling readers was still relevant and beneficial towards their growth. After conducting a two-year study, which allowed the researchers to investigate the benefits of a fully developed CSR intervention with adolescent readers. Participates included struggling 7th and 8th graders, from six middle schools in Colorado and Texas; the socioeconomic status was described as low to moderate. Various classroom teachers implemented the CSR method of preview, click and clunk, get the gist, and wrap up. Within the first year there was a small significant main effect of CSR on reading comprehension. In year two there was a larger gain in the comprehension of students exposed to CSR in their classroom. Swanson, Gould, Vaughn, Klinger, Leurox, and Solis concluded that the first year this was introduced, teachers were still learning how to implement it in their classrooms, which is why the gains in comprehension were not as large as the second year. “Year two more teachers were trained during professional development classes on CSR and they became more comfortable utilizing these strategies with students; therefore a larger amount of gains in comprehension was reported.” (Swanson, Gould, Vaughn, Klinger, Leurox, and Solis, 2010)
This raises one important criticism of this study and questions its validity in comparisons from year one to year two. The CSR interventions in year two were used on a new cohort of students, making it difficult to measure the gains from the previous year accurately. The study should also indicate in its results more specific information on how these teachers made the gains in year two. What parts of their instruction changed? That would make it more effective, than stating it was due to their comfort with the material. That can already be assumed after a program has been tested over a period of time.

In conclusion, these research studies both found that the benefits of CSR are a useful comprehension strategy to be executed by teachers. Students’ motivation to read and participate in class increased, students were able to work cooperatively and learn from one another, and the strategies utilized within the CSR method helped improve comprehension of all types of text. These interventions are relevant to the needs of upper grade and middle school students. They address the issues that can hinder successful reading comprehension. The strategies activate the different steps of comprehension in an organized fashion. Both of these studies showed great support of why CSR should be implemented with struggling readers in the upper grade and middle school classroom. They showed this intervention could be utilized across content areas to help students retain and organize what they are reading better. The only issues with these studies were a lack of some specific information that would have answered the unanswered questions at the end of the study. For example, the first study conducted by Klinger and Vaughn (1998) did not give any information about the socioeconomic status and demographics of the students. The study conducted by Swanson, Gould, Vaughn, Klinger, Leurox, and Solis (2010) raised questions as to the reliability and validity of the study’s results, due to the a different group of students being treated with the intervention in year one and year two.
**Transactional Reading Strategies**

Transactional Reading Strategies (TRS) were first developed in 1978 by Louise Rosenblatt and were found to be ideal with 4th-12 grade students. Graves and Liang (2008) describe TRS as, “comprehension strategies that teach students how to interact with text through teacher support. Eventually these skills become flexible self-regulated strategies that can be applied while reading independently.” Graves and Liang (2008) found that transactional reading strategies are beneficial for readers who read at all levels, especially struggling adolescent readers, because age appropriate reading material can be utilized within the application of this strategy. Dr. J. David Cooper found that the TRS when utilized help students create meaning from what they are reading and provide opportunities for students to self-check their understanding, so that they are able to monitor what they are reading. Lastly, Scammacca, Roberts, Vaughn, Edmonds, Wexler, Klien Reutebunch, and Torgesen (2007) found that older students, “benefited from transactional reading strategies at text level (comprehension skill) and word level (fluency skill)”.

Graves and Liang (2008) reported that the benefits of TRS helped readers from all different levels and backgrounds. Cooper believed that TRS progressed students reading comprehension from easy to read materials towards more challenging reading materials in a relatively short period of time. Scammacca, Roberts, Vaughn, Edmonds, Wexler, Klien Reutebunch, Torgesen (2007) reported that TRS helps struggling readers spend more time reading, and in turn benefited their vocabulary skills and overall comprehension of the presented reading material.
The first research study that was reviewed was by Graves & Liang in (2008) provided TRS instruction that addressed the comprehension needs of struggling middle school students. A diverse class of sixth grade suburban students participated in the study. The TRS interventions that were used were introduced through reciprocal teaching and included the following four facets of reading comprehension: fostering learning from the text, nurturing response to literature, teaching comprehension strategies, and promoting high order thinking. Graves & Liang (2008) found that students, who utilized the four facets of reading comprehension to better their understanding, became more engaged and it enhanced the academic achievement in reading for the below-level readers. They concluded that providing students with a comprehensive reading program in the middle grades is just as important for student achievement in reading, as it is for students in the early elementary grades. The only criticism from this article is that it is based upon the strategies created by the researchers and doesn’t discuss the use of alternative comprehension strategies that would be utilized in a TRS model. These are comprehension strategies these researchers created form previous teaching experiences; therefore their viewpoint can be considered slightly bias.

Dr. J. David Cooper (2013) investigated particular TRS interventions to benefit the reading achievement of middle school students. Some of the interventions utilized are considered standard TRS that have been implemented since the late 1970’s, these include: scaffolding, daily fast-paced lessons, modeling good work habits, reciprocal teaching, graphic organizers, and providing proper reading materials that address the students reading needs and interest levels. Dr. J. David Cooper (2013) found that TRS interventions utilized helped students create meaning from what they were reading and provided opportunities for students to “self-check their understanding, so that they were able to monitor what they were reading.” Dr.
Cooper concluded, “With the proper tools and training teachers can help struggling readers, read on-level or above-level in a short period of time.” This article is very useful for the classroom teacher and includes strategies that many teachers are comfortable with and can adjust to the needs of their classroom. The type of TRS interventions used by Dr. J. David Cooper benefit the reading needs of upper elementary grade students working on their reading comprehension by allowing them to catch up to their peers.

Lastly, Scammacca, Roberts, Vaughn, Edmonds, Wexler, Klein Reutebunch, and Torgesen conducted a research study that reviewed the use of TRS interventions for struggling readers in grades 4th-12th in 2007. Their hope was to provide TRS that addressed struggling adolescent readers in fluency, vocabulary, comprehension, motivation, background knowledge, and reasoning. Participants were English-speaking students who were struggling with reading comprehension in grades 4th-12th. Scammacca, Roberts, Vaughn, Edmonds, Wexler, Klein Reutebunch, and Torgesen found that the students in grades 4th-12th benefited from the TRS interventions on text and word level. Their time spent reading increased and their vocabulary skills, comprehension skills, and fluency skills improved. Scammacca, Roberts, Vaughn, Edmonds, Wexler, Klein Reutebunch, and Torgesen (2007) concluded, “TRS better the comprehension skills of 4th-12th grade struggling readers when they are executed by teachers who are knowledgeable in examining students’ needs in reading comprehension.” The major criticism of this article is that the study does not point out specific interventions, it only addresses the overall focus of implementing instruction in the classroom for below level readers with the particular needed reading skills to be obtained in order to comprehend better. For example, the article doesn’t mention the use of graphic organizers, reciprocal teaching, or making predictions before reading to help improve the reading comprehension of 4th-12th grade readers. It provides
very general information about the particular instructional practices that were implemented to improve students’ fluency, vocabulary, comprehension, motivation, background knowledge, and reasoning. This may be in part to the amount of participants and variance of participants in the study.

In conclusion, the interventions used through the implementation of TRS helped improve the motivation, confidence, and ability of struggling readers in the upper middle grades, because these strategies are geared towards older readers. The interventions used helped students develop reading skills that will be useful throughout their schooling and can be applied in all content areas. Students in the upper elementary and middle school grades need comprehension instruction as much as students who are beginning readers. TRS provides opportunities for students to monitor and self-check their comprehension of what they read. TRS can be used with students of all reading levels. With the proper support and training teachers can help students catch up to their peers who read on or above level, without the risk of falling further behind. TRS is a helpful instructional technique for older students, because the teacher is able to incorporate age appropriate curriculum materials within their reading instruction. There are multiple TRS instructional practices available to teachers; therefore, it is difficult to know which strategies may work best for every struggling reader.
Using Age Appropriate Curriculum Materials and Skills for Struggling Upper Grade Readers:

It is important for teachers to use age appropriate reading and curriculum materials while helping struggling upper grade readers. By providing material that interests students in this age group, their motivation to read will be enhanced, which in turn will help motivate them to learn to comprehend what they are reading and improve their reading achievement levels. Ivey and Baker (2004) sought to prove that students in the upper elementary grades and in middle school do not benefit from phonics programs. Avilia (2010) found that struggling readers achievement was higher when their teacher held them to high standards and implemented reading interventions that were based upon the students’ interests and needs. Melendez (2012) discovered that reading interventions that are used with primary elementary students are not as effective for intermediate elementary students and middle school students. Hall (2005) examined how a students’ self perception affected their self-efficacy while reading and impacted their reading comprehension achievement levels. There are many benefits to giving struggling upper elementary and middle school students age appropriate curriculum materials. Ivey and Baker (2004), Avilia (2010), Melendez (2012), and Hall (2005) all found that by providing age appropriate curriculum materials and skills to older struggling readers their achievement improved, motivation and engagement to read improved, and their self confidence in comprehending what they read improved.

The first research study to be reviewed about this topic was examined by Ivey and Baker (2004). They sought to provide alternative reading interventions, not phonics instruction, for upper elementary and middle school students who struggled with reading comprehension. Ivey and Baker (2004) utilized Collaborative Reading Strategies and Transactional Reading Strategies
with their middle school participants. They found that students, who worked in peer groups with other students and their teacher; connected with the reading on a deeper level and developed better comprehension skills than students who were exposed to phonemic awareness skills in the later grades. Ivey and Baker concluded, “Phonemic awareness skills do not benefit older readers. They need to be exposed to interventions that engage, motivate, and challenge them to want to read.” This article provided a great in-depth look at how phonemic programs can benefit beginning readers, but do not meet the needs of struggling readers. The article unfortunately doesn’t mention the reading levels of the students involved in the study; therefore, it is unknown if these students are struggling readers or have a learning disability in reading comprehension.

Avila in 2010 wanted to evaluate a reading intervention program that was created to narrow the achievement gap of proficient language arts students and below proficient language arts students. The participants included eighty combined elementary and middle schools in Fresno, California in grades 4th-8th. The following TRS interventions were used in the classroom: Fast Track, Kaleidoscope Intervention, and Reach. Fast Track is a reading program provided by the publisher McGraw Hill Education. It is designed for delayed readers in grades 3rd-8th who are at least two years below grade level. “It is a comprehensive program that is based upon theoretical models of reading, instructional design, and methodologies, and the needs of delayed readers.” (McGraw Hill Education, 2010) McGraw Hill Education also produces “Kaleidoscope Intervention” and it is designed for students who are reading two or more grades behind grade level. It is delivered in an intense form of instruction that “makes it possible to deliver two years of instruction in one year”. (McGraw Hill Education, 2010) Lastly, REACH Higher System (2008) also developed by McGraw Hill Education “is composed of six highly effective research-based and validated programs that have been integrated into one
comprehensive intervention reading salutation for students who have fallen significantly behind in school.” (McGraw Hill Education, 2008) Skills in the program include: Corrective Reading Decoding, Corrective Reading Comprehension, Reasoning and Writing, Expressive Writing, Spelling Mastery, and Spelling Through Morphographs. This program is for grade levels 4th-adult.

Avilia (2010) concluded, “Struggling readers can improve their achievement when held to high standards by their educators who implement comprehensive reading intervention programs based upon the child’s literacy needs.” The criticism with this study is that the focus is on closing the gap between Caucasian students and ethnically diverse students. It does not discuss the need to help non-diverse students who are identified as reading below level, but do not qualify for services. The question is would these techniques also work well with English speaking students? Based upon the support, resources, and guidelines on how to implement these programs provided by McGraw Hill, it seems it would benefit all students who are reading only one two levels below grade level and need to catch up within a short amount of time. Utilizing this type of approach with Dr. J. David Cooper’s may be a beneficial combination that would reach the needs of all struggling readers in grades 4th-8th.

The study conducted by Melendez (2012) examined and explained how middle school students identified as at-risk in comprehension and fluency, responded to reading intervention models. The participants were 133 struggling sixth grade readers who were followed for three years (through 8th grade) in North Carolina. The following TRS interventions were utilized in this study: Response to Intervention Framework, Problem Solving Model, and Standard Protocol Model. Response to Intervention Framework (RTI), “seeks to prevent academic failure through early intervention, frequent progress measurement, and increasingly intensive research-based
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instructional interventions for children who continue to have difficulty”. (Rti4success.org, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Response_to_interventionwikipedia) The Problem Solving Model is a “systematic approach that reviews student strengths and weaknesses, identifies evidence-based instructional interventions, frequently collects data to monitor student progress, and evaluates the effectiveness of interventions implemented with the student”. (Canter, 2004) The Standard Protocol model “allows struggling readers to have access to the general education curriculum with differentiated intensity at each level.” (Marchand-Martella, Ruby, and Martella, 2007)

Melendez’s (2012) research resulted in students showing a significant increase of performance on the state reading test during the three years of reading intervention. Melendez (2012) concluded, “Reading interventions that focus on the needs and interests of students work best at helping students make gains in their reading achievement levels.” The research article provided great statistical data to support its claim that the use of age appropriate materials are crucial for older students reading achievement. The systematic intervention programs that were utilized in this study were great instruments to measure the academic gains made by the sample of student participants.

Lastly, a study conducted by Hall (2005) explored how struggling readers in middle school; comprehend information in different content classes and how their perceptions of their reading skills affected their success in these subjects. The participants included three female students one was a sixth grade Social Studies student, another was a seventh grade Mathematics student, and the third was a eighth grade Science student. There were no interventions used within this study, it was an observational research study. Hall’s results indicated that, “each reader “transacted” with the material based upon how she saw herself as a reader”. (Hall, 2005) Not if she was stronger or more interested in that particular subject area. The students utilized
different strategies to try to understand the material, even after not comprehending what was read, or after giving up on what needed to be read. Hall (2005) concluded, “Reading comprehension in middle school is geared towards content in all subjects, and can affect a students’ success in all areas besides English class. Every teacher must help students comprehend reading material in class.” By providing these students with below level curriculum materials, students are not given a sufficient chance to catch up to their on level and above level peers. The curriculum materials they are provided, based upon the reading struggles they experience, can also affect their confidence and engagement levels while reading the material. This article does not utilize different interventions; instead it discusses observations of how students who struggle to read, respond to what they read. This can support the claim that it is important to provide age appropriate curriculum materials and skills to struggling readers in the upper elementary and middle school grades, because it builds students self-efficacy skills and can affect how they “transact” with the material they read. It may be challenging for them, but with the proper teacher support and reading interventions like CSR and TRS students can improve and build their confidence as readers in all content areas.

In conclusion, by providing age appropriate reading materials to upper grade and middle school readers these studies found the reading achievement of these students improved, reading confidence improved, and their motivation and engagement in reading improved. Age appropriate reading interventions like TRS and CSR activities were more beneficial for struggling upper elementary and middle school readers, rather than phonemic awareness activities. Students’ fluency skills improved while learning vocabulary skills and being exposed to reading material they found engaging and motivating. Age appropriate curriculum materials and interventions are beneficial to improving the reading comprehension of struggling upper
elementary and middle school students. These studies unfortunately do not indicate the success rates of students multiple reading levels below their peers; however, for students who are within reach of reading on-level, these types of interventions can be beneficial for struggling upper elementary and middle school students’ achievement, engagement, and academic confidence.

Implications for Classroom Practice:

Based upon the literature review there are four different implications for classroom practice. The first of these implications is how Collaborative Strategic Reading would be implemented in the classroom for struggling 5th grade readers. The second implication is how Transactional Reading Strategies would be implemented in the classroom for struggling 5th grade readers. Lastly, the third implication is the effects of not using age appropriate curriculum materials and instructional techniques with struggling 5th grade readers.

The implications for fostering a Collaborative Strategic Reading environment for struggling 5th grade readers in the classroom are that students’ levels of engagement and participation improve, the level of interaction they have with their peers improves their reading comprehension, and this type of instructional strategy can improve a students’ enjoyment of reading. CSR can be used in any subject that requires students to comprehend a text. It would be an excellent practice to utilize during Social Studies or Science lessons that involve reading a textbook or articles. Students can discuss more complex ideas and help one another understand them in their age appropriate language. Many of times students are able to explain a process to the class with more clarity than the teacher. CSR during Language Arts would be an excellent model to follow if the teacher has students participate in literature circles. Essentially that is what lit circles are all about. Working collaboratively to better understand what is read. Students make
connections with the text and share them, or listen to other people’s connections to help them understand the text better. Collaborative learning groups are beneficial to students, because it teaches them to be active participants in their learning.

The implications of implementing Transactional Reading Strategies in the classroom environment for struggling 5th grade readers are that teachers are able to present students with skills that advance their reading abilities in a relatively short period of time. Students enhance not only their comprehension skills, but also their fluency skills by participating in activities that utilize TRS. These strategies are helpful for upper elementary and middle school readers, because the activities can be implemented in a way that is geared specifically to students’ reading needs. TRS interventions also help students develop the self-checking and monitoring skills that are important in reading. Bettering reading comprehension. There are many resources available for teachers and TRS lessons can be implemented in the classroom in various content areas. With support, resources, and age appropriate materials, teachers can help struggling readers catch up to students that perform on level and above level in reading comprehension.

The implications of ensuring that struggling readers in grades 4th-8th are provided with age appropriate curriculum materials and instruction is an important component in their academic achievement. By providing age appropriate instruction to students and avoiding phonics awareness programs to better their reading comprehension students vocabulary, fluency, and reading motivation improved. When educators plan instruction and prepare materials that are relevant to their students’ current and future educational needs, the chance for student success is greater. Utilizing phonemic awareness programs for readers who are in the upper elementary and middle school grades and who are reading one to two levels below grade average will not find success or motivation to read by receiving interventions based upon phonics programs. These
students would benefit from Collaborative Strategic Reading activities and Transaction Reading Strategies that are geared towards their learning needs. By providing these students the same style of instruction, their engagement, motivation to read, achievement, and confidence will improve. “Finding ways to motivate and engage students in reading is an essential feature of adolescent literacy instruction.” (Boardman, A. G., Roberts, G., Vaughn, S., Wexler, J., Murray, C. S., & Kosanovich, M., 2008) Many students who struggle with reading within grades 4th-8th must overcome the lack of motivation, confidence, and engagement while reading. This is the first hurdle they face towards comprehension achievement and academic success. That is why providing interventions like Collaborative Strategic Reading and Transactional Reading Strategies within an age appropriate curriculum is vital to bringing these readers comprehension skills up to grade level.
References


Melendez Chevere, R. (2012). Responsiveness to instruction: How effective is rti with struggling middle school students identified as at-risk in reading comprehension and fluency.


