Pairing and Sharing: A Technique to Increase Engagement and Achievement with Struggling Middle School Readers

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Pairing and Sharing: A Technique to Increase Engagement and Achievement with Struggling Middle School Readers

A Project Presented to
the Graduate Faculty of
Minnesota State University Moorhead

By

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Abstract
The purpose of this research was to determine whether reading with a partner coupled with active reading based communication would increase the engagement and achievement of seventh grade READ 180 students. READ 180 was a reading intervention program which consisted of four main components: whole and small group instruction, software, and independent reading. Many students struggled with the independent reading component of the program, failing to finish books and/or pass comprehension quizzes. During the study, students were assigned a partner. They read together instead of separately during independent reading times. Three primary types of data were collected to monitor engagement and achievement: first, observable student reading behaviors; second, the number of comprehension quizzes passed; third, the number of words read independently. Two secondary forms of data were also examined: the average number of pages read daily and student responses to a post-study survey. The researcher used both qualitative and quantitative methods of data analysis to draw conclusions from the study. Findings consistently revealed that while reading with a partner students increased overall engagement and achievement.
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

General Problem/Issue

In the book *Out of the Crisis*, Dr. W. Edwards Deming described his philosophy of continuous improvement based on the Japanese idea of *kaizen*, meaning good change. Continuous improvement models generally follow four to eight steps with guiding words such as assess, plan, implement, and evaluate (Rouse, 2009). In the world of literacy education and its application to struggling adolescent readers there is a constant need for teachers to examine what is effective and what is not. They continually work to improve instruction in hopes of helping their students succeed.

Dealing with the *can’ts*—students who are unable to do work—used to be the primary target of educational remediation. Recently there is an equal and increasing amount of *won’ts*—students who refuse to try. This adds another dimension of difficulty for educators on a quest to continuously improve in their efforts to help students succeed. Teachers frequently address these problems with techniques designed to motivate, consequence, or incentivize readers. Literacy issues with students below proficiency in reading often relate to a lack of engagement. A teacher might be able to get a student motivated to work, or perhaps avoid a consequence, but ensuring that the student sees the work through is another matter. In some cases, students may be unable to complete tasks, but in many other cases, they simply lack the *grit* necessary to persevere (Donahue, 2015). Sometimes, this lack of stick-to-it-ness results in a refusal to work at all, circumstances which give birth to a *won’t*.

In Madeline Hunter’s mastery learning lesson design, modeling and guided practice lead to independent practice (1991). This design makes sense. Some *can’ts* and
many won’ts, however, throw a curve ball at both well-intentioned and well-prepared teachers. To use a car analogy, these kids may have a key (tools, expectations) but they are out of gas or have a dead battery (lack on-going motivation and engagement). With students who consistently demonstrate this type of low-productivity, a teacher seeking continuous improvement needs a gas pump or a set of jumper cables. These teachers must expand the look of Hunter’s independent practice to include additional scaffolds for success because sometimes going it alone may be too hard.

In her book, *When Kids Can’t Read: What Teachers Can Do* (2003), author Kylene Beers writes about turning dependent readers into independent readers through the building of three types of confidence: cognitive confidence, text confidence, and social-emotional confidence. Cognitive confidence allows readers to read fluently and monitor for understanding. Text confidence allows readers to find books they like and develop stamina to read more challenging books. Social and emotional confidence allows readers to participate actively in a classroom community and maintain a positive attitude toward reading without getting discouraged or overwhelmed. Beers describes how when one of these areas improves, the others do, too. Reading with a partner and gaining social-emotional confidence may begin a cycle that leads to the growth of text confidence, cognitive confidence, and eventually to reading independence.

**Subjects and Setting**

**Description of Subjects**

Participants in this study were seventh grade *READ 180* students in an upper Midwest middle school. At this school, approximately 15 percent of students are placed in a reading enrichment program called *READ 180*. This program consists of four
structured components divided into rotational periods: whole group instruction, small group instruction, instructional software, and independent reading. *READ 180* generally services students who have fallen two or more grade levels behind in reading proficiency. This is based on scores from standardized reading assessments used by the school district at the middle school level: the Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Reading Inventory (RI) and the NWEA Measures of Academic Progress test in reading.

**Selection Criteria**

All students participated in the study, but students meeting two or more of the following three criteria represented the target population: first, students who had been observed as being disengaged readers based on a modified version of the Silent Reading Behaviors Checklist (Kelly & Clausen-Grace, 2009); next, students who had been less productive within the independent reading portion of the *READ 180* program based on the total number of quizzes passed and/or the total number of words read. This data is found on their *READING COUNTS!* Student Reading Report (See Appendices A and B).

Since the study requires partnering, the teacher made pairings based on the number of students within a class period and who was likely to cooperate with the demands of the study. Potential gender, social, and behavioral issues were also taken into account. There was not a separate control group. Comparisons were drawn against participants’ own data from earlier in the year.

One issue was that of partnered students having different reading levels, since the *READ 180* program strongly encourages students to read within an approximate range of 100 above or below their own Lexile level. In the event of major discrepancies, the Lexile level of books selected for reading needed to err on the side of the lower achieving
student in order to facilitate independence and success. It was also necessary to have two copies of each book selected by the partnerings which limited some choices and required other books to be borrowed from the 8th grade READ 180 classroom library.

**Description of Setting**

The research setting was an upper Midwestern city with a population of approximately 120,000 (“Quick Facts,” 2017). The study took place in a public middle school which housed approximately 800 students in grades six, seven, and eight. The student body was diverse. Close to 50% of the students qualified for free and/or reduced lunches, about 10% were actively serviced by English Learner (EL) programs, and between 10-15% of students had an Individualized Educational Plan. The school was built in 2006, and since opening its diversity had continued to increase. At the time of the study, the ethnic breakdown at the school was approximately: African American 13%, Asian 8%, American Indian 3%, Caucasian 70%, Hispanic 5% and Pacific Islander <1% (Larson, 2016). There was a teaching staff of approximately 80 people plus many other support personnel. There was a wide variety of activities for students to be involved in, and the school’s motto of “Great Relationships Produce Great Students” was easily witnessed in the interactions throughout the building. The school generally felt safe and pleasant.

**Informed Consent**

Permission to conduct this study was obtained from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Minnesota State University—Moorhead and from the school district. IRB procedure was carefully followed. This involved receiving permission from study
participants and parents (see Appendix C). Permission to conduct research was also obtained from all pertinent administrative officials.

Protection of human subjects participating in the research was assured. Participants were informed of any procedures involved in the research as well as any foreseeable risks or benefits. To protect the confidentiality of participants, student names were replaced by codes. Participants had the option to withdraw from the study at any time.

**Review of Literature**

**Introduction**

Houghton Mifflin Harcourt’s *READ 180* is a reading intervention program designed for students in upper elementary through high school who are two or more grade levels behind in reading achievement. The program is research-based and has four main components: whole group instruction, small group instruction, software, and independent reading (*READ 180*, 2017).

During the independent reading portion of the class, students are to select a book at their Lexile level and complete a short online comprehension quiz when they are finished. This may mean quizzing after one day of reading or quizzing after one month of reading, depending on the length of the book and the engagement of the reader. There are some students who diligently try to make progress in their selections and eventually several who learn to enjoy reading. However, there are always those who do not, and often they represent a sizable percentage of a small remedial reading class. This not only translates into wasted time and wasted opportunities for growth, it invariably leads to discipline issues as well. Another complicating factor is the rotational set-up of the class;
while students are reading independently, the classroom teacher is normally engaged in small group instruction or one-to-one conferencing with students. This means that unproductive readers are often left on their own to flounder or squander or squirm.

**Definition of Terms**

For the purposes of this study, the following definitions and explanations will apply:

Disengaged readers: seventh grade *READ 180* students who, by comparison to peers, exhibited a higher number of disengaged reading behaviors when observed using the modified Silent Reading Behaviors Checklist. These behaviors include, for example, eyes straying from the text or switching texts prior to the completion of reading/quizzing.

Low productivity students: seventh grade *READ 180* students who have comparatively fewer *READING COUNTS!* quizzes passed and are credited with fewer words read than classmates during similar time frames.

Target Population: seventh grade *READ 180* students identified as disengaged and low-productivity.

*READING COUNTS!*: The portion of the *READ 180* program that combines independent reading practice and software-based reading assessment. Teacher and student data reports from the program document information such as the number of total words read and average Lexile of books read. Data reflects achievement and productivity.

*READING COUNTS!* quizzes (*RC! quizzes*): *READ 180* students must take a ten question online *RC!* comprehension quiz after reading a book. A score of 70% or above is required for passing.
Active reading: Student reading characterized by the use of self-monitoring comprehension strategies. An active reader will be aware of unfamiliar words or phrases and confusing passages in a text. An active reader will sometimes comment on and make connections to a text, as well as periodically summarizing or reviewing portions to secure understanding. An active reader will infer and predict as a natural part of the reading process.

Independent Reading

In Profiles of Motivation for Reading Among African American and Caucasian Students (2009), researchers Guthrie, Coddington, and Wigfield proposed four reader profiles: avid, ambivalent, apathetic, and averse, with apathetic and averse readers exhibiting the least engagement. In Facilitating Engagement by Differentiating Independent Reading (2009), Kelley and Clausen-Grace categorize and refer to unproductive students as fake, challenged, wannabe, or compliant readers whose avoidance tactics require specialized attention or strategies on the part of the teacher. However, even with tools in place to incentivize or consequence, wasted time during independent reading is a constant problem in a READ 180 classroom.

Some teachers outside of prescribed programs have abandoned in-school independent reading (Kelley & Clausen-Grace, 2009), believing it to be a waste of time; however, the rewards of authentic independent reading are many. Students who have enjoyed success with independent reading report it has had transformative effects on their lives, helping them to develop not only academically or intellectually through the building up of strategic reading skills, but also to develop socially, emotionally, and morally, as well. These students claim to have become not only more sensitive and
empathetic toward others, but to have become empowered in their own lives through the vicarious experiences available to them in print, stating that, ultimately, reading (fiction) is about relationship building within themselves and their community (Ivey, 2014). Other significant research shows that independent reading may be a critical tool for this generation of young adolescents in helping to mitigate the effects of media multi-tasking on deteriorating concentration or cognitive stamina (Merga & Moon, 2016). A practice this powerful must not be abandoned lightly, especially when research also shows that these positive results can potentially transcend the classroom and cause a change in a student’s self-perception, one that might even allow a rise above low socio-economic circumstances and underprivileged educational backgrounds (Kelley & Clausen-Grace, 2009).

With these known motivators to compel, how can teachers begin to make independent reading programs more worthwhile for all—especially the struggling reader—when reading disengagement is on the rise even to the point of being referred to as a national dilemma (Guthrie, Wigfield, & You, 2012)? We may begin by noting that independent reading can be observed and measured. Using techniques such as the Silent Reading Behaviors Checklist (Kelley & Clausen-Grace, 2009) allows teachers to observe and categorize avoidance behaviors, outward signs of negative motivation, and likely an indication that a reader is feeling a task is difficult or unimportant (Guthrie & Lutz Klauda, 2013). In *Developing an Observation Instrument to Support Authentic Independent Reading Time during School in a Data-Driven World*, the researchers identified visible factors relating to independent reading, including eyes on text moving in the direction of the print, facial expressions, and flipping of pages (Williams, Hall,
Hedrick, Lamkin & Abendroth, 2013). Once unproductive readers are accurately identified, the real work begins.

**Engagement**

Engagement has been defined in numerous ways but is generally agreed to be multi-faceted, having behavioral, emotional, and cognitive components (Guthrie & Lutz Klauda, 2013). Because of the parameters of the *READ 180* program, one or more of the conditions needed for learning may not be met during the independent reading time. Perhaps it is a lack of demonstrations, or modeling, of the think-alouds which are necessary to visibly or audibly show the cognitive processes behind successful reading (Ivey, 2014), especially those needed over the course of reading an intermediate-level chapter book.

There are differing opinions about the influences on engagement, but in many learning models it is motivation that directly relates to engagement which then leads to achievement (Guthrie et al., 2012). In their research, however, Lutz Klauda and Guthrie (2014) showed that this model may not always apply to struggling readers. There may be cognitive challenges getting in the way of achievement. These challenges may lead to a lack of motivation to read or learn, rendering struggling readers unable to change and with growth patterns discouragingly resistant to effort, time, and persistence. With middle schoolers, scaffolding—which considers their age—may help. In the article *Social Side of Engaged Reading for Young Adolescents*, Ivey (2014) states, “It is this…social dimension that we found in our work to be more substantial than previous research has led us to believe, particularly for young adult readers…(reading is)…far from a solo act” (p. 166).
So, whether a lack of engagement stems from a lack of modeling, cognitive ability, or motivation based on their age and a preoccupation with peers, what can a busy teacher in a classroom with an increasingly diverse population—and a prescribed reading program expecting fidelity in implementation—realistically do to help? Are there ways to help low productivity students achieve in the independent reading portions of a seventh grade *READ 180* program?

**Pairing**

Perhaps a solution is sitting right in front of a teacher’s face. Literally. Known by a variety of names and specific styles, the use of students-helping-students is not new. Peer tutoring, reciprocal teaching, cooperative learning, collaborative grouping, and partner or paired reading are some of the variations on the theme of learners-helping-learners. These are long-used techniques that have sometimes been very general and natural in use and other times been highly defined and developed. The practice of partner reading is believed beneficial. According to an Evidence Based Intervention (EBI) Brief on the topic (Sparks, 2010), it is shown to increase fluency in middle schoolers, which in turn can benefit comprehension and achievement. This brief also noted that the technique has proven useful for all types of students but particularly for lower readers. And finally, partner reading is valuable to teachers as an aid in time efficiency, differentiating instruction based on need, and sharing of the teaching load.

*PALS* is an example of a well-developed and researched program in wide use. *PALS*, or Peer-Assisted Learning Strategies is a program designed to partner higher and lower students in a tutor-tutee relationship while specifically implementing three techniques: partner reading (including rereading and retelling of information), paragraph
shrinking (summarizing), and prediction relay. In *Effects of Peer-Assisted Learning Strategies on High School Students with Serious Reading Problems* (1999), Fuchs, Fuchs, and Kazdan examined these techniques with older students who were struggling in reading. They discovered the tactics to be relatively ineffective. The researchers proposed that part of the problem may have been the lack of range of ability within the sample studied; there were not enough strong readers to act in the role of tutors, thereby resulting in only modest gains overall. However, the researchers still considered gains of any nature to be a success as they were working with a recognized intractable population.

**Sharing**

Collaborative Strategic Reading, or CSR, is another technique which is dependent upon student interactions. CSR incorporates both cognitive and sociocultural theory. Like in *PALS*, CSR has specific steps or strategies to be applied when students are reading together. Findings suggest positive effects for the use of these techniques with younger readers, low readers, and learning disabled students, but unfortunately, the results for middle school students were less strong. The results at this level suggest that student engagement was as likely the result of the group collaboration and discourse as it was the actual program components (Vaughn, Klingner & Bryant, 2001).

There are other studies that test and recommend strategies tied to peer collaboration and self-monitoring strategies, such as the research done on *CORI*, or Concept-Oriented Reading Instruction, another program utilizing specific techniques which has proven to have positive effects on reading motivation and the comprehension of struggling readers (Guthrie, Wigfield & Lutz Klauda, 2010). For each structured group or partner approach explored, however, there were pros and cons. For example, in the
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PALS program, the reading partners didn’t always catch one another’s errors, in CSR students may have spent too much time discussing their assigned roles instead of the content of text, and in CORI struggling readers performed more poorly on inferring and literal information text comprehension after interventions using program techniques (Guthrie et al., 2009). “Teachers and students may miss the larger point of the strategies, that is, active comprehension...not just the use of many strategies. It is important for teachers to ensure that students understand that using strategies is a way to accomplish the goal of comprehension” (Kamil et al., 2008, p. 20).

Looking to conclusively support or reproach a single researched-based program that satisfactorily addresses the variables of age and ability proves to be challenging. Despite the mixed findings throughout this review, there was one recurring theme; research consistently reiterated the need to provide opportunities for students to authentically share, discuss, or dialogue with one another about reading. Specific format aside, it may come down to this: for disengaged and unproductive adolescents, the social interaction is critical.

In R5: The Sustained Silent Reading Makeover That Transformed Readers (2006), researchers Kelley and Clausen-Grace designed a less structured program for elementary students to add value to sustained silent reading. Their R5 Workshop approach included time for students to relax and read independently then reflect and respond in a written format, and conclude with a peer rap session to increase comprehension and reduce issues with fake reading (2006). In agreement with this approach, but considering slightly older students, in Motivating Readers through Voice and Choice the author determined that
teachers should capitalize on students’ desire to socialize and connect with other adolescents (Ranck-Buhr, 2012).

In the 2008 Institute of Education Sciences (IES) practice guide, *Improving Adolescent Literacy: Effective Classroom and Intervention Practices*, one of five evidence-based strategies proposed for improving adolescent literacy is to provide opportunities for extended discussion of text meaning and interpretation (Kamil et al., 2008). In *Rethinking Reading Comprehension Instruction: A Comparison of Instruction Strategies and Content Approaches* (2009), researchers McKeown, Beck, and Blake found that content approaches which include discussion-based ideas resulted in reader advantages in recall length and quality in narrative texts over strategies instructional approaches, which emphasize, for example, categorization of information. The researchers observed that, “The importance of making connections among ideas is paramount” (p. 246). And finally, the International Reading Association, in a position statement on the topic of *Leisure Reading* stated, “Teachers should provide time for students to talk with peers or perhaps blog or write reflections about what they’ve been reading, a practice that enhances students’ enjoyment and understanding” (2014, p. 2). This same recommendation was recurring in many other studies (Merga & Moon, 2016; Guthrie & Lutz Klauda, 2013, Guthrie et al., 2012; Pratt & Urbanowski, 2016). Whether it is with a specific program or simply using generic active reading techniques, working collaboratively is good for adolescent readers.

Nonetheless, a lack of structure in student communication is unadvisable. Poor readers often don’t ask questions or don’t know what questions to ask (Pratt & Urbanowski, 2016). In *Engagement Model of Instruction: A Motivational Rationale*
J.T. Guthrie and M.H. Davis note that struggling readers in middle school are, at best, passive. In their research recommendations, they suggest six characteristics needed to foster engagement and aid in achievement of reading competence. One of the six characteristics is collaboration support. According to researchers Adler and Rougle, it is advisable to develop and practice the use of a specific discussion process because it is challenging to lead the type of discussion that has an impact on students’ reading comprehension (2005). In the National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance (NCEE) practice guide (2008), Kamil et. al says, “…to be effective these types of discussions…need to give students the opportunity to think more deeply about the meaning of what they are reading” (p. 23).

There is fundamental value in shared literacy. “Struggling middle school readers want opportunities to share reading experiences with their teachers and their classmates” (Ivey, 1999, p. 375). “If students who struggle in reading are to become better and more enthusiastic, they need many opportunities just to enjoy the literate experience with peers when they are not also being monitored, corrected or tested” (Ivey, 1999, p. 377). Active reading based discussions may provide an effective medium, offering enough support to maintain engagement, but not so much as to create cumbersome tactics lacking in meaning or worth.

In the book Understanding Reading (1982), Frank Smith states, “On the positive side, reading can provide interest and excitement, stimulate and alleviate curiosity, console, encourage, rouse passions, relieve loneliness, assuage tedium or anxiety, palliate sadness, and on occasion induce sleep. On the negative side, reading can bore, confuse, and generate resentment” (pp. 190-191). Reading is a life-long and life-changing
experience. When older students remain stuck in the learning-to-read instead of the reading-to-learn phase, it must become the primary goal of a teacher—perhaps of our entire education system—to figure out how to fix it, to continuously improve, to find methods of building student confidence that may help push through walls of can’t and won’t.

The following hypothesis was proposed with the goal in mind of helping adolescent struggling readers who were disengaged and unproductive during independent reading times:

Seventh grade READ 180 students who read with a partner and have active reading based discussions will increase engagement and achievement during the independent reading portion of the READ 180 program; this will be evidenced through one or more of the following criteria: a decrease in the number of disengaged behaviors during reading time, an increase in the number of quizzes taken, or an increase in the number of words read as reported on their READING COUNTS! Student Reading Report.
CHAPTER TWO: DATA COLLECTION

Research Questions

In my seventh grade READ 180 classroom, one area which required continuous improvement efforts was independent reading time. In this prescribed program, students were required to do approximately 60 minutes of independent reading per week in three separate 20 minute increments. Although they were allowed to choose their own book, reading by themselves was a struggle for many students. Since independent reading time was one of four required program components, students not able to do it successfully were losing out on 25% of potential opportunities for personal growth in literacy.

In analyzing this concern, I hoped to better understand the reasons that the independent reading rotation was so challenging for my students and to generate some strategies to enable them to be more successful. For many of my READ 180 students, reading was not relaxing and absorbing; it was work. The resulting avoidant and/or fake reading they engaged in was detrimental, and it created classroom management problems. In other words, I was motivated to address this issue for more than one reason.

Having approached this dilemma from various angles in the past, I decided to try a vinegar and baking soda approach, a study that coupled two methods. I hoped to find out that if by working together the combined methods would encourage more productive reading among students who continued to lack the skills or motivation to read independently. The two methods were: reading with a partner and engaging in active reading based discussions.

I believed those two processes would unite, like vinegar and baking soda, to create a sort of chemical change in the readers, one which would empower them to grow
into successful independent readers. Based on these ideas, I formulated the following research questions (RQs):

While reading with a partner and encouraged to communicate as active readers...

1. Will students decrease their number of disengaged/off-task reading behaviors?
2. Will students pass more READING COUNTS! quizzes?
3. Will students read more words?

Answering these questions would help to determine if the independent reading portion of the READ 180 program should actually be less independent. Maybe I would discover that the option of reading with a partner should be an integral program modification, and pairing and sharing should be a scaffolded support available immediately each school year.

Research

Methods and Rationale

To identify the impact of partner reading and active reading discussions on student engagement and achievement, three types of data were collected.

First, a modified version of Kelley and Clausen-Grace’s Silent Reader Observation Checklist (2009) was used. This informal method of data collection involved classroom observations conducted by the teacher-researcher. These observations helped to confirm changes in student behavior during designated independent reading times. Off-task behaviors were tallied on the checklist, without correcting the student, allowing the teacher to identify levels of disengagement. Original baseline data from this checklist was collected prior to the start of the study as some data was needed to identify the target population. Whenever it was possible, students were observed when no conflicting teaching/conferencing was occurring to maximize the reliability of the data collected.
A second type of data was the number of \textit{READING COUNTS!} quizzes passed. Students were trained on how to take quizzes in the \textit{READING COUNTS!} program at the start of the year and were able to navigate the program soon after its introduction. Students took a ten question online quiz after completing each book and passed if they received a score of at least 70 percent.

A third type of data collection was the number of words read as recorded on the \textit{READING COUNTS!} Student Reading Reports. Every book in the \textit{READING COUNTS!} database had an identified word count; when a student passed a quiz over a book, they were credited with having read that number of words.

The word counts and number of quizzes taken were able to be tracked by teachers via an online administrative program called the Student Achievement Manager, or \textit{SAM}. This tool was highly reliable, instantly and consistently updating following successful testing. \textit{READ 180} also had an expert online support team available in the event that a program element was not working properly.

Two types of secondary, or informal, data collection were also used: monitoring of student reading logs and information drawn from student surveys during the final week of the study (see Appendix D and E).

Students used reading logs to record the number of pages read during each independent reading rotation. The goal was for students to read a minimum of ten pages in a chapter book at their Lexile level during a given 20 minute period. One difficulty that prevented the use of this as a formal source of data was the variance in the number of words per page of a text. For example, \textit{novels in verse} have far fewer words per page than a regular work of prose. This made data from this measurement tool potentially less valid.
Student inconsistency in filling out the logs presented an additional concern. Despite classroom expectations, readers who were disengaged or unproductive tended to be sporadic in filling out their reading logs. Because of these concerns, the logs were used as an informal, rather than a formal, source of comparative data for the study.

And finally, near the conclusion of the study, partners were surveyed by the teacher-researcher. Students were asked to reflect on their experiences with partnered reading. Student perceptions provided additional qualitative data for post-study analysis, supplying insight into the influence of variables beyond the control of the study such as personal tendencies toward introversion or extroversion.

Schedule

This study was conducted over an eight week period. Pre-observational data was collected in the four weeks immediately before the start of the formal four-week research period.

During week one of the actual study, students were assigned reading partners and they selected books for reading. Since it was important “…to establish a nonthreatening and supportive environment…(to) encourage acceptance of diverse viewpoints and discourage criticism and negative feedback on ideas” (Kamil et al., 2008, p. 24), students were given behavior expectations to be adhered to during reading times together.

During this week, partners reviewed the active reading techniques to be used in the study. To provide some structure for discussion, students working together used simple prompts, printed on two-sided bookmarks, both during and after reading (see Appendix F). They selected which technique to use according to the nature of the reading each day. For any active reading/self-monitoring strategy used, students were asked to
record the corresponding code onto their independent reading log (ex. ☒ would indicate the student noticed and discussed an unfamiliar vocabulary word). As a part of their active reading conversations, each student was encouraged to utilize one or two of these reading supports per reading session. They also recorded the number of pages read.

During the next weeks of the study, as partners read, discussed, and recorded, independent reading logs were checked to monitor the level of partner sharing. The number of pages read was also compared to prior periods when they were reading without a partner.

Upon completion of a reading selection, the reading partners took their book’s correlating *READING COUNTS!* quiz. This allowed them a chance to be credited with that book’s number of words read before selecting another title and beginning the cycle over again.

Throughout this period, the teacher made observations using the modified Silent Reading Behavior Checklist. Changes in behavior provided data for post-study analysis. Student surveys were completed during the final week of the study.

**Ethical Issues**

Some ethical issues which may have arisen during the research process were that of students or parents who may have felt that the educational methods used in, or expectations created by, the study caused either an unfair advantage in relationships or skills, or—on the contrary—a disadvantage, for participants. Fortunately, these problems did not occur.

If any forms of the above ethical issues should have arisen, they would have been handled on a one-to-one basis. Students would have been reminded that the research
period was limited and they would have been allowed to withdraw, if necessary. Students would have been reminded that everyone in the class had the same general expectations of reading for 60 minutes weekly and completing approximately 30 pages of reading during the independent reading rotational time periods, just as they had prior to the study period.
CHAPTER THREE: DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

Description of Data and Methods

My research was undertaken with the intent of finding out whether seventh grade READ 180 students—particularly those who were less engaged or productive than average—would read more during designated reading periods if they read with a partner rather than reading alone. READ 180 students in my school were generally those identified as testing two or more grade levels below proficiency and many fit descriptors such as dormant or reluctant readers. To research this topic, I intended to observe their reading behaviors and compare their productivity using data from the number of comprehension quizzes students passed and the total number of words they read both before and during the study.

In beginning this study, I opted to partner all students rather than only those who lacked engagement or productivity. Not only did this de-stigmatize the target population, or those being primarily observed, but the greater number of participants also allowed for better-fitting combinations of students and provided additional data useful for comparison. I considered various partner choices, weighing the pros and cons of pairing friends versus deliberately not pairing friends. Ultimately, I decided to put together students who, on their own, probably would not have chosen to work together. I did this to maintain a certain natural tension. I hoped this dynamic would be conducive to creating a working—and not a social—relationship.
Target Population

Despite universal participation, I established a target population of students who exhibited disengaged and unproductive behavior using a system of triangulated data. I reviewed the following three statistics: the total number of off-task behaviors in the pre-study period (grouping them from 10-14, 15-19, 20-30, or 30+); any student who had taken fewer than five quizzes prior to the study, putting them below the first quarter goal (grouping them from zero-two, three, or four-five); and any student that had fewer than 25,000 words read, putting them below the first quarter goal (grouping them from 0-4.9K, 5K-10K, 11K-15K, 16K-20K, and 21K-25K). These groupings allowed me to see patterns of low, medium, and high performance in each area, as well as some low-medium or medium-high delineations, for further clarity when needed.

Any student who appeared on all three sets of data was automatically placed in the target population; students who appeared on only one list, were not. Students on two of the three lists, were ranked according to category and level of need. Of these eight students, five more were added to the list. The identified target population ended up as 17 of my 36 students or approximately 47% of all seventh grade READ 180 students.

After letters of informed consent were distributed, our first official partner reading time finally came, and the novelty of it spelled success. This initial success, however, gave way to a pattern of up and down days. Through it all, I observed, noting changes in student behavior and striving to discern whether or not partner reading was adding value to my students’ READ 180 experience.
Research Questions

RQ #1: Disengaged Behaviors

While reading with a partner and encouraged to communicate as active readers, will students decrease their number of disengaged, or off-task, reading behaviors?

I utilized my modified Silent Reading Behavior Checklist to formally observe my students while they read; first, I made observations for a period of approximately four weeks prior to the start of the study while they read independently and, next, for four weeks during the study while they read with a partner. I specifically monitored for/tallied disengaged or off-task behaviors such as a reader’s eyes straying from the text or talking which was unrelated to reading. The following bar graphs show the difference between these behaviors before the study and during the study. Tallied behaviors were averaged using the following formula: total number of tallies divided by the total number of observed days=average # of disengaged/off-task behaviors per day. When observing for behaviors such as looking away from the book, intervals of at least one minute separated tallies indicating sustained off-task behaviors or a repeated loss of sustained focus.

Figure 1 shows the average number of disengaged/off-task behaviors—by category—in the pre and during study periods. The category of teacher redirects was added after observations began and there was a recognized need for it.
Figure 1
*Average Off-Task Reading Behaviors All Classes*

The data in Figures 2 to 6 represents the average disengaged/off-task reading behaviors by individuals in each class period during the same time frames. Each item on a horizontal axis represents one student. Members of the target population are starred.

Figure 2
*Average Off-Task Behaviors Period 1*
Figure 3
Average Off-Task Behaviors Period 3

Figure 4
Average Off-Task Behaviors Period 4

Figure 5
Average Off-Task Behaviors Period 7
In comparing the results of pre and during study reading behaviors, several things became evident. First of all, there were clearly dominant categories of disengaged/off-task reading behaviors: looking away from the text and off-task talking. This particular school year, I have fewer students falling asleep or switching books than other years, and during the study period, lesser problem behaviors such as these were nearly eliminated. Interestingly, the average number of teacher redirects stayed approximately the same.

Not surprisingly, the biggest issue during the study was no longer looking away from the book, but instead, talking that was unrelated to the reading. Since they were working with a built-in buddy, this issue was not surprising. However, unlike the off-task talking being done prior to the study which was often disruptive and prolonged, the majority of the off-task interactions during the study were innocuous exchanges between partners, generally brief, and ending when one or the other partner called the duo back to work. Still, there were exceptions to this behavior. In 1999, Fuchs et al. concluded from their research with older struggling readers, that sometimes there were not enough strong readers to take the lead in reading partnerships. Similarly in my study, a handful of
partners engaged in on-going playful, argumentative, or flirtatious behavior that hindered progress. In most of these instances, neither partner seemed accepting of—or able to—act as leader. There were also times when one reader was noticeably bored by a partner who was reading or processing at a slower rate. In most cases, these manifested as polite glances away from a book, requests to use the restroom, or temporary relief found in the form of shoe-tying, etc.

There were moments when I watched in silent awe as literally every student in a class period was actively engaged in real reading, and I wondered why I hadn’t done this sooner. Then there were moments of utter dismay when I looked at partnerships going haywire in every corner of the room, and I wondered how soon I could end this little experiment. In this valuable period of watching, I worked to find my balance of non-invasive outside observer to classroom teacher responsible for student learning. I tried to remain approximately as interactive as I would be during the regular independent reading periods prior to the study. I would call students back to their work if they strayed too much, but I allowed them time to first redirect themselves because much of true READ 180 reading time is done when I am teaching a small group or working one-to-one with students, and I am, therefore, unable to heavily monitor. At times I intervened to encourage partners to take turns reading by paragraph, instead of by page or chapter, if it was evident that one or the other was prone to drifting off when it was not his or her turn to read.

What I saw over time was that there was much more actual reading being done. This was especially true for the target population. In the same way a gym buddy helps a person exercise, the presence of a waiting reading buddy helped to increase the
observable engagement of many of these students. Nonetheless, I often witnessed partners reading well below their actual Lexile levels. Author-researcher Kylene Beers described the need for different types of reading confidence: cognitive, text, and social-emotional (2003). Because I had partnered students who were not entirely comfortable with one another, selecting easy books may have resulted from a need for the social-emotional confidence to read something well. When they were reading at higher levels, they were not processing as deeply as I would have liked or expected; this was reflected in the length of time it took them to answer quiz questions, often needing to revisit portions of a text to review content. In these instances, students may have had text confidence but lacked the cognitive confidence necessary for authentic comprehension.

A few partnerships were responsible about the sharing portion of the pair and share reading, regularly stopping to ask or answer questions, make a prediction, add comments or connections, or summarize a section of the reading. However, the great majority limited their communication to remarks on unfamiliar vocabulary. I believe that deepening discussions between student partners would be possible, but it would require more time, more training, and more trust. I believe that if students were provided these things, they would also gain the confidence necessary to attempt more challenging reads.

In summary, during the study individual off-task reading behaviors decreased—in some cases dramatically. Those behaviors remaining were less widespread or indicative of disengagement. Most appeared to be the result of natural social interactions between people together at work.
RQ #2: Quizzes Passed

While reading with a partner and encouraged to communicate as active readers, will students pass more READING COUNTS! quizzes?

READ 180 students take online comprehension quizzes after reading a book. A score of 70% or greater is considered passing and allows a student to select a new book. Lower percents require a reread/retake. These grades become an important part of their overall grade for the class. In my classroom, minimum goals are set at passing five quizzes per quarter, or ten per semester, in hopes that all students will have taken and passed a minimum of 20 comprehension quizzes by the end of a given school year. Because books vary so widely in length and difficulty, this goal is checked in collaboration with the total number of words read. Students are encouraged to read at their Lexile level, although this is often not done.

In READ 180, students may also take quizzes over short online articles called eReads. Similar to a nonfiction magazine article, an eRead offers optional audio support and culminates with a five-question quiz. Due to their length they require less sustained engagement, but they have value because they provide practice for modern standardized testing. Although eReads appear on the READING COUNTS! Student Reading Reports, they are generally completed as a software component. Therefore, the scores for these quizzes were not factored into the data that was compared for the quizzing done during independent reading time. A teacher read-aloud book at the start of the year was also removed from the comparative data. To reiterate: the data for the figures in this section—and the following section on total number of words read—do not include any information from READING COUNTS! quizzing done over eReads or teacher read-alouds as they
were determined to be too different in nature from what was being evaluated in this research study.

When taking an RC! quiz, students are allowed and encouraged to use their books for checking answers, if needed. During the study, partners were permitted to sit side-by-side and test simultaneously on their own personal learning device (PLD). There is a pool of 30 possible questions per story. This meant when two students were each taking a ten-question quiz over the same story, there were times when they happened upon a few of the same questions; yet, they usually had a good variety of dissimilar ones. My policy was for students to try and answer on their own first but to allow consultation when uncertain about answers.

The data in Figures 7 to 11 represents a comparison of the total number of RC! quizzes taken by individual students in each class period. Different colors on the bar graph show the number of quizzes taken during the entire first semester of the 2017-2018 school year, the first four weeks of the second semester, and the following four weeks of the study period (both as stated earlier). Each item on a horizontal axis represents one student. Members of the target population are starred.

![Figure 7](image)

*Figure 7*

*Total Quizzes Passed Period 1*
Figure 8
Total Quizzes Passed Period 3

Figure 9
Total Quizzes Passed Period 4

Figure 10
Total Quizzes Passed Period 7
Figure 12 shows the total number of RC! quizzes taken by each class in the pre and during study periods.

Based on the number of quizzes taken during the study period, as illustrated in Figure 12, I concluded that student reading engagement and achievement increased while
reading with a partner. This was true for both the target population and the rest of the students, as well. It was evident in watching the work in the classroom with several partners regularly finishing books every two to three days.

In their 2014 research, Lutz Klauda and Guthrie found that some struggling readers experience more than an issue with motivation or engagement; they have cognitive impediments. In my study, I found that although there were many mutually balanced partnerships, there were a few that had a clear leader, a stronger partner leading the way in both reading and testing. Sometimes this was the simply the result of more maturity or confidence, but sometimes it appeared to be the result of a partner with a higher Lexile and more skill. With small class sizes, it was difficult to match students not only for social compatibility, but also for ability and work-style, so resulting imbalances such as these did occasionally occur. In all cases, it appeared good for the less competent or confident student to ride the wave of productivity or success created by his or her more dominant half. My period seven class was marked by this dynamic with several partnerships having a clear leader and a clear follower. Both roles seemed to be embraced. Surprisingly, one of the leaders emerged from the target population and was one of my least productive independent readers. This was a capable, but frequently off-task, female partnered with another very responsible, but very quiet, classmate. The former found herself thrust into the role of leader and excelling at it.

As mentioned in the section above, most students were reading below their actual Lexile, an issue that is hard to combat in READ 180. I anticipated that reading with a partner would bolster students’ willingness to take on more challenging books, but—at least in such a short study period—that did not generally happen. Typically, when they
did test, students were very successful. In only one partnership did I have an issue where after reading, one of the partners failed two tests over consecutively read books while the other partner passed both. This was a mixed gender partnership with chummy, but at times awkward or frustrated interactions between the two, and when they were testing there was limited or no communication. I had also noted that on several occasions the student who failed the quizzes would lose focus when not the one reading.

Overall, there was an uptick in the rate of quiz taking during the study period, with a feeling of some enthusiasm for completing stories and selecting new titles. As we neared the end of the study period, partners were actively working to squeeze in one more quiz. The energy behind this push was contagious. At times, I even helped to facilitate finding shorter books to aid in it. The need-for-speed, however, was also a contributing factor in reading below ability levels, an issue to be mediated should I utilize partner reading in the future.

**RQ #3: Total Words Read**

*While reading with a partner and encouraged to communicate as active readers, will students read more words?*

Each time a student passes a *READING COUNTS!* quiz, the total number of words in the book is credited to that student on their *READING COUNTS!* Student Reading Report. There is a point value assigned to every book which has an *RC!* quiz. This point value is based on a combination of word count, Lexile level, and text complexity. *READING COUNTS!* point goals can be set for each student and used as tools in measuring progress. In my *READ 180* classroom, I rely on goal setting based on the individual components of number of quizzes passed and number of words read, rather
than encouraging students to reach a targeted number of points. I prefer the concreteness of these elements to the somewhat more obscure point system. In the same way that accuracy and power define a well-rounded athlete, the number of quizzes passed and the number of words read work together to reflect overall advancement. Both represent different—yet important—accomplishments for a struggling reader. To illustrate, one student may pass four quizzes with a sum total of 10,000 words, while another passes only a single quiz but is credited with over 50,000 words read.

The time constraints set by the study created an environment more impactful to the variable of number of words read than to the other variables under examination. This was especially true in regard to the non-targeted population of students who were reading longer books prior to the study. The need for definable time increments useful for comparison mandated a start and end date to the study period and a similar period of time set prior to the study to contrast against. This meant some students happened to finish—and get credited with—reading a 40,000 word book during the four-week pre-study period although they may have been, in actuality, reading that book for the two months prior. In contrast, other students who showed zero words read in the pre-study period, may have found themselves in the middle of a book during those same four weeks, perhaps making progress, but not finishing. Therefore, they were not able to receive credit for any words read during the allotted time frame. Hopefully, the final averaged numbers reflect a balance of the two issues. Initially, I proposed using number of pages read instead of words read to lessen the effect of this issue, but I was rightly concerned about the inconsistency of daily use of student reading logs. I was worried the data would not be as reliable as that retrieved from the READ 180 Student Achievement Manager.
(SAM). More information on this will be provided in the informal review of student reading logs.

The data in Figures 13 to 17 represents a comparison of the total number of *READING COUNTS* words read by individual students in each class period. Different colors on the bar graph show the number of words read during the entire first semester of the 2017-2018 school year, the first four weeks of the second semester, and the following four weeks of the study period. Each item on a horizontal axis represents one student. Members of the target population are starred.
Figure 15
Total Words Read Period 4

Figure 16
Total Words Read Period 7

Figure 17
Total Words Read Period 8
Figure 18 shows the total number of READING COUNTS! words read per class period in the four weeks prior to the study and the following four weeks during the study.

Figure 18
Total Words Read All Classes

Figure 15, representing my period four class, the great majority of whom are part of the target population, perhaps best supports the conclusion that reading with a partner can lead to an increase in the number of words read, another achievement reflective of engagement. The total number of words read by this class is noticeably less than other class periods. The number of words read during the entire first semester was extremely low. The top performing student in this class had not met the first quarter goal of reading 25,000 words even by the end of the third quarter. Yet, during the four-week study period, this class performed comparatively well. There was not a drastic difference between them and their counterparts in other periods as shown in Figure 18. These findings reflected an increase of engagement. The research team of Kelley and Clausen-
Grace together had studied and reported on issues related to struggling readers and engagement in both 2006 and 2009. In their work they discussed the known avoidance tactics of fake readers and experimented with ways to eliminate them. Their R5 Workshop included some components loosely resembling the partner reading in my study. Reading with a partner had apparently weeded out the fake and avoidant reading previously prevalent in my period four class and helped to level the playing field in reference to their number of words read. As a class, they had the same amount of time available as other sections and the same general expectations for work to be completed, but they consistently underperformed when compared with students from other class periods. They sat—with books open—reading far fewer words in equal time periods. The data on number of words read showed that when reading with a partner, period four students began engaging in real reading rather than fake reading.

For those students who were not part of the target population, reading with a partner had somewhat less dramatic effects, but nonetheless, appeared to have benefits. These kids may have been making progress as independent readers, successfully finding books at the right level and interest, or perhaps utilizing audio supports to help them find and finish books. For the most part, these students were cooperative with the partnering and made it work, although by the end of the study period, some of them were ready to go back to reading books on their own. Not all though; several were enjoying the change of routine and the burgeoning friendships.

In a favorable way, I witnessed kids select a variety of books and figure out how to approach reading a text. With formats varying from regular chapter books, to plays, to graphic novels, to biographies, and everything in-between, they would discuss and decide
how to read together, often with fun and exciting results. They were all cooperative participants, aware sometimes that they were the weaker reader, less fluent or vocabulary-strong than their partner, but still mostly motivated and willing to read aloud. My best moments as an observer came when I would hear natural character expression, self-monitoring questions or connections, or authentic emotional responses to the stories. Ultimately, not only were more words read, more words were read well.

**Secondary Data**

In addition to analyzing the data on reading behaviors, number of quizzes, and total words read, I informally collected and reviewed two other types of data: student reading logs and results from post-study student surveys.

**Average Pages Read**

The average number of pages read was utilized as an informal, rather than formal, source of data collection for two important reasons: one, the number of words on a given page can vary greatly, making it a fickle determinant for comparison, and two, *READ 180* students are inconsistent in the use of their reading logs which are used to record the number of pages read each day. It must be noted that many of my truly resistant readers had insufficient data on their student reading logs to compare against. Also, although the general amount of class time designated for reading was 20 minutes, there were situations when available time was slightly more or less which also impacted the average number of pages read per day.

Figures 19 to 22 show the average number of pages read per day on the reading logs of seven arbitrarily chosen students. Figure 19 shows individual data and Figures 20-22 collective data. In Figure 19, items on the horizontal axis each represent one student.
Three of the seven students were a part of the target population (starred numbers); four were not. The bars on all figures contrast the average reading done on four randomly selected days in both the pre and during study periods.

Figure 19
*Average Pages Per Day Individual*

Figure 20
*Average Pages Per Day Target Population*
The data shows that in every case there was an increase in the average number of pages read, sometimes minimal but most times, marked. The number of pages read increased in both the target (Figure 20) and the non-target (Figure 21) populations, and as a whole, approximately doubled (Figure 22).

The students represented in Figure 19 were reading a wide variety of books, varying from grade level chapter books with standard print to below grade level books with large font or numerous illustrations. In all cases, there was an increase in pages read despite differences in amount of text per page. This data would support the hypothesis...
that reading with a partner can increase the engagement and achievement of seventh grade READ 180 students.

**Post-Research Student Survey**

The second source of informal data was the Post-Research Student Participant Interview (see Appendix E). This was a five-question paper survey given to each student to complete after the study was done. Students were asked to spread out in the classroom to allow for privacy. I reminded them that all data collected was for this study alone and would be kept confidential. I wanted to assure students that if they had any negative comments about their partners, those remarks were safe to divulge and important for me to note. When all students in a class period were finished with the survey, I asked if anyone had comments or questions they wanted to share with the group. They generally did not use take advantage of this opportunity. This may have been due to a feeling of peer pressure (ex. if someone said aloud that they didn’t like partner reading but others did) or just because they felt they had adequately expressed themselves on paper and had no more to add.

Once collected, I read through all the responses for analysis. Then, I condensed the data from each question, and then further classified those findings into general categories of positive or negative comments. Figures 23 and 24 show the group responses to questions one and two on the survey. There were 36 respondents.
In her 1999 research, Gay Ivey showed that struggling readers wanted shared literacy opportunities. This data would seem to confirm that. It showed that more than 80% of students rated reading with a partner at a seven or above on a scale of one to ten. It also showed that approximately 70% responded with a definitive yes, they would
choose to read with a partner again, while fewer than 15% gave a definite no, they would not. Most of the remaining responses suggested they would be agreeable if they had control over variables such as picking their own partner. This positive feedback provided a qualitative complement to the quantitative findings: partner reading was an activity they deemed enjoyable or worthwhile, another factor likely to have led to increased engagement and achievement.

When the specific student responses were classified into general categories, the great majority of positive comments related to how reading with a partner helped them to stay focused or get more work done. The second most common type of response involved the words fun and friendship. The final groupings addressed ways they grew in skills, such as vocabulary, due to a helpful partner or their combined partner efforts.

The negative responses were also organized and categorized. The most common complaints or concerns involved partner reading that was boring, frustrating, or unproductive. For example, working with a partner who read too slowly or quietly, made errors, or was absent too often. After these concerns were issues with arguing/fighting or mutually off-task behaviors (“messing around”). Finally, came issues with an off-task partner, for example, one who would not read on their turn or stop talking to people outside the partnership.

Students were also asked what they would change if they had to repeat the experience. The two most popular answers were split almost 50-50 between “nothing” and “my partner.” There were also responses suggesting that different books or a more accommodating space would be helpful; the classroom was small, and some kids felt that it was distracting to have many people reading aloud at the same time. One student
recommended groups of three. In my period eight class, I ended up with one group of three due to multiple absences with two different partners early in the study. This turned out to be a surprisingly good fit. Because of it, one of my unexpected discoveries was that in some cases, groups of three may be more beneficial than groups of two.

Conclusions

I began this study hoping to discover whether reading with partners and talking about texts would help my seventh grade READ 180 students increase their engagement and achievement. I had witnessed repeated minutes, hours, days, and even weeks of wasted time during our READ 180 independent reading rotation as my struggling readers failed to find books they could or would read. I had discovered through research on PALS, CSR, CORI, and R5 that many educators have attempted some type of partner reading, and that despite varying degrees of success with specific strategies, there was a prevalent recurring theme: adolescents want to socialize; let them. The idea of reading with partners offered the possibility of increased engagement, and with that, the hope for improved achievement. I could not physically replicate myself as a teacher to meet the needs of every student, but I could empower every student to find their own inner teacher as a partner and peer mentor in reading.

The results of my research seem to have confirmed that pairing and sharing is effective. Although not without its drawbacks, quantitative and qualitative data both confirm that when my middle school struggling readers read with an assigned partner, they very consistently passed more comprehension quizzes, read more words, and turned more pages, all while seeming to enjoy the experience and in some cases grow new skills and friendships along the way.
Because of small class sizes, differing ability levels, and sometimes challenging personalities or behaviors, there was art as well as science involved in partnering the right students, but when it worked, it worked well. Even when it was not perfect, I would remind myself that I was not comparing the results to an ideal, but to a very real standard of what my reluctant readers were producing on their own as independent readers day after day, and unfortunately, that was often a very low-set bar. When compared to this, the results were sometimes astonishing.
CHAPTER FOUR: ACTION PLAN

As a result of my research study, I will implement some form of partner reading in the future. READ 180 will continue to have independent reading as a program component, but in coming years, I will know that for some truly averse readers—and for others, too—reading with a partner is likely to increase their engagement and achievement. Pairing and sharing will become a permanent tool in my teaching toolkit; I may utilize variations that are different from my actual research study, but I will not hesitate to put students together if it is apparent that reading alone is a recipe for failure instead of success.

In addition to integrating practices specifically related to this study, I also anticipate reading professional journals. After my own investigation, I have gained a deeper appreciation for the educational research conveyed in these journals. I want to stay current on findings related to the topic of struggling middle school readers, and more precisely, on discoveries which will help those readers increase their engagement and achievement.

Pairing

During the study, all students were partnered up and given the same expectations (see Appendix D). All kids read together for a specified four-week period. In the future, I may partner only select individuals and/or modify the duration of the partnerships. Or I may partner all students but rotate partners on a regular basis. Or alternatively, maybe there would be some long-term partnerships so that partners could develop reading relationships and grow into new skill levels together. Another variation may involve grouping three kids instead of partnering two.
Sharing

Other adjustments might be made in the sharing portion of the pair and share reading. Throughout the study, I said that students were to be encouraged to have active reading based discussions. Encouraged, not required. Unfortunately, for many of my naturally passive READ 180 learners, encouraged was not enough. In the article The Social Side of Engaged Reading for Young Adolescents (2014), Ivey states that cognitive demonstrations, or think-alouds, are often necessary to display what is done internally by a skilled reader. This type of modeling was lacking in my study. Since sharing between partners was underutilized and it was to replace the self-monitoring done internally by an independent reader, I would take more time to clearly define and model worthwhile conversations about a text.

I also believe that the sharing portion could be improved using writing. In their 2003 research, Guthrie and Davis found that passive readers need collaboration support, so student writing could take the form of an interactive Google Classroom assignment which could be responded to by the partner or teacher. Blogs, paper and pencil journals, and multi-media projects could also inspire sharing and response to texts on deepening or more creative levels. Not all work would need to be graded, but it should be regularly monitored and acknowledged to assure its use and cultivate its quality.

Space and Materials

Despite stated concerns on post-study participant surveys, I could not make adjustments to my classroom space to decrease the noise created by numerous students reading aloud simultaneously, but I could stagger the reading groups so this would create less of an issue. And although there is currently a limited budget for adding book titles to
the *READ 180* classroom Lexile library, I could address the students’ concerns over book choice by allowing them to use our school library as an option for finding books with their partner, provided there were multiple copies available either on-site or within the district. They could also utilize their eBook, or electronic book collections on their PLDs.

With these considerations and modifications in place, I plan to continue pairing and sharing in the 2018-2019 school year and beyond.
CHAPTER FIVE: PLAN FOR SHARING

First, I will share a simple version of my findings with my students. Because the results were positive and consistently showed that partner reading increased engagement and achievement, I want them to be empowered by this knowledge and use it as a tool for their own self-improvement as a reader.

Next, our district team of middle school and high school READ 180 teachers meets monthly to discuss topics and issues related to our program. At an upcoming Professional Learning Community meeting (PLC), I will request time to share the PowerPoint I developed which highlights the results of this study. This format will allow me to tailor my feedback to a group of teachers with highly similar student populations who have highly similar difficulty in engaging students during independent reading.

Finally, I will also share this PowerPoint with seventh grade language arts teachers and the school media specialist to further elaborate details of the research as interest dictates. They work with the same student population and may benefit from the study findings.

Reflecting on next steps and disseminating the findings of this action research will demonstrate my own efforts at kaizen, or continuous improvement. For my remaining years as an educator, I will strive to turn students with attitudes of can’t and won’t into those with attitudes of “I can” and “I will.” In these efforts, pairing and sharing will assuredly help.
References


Williams, L. M., Hall, K. W., Hedrick, W. B., Lamkin, M., & Abendroth, J. (2013). Developing an observation instrument to support authentic independent reading
## Appendix A
Silent Reading Behaviors Checklist

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<th>Switches Book</th>
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Appendix B

READING COUNTS! Student Reading Report

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### Student Reading Report

**STUDENT:**

**School:** Carl Ben Eielson Middle School

**Teacher:** 7th Grade

**Class:** CAMERONP_P3_R180_1718

**Time Period:** 08/24/17 – 06/29/18

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### Goal Progress: Points

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<td>From Homeless To Higher Ed (eReads)</td>
<td>Leonard, Ashley</td>
<td>800</td>
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<td>Classic Tales Of Terror (READ 180. Level 4, Stage B)</td>
<td>Wells, H.G.</td>
<td>810</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>T</td>
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<td>03/15/18</td>
<td>Donner Party (Read 180)</td>
<td>Olson, Tod</td>
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<td>O</td>
<td>100%</td>
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<tr>
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<td>1</td>
<td>822</td>
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<td>Tunnel Of Terror And Other Stories</td>
<td>Stamper, J.B.</td>
<td>630</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>Q</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>5</td>
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<tr>
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<td>5.3</td>
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<td>Glenn, Karen</td>
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<td>NR</td>
<td>80%</td>
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<tr>
<td>10/12/17</td>
<td>Just Kidding!</td>
<td>Brown, Jordan</td>
<td>420</td>
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<td>N</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>09/22/17</td>
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<td>Testa, Maria</td>
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<td>6.4</td>
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**TOTALS**

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<th>Lexile® (AVG.)</th>
<th>READING LEVEL (AVG.)</th>
<th>GRL</th>
<th>SCORE (AVG.)</th>
<th>POINTS (AVG.)</th>
<th>WORDS READ (AVG.)</th>
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<td>635</td>
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### Using This Report

**Purpose:** This report provides a comprehensive review of students' participation in the Reading Counts! program.

**Follow-Up:** Review the data points on the report for indicators of low performance and intervene accordingly.
February 12, 2018

Dear Students, Parents, and Guardians:

My name is Patricia Cameron, and I teach grade 7 READ 180 at Carl Ben Eielson Middle School. I am currently pursuing my Masters in Curriculum and Instruction with an emphasis in Reading at Minnesota State University Moorhead. As part of the requirements to fulfill my degree, I need to carry out an action research study. This study will be conducted in my classroom during the second semester of the current school year. The purpose of this letter is to invite students to participate in the study and to obtain parental or guardian approval.

Students in my READ 180 classes are expected to read books independently and take comprehension tests over the material. During the study, students will be asked to read and discuss books working with a partner – instead of reading independently – to contrast and examine the difference in engagement and productivity.

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with your child will remain confidential and will not be disclosed. Your decision whether or not to allow your child to participate will not negatively affect his or her grades, future relationships with the teacher/researcher, or the school. Participation in this study will not interfere with learning the district directed curriculum or with the READ 180 program expectations. If you decide to allow your child to participate, you are free to have their participation discontinued at any time without any consequence.

If you have any questions, please contact me at any time. My email is camerop@fargo.k12.nd.us and my classroom phone number is 701-446-1841. Any questions about your rights may be directed to Dr. Lisa L. Karch, Chair of the MSUM Institutional Review Board, at 218-477-2699 or by email at: irb@mnstate.edu.

Thank you very much for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Patricia M. Cameron

Please sign below indicating your decision regarding this study.

I agree to allow my child to participate in the study explained above.

__________________________________________  _________________________
Signature of Participant                          Date

__________________________________________  _________________________
Signature of Parent or Guardian                   Date

__________________________________________  _________________________
Signature of Teacher/Researcher                   Date
### Appendix D
Sample Student Reading Log with Coding

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Book Title</th>
<th>Total Pages</th>
<th>Start Page</th>
<th>End Page</th>
<th>Notes</th>
<th>Quiz Score %</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1-24</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>24</td>
<td>32</td>
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<tr>
<td>12-8</td>
<td><em>First on the Moon</em></td>
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<td>4</td>
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<td></td>
<td>14</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
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<td>5</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>14</td>
<td>18</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2-12</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>18</td>
<td>43</td>
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<tr>
<td>2-14</td>
<td><em>Creatures Inset From School</em></td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
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<td>41</td>
<td>50</td>
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<tr>
<td>3-6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>50</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>Quiz 60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-8</td>
<td><em>Varnished</em></td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Done</td>
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<tr>
<td>3-9</td>
<td><em>Happy Buger</em></td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Done</td>
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<tr>
<td>3-12</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>10</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Quiz 60</td>
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Appendix E
Post-Study Participant Survey

Student Name ____________________________ Date __________________

Post-Research Student Participant Interview

1. On a scale of 1-10 (with 1 being bad and 10 being great), how did you feel about reading with a partner? Why did you choose that rating?

_________________________________________________________________________

_________________________________________________________________________

_________________________________________________________________________

_________________________________________________________________________

2. If you were allowed to read with a partner again in this class during independent reading time, would you choose to do so? Why or why not?

_________________________________________________________________________

_________________________________________________________________________

_________________________________________________________________________

_________________________________________________________________________

3. What parts of reading with a partner went well?

_________________________________________________________________________

_________________________________________________________________________

_________________________________________________________________________

_________________________________________________________________________

4. What parts of reading with a partner were challenging?

_________________________________________________________________________

_________________________________________________________________________

_________________________________________________________________________

_________________________________________________________________________

5. If you had to repeat this experience, what would you want to change?

_________________________________________________________________________

_________________________________________________________________________

_________________________________________________________________________
Partner Reading
Rules and Expectations

1. Stay on task.

2. Sit side-by-side or directly across from one another; be close enough to hear each other easily.

3. Take turns.

4. Track in your own book when the other person is reading.

5. Share your own ideas and questions, and listen respectfully as your partner shares theirs.

ACTIVE READERS
self-monitor as they read.
Record the symbol/code and page # on your reading log each time you use a self-monitoring technique.

☑ Vocabulary
“_______ is an unfamiliar word to me.”
“_______ is an unfamiliar phrase/expression to me.”

@Question
“What did that mean? I didn’t understand the part when…”

©Comment/Connect
“I liked (or I didn’t like) when…”
“That part reminds me of…”
“I feel like…”
“I learned that…”

§Summarize
“I can retell the important parts of what I read…”

💡 Infer & Predict
“I figured out that____ because in the book it said…”
“I predict that____ will happen because…”