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Case Studies of Successful Schoolwide Enrichment Model-Reading (SEM-R) Classroom Implementations

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> When I read I feel wonderful. I feel amazing, really amazing. I read silent when I'm reading so I can keep the words in my head. It's fun to read. I feel all kinds of emotions when I read, like joyful, happy, amazing, and wonderful.
>
> (reflection from SEM-R student log, February 2010)

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine the scaling up of the Schoolwide Enrichment Model in Reading (SEM-R) in 11 elementary and middle schools in geographically diverse sites across the country. Qualitative comparative analysis was used in this study, with multiple data sources compiled into11 in-depth school case studies summarizing findings from researcher observations of the SEM-R and comparison classrooms. Teachers were assigned to implement either the SEM-R for 3 hours each week as part of their reading program or to continue teaching their regular reading curriculum during their reading block. Three core student categories emerged across all schools, beginning with increased student enjoyment in reading for students using SEM-R. The second most dominant student finding related to how SEM-R was effectively used to challenge talented readers, and the third related to increased self-regulation in students as observed by teachers, coaches, and principals. Teacher findings that emerged across all schools focused on the perceived benefits of SEM-R for both students and teachers, teachers use of differentiated reading instructional practices and how they were enhanced after the SEM-R was implemented, and the professional benefits and challenges experienced during their successful implementation of the SEM-R. Over 90% of the teachers implemented the SEM-R with high fidelity, and this approach was considered beneficial to all students, including those who achieved at very high and very low levels of reading comprehension by teachers, principals, and literacy coaches.

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CHAPTER 1: Using the Schoolwide Enrichment Model to Create a Culture of Challenging Reading and Differentiate Reading Instruction for All Readers

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Introduction

The Schoolwide Enrichment Model Reading Framework (SEM-R) is an enrichment-based reading program designed to stimulate interest in and enjoyment of reading, promoting higher reading achievement by enabling students to select high-interest books that are slightly to moderately above their current reading levels. In this study, researchers examined the implementation of the SEM-R in 11 schools across the country. In previous research, the SEM-R has been found to be effective at increasing reading fluency and comprehension (Reis & Boeve, 2009; Reis, Eckert, McCoach, Jacob, & Coyne, 2008; Reis & Housand, 2009; Reis et al., 2007; Reis, McCoach, Little, Muller, & Kaniskan, in press). When teachers implement the SEM-R, they analyze students' strengths and interests and provide reading instruction through the use of enrichment pedagogy, including curricular differentiation (both acceleration and enrichment) and instructional differentiation. The goal of the SEM-R is increased student reading fluency, comprehension, and increased enjoyment of and self-regulation in reading for students who are at greatest risk for developing reading problems or becoming aliterate, or being able to read but choosing not to read.

The purpose of this study was to examine the scaling up of the SEM-R in 11 elementary and middle schools across the country in which local teachers provided support for colleagues implementing this differentiated reading enrichment approach. Professional development about the SEM-R was organized and implemented the summer before the program began. Each school sent a team of administrators and teachers to a SEM-R workshop with special guidance for coaching, and these individuals subsequently conducted introductory professional development for other participating teachers in their own schools. Accordingly, this study examined the implementation of this enriched approach to reading supported by local school-level coaches as opposed to a SEM- R research team, as has occurred in previous research (Reis & Boeve, 2009; Reis et al., 2008; Reis & Housand, 2009; Reis et al., 2007; Reis et al., in press). This current qualitative study scaled up previous research by (a) increasing the number and the geographic and demographic diversity of schools, (b) decreasing direct involvement from the research team in supporting classroom teachers' implementation of the intervention,

and (c) using local coaches to provide professional development and coaching for implementation.

Qualitative comparative analysis was used in this study, with data collection that included finding, gathering, or generating materials that were subsequently analyzed (Strauss, 1987; Yin, 2002). Data were compiled into in-depth case studies for each school. Each individual case study, attached in subsequent chapters, summarizes findings from researcher observations of the SEM-R and comparison classrooms; interviews with SEM-R teachers, administrators, and school staff; and review of teacher and student logs, questionnaires, and other forms of communication.

Related Research

The research reviewed in this study focused on differentiation in reading, research conducted on the SEM-R, and research on student engagement and self-regulation in reading. A major theoretical influence on the SEM-R has been an emphasis on differentiated instruction using assessment data to support modification of curriculum and instruction to respond to differences in students' readiness, interests, and learning profiles (Renzulli, 1988; Tomlinson, 2001).

Differentiated Instruction

Differentiated instruction is based on the premise that learning is most effective when teachers are able to assess students' current levels of academic progress and learning styles and preferences and subsequently use this information to help students progress to more advanced levels of learning. Differentiation attempts to address the variations among learners in the classroom through multiple approaches that enrich, modify, and adapt instruction and curriculum to respond to students' individual needs (Renzulli, 1977, 1988; Tomlinson, 2001). Tomlinson (1999) emphasized that in differentiating the curriculum, teachers are not dispensers of knowledge, but organizers of learning opportunities. Differentiation of instruction suggests that students can be provided with materials and work at varied levels of difficulty through scaffolding, enrichment, acceleration, diverse kinds of grouping, and different time schedules (Tomlinson, 2001).

The most common strategy suggested in the literature to meet the needs of advanced readers is to accelerate their reading by providing them with material that is above their current grade level (Reis et al., 2004). Differentiated instruction in the SEM-R includes making adjustments to reading tasks and enabling individual students to read at levels that are targeted to their specific interests and levels of readiness. Tomlinson and Allan (2000) summarized some of the challenges teachers face when they try to differentiate, including concerns about planning and management, as well as issues of finding the time to prepare for state assessments, limited preparation time overall, professional development needs, and materials to challenge all students (Hertberg-Davis

& Brighton, 2006; Reis et al., 1993; VanTassel-Baska & Stambaugh, 2005). Recent research suggests that many teachers do not differentiate instruction on a regular basis. For example, in one recent study, little purposeful or meaningful differentiated reading instruction was found in reading instruction for elementary or middle school talented readers who read several grade levels ahead of their chronological peers (Reis et al., 2004). Researchers also found that above-grade level books were seldom available for these students in their elementary or middle school classrooms, and students were not encouraged to select more challenging books. Accordingly, these talented students made little continuous progress over the course of the year. Other research with middle school educators found that little differentiation occurs and that teachers and administrators believe advanced students are under-challenged in many middle school classrooms in the United States (Moon, Tomlinson, & Callahan, 1995). The current study was conducted as a qualitative investigation about the nature and type of differentiated reading strategies included in the SEM-R and whether and how they were implemented by a wider variety of teachers with a broad range of readers.

Previous Research on the SEM-R

The SEM-R is an enrichment-based reading program that is based on a widely used enrichment approach to learning called the Schoolwide Enrichment Model (Renzulli & Reis, 1997). In the context of the SEM-R, students read from self-selected, high-interest books that are slightly to moderately above their current reading levels, and teachers provide individualized, differentiated instruction. The SEM-R has been implemented in several previous research studies (Reis & Boeve, 2009; Reis et al., 2008; Reis & Housand, 2009; Reis et al., 2007; Reis et al., in press). In one study, a randomized design was used to investigate the use of the SEM-R for 12 weeks with third- through sixth- grade students from two low-socioeconomic, urban elementary schools. Teachers and students were randomly assigned to treatment or comparison classes. During the study, treatment and comparison group students participated in a direct instruction reading program in the morning, but in the afternoon, the comparison group received one hour of remedial reading instruction and test preparation while the treatment group participated in one hour of the SEM-R. Significant differences were found, favoring the SEM-R treatment group, in students' attitudes toward reading, reading comprehension, and reading fluency (Reis et al., 2007).

Another randomized design study investigated the use of the SEM-R for 16 weeks with third- through sixth-grade students in one suburban school and one urban elementary school (Reis et al., 2008). Again, teachers and students were randomly assigned to teach and participate in either treatment or comparison groups. The treatment and comparison group students participated in the regular basal reading program for one hour each morning. The comparison group received a second hour of the basal reading program instruction while the treatment group participated in SEM-R during the second hour of the reading program. Significant differences favoring the SEM-R treatment group were

found in reading fluency, but most of the variance was explained by the results in the urban school (Reis et al., 2008).

The SEM-R has also been implemented in urban schools with high populations of bilingual students (Reis & Housand, 2009). In this study, significant differences favoring the SEM-R group were found in oral reading fluency, suggesting that an enriched reading program that challenges and engages students produced higher oral reading fluency in both English and bilingual students when used in conjunction with a standard basal program as compared to the use of the standard basal reading program alone. In other research, an after-school SEM-R program was implemented to investigate whether increases in fluency and self-regulation in reading could be accomplished in less time (Reis & Boeve, 2009). Resulting benefits included significantly higher reading fluency for SEM-R participants in a program implemented for 20-25 hours after school for 6 weeks.

In summary, previous research (Reis & Boeve, 2009; Reis et al, 2008; Reis & Housand, 2009; Reis et al., 2007; Reis et al., in press) suggests that students of various achievement levels have benefitted from the SEM-R approach. Across a wide range of schools and classrooms, evidence has demonstrated that the SEM-R consistently supports achievement at least at the same levels and in some cases higher levels when compared to regular reading instruction (Reis & Boeve, 2009; Reis et al, 2008; Reis & Housand, 2009; Reis et al., 2007; Reis et al., in press).

Engagement and Enjoyment of Reading

Research links increased levels of student engagement to higher achievement in reading (Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000; Teale & Gambrell, 2007) and research about reading engagement has focused on the importance of increasing student motivation for reading (Gambrell, Palmer, Codling, & Mazzoni, 1996), and the role of student interest in higher reading achievement (Guthrie, 2004; Guthrie, Hoa, Wigfield, Tonks, & Perencevich, 2006; Meece & Miller, 1999).

Teale and Gambrell (2007) have found that engaged readers and writers use literacy skills to read for pleasure, engage in social interaction, and satisfy their own intellectual curiosity. Goodman (1986) also underscored the importance of engagement, finding that students read because it is enjoyable, interesting, or useful. Compton-Lilly (2007) discussed a connection between avid reading and engagement in reading, as did Guthrie and Wigfield, whose research has documented the relationship between engagement and motivation, as students who read more generally have higher motivation (Guthrie, 2004; Guthrie et al., 2006; Guthrie et al., 2007). Recommended instructional practices to increase reading motivation and comprehension from Guthrie and Wigfield's research are embedded in the SEM-R, including specific attention to supporting student autonomy, exposure to and having students read interesting texts, facilitating social

interactions related to reading, and forging strong relations between teachers and students (Guthrie et al., 2006; Wigfield & Guthrie, 2007).

Self-Regulated Learning

Another area embedded into the SEM-R is self-regulation, a multi-faceted construct that numerous theorists have conceptualized and operationally defined (Boekaerts, 1997; Schunk & Zimmerman, 2007; Zimmerman, 1989, 1990). Most theorists have argued that students who successfully self-regulate their learning engage in knowledge acquisition and learn strategies to adapt their behavior, personal processes, and environment to support their learning and goal attainment. Researchers have found students' effectiveness in the process of self-regulated learning varies based on academic context, personal effort, and performance outcomes, and that academic achievement is increased by the use of self-regulation strategies such as organizing, goal-setting, planning, self-evaluating, information seeking, record keeping, self-reflecting, self-monitoring, and reviewing (Boekaerts & Corno, 2005; Winne & Perry, 2000; Zimmerman & Martinez-Pons, 1990).

Schunk and Rice (1987, 1991) analyzed the effects of explicit instruction and modeling of self-regulation strategies on reading comprehension, finding that orienting students toward a specific goal and using verbal feedback resulted in greater increases in reading comprehension and self-efficacy. They also found that combining specific strategy instruction with modeling of the strategy to answer questions increased comprehension more than simply modeling the strategy or providing instruction on the strategy alone (Schunk & Rice, 1987). The modeling of and explicit instruction on effective strategy use are incorporated into all phases of the SEM-R.

Multiple studies have addressed how classroom environments can support students' development and use of self-regulated learning strategies (Perry, 1998; Perry, Hutchinson, & Thauberger, 2007; Perry, Phillips, & Dowler, 2004; Turner, 1995). The use of differentiation also supports self-regulated learning by providing the opportunity for students to seek help from teachers (Perry, 1998; Perry et al., 2004). Finally, higher self-regulated learning strategies are usually observed in classrooms in which students participate in evaluating their own work (Perry, 1998; Perry et al., 2007; Perry et al., 2004).

Research Methodology

Qualitative comparative analysis was used in this study with varied data collection methods including finding, gathering, or generating materials that were subsequently analyzed (Strauss & Corbin, 1999; Yin, 2002). Qualitative case study research design (Creswell, 2008; Miles & Huberman, 1994) involves in-depth, field-based studies of particular phenomena, such as the SEM-R (Gall, Borg, & Gall, 2002).

Creswell described three types of case studies—intrinsic case, instrumental case, and collective case study. Collective or comparative case study research includes multiple cases that are described and compared in order to provide insight into an intervention, such as the SEM-R. This study used collective, comparative school case studies (Creswell, 2008; Miles & Huberman, 1994) that involved in-depth, field-based studies of the SEM-R with extensive data collection.

Institutional Review Board permission was sought and granted for the study prior to case study visits. Researchers from the SEM-R team communicated with school-based coaches during the school year to answer questions and encourage coaches' completion of classroom observations, and then members of the research team spent 2-3 days at each school, conducting observations in SEM-R and comparison classrooms as well as in-depth interviews with principals, teachers, and literacy coaches to address the research questions that follow. In this study, researchers extended previous research on the SEM-R to focus on how implementation works with coaching and professional development for teachers handled locally by school personnel.

Research Questions

1. What elements characterize SEM-R implementation and treatment fidelity in classrooms for which support is provided through local professional development and coaching?
2. What are teachers' attitudes toward the implementation of SEM-R? What has worked best and what has been most challenging?
3. How have teachers and students changed their reading practices while using SEM-R?

The SEM-R Intervention

The SEM-R intervention includes three phases. Phase lengths were fluid and varied over time during the course of the total intervention. During Phase One, the "exposure" phase, teachers presented short read-alouds from high-quality, engaging literature to introduce students to a wide variety of titles, genres, authors, and topics. Along with these read-alouds, teachers provided instruction through modeling and discussion, demonstrated reading strategies and self-regulation skills, and posed higher-order questions to guide discussion. Early in the study period, these Phase One activities lasted about 20 minutes per day; Phase One decreased in length relative to the increase in time spent in Phase Two over the course of the intervention.

Phase Two of the SEM-R model emphasizes the development of students' ability to engage in supported independent reading (SIR) of self-selected, appropriately challenging books, with differentiated instructional support provided through conferences with the teacher or another adult. During Phase Two, students selected books that were at a challenging instructional level of at least 1 to 1.5 grade levels above their current

reading levels. Teachers monitored each book and assisted students in the selection of books that were of interest and at appropriately challenging instructional levels. At the beginning of the intervention, students read for 5-15 minutes a day during Phase Two; over time they extended their reading to 25 minutes and finally to 35-45 minutes each day. During this in-class reading time, students participated in individualized reading conferences with adults. On average, each student had a conference 1 or 2 times per week for about 5 minutes. In student conferences and student logs, teachers consistently monitored and documented the instructional challenge match of each book read in Phase Two. During conferences, classroom teachers and instructional aides assessed reading fluency and comprehension and provided individualized instruction in strategy use, including predicting, using inferences, and making connections. For more advanced readers, conferences focused less on specific reading strategies and more on higher-order questions and critical concepts.

During Phase Three, teachers provided options for varied extension and exploration activities for students, through which students could continue to pursue topics of interest through individual or group projects, work on creative thinking tasks, extend their reading through author studies or literature circles, explore technology resources, or engage in a variety of other learning opportunities. The intent of these experiences was to provide time for students to pursue areas of personal interest through the use of interest development centers and the Internet, and to give them opportunities to learn to read critically and to locate other reading materials, especially high-quality, challenging literature related to their current reading and related interests. Over the course of implementation, students transitioned from teacher-organized learning activities related to reading to more student-directed activities, including pursuit of independent study options. The length of Phase Three varied throughout the intervention, with more or less time devoted to Phase Three on particular days based on progress in independent reading and need for time to be devoted to independent projects and activities.

Recruitment, Professional Development, and SEM-R Implementation in Participating Schools

Schools recruited for the study included those of educators who had contacted the SEM-R web site asking for information as well as schools from the network of schools connected with The National Research Center on the Gifted and Talented collaborative districts. Email requests were distributed to both of these lists. A summary of expectations was noted in the recruitment letter, and interested respondents were asked to contact project staff. Requirements for the study included the willingness to have some teachers serve as treatment group teachers and others as comparison group teachers, as well as a series of responsibilities for administrators, a school coordinator for the SEM-R, SEM-R teachers, and comparison teachers. Administrators' responsibilities included selecting and supporting one individual for the position of SEM-R Coordinator and then enabling that coordinator to spend at least 2 hours of time each month to meet with SEM-R treatment teachers. Administrators also had to agree (a) to provide the SEM-R

Coordinator with time (up to 4 hours each week) to devote toward the administration and implementation of the SEM-R project; (b) to allow treatment teachers to attend up to 2 full days of professional development sessions over the course of the academic year; and (c) to support teachers in the implementation of the study overall, including overseeing teacher roles as treatment or comparison and facilitating the implementation of the SEM-R daily during reading classes in the treatment group.

The SEM-R school coordinators were responsible for organizing and facilitating meetings for SEM-R treatment teachers, implementing the SEM-R project, providing coaching support to treatment teachers, and functioning as liaison between the school and our SEM-R research team. This liaison role included responding to research team communications in a timely manner and assisting teachers and the SEM-R research team in the administration of pre- and post-assessments as needed. The SEM-R treatment teachers were expected to implement all three phases of the SEM-R in half of their language arts/reading block each day, for a minimum of 3 hours per week, and they were also expected to attend regularly scheduled meetings regarding the implementation of the SEM-R project with the SEM-R coordinator. They were provided with a log to track their SEM-R implementation activities, and they understood that they would be observed periodically by the coordinator and members of the SEM-R research team . Comparison group teachers agreed to support and assist with administration of pre- and post-assessments and to be observed periodically. The schools whose administrators agreed to participate were further screened by our desire to have a wide range of schools across the country serving diverse communities.

The 11 participating schools were located in varied regions across the country and included 6 elementary and 5 middle schools (see Table 1). The SEM-R was implemented in the treatment group during daily reading classes in 10 of the schools; in 1 school, the SEM-R was implemented for 3 hours each week as an after school literacy enrichment block, supervised by a reading teacher. Each participating school sent a team to a summer professional development workshop on the SEM-R; this workshop included both a detailed overview of the SEM-R framework, including modeling and practice opportunities, and also smaller group meetings about coaching and facilitating during SEM-R implementation. After the summer workshop, each school's team returned to the school to provide introductory workshops on the SEM-R to the other teachers who would participate in the treatment group. The teams were provided with the same professional development materials that had been used during the summer workshop to use in their school-based sessions.

Ten of the 11schools implementing this study during the school had a two-hour daily block devoted to reading and language arts instruction. Those teachers in the SEM-R treatment group taught one hour of regular language arts instruction focusing on writing, vocabulary, and other spelling and language activities, and taught SEM-R in the other hour of the block. Treatment teachers received SEM-R classroom libraries consisting of high interest fiction and non-fiction books across several reading levels to

support SEM-R implementation. Teachers also received sets of bookmarks that listed higher-order questions; each bookmark listed 3-5 questions addressing a particular literary element, theme, genre, or other area of study. Teachers used the bookmarks in both Phase One discussions and Phase Two conferences to promote higher-order thinking. SEM-R activities were documented in teacher and student logs, as teachers noted the activities conducted within each phase and students recorded the books they were reading and how long they spent reading each day. Teachers assigned to the comparison group continued providing locally determined language arts and reading instruction, which varied somewhat within and across schools.

Table 1
Demographic Data

School Name	Location	Total Students	Amer. Ind./ Alaskan	Asian	Black	Hispanic	White	Free Lunch Eligible	Reduced-Price Lunch Eligible	SEM-R Treatment Teachers	Comparison Teachers
Highland Peaks Middle	Suburban	664	4	6	3	21	630	36	23	5	5
Jane Addams Middle	Urban	1069	8	23	157	828	53	891	84	5	5
Kendrick	Rural	455	7	11	17	13	407	121	44	6	5
Main Street	Urban	635	6	52	44	326	207	164	66	7	7
Martin Luther King Magnet	Urban	535	2	28	232	35	200	160	44	5	4
McMann Middle	Suburban	750	36	24	7	148	535	74	37	6	5
Monument Magnet Middle	Urban	187	1	75	7	46	58	68	33	1	1
North Pacific	Suburban	583	7	47	20	264	245	185	63	8	7

Poe Classical	Urban	177	1	0	167	2	3	51	28	5	5
Rainy Valley	Suburban	708	4	64	33	224	383	118	45	6	6
Rosa Middle	Suburban	1413	9	107	56	778	463	501	193	6	6

During the study, school or district-based literacy coaches worked cooperatively with research team members to collect data such as weekly lesson plans and to coach teachers about implementation of the SEM-R. Research team members were available by email and phone during the intervention to provide support and to monitor both intervention and comparison classrooms. Research team members traveled to the schools to conduct interviews and observations of treatment and comparison classes for treatment fidelity practices and to investigate comparison group practices.

Data Collection

Research team site visits included classroom observations with review of teacher and student logs, as well as interviews with administrators, site coordinators, and teachers. Field notes from the interviews, observation notes, and treatment fidelity checklists from classroom observations were used to triangulate sources. Across the 11 schools, researchers interviewed all principals and all SEM-R site coordinators/coaches, as well as 54 of the 60 SEM-R teachers. Additionally, observations were conducted in all 60 SEM-R classrooms and in 24 comparison classrooms across all schools. During treatment classroom observations, researchers took detailed field notes on the specific features of each phase of the SEM-R observed, including notes of specific books, quotes from teachers and students, and descriptions of the classroom setup. Observations were also guided by the SEM-R Observation Scale (Little, Fogarty, & Reis, 2005), which includes a 9-item fidelity form on which observers indicate whether or not particular SEM-R elements were present during the observation. Comparison classroom observations involved careful field notes of the instructional activities observed, again with notes of specific texts used, teacher and student comments and behaviors, and classroom features. Furthermore, site coordinators' observation notes and fidelity checklists, collected throughout the year, were used as data sources in developing the case studies for each site.

The data collection procedures enabled researchers to compile thick descriptive case studies for each school that presented detail, context, and patterns of reading instruction across the SEM-R treatment and comparison classrooms for each site. Observations included a systematic description of events and student behaviors during SEM-R sessions accounting for at least 10-15 hours of observation at each school by the

treatment team and extensive additional hours throughout the year by the SEM-R coaches. Again, site visits also included in-depth interviews with key school personnel. This thoroughness in data collection was necessary to compare outcomes across cases, and develop rich descriptions and powerful explanations (Creswell, 2008; Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Comparison Classrooms Observations

Reading instruction across comparison classrooms followed a general pattern, consisting of whole group and smaller group instruction most often using basal reading programs in the elementary school and class sets of novels in the middle school classrooms. From the observations, a representative summary of reading instruction was compiled across the comparison classrooms, documenting a similar pattern of instruction across most classrooms. At the beginning of the reading period in most classrooms, time was usually spent (varying from 15-25 minutes) on whole group instruction, followed by practice or test-preparation activities. Frequently observed activities included repeated reading passages, short read-alouds followed by lengthy whole-group lessons on comprehension strategies, specific test preparation skill lessons, and discussions featuring primarily comprehension questions related to texts read by the group. In some classes, a short period of silent reading was also given, with some student choice of text without observed monitoring of challenge level. Teachers in comparison classrooms also tended to spend more minutes managing transitions between activities, as compared to time spent in SEM-R classrooms.

The majority (80%) of comparison classroom teachers were not observed to provide opportunities for reading of student-selected books during reading instructional time and rarely or never encouraged students to read challenging, high-interest literature. In one comparison classroom, for example, the opposite occurred, as students were observed being admonished for selecting a book above their Accelerated Reader (AR) levels. Many classroom libraries in comparison classrooms were small, lacked organization, and did not display books in an inviting way. Self-regulation tools and strategies, including those used in SEM-R such as documenting time read, identifying reading strategies used, and monitoring requests to teachers for help with reading, were not observed being introduced to or used by the students.

Field notes and observations documented that teachers in comparison classrooms struggled twice as often with classroom behavior and management issues as compared to teachers in SEM-R classrooms. The use of extrinsic motivation was more frequently noted in field notes of comparison classrooms, with teachers offering rewards such as parties, candy, and free time without assigned work to promote on-task student behavior. Student engagement in reading or work assignments was reported more inconsistently in the comparison classrooms, where teachers were able to engage some students during small group instruction, but other students were largely off-task during that time. The use of differentiation of instruction or content was never noted in field notes of any

comparison classrooms. Individual differences in reading were not observed being addressed in comparison classrooms for either talented or low achieving readers, with the exception of occasional groups of students being grouped together to use similar materials or basal readers.

Data Analysis

Data were coded manually using Strauss and Corbin's (1999) data coding paradigm and verified using meta-matrices and master charts that organized data from each of the schools into a standard format to enable patterns and themes to emerge (Miles & Huberman, 1994). As suggested by Strauss and Corbin (1999), data were organized into open, axial, and selective coding. Researchers independently coded, and then conferred with each other to confirm the decisions made about initial coding and emerging categories and theory. Open coding is the first stage in the coding process, and in this study, researchers examined, compared, conceptualized, and categorized all data from multiple sources including observations and field notes, interviews, and other document reviews. In open coding, codes in the data were identified and patterns and regularities were transformed into categories. Open coding occurred after initial data were collected and continued during data collection, resulting in the identification of multiple codes. Examples of open coding included teachers' observations of their students' enjoyment of and engagement in reading, with comments such as "my students love reading now" and "my students do not want to stop reading."

During the next phase of axial coding, open codes were combined into broader categories. As relationships were identified among codes, a determination was made about the relationship of an open code to an axial code. For example, over 70 comments about students' enjoyment of reading from interview transcripts and field notes resulted in an axial code of the same name. The coding paradigm examined the elements of each category in terms of conditions, context, action/interaction strategies, and consequences (Strauss & Corbin, 1999). Axial coding enabled the researchers to specify relationships among the many categories that emerge in open coding. In the last stage, selective coding was used to identify a core category across the case studies (Gall et al., 2002).

Findings

The research questions in this study addressed (a) whether classroom teachers across sites implemented SEM-R with strong treatment fidelity, (b) classroom teachers' attitudes about and experiences with the implementation of the SEM-R, and (c) the ways that teachers and students changed their reading practices while using the SEM-R. Overall, based on a review of all the data sources from across all the sites, 90% of the teachers implemented the SEM-R with strong fidelity. Findings also indicated that teachers had very positive attitudes about the implementation of SEM-R while acknowledging challenges and concerns related to this new way of teaching reading. Findings also demonstrated that teachers changed the way they taught reading, and that students changed the way they read while using SEM-R.

Major Findings

Across all 11 schools implementing the SEM-R in this study, including elementary and middle schools, three key student-related findings and three key teacher-related findings emerged. The first theme across all sites focused on the perceived benefits of SEM-R for both students and teachers, including perceptions of how the SEM-R affected students' reading habits and practices, the ways in which teachers' reading instructional practices changed after the SEM-R was implemented, and the professional benefits and challenges experienced by teachers during their successful implementation of the SEM-R. These themes and the additional themes for students and for teachers are discussed below.

Student Themes

The core student theme that emerged in all schools was increased student enjoyment of reading. This theme was consistently observed and discussed in interviews and site visit observations. The second most dominant theme that emerged related to the ways in which the SEM-R challenged talented readers. Across each site, teachers consistently discussed their belief that, in some cases for the first time in years, they were successfully challenging their talented, advanced readers, even though many of them struggled to maintain these students' focus on reading appropriately challenging books. The third most frequently mentioned theme related to increased self-regulation in students as observed by teachers, coaches, and principals.

Increased Enjoyment and Engagement in Reading

During observations and interviews of the SEM-R in all elementary and middle schools, the primary theme that emerged focused on increased student engagement and enjoyment in reading. Over 95% of the teachers reported positive changes in student attitudes toward reading and attributed these differences to their implementation of the SEM-R. One of the first changes that teachers reported was the creation of a classroom reading climate of increased enjoyment and engagement in reading. Each teacher and principal interviewed commented on students' enjoyment of reading, and observations across schools demonstrated high levels of student engagement in reading. Teachers consistently discussed their perceptions that the use of the SEM-R contributed to a more enjoyable reading climate and cited, during interviews, multiple success stories about student enjoyment in reading. A representative student statement from Highland Peaks Middle School summarized what the majority of teachers reported about student perceptions across schools: "For the first time, I actually read for fun instead of for an assignment because I get to choose my own book."

During observations across schools, many teachers asked students to explain their perceptions of this new reading program, and most comments focused on their enjoyment

of reading. For example, one of Mrs. Mallory's students at North Pacific explained, "My favorite part of school is SEM-R. My least favorite part is when we have to stop. It is not fun to stop." Another representative comment from multiple students was "I love reading in SEM-R because I can choose my book." Teachers also had positive feelings about their use of SEM-R; for example, Mrs. Mallory commented, "I enjoy meeting with my students and discussing their books. It's a great opportunity to dig deeper."

During interviews and in teacher logs, teachers continuously reported increasing levels of student enjoyment of reading during SEM-R time. At each school, teachers gave multiple examples of how SEM-R had improved reading comprehension and fluency of individual students, indicating that the greatest improvement had been that their students found reading enjoyable. At Mandela School, the same sentiment was echoed by the principal, who explained, "…to see kids excited about reading is what makes this special to me." During observations, reviews of student logs, and informal conversations, students demonstrated pride in the number of books they were reading. One student explained that she occasionally came across a book that was so well written that she intentionally did not hurry to finish it. Instead, she would read it more slowly and in short spurts, to ensure that her reading of the book lasted longer. She called the experience "savoring a book" (Mrs. Bucknell, Mandela Magnet).

At Jane Addams School, a representative student comment was made about the selection offered by the expanded classroom SEM-R library, "I can't remember when I've been so excited about getting new books!" A teacher described a struggling reader who had become much more engaged in reading, explaining, "He'll buy a book and bring it in to show me. He gets really proud when he has read a book. He's really reading a lot more." Teachers consistently discussed their perceptions of how enjoyment influenced students' reading habits and interests in reading in their SEM-R classes: "My third graders have just blossomed. They read without watching the clock." (Teacher log, North Pacific). Mrs. Conlon from Main Street discussed how her students demonstrated a greater interest in books in general, as she explained, "They love it—that's all they want to do is read. In between words on a spelling test all they want to do is read."

Mrs. Everett at Main Street shared how "The kids groan when I tell them to put their books away," and further explained that her students' fluency levels had increased, and that she appreciated the opportunity to conduct one-on-one in conferences with her students as it had enabled her to learn so much about her students' progress.

Increased levels of enjoyment were also attributed to the Phase One Book Hooks that teachers conducted. Observations from all schools summarized the ways in which enjoyment of reading was enhanced through the regular use of Book Hooks. For example, Mrs. Jacobs conducted a Book Hook on *How to Eat Fried Worms* during an observation of SEM-R in her classroom. She told the students that she really enjoyed the humor of the book, including the title. She asked if any of the students had seen the movie based on the book, and then began a short conversation about the differences

between the movie and book versions of a story, based on a previous discussion about *The Tale of Desperaux.* She engaged students in a short discussion about genre, asking them whether the book was a fantasy, then asking them to compare realistic fiction and biography (Main Street School).

Teachers reported the usefulness of Book Hooks as an instructional strategy to engage students in reading, but explained that they also served other purposes. For example, teachers reported using Book Hooks to increase students' interests in reading, as well as to increase students' overall motivation to read, and to introduce reading strategies embedded in the content of their hooks. Mr. Isobe, a third grade teacher at Rainy Valley, explained that he "thinks the Book Hooks have motivated kids to choose books to read for enjoyment."

This finding about excitement due to Book Hooks emerged across all elementary schools and was mentioned as a positive part of the program by over 80% of the SEM-R teachers. Most middle school teachers had similar perceptions of the Book Hooks, but three middle school teachers reported some challenges and concerns about using Book Hooks. For example, Dr. Lowery, a teacher at McMann Middle School, conveyed her decision not to use Book Hooks by explaining, "I tried that a couple of times. These kids are beyond that." Despite the absence of Book Hooks in Dr. Lowery's class, Book Hooks were still conducted by the librarian and by some students themselves in this classroom. The librarian at McMann Middle School enjoyed doing Book Hooks with students, and reported positive results, "I do a book talk and there is a stampede to get those books."

Overall, 95% of the teachers perceived the use of SEM-R as having a positive impact on reading in their classroom and pointed to student logs to verify this finding in their interviews with researchers, showing comments like "I LOVE to read now!" (student in Mrs. Laverty's sixth grade SEM-R class, McMann MS). A student at Rosa School explained to researchers, "I used to like to read. Now I love to read." "And all of them will be readers, and will enjoy reading; last year I couldn't say that about my students." (Mrs. Randall, Resource teacher, Main Street)

At the Highland Peaks Middle School, the principal explained his belief that students in SEM-R classes enjoyed reading because they believed that they were in control of their learning. He explained that it was the first time that students had a sense of autonomy. He had read the SEM-R logs of many students and pointed to the words of a student writing in a log in this school, "For the first time I actually read for fun, instead of for an assignment, because I choose my own books."

Another teacher explained, "The firm establishment of a culture of reading is the biggest impact of SEM-R. Not only are the kids reading during Phase Two time, they are sharing and talking about books and forming their own informal book groups" (Mr. Stephens, Rosa School).

In summary, the most prevalent finding in this study related to students' engagement and enjoyment of reading. Every teacher and principal explained how much students using the SEM-R enjoyed reading, and all of the observations demonstrated high engagement. The overall culture of most SEM-R classrooms incorporated strong support for literacy and involvement in reading, as evidenced by the organization and use of SEM-R classroom libraries as well as the general engagement in reading activities by students. Most treatment teachers perceived a notable difference in their students' reading involvement using the SEM-R, as compared to previous reading programs. When asked to what they attributed this increased enjoyment, most of the teachers believed that engagement and enjoyment came from students' opportunity to choose what they read, as well as to opportunities to discuss books that they were reading with their teachers and one another.

Benefits of the SEM-R for Talented Readers

When asked an open-ended question about the benefits regarding the use of SEM-R, a second pervasive category that emerged across the 11 schools related to the perceived benefits of the SEM-R for talented readers. Over 90% of the teachers and administrators discussed the positive outcomes of the SEM-R for talented readers. At Discovery Magnet, for example, all of the teachers interviewed commented that the SEM-R had positive effects on their talented readers in particular. One teacher indicated that her highest readers seemed more engaged than they had in previous years. Another reported "many students, especially my highest readers, are benefitting from reading books at their level instead of the basal reader." In fact, some of the teachers even commented on the challenge of finding enough books to meet these advanced needs. As Ms. Leachman at Rosa School explained, "the challenge has been to find enough books to support struggling readers and allow talented readers to continue to grow."

At North Pacific, teachers discussed how talented readers made measurable progress on reading assessments given during the year. Teachers at MacQueen also explained that talented readers were benefitting from SEM-R, and that their greatest difficulty was transitioning students from books that were too easy for them. At Rosa School, talented readers became a priority for teachers, as many read books at a faster rate than the teachers could initially manage.

The principal at Mandela Magnet explained that he was grateful for the SEM-R because he had not had to answer phone calls or emails parents of gifted students, as he had in previous years, about the lack of challenge for talented students. He explained that the majority of negative parental feedback he had previously received related to the lack of challenge in both math and reading, but that he had not had a complaint from any parent of a high-ability reader in a SEM-R classroom this year, and summarized by explaining that he considered this a good endorsement of SEM-R and of the benefits of the SEM-R for talented readers. At Rainy Valley, the teachers reported the delight they felt at the continuous growth and improvement for their most talented readers. The

principal also reiterated that talented students' growth in reading had exceeded teachers' expectations. A teacher at Main Street, Ms. Bartlett, summarized what many teachers indicated about reading instruction for this population. "Our gifted kids are not getting what they need with the basal, and I think we're losing a lot of bright kids that way."

Several teachers explained that the SEM-R provided opportunities for talented readers that previous programs had not, such as opportunities to read at a higher and more appropriate level of challenge. All of the teachers who mentioned the benefits of the SEM-R for advanced readers were able to respond to questions about the ways in which they engaged and challenged higher-level readers, such as using more advanced Book Hooks and incorporating advanced, differentiated reading strategies as well as a focus higher level questioning skills during Phase Two conferences. The broad range of reading levels of books and availability of challenging read by students in SEM-R classrooms was also an indication of the response to varied levels of student reading.

Approximately 90% of teachers also explained that while simultaneously challenging talented readers, their use of the SEM-R also helped students at the lower levels of ability in reading, commenting on how the SEM-R enabled these students access to and success in reading that they had not experienced before. Several teachers also discussed how some students "slipped under the radar" in a whole class instructional setting, while their needs and successes were more noticeable in the individualized SEM-R structure.

Increased Self-Regulation and Decreased Behavioral Problems

When asked the open-ended question about the benefits of SEM-R, over 90% of teachers discussed their perceptions that students increased their use of self-regulation strategies and displayed fewer behavioral issues during their use of the SEM-R, as compared to previous reading programs. Thus, this represented another pervasive category across sites. Teachers attributed the decrease in behavioral problems to students' increased interest. engagement, and self-regulation in reading. Patterns of student behavior that emerged across schools contributed to more focused reading during the SEM-R instructional block. These teacher-reported and observed behaviors included routines that helped students gain and use self-regulation strategies and decrease off-task behaviors. For example, at the beginning of each SEM-R time block, many teachers provided students with a specific number of minutes to retrieve their books and reading logs from a specified location if students did not keep them in their desks, and the materials were returned to the box or the file cabinet at the end of every class. The structure and expectations for the SEM-R were clearly established in most of the classrooms observed for this study. After students gathered their SEM-R materials, they usually listened to a Book Hook and then began reading with little initial direction for Phase Two. In classes in which some behavioral issues emerged, audio books were made available to support readers who struggled or had poor self-regulatory behaviors. These students were regularly observed reading individually and occasionally, as suggested in

the SEM-R, using the aid of audio books and headphones. Observations also suggested that students interacted with each other to increase self-regulation, asking students near them to be quiet, or to focus more on reading. These comments enabled the class to continue reading, and most teachers concluded Phase Two at the time when several students in the class lost their focus in reading.

Teachers regularly discussed students' increased development and use of self-regulation strategies both in interviews and in their logs. Teachers across sites also explained how the SEM-R emphasis on self-regulation helped students: "I have one kid this year who's more of a challenge than some, but I am able to get him to buckle down—he might just slide right through under the radar with the anthology." (Mrs. Jacobs, third grade SEM-R teacher, Main Street). The majority, over 90%, of teachers also described a positive change in the behaviors of their students before, during, and after SEM-R: "Some of them didn't know how to sit and read. At first they couldn't sit and read for 15 minutes but now they all read for prolonged periods of time." (Ms. Bartlett, Main Street)

Special education teachers who were using the SEM-R or working with special needs students in SEM-R classrooms also commented about the behavioral benefits for their students. Mrs. Randall at Main Street discussed her experience with students who struggled with self-regulation, noting the skills that her students had acquired during the SEM-R, explaining, "A lot of them have attention problems—but you'll see them monitor themselves, maybe moving to a different place or turning a different way to avoid distractions—they are really into their books."

Teacher Themes

The most dominant teacher theme, emerging with 98% of teachers when asked about instructional changes they made using SEM-R, was about their use of differentiated instruction. Teachers highlighted the specific ways they used differentiation in SEM-R to challenge talented and struggling readers, the ways in which they had increased their awareness of the unique needs of their students as readers, and how differentiated instruction helped them to help their students acquire different levels of reading skills and strategies. One principal's comment about the SEM-R summarizes what many of the teachers said about the use of differentiation. "I think the program is terrific because not only does it encourage students to read by providing Book Hooks and time, it also sets up a one-on-one coaching situation between student and teacher. This, in my opinion, is where the real learning takes place." (Mr. Taylor-principal, Highland Peaks).

The second most frequently noted theme was related to professional autonomy, as 80% of teachers who responded to an open-ended question related to their perceptions about professional benefits or challenges of their use of SEM-R discussed their perception of choice and professionalism. Teachers discussed their enjoyment of the

differentiated choices within Book Hooks and conferences and the ability to decide on the types of questions they could ask and instruction on which they could focus with their students. For example, Ms. Binney explained she had choices about timing and types of instruction when using the SEM-R, "Since the kids are more focused in the morning, I do our SIR during the morning block and I do the Book Hooks at the end of the day" (North Pacific). Teachers also mentioned that in the years since No Child Left Behind, they had limited choice about how and what to teach, and they found SEM-R refreshing in that it gave them opportunities to use their professional judgment.

The last teacher theme related to concerns and questions generated about using the SEM-R, and the ways in which teachers' concerns related to their professional growth and development. The majority of teachers, 55%, explained that they wanted to improve their implementation of the SEM-R. For example, 25% of teachers said that they wanted to read more of the student SEM-R books before their next implementation, and 15% planned additional ways to integrate more of their state reading standards into the Phase Two conferences and the Book Hooks they conduct. Each of these teacher-related themes is discussed in depth below.

The Use of Differentiated Instruction

Across all schools, the most pervasive teacher theme related to how teachers used the SEM-R to differentiate reading instruction to challenge all readers. Teachers are asked to differentiate instruction during all three phases of SEM-R; however, observations found the most consistent evidence of differentiation occurred during Phase Two conferences. The majority, over 90%, of teachers across schools discussed their increased use of differentiated reading instruction and strategy use as a part of their Phase Two implementation of the SEM-R.

Researchers' observations of and interviews about differentiation in Phase Two conferences were documented across all schools; moreover, observation and interview notes indicated that teachers were able to integrate differentiated instruction across all phases of the SEM-R. They used differentiation in their conferences by initiating different types of conversations and asking questions that varied in focus, but generally included vocabulary development, fluency strategies, comprehension, reading strategy use, and/or literary devices such as plot, theme, and setting. Researchers noted teachers' efficacy and ability to conduct these conferences, often without bookmarks or other prompts, suggesting that they had increased their levels of skill and comfort with differentiated instruction as the year progressed.

One component of differentiated instruction discussed by most teachers involved their perceptions about how well they knew their students' skills and reading patterns after using the SEM-R, due to the frequency of their Phase Two conferences. Over 80% of teachers interviewed explained how this knowledge increased their ability to differentiate instruction. Principals noted this as well; for example, Principal Burke at

Kendrick explained, “As the teachers became comfortable with what they were doing, the comments came in that they were getting to know their students as readers much more completely.” The following representative teacher interviews and log entry excerpts characterize this increased knowledge of student’s skills and potential:

> “I know my students better than ever before and what they are reading far better than I did prior to my use of SEM-R.” (Teacher log, Rainy Valley).
> “The conferences allow me to gain a wealth of knowledge about the students and their reading abilities.” (Interview, Mrs. Mallory, North Pacific)
> “I have also really enjoyed getting to know the level they are capable of—you can tell some things from how they do with the anthology, but not everything.” (Interview, Mrs. Jacobs, Main Street)

Over 80% of the teachers also explained that their assessments of students’ individual reading skills and needs were more accurate because of the regular conferences they conducted with students in Phase Two. Most teachers discussed the increased awareness they were able to maintain with each student’s progress. Teachers reported that these individual meetings with students and the book discussions were enjoyable parts of their daily routine and that they “…really enjoyed conferencing with students about what they are reading. It really helps me understand their level and interests.” (Ms. Binney, North Pacific).

As teachers discussed their new process of understanding their students’ reading skills, over 60% reported that using SEM-R had led them to understand that some of their students really did not understand various types of reading strategies, as their teachers had previously assumed. A representative comment echoed by most teachers concerned the fact that teachers usually assume that students already know how to use reading strategies to discuss connections, predictions, or other reading strategies, but through their conferences, they learned that many students do not. The SEM-R highlighted this phenomenon for many of the teachers.

Having an appropriately challenging book to differentiate content was also frequently mentioned, as 80% of the teachers explained that they had not really considered the level of reading challenge necessary for students at such diverse ends of reading ability. Ms. Smith reflected she not previously considered her students’ level of challenge in reading, explaining that reading consultants had always told her that students should read “just right” books whenever they read. Most teachers explained that they usually asked students to pick books that were in their fluency range and never really thought about challenge.

Over 80% of the teachers interviewed mentioned diverse ways that differentiation helped them to increase their professional competency, generally explaining that the SEM-R’s differentiated instructional approach benefited not only their students but also their own level of professionalism. Mrs. Solomon, for example, discussed her use of

differentiation during Phase Two of the SEM-R, “I am finding that conferencing doesn’t have to be a formatted or equal experience for all students. Some need modeled questioning strategies while others need a little inspiration and stimulation.” (Rosa School).

Representative observations of Phase Two reading conferences also demonstrated how teachers asked differentiated questions of multiple students. In one observation at Mandela Magnet, a teacher conducted nine Phase Two SIR conferences of approximately 3-5 minutes each during a 50-minute reading block. Each was quiet, focused, and employed differentiated questioning about various reading strategies (making inferences, using connections, synthesizing, determining importance, questioning, and using metacognition) using bookmarks based on students’ reading levels, instructional needs, prior use of reading strategies, and interests. Mr. Faulkner at North Pacific enabled students to volunteer for conferences, using his SEM-R Teacher’s Log to track the number of conferences that had been conducted with each student. He asked each student to read a short passage and then followed up with varied, differentiated, open-ended questions.

At another school, during the 45 minutes of Phase Two reading time, Mrs. Slatov conducted conferences with 8 of her 33 students, while her teaching assistant met with seven students. Using this schedule, students had a conference with an adult every other day. During each conference, Mrs. Slatov established a purpose for the conference by reviewing the student’s reading log, and in most instances, asking the student to read from the book to check for correct match for challenge as well as for fluency. A variety of discussions were held during these individual conferences, including topics such as the use of context clues, advanced vocabulary, book selection, characterization, and exposition. Students experienced the freedom to make their own choices in books and seek out answers to questions they had raised in their logs. For instance, two different students were observed using dictionaries to find the meanings of words that they did not know (McMann School).

Ms. Walker began Phase Two conferences by inviting a brief summary of the book from the student, and then asking the student to read aloud. After listening to one student read, Ms. Walker asked the student why she believed that the book had been leveled the way it was. They discussed the features of the text that made it more advanced, and the student seemed excited about her book and discussed the plot in an animated way. Ms. Walker also asked several other higher-order questions about the book. During other conferences, she occasionally checked a website on the laptop next to her when she needed to understand a book’s level and ensure that it was a reasonable challenge for the student reading (Highland Peaks Middle).

Over 90% of the teachers discussed the benefits of Phase Two conferences for meeting the needs of all students and commented on how students at both the high and low end were challenged using the SEM-R, again, focusing on the benefits of

differentiated instruction. “During this process I’ve become more aware of what they need as readers. Just because they’re a Z doesn’t mean that they’re done with learning how to read S-level books.” (Teacher log, Jane Addams Middle).

More than half of teachers interviewed expressed their concerns about the use of the status quo reading instruction in their schools prior to their use of the SEM-R. The most common concern was that gifted students were not getting what they needed with the basal programs, and teachers believed they had previously been losing a lot of bright kids. Teachers also described the ways in which their use of differentiated instruction enabled them to work individually on skills that some students had not yet mastered, but eliminate skills that other students had already mastered. “Even though that seems strange because it’s one on one, you can be more efficient with your time with each student while the others are reading. You can work with decoding if that’s an issue for a student, or whatever is the particular need.” (Mrs. Nicholson, Main Street). Across schools, researchers observed the many ways in which teachers’ Phase Two conferences included differentiated questions to address students’ use of strategies in their reading. Students were also often asked to reflect on how they had used a strategy, such as synthesizing or determining importance, in their reading, or to evaluate their choice of reading materials, including whether the book was too easy, too challenging, or at an appropriately challenging level for the student. Teachers frequently compared the SEM-R to approaches that involve an anthology or basal series, explaining that the anthologies do not meet the needs of students at the higher and lower ends and that the SEM-R really helped to differentiate more effectively and challenge this population.

Observation notes indicated that many teachers seemed to have established specific patterns for their differentiated conferences. Mr. Champion at North Pacific, for example, was one of many teachers who first tried to get information about the content of the book, then asked the student to read briefly, and followed with a series of questions that addressed challenge level as well as strategy use. Many other teachers began their weekly conferences by asking students to illustrate a reading strategy that had been used in their weekly SIR reading time. Still other teachers asked the simple question, “what do you have for me this week?” thereby placing responsibility on the student to identify something to discuss, such as a Book Hook that could be used in class, use of a reading strategy, elaborating on a section that involved advanced vocabulary or questioning skills, or finding parts of a book to use for a writing prompt later in a student log.

At each school, teachers who implemented the SEM-R reported ways in which they adapted or used innovative practices to support their students in the differentiated context. In one middle school, teachers developed a weekly “consider-it” question based on a question from one of the bookmarks that they used to integrate reading strategies into conferences. They asked students to reflect on and write about the question throughout the week in their logs so that by the end of the week the teachers were confident that each student understood the reading strategy and could demonstrate its application to his or her own reading. The “consider-it questions” are just one example of

how the teachers used their own knowledge base and creativity to adapt and differentiate aspects of the SEM-R for their own purposes while retaining the essential aspects of each phase. In all elementary and middle schools, the teachers reported changing instructional practices by incorporating instructional and content differentiation, and they attributed these different practices to their implementation of the SEM-R.

Professional Benefits of Using the SEM-R

One of the purposes of the SEM-R is to enable teachers to make professional decisions about how to introduce strategies, differentiate instruction, select books to challenge and engage, and choose a focus that meets each student's needs during conferences. This opportunity for teacher choice and decision-making emerged as another theme in this study in response to an open-ended question about benefits of the use of the SEM-R. A few teachers admitted they had experienced some struggle with this level of freedom, but 80% explained their pleasure in having the freedom to decide how to pursue opportunities and choices for instruction. Teachers believed that their students had positive growth in reading as well as more positive attitudes about their reading. Teachers explained, both in interviews and in their logs, the ways in which their perceptions of their own growth were intertwined with the progress of their students. "SEM-R is exciting because we, myself and the teachers, have fun teaching and we are allowed to use our professional knowledge." (Reading Specialist, North Pacific)

Mrs. Conlon, from Main Street School, commented that she hopes that her students will be able to be in SEM-R classes next year, because "…it would be harder to go back and not have that kind of freedom." The majority, over 85% of teachers interviewed for this study, displayed professionalism in their use of the SEM-R books that were provided to them, explaining that they had spent time outside of the school reading the books and would continue to do so. A frequent comment was that the teachers would have liked more time to read the books before the SEM-R started in the fall.

Over 90% of the teachers across schools commented on how the implementation of the SEM-R had required both time and effort over a period of months, demonstrating their professional efforts and the time they had devoted to differentiate instruction. The majority of teachers reflected carefully about their implementation of the SEM-R, citing both challenges and successes in their professional growth. Teachers mentioned benefits to students that made their work with the SEM-R much more personally and professionally meaningful to them. In particular, they discussed increases in self-regulation, knowledge and application of reading strategies, self-efficacy in reading, and higher scores in both reading fluency and comprehension.

How SEM-R Meets the Individual Needs of High and Low Readers

Over 80% of teachers interviewed also described their professional growth and successes in using the SEM-R to benefit all students, including those at the high and low

ends of the reading achievement spectrum. A representative teacher comment was that "Especially for the higher-level kids, it's boring to read at a pace below their level, and for the kids reading below grade level, they struggle with some of the stories in the anthology. So the fact that they can choose their own books is the best part." (Mrs. Jacobs, Main Street). Previous research has suggested that the needs of academically advanced students are not met in many classes (Reis et al., 2004), but with the professional development and books given as part of the SEM-R study, these teachers could discuss how important it is to meet the needs of all students and give examples of how they accomplished this goal. Several teachers shed insight into how their prior use of other reading programs resulted in boredom for their higher-level students, who had been forced to read at a pace below their level, as well as the ways that students who read below grade level had struggled with anthologies and novels that were too challenging.

Teachers at all schools were able to give specific examples of how they used the SEM-R to meet the needs of students at both ends of the instructional spectrum, such as doing Book Hooks at levels that were both above and below the chronological grade level that they teach, and making sure that they used a variety of these Hooks to challenge both high and low level readers. Mrs. Jacobs explained that because she had felt that she was not reaching all levels of her students, she now balances her Book Hooks with "about three higher, two lower books per week. That way the lower readers are also excited and are sharing among themselves, laughing out loud" (Main Street).

Teachers also reported how students with unique combinations of strengths and weaknesses benefitted greatly from the SEM-R, and several explained that high readers made progress in SEM-R. One teacher commented about one gifted reader's experiences: "One student is very busy with sports, activities and his church and he recently read *Les Miserables* by Hugo. When we met, he was thrilled about the book and was going on about the relationship between the main characters. He said, 'you know, I've *never* really read a book like this (huge, complex) because I don't have time at home. Here it's quiet and I can really get into the story. It's great!'" (Mrs. Slatov, McMann Middle School).

Most of the teachers interviewed indicated that they had enjoyed numerous professional benefits in challenging both high and low readers using the SEM-R. Their use of differentiation for high and low readers required focused teacher effort to address the differing needs of these students. With regard to students at the lower levels of ability in reading, Mrs. Randall in particular commented on how the SEM-R allowed her students access to and success in reading that they may not have experienced before. Teachers interviewed also commented on how some students might "slip under the radar" in a whole class instructional setting, while their needs and successes are more noticeable in the individualized SEM-R structure. At the same time, four teachers interviewed expressed concern that some students might need more structure than SEM-R provides; Ms. Bartlett, for example, perceived that some of her struggling students might require a different level of structure. Most of the teachers, however, believed that the

individualized structure of the SEM-R was beneficial for their struggling students as well as their advanced readers.

The last pattern that emerged with regard to students at either end of the reading achievement continuum related to challenge level of self-selected Phase Two books. Most teachers observed that their struggling readers tended to gravitate toward books that were too difficult for them. Some of the teachers across all schools believed that their struggling students were aware that their reading level was below that of their classmates, and they wanted to select harder books to mirror what their peers were doing. Consequently, the teachers were faced with the challenge of finding books that were of an appropriate reading level without being too immature in content or appearance. Meanwhile, over 85% of teachers also commented on the tendency of academically gifted students and talented readers to select books that were too easy for them. "My challenges occur when allowing the kids to choose their own books. Many times in third grade, their interests are in picture books, not challenging material" (Ms. Binney, North Pacific). In a few cases, parents even applied negative pressure on teachers saying the reading was too challenging when teachers encouraged students to select appropriately challenging books. "The biggest challenge has been to get my students out of easy books. I have gotten phone calls from parents asking for them to be able to read easier books in class. I tell them to let them read the easy books at home" (Mrs. Slatov, McMann Middle School).

The combination of these two trends, more advanced readers choosing books that were too easy while struggling readers select books that are too hard, should be a focus in future research and may also suggest an important topic for discussion in professional development on the SEM-R. A related point is the issue of how teachers find and provide books that are not too challenging but not too juvenile for struggling readers, while also providing books that are challenging enough but not too mature for advanced readers. Over 70% of the teachers also expressed concerns about their lower-level readers' feelings of embarrassment about reading books they perceived to be too easy. In part in response to this issue, many teachers used the recommended SEM-R strategy of enabling students with reading problems or disabilities to listen to books on CD or tape while they simultaneously followed along with the text. This practice was also found to be effective for students who were not motivated to read for extended periods of time.

Concerns About the Implementation of the SEM-R

When asked specifically about concerns related to implementing the SEM-R, teachers in the study cited four areas. The most frequent teacher concern, expressed by 20% of the teachers across schools, related to conducting conferences with students who were reading books that teachers had not themselves previously read. A representative comment across schools was related to the uneasiness some teachers experienced about how well they knew or did not know all of the books students were reading. A common comment that teachers made was that they felt nervous when they hadn't read all the

books in the SEM-R library. This comment was echoed across schools at the beginning of the intervention, but over time appeared to have less effect on teachers. Mrs. Knight at Kendrick School explained what other teachers also discussed, “My colleague and I kind of mastered having [the students] talk or read while we would scan the book or at least the back of the book—It became kind of an art…It was still stressful, though, when a child came up with a brand new book.”

Another finding from 15% of the teachers’ observations and interviews related to planning and integrating specific objectives and skills into SEM-R instruction. The teachers in this study demonstrated a continuum of concerns about the degree to which they could use the SEM-R to introduce and integrate required skills and strategies for their language arts standards and state assessments into their language arts program that included a block of time for SEM-R. Approximately 10% of the teachers specifically mentioned having alternated SEM-R instruction with more direct instruction, and a few others made reference to administering alternate assessments or integrating objectives from their state standards into their SEM-R instruction when some students appeared to need more structure. Some students may “need more structure to keep them involved. They might sometimes just be turning pages.” (Mrs. Bartlett, Main Street). Teachers seemed to have different levels of comfort with the use of the SEM-R to provide and document instruction and mastery of specific skills. Some teachers seemed to have a strong sense of the specific skills they should integrate into SEM-R differentiated instruction, while other teachers seemed to use the other part of their language arts instructional block to teach these skills. For example, this representative comment from one teacher explained what this smaller group of teachers experienced: “I am having challenges doing SEM-R ‘in addition to’ rather than ‘in place of’ some of our district-mandated pacing guide and assessment driven instruction” (Mr. Isobe, Rainy Valley)

At some school-based professional development sessions, among approximately 15% of the teachers, concerns emerged about how to integrate specific local reading objectives within the SEM-R. However, most teachers felt confident in their ability to use the resources and materials provided as part of the SEM-R training to integrate local requirements into the SEM-R framework. The use of the SEM-R appeared to affect some teachers’ perceptions of how well students were able to see connections through reading. Mrs. Bandura, a teacher at McMann Middle School, reported that, “Students are excited about reading and telling you about their books. They are making connections and sharing insights I have not seen in years past with other reading programs.”

Concerns about time management also emerged from the treatment teachers, but the reasons for the need for more time or better time management varied across teachers. For example, about half of the teachers interviewed discussed the difficulty of conducting enough interviews during Phase Two, finding time for Phase Three, and finding time for completing their reflections in their logs. This concern diminished as the year continued. The most frequent time concern involved time for enough differentiated student conferences during the beginning of the school year. Some teachers initially had

difficulty conducting Phase Two conferences that were 3 to 5 minutes long, enabling them to meet with all of their students at least once a week. Teachers explained that they had to be very organized to conduct conferences with all of students in their classes during the week. “It’s difficult to see [conference with] all students within the week. I can usually see 4 to 5 students per day” (Ms. Finey, North Pacific). The majority of the teachers also discussed their challenges and difficulties in maintaining their reflections in their teacher log. Approximately 60% of the teachers seemed to rely primarily on student logs for tracking purposes, and used their teacher logs less frequently.

The teachers implementing the SEM-R in this study represented a wide range of teaching styles and levels of experience, and the variability in this group emerged in their interviews about how they used the SEM-R. Many teachers demonstrated ease in planning for instruction and monitoring the skills they were integrating, and in integrating key objectives from the district or state standards into the SEM-R. Several of the teachers with less experience or less confidence seemed to need to preserve some of the security they had experienced with whole class instruction related to state standards and state test assessments in previous years.

Another area of variability was in teachers’ questioning during conferences, including both what was observed and what they discussed in interviews. Some seemed to place a stronger emphasis on encouraging enjoyment and sharing than on fostering specific strategies or higher-level thinking. Other teachers selected specific areas to emphasize across conferences, usually demonstrating instructional differentiation as they worked with different students. Finally, some of the teachers seemed better able and prepared to target differentiated questions directly to individual students as opposed to using a similar pattern across students.

A final pattern that emerged in the SEM-R classroom implementation for 90% of the teachers was the evidence of a change process at work, including some of the challenges teachers experienced as they developed their own strategies for a successful SEM-R implementation. When asked about challenges faced, teachers identified questions they had but also explained how they had learned to respond to them. For example, some teachers resolved their concerns about how to integrate state or district standards by implementing new and creative record-keeping and management structures into the SEM-R.

Limitations

Several limitations exist in this study. The geographic spread and time frame of this study meant that extensive on-site observation over several months was not possible, but multiple classroom observations did occur in each school. The time constraints may limit the depth and breadth of the observations and subsequent analysis of themes and processes found in the SEM-R classrooms. The nature and frequency of observations does fall within acceptable case-study guidelines (Yin, 2002).

Observations were conducted of the majority of SEM-R and comparison teachers in every school. All members of the research team who conducted case study research have doctorates in gifted education, with extensive training in research methodology overall and case study methods.

Another limitation involved the selection of classroom teachers for interviews and observations, as it varied among the larger and smaller schools. In the majority of the schools, all SEM-R classroom teachers were both observed and interviewed, and in others, a random selection of teachers implementing the SEM-R occurred.

Researcher bias is possible when researchers conduct observations (Yin, 2002). Every attempt was made to avoid such bias by these researchers throughout the observation and analysis process. When using interviews in a qualitative study, validity and reliability standards are applicable (Gall et al., 2002). To achieve cross-validation of the qualitative data, "between-methods" triangulation was used, including document review of the observation and interview notes as well as other records. Construct validity was achieved through the use of the SEM-R treatment fidelity instrument, and an audit trail was used to validate coding and key decisions made during the research process. As with any new program, results may have been influenced by novelty effects. The extended period of the SEM-R implementation and the frequent observations by the onsite observers, along with the observations by members of the SEM-R research team, mitigated against the possibility of this effect.

Discussion and Implications

Students using the SEM-R had increased enjoyment of, interest in, and engagement in reading, supporting the research mentioned earlier by Guthrie & Wigfield (2000), Teale and Gambrell (2007), Gambrell, Palmer, Codling, and Mazzoni (1996), and Meece and Miller (1999). Across interviews and across schools, the principals, teachers, literacy coaches, and reading specialists routinely discussed the increased enjoyment of and engagement in reading of students who participated in the SEM-R. At Kendrick School, for example, Mrs. Alton and Ms. Knight highlighted student enjoyment of reading as the most important benefit of the SEM-R program. Ms. Knight, one of the SEM-R classroom teachers, explained that students' reading time had become "a sacred 45 minutes a day" and that they were upset if they did not get that time. She said that some books became so popular among the students that they would be anxiously waiting their turn for specific titles and asking the librarian for copies. In addition, students formed "book clubs" around certain books to have more opportunities to talk about the books with one another. She also noted that parents had reported an increase in reading in their children, and that children had been asking their parents to get more books for them, a finding that emerged in several other schools as well.

The SEM-R teachers' reflections about student enjoyment and engagement in reading supports Guskey's (1986) framework about the influence of teachers' trying out an innovation with their own students before they are likely to change their beliefs and attitudes and fully adopt the innovation. These teachers gained confidence from the positive response and growth of their students within the SEM-R. All of the teachers interviewed were enthusiastic about the benefits of SEM-R for their students, and expressed eagerness about continuing to use the SEM-R and their plans to improve their implementation further through additional reading, planning, alignment, and practice. Other research suggests the necessary level of attention is rarely given to support teacher growth and change when new reading policies are adopted and implemented (Allington, 2002; McGill-Franzen, 2000). The attention of the local coaches in the implementation of the SEM-R may have been helpful, as they regularly monitored progress and assisted the SEM-R teachers, as well as completing SEM-R treatment fidelity checks. As these coaches may have been perceived as supportive of teachers' efforts to make change occur, an implication that may emerge from this finding is the importance of local support and help in the ways that teachers are asked to differentiate as well as the ways in which they are supported in this challenge. In this study, principals supported the teachers' use of the SEM-R, and teachers received classroom libraries with books for a wide range of student reading levels. In addition, they received portable CD players and a collection of books on CD as well as print copies of the books.

Differentiation of Instruction and Content

The most dominant teacher theme in this study was the consistent use of differentiated instruction and content, with specific comments and observations about how teachers used differentiation to challenge all readers, including those who were talented and those who struggled in reading. Differentiation is both a challenging and time-consuming process that requires effort to address wide variations among learners in the classroom through multiple approaches including different teaching strategies, materials, content, and other aspects of the learning environment (Renzulli, 1977, 1988; Tomlinson, 2001). The use of differentiated instruction occurred across all phases of the SEM-R, but appeared to be most successful when used in Phase Two conferences with differentiated questions about strategy use, challenge level, vocabulary development, fluency strategies, comprehension, and/or literary elements such as plot, theme, and setting. Researchers noted teachers' increased efficacy and ability to conduct these conferences, often without bookmarks or other prompts, as the year progressed. This suggests that teachers increased their levels of skill and comfort with differentiated instruction over the course of the year. Instructional differentiation was guided by the increased knowledge teachers reported having about their students' skills and reading patterns, due to the frequency of their Phase Two conferences. The use of the SEM-R appears to help teachers differentiate by giving them specific suggestions for different levels and types of questioning during conferences and enabling each student to reading appropriately challenging books within areas of interest.

As opposed to previous research that shows that teachers often have not had the professional development or training to implement differentiation effectively (Archambault et al., 1993; Hertberg-Davis & Brighton, 2006; Reis et al., 1993; VanTassel-Baska & Stambaugh, 2005; Westberg, Archambault, Dobyns, & Salvin, 1993), this study corroborates previous research that shows that with training and support, teachers can implement differentiated instruction and use differentiated materials (Reis et al., 1993). Principals attending the introductory workshop for the SEM-R agreed to support teachers' efforts and make time available for local coaching and support. These elements may also be an important implication for the use of differentiated instruction in reading. With time for professional development and preparation, materials such as a diverse set of books at appropriately challenging levels of content, and local coaching and support, differentiation was much more able to be implemented in this content area. This may indicate that starting in one content area with sufficient levels of materials and support may be an effective way to promote successful differentiation.

Self-Regulation

Teachers' and administrators' perceptions about the increase in self-regulated reading in the SEM-R intervention suggest that in this study, personal processes, the environment, and individual behaviors of both teachers and students increased students' use of self-regulation strategies in reading in the SEM-R classrooms. Researchers (Boekaerts & Corno, 2005; Winne & Perry, 2000; Zimmerman & Martinez-Pons, 1990) have found that academic achievement can be increased with the use of self-regulation strategies such as organizing, goal-setting, planning, self-evaluating, information seeking, record keeping, self-reflecting, self-monitoring, and reviewing. The study suggests that the environment in SEM-R classrooms promotes organization of materials, order, clear expectations, and rules, and also supports the use of student self-regulation strategies in reading.

Implications of this study include the need for more opportunities for self-regulation to develop in school. In the SEM-R classrooms student choices in reading material made reading more personally meaningful and challenging, gave teachers more flexibility in classroom procedures, and enabled students to engage in complex tasks, including longer periods of challenging reading and independent studies that support self-regulated learning. The teachers in SEM-R classrooms in this study modeled and integrated higher order thinking skills, encouraged students to use literacy strategies, differentiated individual conferences, and provided explicit instruction in metacognitive strategies, all of which may have contributed to student engagement and application of self-regulation to reading. Another implication of this study may be the need for other teachers to enable these strategies to be used more often in classrooms across the country to effectively engage, differentiate, and encourage self-regulation in reading.

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CHAPTER 2: Main Street Elementary

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Main Street Elementary School, like many other schools, is designed as a collection of separate buildings connected by walkways and blacktop areas. Once inside the school a sense of connection with the outdoors is immediately felt; all of the classrooms have doors leading outside, and the main eating area is located outdoors. The fence around the school and unadorned doors seemed initially unwelcoming to a visitor; however, staff and students were immediately gracious and friendly, and the classroom interiors were bright and well decorated.

The first stop on an initial tour of the school was in the "Wonder of Reading" library. Wonder of Reading "is a nonprofit organization whose purpose is to inspire in children the love of reading." Because this school was able to meet certain criteria demonstrating a commitment to improving literacy, Wonder of Reading renovated the library and provided extensive resources. The library had a welcoming design, with carpeting, comfortable reading areas, and a small amphitheater for group activities. The library was well stocked with books and had several computers dedicated to Scholastic's Reading Counts, through which students earn points by taking tests on books they have read. The librarian shared that the library is kept open to students throughout the day, including during lunch and after school, so that they learn to see it as a useful, comfortable, and accessible place to go.

Main Street School serves approximately 650 students at grades K-5. According to demographics provided on the district website, about 50% of students are from a Hispanic/Latino background, 32% are White, about 7% are African American, and the remaining students are from a variety of other backgrounds. According to the teachers and principal, many families have been settled in the area for several generations, often employed at the nearby docks. The SEM-R coach and principal both emphasized that the family backgrounds led to some interesting patterns in parent involvement and support; the primary impression given was that families tend to support the school and treat education as important, but as the primary responsibility of the school, perhaps more than the home. The principal also shared that parents were very involved at school, and that the staff worked hard to be responsive to students, parents, and the community.

Over the last 3 years, approximately 60% of students have performed at or above grade level on the state standardized tests for English/Language Arts. The school has been using the Open Court Reading program (OCR) as the primary resource for reading instruction across all grade levels for several years. In kindergarten through grade 3, class

size is maintained at about 18-20; class size is much larger in grades 4 and 5, with about 30-35 students in each class at those levels.

Seven teachers across grades 2-5 have implemented SEM-R this year, including two teachers each at grades 3, 4, and 5 and one teacher at grade 2. One of the fourth grade teachers is a special education resource teacher who works with students in a pullout setting. Seven teachers at the school served as comparison teachers. Four of the treatment teachers attended Confratute in the summer of 2008: the grade 2 teacher, two grade 5 teachers and the special education resource teacher. Teresa Nicholson, one of the fifth grade treatment teachers, also served as the coach for the school.

Over the course of a two-day visit, observations were conducted in all treatment classes and most comparison classes. Interviews were also conducted with all treatment teachers and the school principal. This case study visit occurred during the middle of the week after the school's spring break. On the first day of the visit the large school district had just announced that because of budgetary issues, several thousand teachers would not be returning the following year.

The following pages will provide (a) descriptions of SEM-R implementation in each of the treatment classes, informed by the interviews with teachers and the principal; (b) descriptions of the observations in comparison classes; and (c) a synthesis of findings regarding SEM-R across the school.

SEM-R Classrooms

During the two-day visit to the school, I observed each SEM-R class for at least 20-30 minutes and interviewed each treatment teacher. The observations on the second day were more abbreviated than on the first because of an assembly. On the first day, Mrs. Nicholson accompanied me to the observations in second and third grade and in Kathy Randall's resource room; on the second day, I visited the other classes alone or with the school principal.

Mrs. Conlon's Second Grade Classroom

The first treatment class observation was in Mrs. Conlon's second grade classroom. Upon our entry, Mrs. Conlon was finishing a Book Hook using a Roberto Clemente biography and *Teammates,* a picture book about a critical event in the life of Jackie Robinson. About 18 students were seated on the carpet. The sharing and instructional component of this Book Hook occurred before we entered; however, during the last part of the discussion, a student asked about a sticker on the book. Mrs. Conlon explained that the sticker indicated whether the book was a SEM-R book or a free time book and she asked students to explain what makes the difference. A student replied that a free time book is a book with a lot of easy words and one that is not hard to understand.

To begin the transition to Phase Two, Mrs. Conlon said that the "yellow group" could be on the rug and that the other students should go to desks. The transition took less than two minutes; by 9:05, all students were seated with books open. Mrs. Conlon later reported that she had begun the year with students reading for about 15 minutes during Phase Two, but by the time of this April observation, they were up to about 40-45 minutes. Based on many of the books students were reading, one might expect that this was a class of older students; most students were reading chapter books, ranging in level from titles in the *Junie B. Jones, Flat Stanley,* and *Geronimo Stilton* series to books such as *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* and *Ella Enchanted.* One child was reading a picture book with a lot of text, and two students were reading nonfiction books (on the topics of astronomy and whales). Several titles and series appeared to be quite popular, with several students reading copies of the same books. SEM-R bookmarks could be seen in a number of the students' books, and most students had two or three books stacked on their desks.

The classroom itself was spacious, with student desks arranged in groups of about five. The walls were decorated with student work. A list of vocabulary words was posted on the board; the same list of words would also be observed in the second grade comparison classroom, and as Mrs. Conlon later shared, she was continuing with some aspects of the OCR program in coordination with her teammate as a way of ensuring that students were meeting all of their benchmarks. Also posted on the board was a list of fluency scores for students; it appeared that about half the class was reading at a rate above 100 words per minute.

Mrs. Conlon conducted conferences with the students from the yellow group. She later shared that as part of her management system, she rotated who sat on the floor with her conference schedule. She commented on how the students value their conference time: "They love to talk about their books. I sometimes forget which group I'm supposed to be calling, but they remember—they know when it's their time." Mrs. Conlon held conferences with four students during the observation, covering a range of strategies and topics. She invited connections to other texts or personal experiences from two students, asked one student to explain whether the book he was reading was "real or make-believe" and the evidence they had to support the answer, and asked a fourth student to explain how she was using her post-it notes as she read.

In her follow-up interview, Mrs. Conlon said that one of the major benefits of SEM-R was the increased awareness she has been able to maintain of each student's progress. She explained that she has continued to use some lessons from OCR and to give her students the weekly OCR comprehension tests, because she felt more comfortable using those results as a way of communicating progress to parents. She indicated that when possible, she has aligned OCR expectations with SEM-R activities, for example by integrating specific skills into Book Hooks.

Mrs. Conlon has also seen a big difference from the beginning of the year to the present in students' degree of understanding, as well as their fluency and focus in

reading. She found that attention to reading for long periods was a little harder for some students, particularly one student with ADHD, but that all had shown growth over the year. According to Mrs. Conlon, her students have really enjoyed SEM-R: "They love it—that's all they want to do is read. In between words on a spelling test all they want to do is read."

Another benefit Mrs. Conlon observed was that her students have developed good skills at choosing books, though she acknowledged that some seem reluctant to challenge themselves. She said that some of the boys, in particular, have tended to stay with the same sets of books, such as the *Geronimo Stilton* books, and that she has had to work with them to select something different to challenge themselves. On the other hand, Mrs. Conlon initially thought that *Ella Enchanted* might be too challenging for the student who was earlier observed reading the book, but the student has stuck with the book for more than a month and is understanding it as she progresses.

Mrs. Conlon noted her perception that SEM-R was successful with her group of students because they are a high achieving group with limited behavior issues; she noted that the second grade comparison class also has many high achievers. Mrs. Conlon commented that she hopes that her students will be able to be in SEM-R classes next year, because "it would be harder to go back and not have that kind of freedom."

The paperwork involved in conducting SEM-R was a challenge for Mrs. Conlon, particularly keeping up with her reflections in her log. Another challenge at the beginning was overall management: "… going into it thinking I knew it all, then feeling like I didn't know anything, I think I was a little overwhelmed…." She found that she needed to spend time determining what level of control she felt she needed to have about where students went to read and how she organized the groups, as well as how she planned for SEM-R, "trying to weave everything together." A third challenge was the implementation of Phase Three; Mrs. Conlon commented that she has had difficulty getting students to extend their reading, and that Renzulli Learning has been difficult because of the age of her students.

In her conferences Mrs. Conlon often uses the bookmarks to guide discussions and sometimes just listens to students read or has them retell the story, especially if she herself has not read it. She explained that she has guided her students to use sticky notes to ask questions, formulate thoughts, and make connections. She believed that some students have been more successful with this than others.

Mrs. Conlon's goals for continuing SEM-R and her plans for improvement centered on planning and knowledge of the books and their content. She wanted to be organize Book Hooks by theme and focus on conferences, so she said she intends to read many books over the summer to prepare for next year. She noted again that paperwork has been a challenge for her, but acknowledged that keeping up with her reflections

would be helpful: “Next year I would go back to see what I was thinking, but without the notes I would forget and make all the same mistakes as before.”

Mrs. Everett’s Third Grade Classroom

Mrs. Everett’s third grade class was already engaged in Phase Two when we entered to observe, and Phase Two continued throughout the observation. About half of the students were seated at desks to read, and the other half were sitting or lying on the floor, all clearly engaged in their reading. Mrs. Everett was having a conference with one student while her student teacher conferenced with another. A low noise level pervaded the room; several students seemed to be murmuring to themselves as they read, but the noise did not seem to be distracting to other readers.

The students in this class made extensive use of sticky notes during Phase Two, as evidenced by many notes sticking out of the sides of the books in students’ hands. Two students explained that they used the notes to write down their connections and questions, and they demonstrated specific examples. Mrs. Everett later commented, “They love the post-it activity—it gives them points for going back in conferences to talk about their books.” When asked about how she introduced students to using sticky notes, Mrs. Everett explained, “I started by modeling it with a picture book, so I could show my thinking and use the post-its, and also easily be able to move the post-it when I found the answer to a question or something. Also when I read to them after lunch I model it—it helps them with making connections, and now I see them connecting everything.” She pointed out a poster at the front of the room listing symbols to be used in text coding, and explained that the students also used this for reference in making their notes.

Mrs. Everett’s student teacher was conducting a conference with a student on *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe.* Based on the level of struggle the student was experiencing while reading aloud, this book was probably too difficult for her, but no suggestion of changing the book was observed. On the other side of the classroom, Mrs. Everett was conferencing with a student who was reading Carl Hiassen’s *Scat.* When the student came to difficult words as he read, Mrs. Everett seemed to vary her response based on the words and her knowledge of the student; she supplied some words right away but guided the student to figure out others. Mrs. Everett and the student then discussed the main character, using questions from a SEM-R bookmark about the character’s feelings and whether a character was stronger on the inside than on the outside. Mrs. Everett probed a bit further to encourage deeper thinking on the latter question.

During the next conference, Mrs. Everett asked a student reading *Danny, the Champion of the World* the same question about whether a character was stronger on the inside than the outside. When the student struggled a bit, Mrs. Everett asked if he understood what she meant by the question; she explained the question further and then asked it again, and the student responded with a well-supported answer from the text.

Across the two conferences, the same question was used but adjusted to the particular student and the book being discussed.

Among the books being read in Mrs. Everett's room were the following titles: *Danny the Champion of the World, The Lion the Witch and the Wardrobe, Diary of a Wimpy Kid, City of Ember, Scat, The Horse and His Boy, The Titan's Curse, Otherwise Known as Sheila the Great, Inkheart,* one of the *Little House* books, and a nonfiction book about ancient cultures.

In her interview, Mrs. Everett highlighted the students' enthusiasm as a benefit of SEM-R. She commented, "The kids groan when I tell them to put their books away." She noted that all her students' fluency levels have increased, and that the opportunity to work one-on-one in conferences has been beneficial, because it has allowed her to learn so much about individual students' progress. Mrs. Everett also commented that "the library of books is a great resource. I would like to have read more of the books—I have a list of books to read this summer!"

Mrs. Everett shared that her challenges in implementing the program have primarily been keeping her own log up to date with reflections and conducting Book Hooks. She said, "I don't like just reading a part of a book to them! So I am still reading [all the way through] books to them as well." She commented that she would have liked more training on Book Hooks. She explained that early in the year, behavior management was something of an issue, because her boys in particular had trouble sitting still to read for increasingly longer periods. She noted that she did a lot of modeling and discussion about self-regulation to respond to this issue.

Mrs. Everett explained that she has worked with students on skill-building in reading by integrating strategy activities throughout SEM-R. She pointed out the text coding chart—"that's been really good for helping them build those skills"—and commented that she has integrated some of the skills from the OCR text into conferences with students. She also talked about her students' tendency early in the year to pick books that were too easy for them, but explained how she has used exposure to different books as a way of encouraging wider selection.

Mrs. Jacobs' Third Grade Classroom

Mrs. Jacobs was beginning a Book Hook on *How to Eat Fried Worms* as we entered her classroom. She told the students that she really enjoyed the humor of the book, including the title. She asked if any of the students had seen the movie based on the book, and then invited a short conversation about the differences between the movie and book versions of a story, based on previous discussion about *The Tale of Desperaux.* She then engaged students in a short discussion about genre, asking them whether the book was a fantasy, then asking them to compare realistic fiction and biography. Opening the book, Mrs. Jacobs asked students what they could learn from the lengthy table of contents

relative to the size of the book—would the chapters be long or short? Finally, she read Chapter 1 aloud. The students seemed fairly engaged, with some paying attention directly while others looked around the room; about 2/3 of the students raised their hands when Mrs. Jacobs asked who might like to read the book.

The transition to Phase Two took under two minutes; students' folders, containing reading logs and books, were organized in different baskets by color, and students got their folders and moved to reading spots quickly and quietly. Most of the students went to spots on the floor; the students all seemed to have large pillows to make their spots more comfortable, and Mrs. Jacobs later shared that she had invited the students to bring pillows to school for this purpose.

During each of the two conferences observed, Mrs. Jacobs let the student sit in the rolling teacher's chair, a touch that supported the strong positive relationships that were evident throughout the observation. Mrs. Jacobs focused her questions on characters, tailoring the questions to the specific students and books. In the first conference, Mrs. Jacobs asked a student which of the two main characters she was more like; the student answered, "kind of both" but gave an explanation for only one. Mrs. Jacobs then probed further to encourage the student to explain how she was like the other character. The student at first had no response, but finally found a connection with the second character. The second observed conference focused on the sequel *Stuart Goes to School*. After listening to the student read, Mrs. Jacobs asked the student to talk about in what ways the character's behavior was similar to or different from his behavior in the first book. She followed up with questions about why the changes might have occurred and what the student thought he might have done in the same situation as the character.

Mrs. Jacobs commented in her interview that one benefit of SEM-R has been that the students could pick their own books. "Especially for the higher-level kids, it's boring to read at a pace below their level, and for the kids reading below grade level, they struggle with some of the stories in the anthology [OCR]. So the fact that they can choose their own books is the best part."

Another important benefit, Mrs. Jacobs noted, was the time spent conferencing: "I have also really enjoyed getting to know the level they are capable of—you can tell some things from how they do with the anthology, but not everything." She explained that conferences have been important both for assessment and for her relationships with her students: "It's critical to meet with every child every week because of the improvement just from week to week—and they also really value the time one-on-one with you." Mrs. Jacobs explained that she has tended to focus primarily on questions dealing with character and plot in her conferences, but has raised the level and gone more in-depth as appropriate for the student. She said that she often tries to have students working on the same type of question within conferences but at different levels.

Mrs. Jacobs indicated that she was comfortable integrating a broad range of skills into her SEM-R implementation. She explained that for many of the skills included in OCR, she had been able to have students apply the same skills within SEM-R; she gave examples of such lessons as distinguishing between different types of sentences and finding examples of dialogue, and noted that she felt it was important for students to be able to find these things within their own books.

In talking about challenges she experienced with SEM-R, Mrs. Jacobs focused primarily on what she has learned or changed throughout the process, including recognizing that implementing SEM-R is a learning process itself: "at the beginning it's ok not to get to every bit of SEM-R because some of it you really have to build up to." Mrs. Jacobs also talked about the challenge of determining the levels of books to use for Book Hooks. She explained that early in the year, she started with books "in the middle, but then I felt like I was being the anthology!" This realization led her to start using more challenging books to engage her advanced readers, and her numbers of students reading at higher levels has been growing throughout the year. However, she noted, she then felt that perhaps she was not hitting the other levels, so she now balances her Book Hooks with "about three higher, two lower books per week. That way the lower readers are also excited and are sharing among themselves, laughing out loud."

Mrs. Jacobs commented that Phase Three has also been a challenge; she noted that students enjoy Phase Three when she incorporates it, but that often she has found it difficult to fit in because of time constraints. Another challenge for Mrs. Jacobs has been keeping up with her teacher log; she noted that she has relied much more on the student logs for record-keeping.

Mrs. Jacobs said that her students had exceeded her expectations in their growth during the year. She noted that all of her students have improved in fluency, and that in particular, the program has helped students at the ends of the spectrum: "The anthology doesn't really help as much with kids at the higher and lower ends. This really helps to differentiate." Mrs. Jacobs also expressed her wish that she had known about SEM-R earlier, because of how it might have helped students she taught in the past: "There are so many other classes of kids that I've had that would have benefitted. I can think of many specific students for whom the anthology did not do them justice. I have one kid this year who's more of a challenge than some, but I am able to get him to buckle down—he might just slide right through under the radar with the anthology."

Ms. Bartlett's Fourth Grade Classroom

Ms. Bartlett's fourth grade class was considerably larger than the second and third grade classes observed, with about 30 students. However, when I entered during Phase Two, students were busy reading in whatever spots they had been able to find; some sat at desks, some on the floor, and some in rocking-chair cushions. Two students were taking Reading Counts tests on classroom computers. There were books in every possible

classroom space—bookshelves lined the walls and were arranged at the ends of groups of student desks.

Ms. Bartlett was using a timer to help keep track of time during conferences. Students who were seated in the rocking-chair cushions were those who would have a conference that day—a management system similar to the one observed in the second grade SEM-R class.

Ms. Bartlett conducted two conferences during the observed time. She first conferenced with a student who was reading the final Harry Potter book, and after asking him to explain how he had determined the meaning of a particular word, she asked him to talk about what he thought of this book compared to others in the series. They discussed how they both wished there could be more books in the series. Ms. Bartlett then conferenced with a student reading *Scary Stories,* and after asking the student to share what he liked about the book, she asked whether he thought he should read something more challenging; they discussed what his next choice might be.

Among the books that students were reading in Ms. Bartlett's class were the following: *Ghost Cat, Diary of a Wimpy Kid, Thirteen, Crooked Kind of Perfect, Freak the Mighty, Bad Boy, Scary Stories, Sideways Stories from Wayside School,* and *Janitor's Boy.*

According to Ms. Bartlett, the greatest benefit of SEM-R has been how it has promoted students' love of reading. She explained that she has struggled against the district's "dogmatic" implementation of OCR, "because I feel like it's not the way we should be teaching reading. [SEM-R] gives the opportunity for the students really to experience literature—for me it's a rubber stamp on what I know to be good instruction." Ms. Bartlett commented that her students' reading has improved and that "they get mad if we don't have time every day to read." Ms. Bartlett shared that students have also increased their reading time considerably: "Some of them didn't know how to sit and read. At first they couldn't sit and read for 15 minutes."

In describing her approach to conferences, Ms. Bartlett commented that she has tended to focus on prediction and character analysis questions, using such questions to ensure that students have been paying attention to what they are reading. She noted, "Probably some of the questions aren't as deep as they could be—I like to let them share and enjoy reading, I feel like that's part of the point at this level." Ms. Bartlett commented that she has probably emphasized the sticky notes somewhat less than other teachers, because "I just want them to read." However, she noted that she has encouraged students in conferences to turn back in the text and make notes.

Ms. Bartlett indicated that record-keeping has been her biggest challenge with SEM-R, and that she has not really kept up her teacher log. She shared that she has relied mostly on the students' logs to document progress. Another challenge was that she felt

some students may "need more structure to keep them involved. They might sometimes just be turning pages." Ms. Bartlett also felt it was challenging to conduct conferences on books she had not read herself; she indicated that she was planning to spend time over the summer reading more of the books. Phase Three was another area of challenge, primarily because of trying to manage time.

Ms. Bartlett shared that she has used weekly readings with questions as a way of documenting student progress in line with the school and district expectations (OCR), and she has also encouraged her students to participate in Reading Counts. She commented that these methods let her "feel comfortable that they are above the kids who are just doing Open Court."

Ms. Bartlett commented that being "passionate about it and competent as a teacher" are key aspects of doing SEM-R successfully. She said that she hoped SEM-R could be used "to help out the big urban districts as much as you can," because programs like OCR would be "very disheartening" to a new teacher. In addition, she expressed concern that "our gifted kids are not getting what they need with the basal, and I think we're losing a lot of bright kids that way."

Mrs. Randall's Fourth Grade Resource Classroom

Mrs. Randall has participated as a SEM-R treatment teacher in a somewhat unusual setting, compared to the other teachers in the school. Mrs. Randall works as a special education resource teacher, and she conducts SEM-R with the students who come to her classroom for pull-out reading support. She and Mrs. Nicholson explained that the school provides a flexible reading support program, and Mrs. Randall works with students who have IEPs for services but also with students who do not have IEPs but need additional support.

Mrs. Randall's room was divided into several different sections by low bookcases, and students were able to read on the carpet or at one of several tables. Posters around the room encouraged reading strategies and explained genres of books. SEM-R folders were gathered in baskets on a table. Students entered the room at different times during the observation; Mrs. Randall shared that because the students were coming from different classes and did not all enter at the same time, she generally had students begin reading immediately upon entering. Then, once all students had arrived, she would bring Phase Two to a stop and conduct Phase One, conduct conferences for a while and then move to Phase One, or conduct a mini-lesson with a small group of students while others continued to engage in reading. Additionally, extra Phase One time occurred at least once a week when a former children's librarian served as a classroom volunteer conducting Book Hooks.

During the first 15 minutes of the observation, six students entered the room and began reading immediately; two students were listening to a book on tape, three sat on

the floor reading, and one sat at a table. Mrs. Randall commented that SEM-R has helped her students to feel successful in their reading and to stay focused. Mrs. Nicholson noted that the student sitting at the table, who read steadily from *The Tale of Desperaux* throughout the observation, had never shown that kind of focus previously. Mrs. Randall conducted a conference with this student toward the end of our visit; after asking the student if she had seen the movie based on this book (no), Mrs. Randall invited the student to make predictions about what would happen next.

Mrs. Randall expressed her perception that one of the major benefits of SEM-R has been that the program allowed her to implement it in her role, because her students would not necessarily have had access to it if she were not part of the treatment group. She commented on many benefits she has observed for her students, including their interest and developing confidence in reading, as well as self-regulation skills: "A lot of them have attention problems—but you'll see them monitor themselves, maybe moving to a different place or turning a different way to avoid distractions—they are really into their books." Mrs. Randall noted that most of her students started the year below grade level, but that many have been coming up to grade level. In addition, Mrs. Randall shared that most of her students have increased from only about 5 minutes of reading time at the beginning of the year to 30 minutes now. "And all of them will be readers, and will enjoy reading," she said. "Last year I couldn't say that about my students."

Mrs. Randall explained that she sometimes used a strategy of alternating reading aloud with students in conferences, fading out this strategy as students grew more confident. She also explained that during conferences, she focused extensively on book selection and on helping her students to find books that are an appropriate match. She shared that many of her students, especially those who are low-level readers, often wanted to pick books that are too hard, "because they know that they're not reading the same things as some of the other kids and they want to pick the big fat books. So making sure they can access what they are reading is important."

Mrs. Randall also shared that she had felt it necessary to add more books to the collection for her lower level readers, and that she had focused on finding picture books and other books with relatively simple text but with more advanced concepts and symbolism. "It's important with these kids not to be assuming that they can only read and understand lower level *concepts* just because their reading level is lower—we had surprises from some kids who chose harder books. Sometimes orally maybe they struggle and can't get the words out, but their comprehension may be much higher." Mrs. Randall shared that one of her goals for next year would be to help broaden as well as raise the level of students' book selections; in particular, she wished to help some students who tended to focus on nonfiction to find fiction choices that appealed to them.

Implementing Phase Three has been a challenge for Mrs. Randall, largely because of time. However, she wished she could have had more training on Phase Three.

Mrs. Randall raised several points about aspects of planning SEM-R and linking it to other instruction in reading and language arts. She emphasized the importance of taking time to go through the standards to determine how best to integrate them and document connections, especially because such connections "give you more confidence about what you are doing." She highlighted some resources Mrs. Nicholson had provided (from *Comprehension Toolkit,* Harvey & Goudvis), indicating that she hoped the school would be able to provide more resources like these.

Another of Mrs. Randall's goals, she explained, has been to get the books for the program well-organized so that she knows the themes, concepts, and skills supported by each one, as well as having a sense of the level of each book. She demonstrated her coding system, by which she has been placing a sticky note in the back of each book noting key skills and concepts. She said that she planned to do some more work with that in preparation for next year.

Ms. Oliver's Fifth Grade Classroom

Ms. Oliver's fifth grade class was the largest class observed at that point in the visit to the school, with about 34 students in the classroom. There was limited room for students to sit anywhere but at desks, and the floor was not carpeted. Nevertheless, the room was welcoming and busy, with a lot of books everywhere and posters and student work focusing on reading.

Ms. Oliver was beginning a Book Hook on *Red Kayak.* She shared that she chose this book because of the kayaking they had done on a recent fifth grade field trip. She read aloud briefly from the book, then focused on some foreshadowing and asked students to predict what might happen next. Students suggested several ideas; Ms. Oliver's response seemed to reveal the correct prediction, but whether the students picked this up was unclear! She then read from *Pictures of Hollis Woods,* commenting that the cover had intrigued her. Ms. Oliver then asked students to talk about what kind of person they thought the character was, based on the excerpt.

Ms. Oliver began a countdown from 10 while students transitioned to Phase Two. As noted, there was limited space, but students took advantage of the opportunity to move to a different desk or to lie on the floor underneath a desk. All students were ready to read by the time Ms. Oliver's countdown ended, and she said they would be reading for at least 30 minutes, after which they would decide whether to continue reading or move to language centers. Across all observations, this was the only comment to students that seemed to refer to Phase Three.

Despite the limited space and the issue of students being practically on top of each other, most students remained quiet and engaged in reading throughout the rest of the observation. Only one conference was observed during the period; Ms. Oliver and a student were discussing the student's perception that his book was getting boring and

confusing, and they were trying to together determine what had happened thus far in the story and why it had started getting boring. The focus was on the match of both interest and challenge level of the book.

Books being read in Ms. Oliver's classroom included *Diary of a Wimpy Kid, Hitler Youth, Captain Underpants, Love That Dog, Lost and Found, Elsewhere, Because of Winn-Dixie, Kenny and the Dragon, Hatchet, Every Soul a Star, Snow White* [fairy tale anthology], *The Littles, Book of Dogs, Charlie and the Chocolate Factory, Yellow Star,* and *Olive's Ocean.*

Ms. Oliver commented in her interview that one of the main benefits of SEM-R has been that students have been able to have choices in their reading. She also said, "Reading aloud went better for me this year than ever before, so that's something I'll take away from this."

Ms. Oliver commented that as a new teacher, she found SEM-R to be somewhat overwhelming; she does not believe she has a large toolbox of skills from which to draw in implementing her instruction. She said that during conferences, she generally asked students to tell her about their books and continued the conversation from there—"I didn't usually pick a specific set of skills to work on." Ms. Oliver commented that classroom management was a challenge at the beginning: "I found I spent more time policing than conferencing sometimes." She said that she found management to be easier when the students got more used to SEM-R. In addition, early in the year, Ms. Oliver was alternating SEM-R with OCR instruction, and she said that her students seemed to struggle with not having the consistency of one or the other. She said that she had decreased her OCR instruction, and although she still has been giving some OCR assessments for documentation, the students seemed to have settled into SEM-R.

Guiding her students to particular books was another challenge. Ms. Oliver said that she wished that she could have read more of the books in advance. She specifically indicated concern about helping lower-level readers find books that were a good match. She said that some of these students tended to perceive that they should be reading something more advanced to be like their peers and to pick books that were too difficult for them; in addition, many of the books actually on their reading level were "too juvenile." Ms. Oliver reflected that she had tutored adult nonreaders in the past and that perhaps some of the books from that context might be appropriate choices for struggling but mature fifth graders in the future.

Because of the budgetary issues in the school district, Ms. Oliver likely will not have a full-time teaching position next year. However, she said, "The thing I'm taking away from this is that as a child I was an avid reader, and some of these kids are, and we're not really supporting that in schools. I feel more prepared to support that for those kids."

Mrs. Nicholson's Fifth Grade Classroom

Mrs. Nicholson began Phase One with a discussion of nonfiction reading, including the idea that some nonfiction texts may not be intended to be read straight through from cover to cover. She used her document camera to show some sample pages from *101 Places to Go Before You're 12.* She then introduced *Hungry Planet,* discussing some sample pages, and then commented that the text in the book is pretty difficult, so students might want to consider reading a part of the book but wouldn't necessarily have to take on the whole thing. Students seemed interested in both books and leaned forward to see the pictures being shared.

Mrs. Nicholson wrapped up Phase One with a brief discussion of two novels. She explained that both *Science Fair* and *Scat* have connections to science that might help students get ready for Earth Day and the science fair. Students seemed engaged by the brief summary of the two books; Mrs. Nicholson later shared that she had been finding lately that students seemed less engaged by read-alouds and wanted to get to their own books and conferences, so she often focused Phase One on brief discussions of book selection and themes rather than reading aloud.

Following Phase One, Mrs. Nicholson directed students to find a space for reading. With over 30 students in the class, available space was limited, but most students found places to read away from the desks. The available space was expanded considerably by access to the outside; 11 girls went out to the outdoor "hallway" to read. They sat there throughout Phase Two, several in camp chairs and the rest on the floor, all facing toward the classroom and engrossed in their books. In the classroom, one small group of boys required several directed comments during the time observed to settle down, but overall students were engaged with their reading.

Mrs. Nicholson began her conferences with a student who was reading Sharon Creech's *Castle Corona.* She asked the student to talk about in what ways the book was or was not a traditional fairy tale, and shared with the student that the book reminded her of the movie *Enchanted.* They discussed the connections between the book and movie briefly, then moved on to talk about connections to other books by the author, and they discussed other Creech books briefly.

The next conference was with a student who was reading the poetry collection recently compiled by Caroline Kennedy. After the student read aloud, Mrs. Nicholson asked what the student observed about the poem, and they discussed elements such as rhyme scheme and the meaning of the term "anonymous." Mrs. Nicholson later shared that this student had been struggling to find books to engage her, and that poetry seemed to have appealed to her.

In her next conference, Mrs. Nicholson discussed *Ink Drinker* with a student, primarily focusing on why the student had chosen this book and stopped reading another book; the student acknowledged that this book was not sufficiently challenging for him.

Mrs. Nicholson and the student discussed which books he has most enjoyed, and how he might use those experiences to find his next book; they moved to a bookshelf together to look for a new title.

Books being read by Mrs. Nicholson's students included *The BFG, Freak the Mighty, Inkheart, Sounder, Frankenstein, Elephant Fun, Thirteen, Revenge of the Scorpion King, The Thief Lord, Elsewhere, 5 People you Meet in Heaven, Ghost Ship,* and *Things Hoped For.*

In her interview, Mrs. Nicholson said that the biggest benefit of SEM-R was that students could take ownership of reading and make individual choices: "Not every kid is into every story, so this is an improvement over the basal in terms of matching their interests." She said that students were recommending books to each other and increasing the level of their connections: "They are paying attention to authors the way we might do as more sophisticated readers."

Mrs. Nicholson also shared her perception that SEM-R is more effective for time management than a basal program. "Even though that seems strange because it's one on one, you can be more efficient with your time with each student while the others are reading…. You can work with decoding if that's an issue for a student, or whatever is the particular need."

Mrs. Nicholson indicated that the biggest challenge for her in implementing SEM-R has been "management of paper" and that keeping up with her teacher log has been challenging. She explained that another challenge has been working out ways to build mini-lessons within Phase One around particular skills and concepts. She explained that she plans to consider emphasizing one genre per month in Phase One as a way of organizing Book Hooks and related mini-lessons. Mrs. Nicholson explained that she hopes through such strategies to reduce even more how much students use OCR: "I want to go back and align a bit more the things I'm doing with the standards. I would love not to have to make them pick up a textbook at all."

Describing her conferences, Mrs. Nicholson said she has worked over the year to reduce the length of conferences and to extend the focus of the conversations. She explained that usually about a minute of reading aloud has seemed to be sufficient for assessing fluency and the match of the book, and she has generally followed this with some discussion about the selection of the book. Beyond these initial steps, she has used the bookmarks but has decreased her reliance on them over time while still focusing on developing particular skills with particular students based on their needs, and on developing specific skills and strategies within the standards.

Mrs. Nicholson commented that her own extensive reading of children's books and of books in general has been an important aspect of her development of conferencing skills, and indeed of teaching reading in general. "It's hard to do the conferences if you

don't read—but if you're not a reader, you're going to have a hard time teaching reading." She further discussed the challenge of assessing books for advanced readers in fifth grade based on maturity of the content. She explained that she has tried to screen books and make judgments as to whether specific books are or are not appropriate for specific students. She also explained that she spent time in parent-teacher conferences discussing this issue with parents. Mrs. Nicholson's comments indicated that she has been careful to get to know her students well and to assess whether certain content is or is not appropriate for them at their level of development, whatever their reading level. "I don't believe in censorship, but just using my own judgment about whether the kids are ready for those books, and again talking with parents."

Extending the discussion about parent involvement and communication, Mrs. Nicholson described monthly family reading events that she has implemented to support and encourage engagement with reading. These themed events have involved having parents come to spend a morning at school reading alongside their children and sharing in the overall experience. Mrs. Nicholson commented that parents have been excited to be involved and to take time out to read and spend time reading with their children.

Part of Mrs. Nicholson's interview focused on her role as the school's coach and liaison for SEM-R for the school. She explained that there had been some challenges in ensuring implementation because of some administrative concerns, especially because of pressure from district administrators about OCR. Mrs. Nicholson explained that the area language arts director was a strong supporter of OCR, and that it took visits to classrooms and lengthy conversations to demonstrate the potential of SEM-R to him: "I had to sit down with him to explain what the program was about and how we were covering everything needed, but the situation was problematic." The limited documentation of specific skills in SEM-R, especially compared to OCR, was a particular area of concern. In addition, although Mrs. Nicholson felt that her principal was supportive, she also wished that Mrs. Hale had been more involved in SEM-R professional development so that she would have a stronger understanding of the program.

Because of her role as a full-time classroom teacher, Mrs. Nicholson said, coaching was difficult; she had limited availability to the other teachers during instruction. She commented that she had struggled to balance her nonevaluative support role with how to respond when she saw problems. She explained that she had tried to manage these situations with strategies such as saying she was struggling with something herself and drawing teachers into conversation on it.

Mrs. Nicholson noted that she thought implementation was more difficult for the teachers who received training from their colleagues instead of directly from the SEM-R team, and that for the whole group there may have been some hesitation in sharing any difficulties they were having: "There's a fear, I think, of asking questions, because teachers don't want to look like they don't know what they're doing." She said that she used a strategy of building scaffolding when teachers expressed concerns, suggesting that

they try something just for a month, and then build on that for another month, and so forth. Mrs. Nicholson also said that the SEM-R resources online were helpful, although the teachers seemed to have limited time to access them.

Mrs. Nicholson expressed her opinion that success with SEM-R was related to whether the teachers themselves were readers. “Some are readers and some are less so—I think to do this it really helps to have a good awareness of children’s books—to know the text features, know the authors, and so on. When you haven’t read the book, if you have a good overall sense, you can tell much more whether they’ve really read and understood it. And so I’ve been recommending, encouraging the teachers to read particular books, and some of them do and others might not.”

To support the group of teachers implementing SEM-R, Mrs. Nicholson had tried a few strategies including encouraging weekly lunch meetings and scheduling a professional development day to work on materials. She provided the teachers with some resources on reading strategies from Harvey and Goudvis’s *Comprehension Toolkit*, and the teachers worked together to prepare posters and to talk about how they were modeling use of sticky notes for their students and implementing that in their classrooms, with an eye to supporting one another and establishing common language across the school. The teachers felt such commonality was important, so that students who continue in the program would have some continuity in the terminology they use as well as the framework overall. Mrs. Hale, Mrs. Nicholson, and the other treatment teachers discussed the challenges of meeting as a group on SEM-R, but several commented on the support structure of knowing there were other teachers implementing in the school as well who were available for sharing and discussion. The teachers also talked about feeling somewhat awkward about the treatment/comparison class situation, and explained that the group had done some sharing in staff meetings to help alleviate those concerns.

Comparison Classrooms

Brief observations, lasting from about 10-25 minutes, were conducted in five of the seven comparison classes. Most of the comparison classes were engaged in OCR activities.

Ms. Parrish’s Second Grade Classroom

Ms. Parrish’s room had many similar posters and projects to Mrs. Conlon’s treatment classroom next door. The vocabulary list posted on the board was the same in the two rooms; the list was drawn from the OCR story Ms. Parrish’s class was reading, “Molly the Brave and Me.” Mrs. Nicholson shared that Ms. Parrish had attended a SEM-R presentation prior to the school’s involvement in the study, so she had some knowledge of the program; in addition, Ms. Parrish and Mrs. Conlon continued doing a lot of their planning together.

When we entered, students were copying and editing sentences from the board. Ms. Parrish invited one student to the board at a time to correct a sentence, and the other students corrected their own work at their seats. Then several students shared aloud from their journals.

Ms. Parrish then asked students to take out their OCR books and to open to their current story. She engaged them in a whole group discussion of the story, which clearly the students knew well based on having worked on it for the previous couple of days. All of the students seemed engaged in the discussion, and Ms. Parrish's questions included a variety of levels; some required only recall of what was happening in the story, while others required more thinking, such as a question of which character in the story was braver and why.

Mrs. Brennan's Third Grade Classroom

Students were busy with a sequencing activity when I visited Mrs. Brennan's third grade classroom. They were creating booklets in which they identified events that happened *first, then, next,* and *finally* in the story they had been reading from their OCR textbook. When asked about their reactions to the story, several students said that they liked the story because it was exciting. Most students in the classroom seemed engaged in the activity. A few who had completed their work were reading books on their own.

Mr. Dell's Fourth Grade Classroom

During my observation of his fourth grade classroom, Mr. Dell guided students in a whole group discussion of the novel they were all reading, *Island of the Blue Dolphins*. Based on the discussion, it was evident that the class had read about 1/3 of the novel so far. Mr. Dell began by directing students to a given page and asking for someone to summarize the plot to that point. He focused on a *compromise* that had taken place and explored several real-world examples of compromises. When he then asked a student to continue with the plot summary, the student said she had not been there when they were last reading the book, so she didn't know.

Mr. Dell continued the discussion of the book, drawing connections between the text and the local area, pointing out geographical connections and sharing his own experiences. Most of his questions to students were specific recall questions about plot points in the book; students were not disruptive during the discussion, but most were not highly engaged, as evidenced by limited hand-raising and the fact that students seemed to be looking around at other things.

Ms. Lund's Fifth Grade Classroom

A brief, 10-minute observation was conducted in Ms. Lund's fifth grade classroom as she conducted a lesson on fact and opinion, drawn from the OCR

workbook. Ms. Lund had students choral read definitions of fact and opinion, alternating readings with questions to help students clarify their understanding of the terms. She asked why it would be important for a reader or a writer to know the difference between fact and opinion, but did not pursue the discussion to much depth. After students read the definition of opinion, Ms. Lund invited them to give examples of opinions and explain how they knew these were opinions, but did not do the same for fact. Then Ms. Lund passed out a reading passage about King Tut's tomb and directed students first to read the page silently, then to go back and label examples of fact and opinion.

Substitute Teacher's Fifth Grade Classroom

One of the grade 5 comparison classes had a substitute for the day, but I conducted an observation anyway based on an understanding that the substitute was following the regular teacher's pattern for reading instruction. The class was reading from a story about the siege of Vicksburg from the OCR textbook. One student would read a paragraph aloud, and then the teacher would ask a question or two before inviting another student to read. Some questions probed for background knowledge, such as a question about the location of Mississippi and another about the meaning of the word "firing" in context. Other questions required students to make inferences; for example, the teacher asked why the characters were drinking tea despite the cannons and what the significance was of the weeds growing in the yard.

Students were generally responsive to the questions and seemed to be following along or reading ahead. Each time the teacher asked if any students had questions or comments, the only students raising their hands seemed to be those who were asking if they could read next.

Summary of Comparison Classes

Overall, the comparison classrooms looked similar in many ways to the treatment classes, with many books in the rooms and books on students' desks in several of them. Also, posters and student projects reflected an overall focus on literacy. Students across classes were well-behaved and, in general, engaged in the activities. The emphasis on the OCR program clearly limited the differentiation being implemented, because in each class observed, all students were reading the same thing. The teachers varied considerably in the types of questioning they employed, and the amount of reading time for students was limited in the time observed. It should be noted, however, that all of the teachers indicated in conversations or posted schedules that students would have independent reading time during the day, in a sustained silent reading format.

Interview With Laura Hale, Principal at Main Street School

Mrs. Hale, the principal of Main Street School, commented that one of the most important benefits of SEM-R in her school had been "the love of reading that I see—some students that I'm just amazed to see how much they are reading, and how much the students want to tell me about their books." She described talking with students about their books and seeing other students come into the conversation because of their excitement about reading. She explained that the program has also been exciting and beneficial for the teachers: "These are teachers who have felt stifled by Open Court—this is more like why they wanted to become a teacher." Mrs. Hale did note that for some teachers, she felt that OCR was beneficial because of its level of structure, "but for seasoned veteran teachers it's not really a good fit."

Mrs. Hale indicated that parents who are aware of SEM-R in the school have been very supportive: "The parents who know about it want their children involved in it, especially the ones who volunteer here at the school and see it." She explained that she has ensured that parents understand all students are having the curriculum covered, and to avoid perceptions that there are "haves" and "have nots" with a special program running in the school. She also noted that she has tried to avoid similar issues among her staff, and that she is trying to respond to those teachers who have indicated that they want to have involvement with SEM-R in the future. She explained that she has invited Mrs. Nicholson and the other treatment teachers to share some aspects of what they are doing in staff meetings, to preserve community atmosphere.

Challenges in implementing SEM-R, according to Mrs. Hale, have included helping Mrs. Nicholson to be able to visit other classes because of the need to cover her own, as well as budgetary restrictions that have limited the number of sub days that could be provided to allow the treatment teachers to work on collaborative planning for SEM-R. Mrs. Hale explained that her goals for further implementation of SEM-R include expanding it to those teachers who are interested and ready, assuming that the results support it as well as the evident student engagement has. She said that she is looking forward to seeing test scores at the end of the year to help to document other positive results of SEM-R, and she emphasized the importance of looking at the data to determine what is working. She explained that the area language arts director has allowed SEM-R despite his preference for OCR because the school already has a relatively high percentage of students reading on grade level.

Mrs. Hale commended Mrs. Nicholson's selection of treatment teachers, and noted that starting with a group of motivated, talented teachers was important to getting the program off the ground. She commented that she would recommend the program to other administrators, again depending on the results: "My job is to support the teachers—if they can convince me that what they're doing is going to be good for the kids, I will support that. Again this is all depending on the test scores—we have to wait to see the

results, because really that's the way the world is now, that's what matters, but assuming the results are good I would recommend it."

Findings

Several findings emerged across the observations and interviews at Main Street School. The most notable patterns included student enjoyment of and engagement in reading; the challenges and benefits of SEM-R for students at the ends of the spectrum of reading ability; an emphasis on planned instructional integration to respond to standards; and time management. In addition, clear variability among teachers emerged, along with patterns regarding the process of implementing an innovation. Each of these key findings is discussed in more detail below.

Across all observations and interviews, one very clear finding was the engagement of SEM-R students with reading and their enjoyment of it. All of the teachers and the principal commented on how much students were enjoying reading, and all of the observations demonstrated high engagement. The overall culture of the school seemed to incorporate strong support for literacy and involvement in reading, as evidenced by the library, the well-stocked classrooms, and the general engagement in reading activities of students in both treatment and comparison classes; however, the treatment teachers seemed to perceive a notable difference in their students' reading involvement during SEM-R compared to previously. The teachers attributed some of the engagement and enjoyment to students' opportunity to choose what they read, as well as to the opportunities to talk about what they were reading with their teachers and one another. Several of the teachers highlighted the significant differences in level of enthusiasm between reading in SEM-R and reading in OCR. Two comments from Mrs. Conlon help to demonstrate these differences. First, in describing her students' engagement with SEM-R, she said, "It has made them enthusiastic readers. Being interested—the only unit in OCR they really like is about dinosaurs." Later, in discussing implementation of SEM-R across multiple classes and grades, she said, "Seeing third graders that I had last year and hearing about those kids now and what they are excited about—they had a love of reading then, too, but I had one of them say to me, 'I didn't really like to read before but I do now.'"

Several of the teachers talked about the benefits and the challenges that SEM-R presented for students at the higher and lower ends of reading ability. For students at the higher end, several teachers commented that SEM-R provided opportunities that OCR did not, and gave these students opportunities to read at a level of challenge. Ms. Bartlett commented, "Our gifted kids are not getting what they need with the basal, and I think we're losing a lot of bright kids that way." Mrs. Jacobs highlighted the ways in which she has been able to engage her higher-level readers with more advanced books in Book Hooks, while also raising the overall number of students reading at higher levels. The range of books being read in each SEM-R classroom was also an indication of the

response to varied levels; this range was especially noticeable compared to the use of the same readings for the whole class in every comparison class observed.

With regard to students at the lower levels of ability in reading, Mrs. Randall in particular commented on how SEM-R has allowed her students access to and success in reading that they may not have experienced before. Several of the teachers also commented on how some students might "slip under the radar" in a whole class instructional setting, while their needs and successes are more noticeable in the individualized SEM-R structure. At the same time, several of the teachers did express concern that some students might need more structure than SEM-R provides; Ms. Bartlett, for example, perceived that for some of her more struggling students a different structure might be more appropriate, and Mrs. Conlon felt that her success in implementing SEM-R at grade 2 had much to do with the high achievement level of her class in general. Nevertheless, most of the teachers saw the individualized structure of SEM-R as a benefit for their struggling students as well as their classes overall.

One further pattern emerged with regard to students at the ends of the reading spectrum. Several of the teachers, notably Mrs. Randall and Ms. Oliver, observed that their struggling readers tended to gravitate toward books that were too difficult for them. These teachers felt that their struggling students were aware that their reading level was below that of their classmates, and wanted to select harder books to reflect what their peers were doing. Consequently, the teachers were faced with the challenge of finding books that were of an appropriate reading level without being too "babyish" in content or appearance. Meanwhile, other teachers commented on the tendency of students to select books that were too easy; this pattern was not specifically attributed to advanced readers, but there was a suggestion of this in the teacher comments and observations. The combination of these two trends—more advanced readers picking books that are too easy while struggling readers pick books that are too hard—may warrant further exploration across other sites and data sources, and may also suggest an important topic for discussion in professional development on SEM-R. A related point is the issue of how teachers find and provide books that are not too challenging but not too juvenile for struggling readers, while also providing books that are challenging enough but not too mature for advanced readers.

Another pattern emerging across the observations and interviews was an emphasis on planning and integrating specific objectives and skills into SEM-R instruction. The teachers demonstrated a continuum of concern about the degree to which SEM-R supported them in covering required skills and strategies for their language arts standards and assessments. Several of the teachers specifically mentioned having alternated SEM-R instruction with OCR instruction, and others made reference to administering some assessments from OCR or integrating objectives from OCR or from the state standards into their SEM-R instruction. Consistently, most teachers expressed their dislike for the OCR program, and the principal seemed to have some ambivalence. Nevertheless, the teachers seemed to have different levels of comfort with being able to use SEM-R to

provide and document instruction and mastery of specific skills; the teachers who were not using OCR much at all seemed to have a strong sense of the specific skills they were integrating into SEM-R, while the other teachers seemed to prefer alternating or doing occasional OCR activities. The concern about integrating specific objectives into SEM-R seemed to have driven the professional development time the treatment teachers were able to spend together, and the resources used from Harvey and Goudvis were perceived by the teachers to create a good bridge between the very specific instruction of OCR and the less specific linkage to skills and standards in SEM-R.

Concerns about time management emerged across the treatment teacher interviews at Main Street School. Nearly every teacher raised some issue of time management, usually referring to the difficulty of finding time for Phase Three, time for completing their reflections in their logs, or both. Each teacher commented on Phase Three as an area of challenge; several of them noted some Phase Three activities they had done, including book projects, book clubs, art projects related to reading, and Renzulli Learning, but all teachers indicated that time for Phase Three had been limited throughout the year. No classrooms were observed to be conducting Phase Three. Consistently, the teachers also talked about how they had found it difficult to keep up with their reflections. Most of the teachers seemed to rely primarily on student logs for tracking purposes, and used their teacher logs much less frequently.

The seven teachers implementing SEM-R represented a wide range of experience and of teaching style, and the variability among this group emerged in several ways in their implementation of SEM-R. As previously noted, there was variability in how much the teachers felt they needed to integrate OCR directly with SEM-R. Several of the teachers seemed to eliminate OCR almost entirely from their reading instruction; two of these teachers, Mrs. Nicholson and Mrs. Jacobs, also reflected in their observation and interview a strong capacity for planning for instruction and monitoring the skills they were integrating, so their confidence in eliminating OCR seemed warranted. Mrs. Randall, in addition, indicated a strong confidence in integrating key objectives from the standards into SEM-R. Several of the teachers with less experience or less apparent confidence seemed to want to preserve some of the security they felt the OCR assessments offered them. Another area of variability was in teachers' questioning during conferences, including both what was observed and what they shared in interviews. Some seemed to place a stronger emphasis on encouraging enjoyment and sharing than on fostering specific strategies or higher-level thinking. Other teachers selected specific areas to emphasize across conferences, usually demonstrating differentiation as they worked with different students. Finally, some teachers appeared to target their questions directly to the particular student and book with whom they were working, rather than using a similar pattern across students. Variability in questioning styles and strengths was also apparent across the comparison classes.

Many of the teachers commented on feeling some discomfort conducting conferences on books they had not read, and most of them indicated that they had plans

to spend some of their summer reading books their students were reading, to prepare better for next year. Two of the teachers, Mrs. Nicholson and Ms. Bartlett, discussed the issue of teachers' own attitudes toward reading having a significant relationship to their work in SEM-R. Mrs. Nicholson, in her role as coach, specifically emphasized the importance of teachers' knowledge of children's books as a critical factor in SEM-R, and seemed to suggest that some differences in preference for reading children's books affected teachers' work in the program.

A final pattern that emerged in the SEM-R implementation at Main Street School was the evidence of a change process at work, including some of the "ups and downs" experienced as teachers developed their own understanding of SEM-R. When asked about challenges they had faced, many of the teachers identified challenges but also explained how they had learned to respond to those challenges. For example, the teachers demonstrated that they had resolved some concerns about how much of OCR to integrate, and they had put several management structures in place to guide their implementation. Of the four teachers who had attended professional development for SEM-R at Confratute, two specifically noted that they had come back from Connecticut feeling confident and ready to implement, but had then found themselves more uncertain as they got started; they indicated that it took some time to build their confidence as they implemented the program. Several of the treatment teachers also indicated that they wished they had had more training in certain aspects of SEM-R, including Book Hooks and Phase Three, but that they had developed their understanding as they progressed through the year.

The treatment teachers also reflected Guskey's (1986) framework about the importance for teachers of seeing something work for their own students before they are likely to change their beliefs and attitudes and fully adopt an innovation. These teachers clearly took confidence and energy from the positive response and growth of their students within SEM-R. All of the teachers were enthusiastic about the benefits of SEM-R for their students, and all expressed eagerness about continuing to use SEM-R and strengthening their implementation through further reading, planning, alignment, and practice.

CHAPTER 3: Rainy Valley School

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Rainy Valley School, a K-5 elementary school, was opened in 2006 as part of re-districting efforts. The newly constructed school boasts colors of grey and white with purple accents. The open campus has exterior walls of white flanked by steel arbors and covered walkways. As one approaches the school, an electronic banner flashes upcoming school events and vehicles line the sidewalk waiting to drop students off for the upcoming school day. Upon entering the office one is faced with a gracious but austere lobby and a large reception desk opposite the entrance. The harsh lines of the architecture and lack of color create an atmosphere of "business only", and the orderly manner of the office staff reinforces the image. The school's website reflects a similar orderliness, and an impression of organization as the Rainy Valley Mission Statement webpage includes three scholarly references that guide the school's culture.

Beyond the office, a rectangular center courtyard is flanked on one end with an open-air stage area separated from the multipurpose room by a large garage-like door. The classrooms are situated on the remaining sides of the courtyard opposite the administrative offices and multi-purpose room. The classrooms themselves are arranged in pods of four and are connected by a small common space, which provides access to a teacher work area and student rest rooms.

Approximately 708 students attend Rainy Valley School and a little less than half (45.9%) are students from culturally diverse population groups, mainly Hispanic or Latino (31.6%), with English language learners making up 17.0% of the total school population, and 27.0% of socioeconomically disadvantaged students.

Implementation of the SEM-R framework was a choice that aligned with the district's prescribed academic focus on comprehension. The Rainy Valley website identified the school's parsimonious version of the district focus as: summarization, making inferences, and activating background knowledge through questioning to build "comprehension."

The principal and reading specialist served as the primary contacts for the SEM-R pilot study. Teachers in grades 3-5 were invited to participate, and 7 of 13 teachers decided to implement the SEM-R. The remaining teachers' classrooms were used for comparison purposes. Review of observations by the principal, two days of researcher observation in Rainy Valley School classrooms, teacher questionnaires, and interviews with teachers, the reading specialist, the principal, and the media specialist served as the basis for this report.

SEM-R Classrooms

Ms. Jewels' & Mr. Isobe's Third Grade Classrooms

In the third grade, class sizes ranged from 16 students in the comparison classroom to 28 in one of the SEM-R classrooms. According to the 2007-2008 Rainy Valley School Accountability Report Card the average third grade class size for the school was 19 students per class. Two of the six teachers in this grade level voluntarily chose to implement SEM-R in their classroom. The majority (four out of six) chose not to participate in the SEM-R study.

In Ms. Jewels' third grade class of 28 students, a small group of students were receiving instruction in the corner while other students read independently. The students working with Ms. Jewels took turns reading from a trade book, round robin style, while embedded instruction was provided in the form of decoding support and questions to check understanding. After everyone in the small group had an opportunity to read, those students were asked to return to their seats as the teacher called another student, this time individually, and began conducting a conference. As the scene changed, it became clear that Ms. Jewels considered the group instruction part of the SEM-R supported reading time despite the fact that all students in the group read from the same book.

The individual student approached Ms. Jewels, as she retrieved a stack of SEM-R Bookmarks, and situated himself in the chair across from her. The conference began without a greeting as the teacher began questioning the student. The initial open-ended, higher order, thinking question, a question from the SEM-R Bookmark, was followed by a series of teacher initiated questions; primarily questions that only required single word answers:

1. Why do you think the author wrote this story? (SEM-R Bookmark Question)
2. Is it a girl dog or a boy dog?
3. Who else do you think would really like this book?
4. Do you think I would like the book?
5. Do you think someone in your family would like it? Your brother, maybe?
6. Tell me about the story and why you like it.

The teacher ended the first individual conference and called another student. During the first conference, the student was not asked to read, no discussion of genre or book match was initiated, and the majority of questions addressed comprehension level understanding rather than engaging more complex, open-ended reading strategy instruction.

As the second conference began, the form of the conference was different as the teacher addressed student self-regulation, asked the student to read aloud, and identified "plot" as the focus for the day's conversations. While the SEM-R Bookmarks were

available and at least one question from the bookmark was used, the majority of questions were low-level questions. The same SEM-R Bookmark question was used with the second student, "Why do you think the author wrote this book?" followed by a series of similar teacher-generated questions, "Who do you think would really like this book? Someone in your family?" One aspect of this conference was particularly noteworthy: while the second student was reading a more advanced text (a book from the *Harry Potter* series) relative to the first student, no differentiated questions were asked of the second student.

By the end of the second conference, more students were talking than reading, and the teacher was forced to walk around the classroom to help students regain focus. Once order had been re-established, the teacher returned to her conference location and began the conferences again. Two more conferences were held, but both were substantially shorter than the first two. The teacher, in a questionnaire response, provided a rationale for shorter conferences, "When we have busy weeks, with testing or other things, I am not able to do conferences with every student. I also have several students from other classes to conference with since our third grade 'levels' students for reading." She acknowledged that this marked an area for improvement supported by a professional goal she set to conference with every student at least one time per week.

No Book Hook was observed in Ms. Jewels' classroom, however she reported positive effects from the one- two Book Hooks she conducted each week in class, "My students love the Book Hooks, and they work. I've had parents tell me that their children are reading more and enjoying it." Ms. Jewels added, "Kids are so much more excited about reading because of Book Hooks!" Mr. Isobe, the other third grade teacher implementing SEM-R in his classroom, cited similar effects from using the Book Hooks, "I see them [the students] reading more books they otherwise might not attempt or even be aware of…and I think the Book Hooks have motivated kids to choose to read for enjoyment."

During an observation in Mr. Isobe's classroom, Phase Two of the SEM-R was conducted without the Phase One Book Hook. When asked about the exclusion, the teacher identified time constraints as the reason that a Book Hook was not conducted. According to Mr. Isobe, these time constraints were, at least in part, due to the requirement that teachers meet *all* of the district's language arts daily program requirements before implementing SEM-R components, "I am having challenges doing SEM-R 'in addition to' rather than 'in place of' some of our district-mandated pacing guide and assessment driven instruction."

In addition to the district mandated language arts program, the school participated in Accelerated Reader (AR), a program in which students read from a variety of trade books in their prescribed "AR Level" followed by a test. The levels prescribed by AR are not challenge level books, rather students are able to read what the SEM-R describes as "comfort reads", books that do not have challenging words or overly complex plots.

Upon completion of the book and successfully passing a test students are provided incentives, often candy and points. After a class has earned sufficient points, they receive a reward often in the form of a "pizza party." Mr. Isobe described the SEM-R's place given the school's participation in AR:

> Using Accelerated Reader is a bit tricky to fully incorporate [both programs], but students have gone up in reading level this year according to AR assessments and are earning AR points too, so hopefully we can meld SEM-R with our culture of Accelerated Reader to benefit all students. (Teacher Questionnaire, November, 2008)

Mrs. Blydenburgh's Fourth Grade Classroom

In the fourth grade, classroom sizes ranged from 29-33 students with an average class size of 32 students per class. The majority of teachers responsible for fourth grade instruction did choose to participate in the SEM-R, as three of the five teachers chose to implement SEM-R in their classroom.

Mrs. Blydenburgh's classroom was orderly; students were seated and working quietly on a variety of classroom activities and the classroom library was meticulously kept with books arranged in bins and on shelves. Each bin displayed and described the genre of the book, and provided the AR levels of books in the corresponding bin. The priority for the organizational system was genre first and AR level second. The impression of order was reinforced with bulletin boards neatly arranged and self-regulation reminders prominently displayed.

On this day, Mrs. Blydenburgh began SEM-R promptly at the scheduled start time of 11:00 AM by saying, "Time to get out your SEM-R books." Without a single reminder given or word spoken students withdrew their SEM-R materials. As students completed the task, Mrs. Blydenburgh asked students what page in their SEM-R Log Book should be opened and in unison, they responded, "Books to read in the future." Mrs. Blydenburgh began to talk about her geology classes in college, stating that if she had not become a teacher, she might have gone into geology because of her love of rocks and minerals. As she spoke, she placed a non-fiction book about rocks and minerals on the document camera and expounded upon her love of geology. She then began to show pictures from the book, pictures that looked like works of art, with intricate and colorful details. Mrs. Blydenburgh stopped her monologue abruptly saying: "Turn to your neighbor and explain what this looks like to you." Students immediately and excitedly engaged in a discussion with their partner until a single clap from Mrs. Blydenburgh, brought the class back to order. After a few volunteers shared their impressions of the picture, Mrs. Blydenburgh highlighted interesting facts about rock formations and connected some ideas to previous books introduced during Phase One; a book about an ice hotel and another about a salt bridge. As quickly as she began, she stopped and said, "I'm not going to show you all the pictures because there is SO MUCH cool stuff in here.

Now, turn to your partner and tell them one question you would like to have answered by reading this book." In a little less than seven minutes, the teacher fully engrossed students in a process of discussion, engaged them both visually and in spoken language, and also provided multiple opportunities for higher order thinking. Students swiftly and easily transitioned into Phase Two, the supported independent reading phase of SEM-R.

Over the course of 33 minutes of SIR time, Mrs. Blydenburgh conducted three individualized conferences. With the first student, Mrs. Blydenburgh asked eight questions. Of the eight questions, five were open-ended and at the conclusion of the conference she provided the student with a SEM-R Bookmark to help focus the student's purpose for reading. One aspect of her conference that was unique was the wait-time she provided for students as they formed answers for her questions. Further, Mrs. Blydenburgh required students to answer the question that was asked. For example, after asking, "Why do you think the author wrote a second book?" The student replied, "to tell a story." Mrs. Blydenburgh responded by saying, "That wasn't the question I asked," and repeated the question, emphasizing the word second, and once again, waited patiently for the student to form an appropriate response. The remaining conferences were very different from the first in that Mrs. Blydenburgh focused on comprehension. During one of the remaining conferences, Mrs. Blydenburgh asked questions like, "Were you stopping to understand what you read?" and "Do the illustrations help you understand the story?" While she also asked higher order thinking questions of the student, the conference was very different from the more advanced strategy oriented questions asked of the first student.

On a different day in another fourth grade classroom, during 20 minutes of SIR time, the teacher conducted four conferences. These conferences were primarily focused on story structure and in one of the four conferences, the teacher was able to identify a mismatch between reading ability and the student's book choice. During another conference, the student was selecting a new book, and the teacher asked the student to read for a while and schedule a conference for later in the day to determine whether the student thought the book was a good match. Notable in this Phase Two was the short 20-minute time limit. When asked if the conference time was always this short, the teacher explained that on this day all of the fourth grade classrooms had to complete the summative evaluations of the basal reading program, the core curriculum mandated by the district. While these evaluations would normally happen on Friday, they were pushed up because the following day was the Pi Day Celebration, which would take up the majority of the already shortened day.

Ms. Dove's Fifth Grade Classroom

In the fifth grade, the average classroom size was reported as 31 students per class. Half of the teachers responsible for fifth grade instruction chose to participate in the SEM-R as two of the four teachers implemented SEM-R in their classroom.

In Ms. Dove's classroom, books were organized on shelves and in bins by genre. On this day, students were in the process of completing the summative evaluation of the basal reading program and Ms. Dove informed the observer that no SEM-R would be conducted on this day. When asked about the reason for cancelling SEM-R on this day, the teacher expressed frustration with the obstacles that prevented her from implementing SEM-R on a daily basis. The primary hurdle she cited was the basal reading program saying, "There is not enough time to do SEM-R the way I want to because of the strict pacing guides of the core curriculum." On this day in particular, she identified the need for students to complete the summative evaluations as the reason for not implementing SEM-R and on other days, obstacles such as school assemblies and events (e.g. Pi Day, music assembly, and end of trimester celebration) often got in the way.

A Case for Comparison

Observation in a comparison classroom highlighted strategies and components of both the Accelerated Reader Program and the district mandated basal curriculum. Upon entering the classroom, one immediately noticed the small, disorganized classroom library. The teacher seemed agitated, as she provided curt instructions to students without smiling. She positioned herself in the middle of the room with students' desks surrounding the perimeter and instructed students to find their partner. Students primarily turned to someone sitting next to them as they prepared to read passages identified as "repeated reading passages." The teacher held the stopwatch in the air and said, "Begin." After a minute, time for oral reading had ended and students wrote their score at the end. The process was repeated for the partner, and the exercise ended as students marked their score on a bar graph.

The general structure of the day's remaining lesson was comprised of a short read aloud followed by approximately thirty minutes of whole group instruction using the "Fix-up" strategy and a series of individual conferences with some embedded strategy instruction. After the read aloud and whole group instruction, students were allowed to read books of their choice while the teacher proceeded to conduct individualized and small group conferences with students. As students began to read their books it was notable that in this third grade classroom, all but one student was reading a picture book. The one student who was not in a picture book had selected a book from the *Harry Potter* series.

The first conference was individualized with a clear focus on comprehension strategies. The initial questions were broad, yet narrowly focused, "What do you think? What is he supposed to be doing? Why do you think he is in the middle of the street? What is the title of the book?" The fourth question was asked to guide the student to the correct answer because the answer to the question *was* the title of the book. The questioning continued, "What does it look like they might be doing?" When the student responded with the incorrect answer, the teacher said, "Look again." This was the response to the student multiple times as he worked to decipher the book from the illustrations. For the second conference, the teacher called for two students to approach. While one read, she asked questions of the other and vice versa. The focus of both talks was the "Fix-up strategy" and she provided both students with a "Fix-up strategy" worksheet. The fourth student to be called for a conference approached carrying his Harry Potter book. The teacher admonished the student for reading a Harry Potter book and instructed him to get a book in his AR level. The student retreated and went to the bookshelf to retrieve a picture book.

The primary differences between the SEM-R and the district mandated reading program illustrated in this observation were the length and complexity of the read aloud, the level of questioning in conferences (i.e. comprehension level questions instead of higher-order thinking questions), and the level of student book choice. For example, in the SEM-R classrooms, students were encouraged to read challenging books or a book with one to two unfamiliar words per page, complex plots, or advanced concepts while in the comparison classroom students were encouraged to read less challenging books.

In another fifth grade comparison classroom the "Theme 4 Test" was being administered, which was weighted heavier then the monthly summative evaluations. In this classroom, students were required to construct privacy walls with filing folders so that they were not "tempted to look at other people's papers." Once the test started, the teacher informed the observer, "The reward for reaching the goal of this test is to have popcorn and juice in front of the home room students while they participate in the SEM-R silent reading time."

The differences between the basal reading program and the SEM-R were apparent in all of the comparison classroom settings. In another fifth grade comparison classroom, the teacher was in the process of administering the basal unit's spelling test. With the exception of five students identified by the teacher as having received 100% on their pre-unit spelling test, all students were in the process of re-checking their words. Students were instructed to finish their "vocabulary paragraph" while a few students handed out the Vocabulary and Concept Development Workbooks, which included the monthly summative evaluations. Students were instructed to complete the test and then select a book to read until it was time for lunch. The schedule, posted on the board, identified the post lunch activity as time for Accelerated Reader.

Differentiation in this classroom took the form of excusing students from a test to avoid repeating material they had already mastered. The SEM-R approach to differentiation was more individualized and focused instruction on the specific learning needs of the individual as part of three to five minute reading conferences with one student at a time.

Interviews

Interviews, conducted on multiple occasions, provided conflicting messages from the teachers and the administration about the implementation of SEM-R. The teachers asserted that the SEM-R implementation was not a priority in this school because the principal maintained a focus on the district's core curriculum, a basal reading program laden with whole class instruction and assessment. The principal, however, stated that garnering district support for the program was a priority and that she felt very positively about the SEM-R program. The desire to garner district support and implement the SEM-R district wide was expressed on multiple occasions by the principal and reading specialist.

In addition to the desire to expand implementation district wide, both the administration and teachers expressed an interest in continued growth of the SEM-R program at Rainy Valley. Teachers were focused on the professional development aspects of expanding and improving the implementation of the SEM-R. Specifically, teachers wanted more training to improve their implementation of Phase Three, the choice activity component of the SEM-R, as well as strategy instruction for shortening Phase Two conferences so that they might better serve students by meeting with each at least one time every week. The focus of the principal and reading specialist was on increasing material resources. On multiple occasions, they inquired about what the SEM-R research study could provide in the way of books, reading logs, and other materials related to the SEM-R program.

Although teachers perceived a lack of support for SEM-R implementation by the administration, they did see positive benefits in their reading classrooms. For example, multiple teachers had seen improvement on AR tests as well as improved performance on monthly summative evaluations from the basal reading program as compared to student performance last year. More generally, teachers cited increased growth for students, better teacher knowledge of students as readers than in previous years, and increased motivation to read as students had been "reading more than ever before."

The positive outcomes are illustrated in a story from Ms. Wallace, a fifth grade teacher working with an English Language Learner who reads at a second grade level:

> Last week at conferences, one of my parents expressed wonder and pleasure regarding her son's reading. She said she often finds her son reading and this is new. One night at 10:00 she had to tell him to stop for the night.

The principal also suggested that the students participating in the SEM-R had scored higher in the guided reading assessments than students at the same time point during the preceding academic year. During an interview with the principal, she cited multiple benefits of the SEM-R:

- Phase Two conferences require students to be accountable for their reading and learning.
- Book Hooks allow the students to become connected to books.
- Kids talking about reading and books they read all the time.
- SEM-R's influence on the culture of the school—not only is it okay to read, but it is cool to read.
- Some struggles, but even though there have been some struggles along the way, student improvement continues and has exceeded teacher expectation.

This interview highlighted another discrepancy between perception and action. After addressing the benefits of the SEM-R and reporting continued improvement on a variety of assessments (basal reading program's summative assessments, AR tests, and guided reading assessments) for students participating in the SEM-R, the principal expressed hesitation in transitioning all third through fifth grade students to SEM-R instructional settings stating, "I am considering transitioning all teachers into using the SEM-R, however I need data to gather support and teacher buy-in."

Findings

Three primary findings emerged from observations and interviews in this school: positive outcomes for students, the need for administrative support, and clear differences between SEM-R instruction and basal reading program instruction.

The principal, teachers, and parents identified positive outcomes for students. The outcomes were measured in a variety of ways, including anecdotal references, positive changes in student behavior related to reading and quantifiable data driven differences identified through multiple testing measures. The behaviors most identified were related to students' desire and motivation to read. One example of this was a story about a parent's surprise at having to force her son to stop reading. Teachers, in comparison, tended to relate increased motivation with increased growth, the ability to focus for extended periods of time, and their ability to seek books from a variety of genres. Teachers across all grades stated:

- I think the Book Hooks have motivated kids to choose to read for enjoyment.

- I have seen the spark and growth in interest and wanting to read new books.
- I have observed the majority of students engaged in a book independently for at least 20 minutes of time uninterrupted.
- Students are trying different genres, and they are more interested in reading.

Anecdotal outcomes are supported by data provided by evaluations used in the basal reading program, the Accelerated Reader tests, and the guided reading program. Consistently, teachers reported continuous growth and improvement for their students including the gifted students and most talented readers. The principal also reiterated that this growth had exceeded teachers' expectations.

A second finding that emerged was related to the need for administrative support both verbally and in action. At Rainy Valley, the principal was in full support of the program, however at the district level, a requirement existed about following the strict pacing and assessment schedule of the specified basal reading program, which took approximately two hours each day to implement with integrity. The basal reading program combined with the school's participation in the Accelerated Reader program appeared to prevent teachers from implementing the SEM-R to the degree that was necessary to maintain fidelity and teachers consistently identified "time constraints" as the major hurdle to full implementation of the SEM-R program. Suggestions provided by the teachers for improving the overall reading program of the school included doing only part of the basal program, providing time in the daily schedule for SEM-R implementation by removing other less effective activities, and integrating the programs rather than requiring multiple disparate programs. Finally, it was suggested that administrative support might also include additional professional development related to SEM-R and the provision of autonomy for teachers within instructional settings.

The third finding to emerge was the qualitatively different approach to reading instruction in the SEM-R compared to the basal reading program and Accelerated Reader. The primary differences teachers identified were related to differentiation of content, challenge level, and assessment. For example, assessment in the SEM-R occurred as teachers worked with students during individualized conferences targeted toward students specific needs. By conferencing with students one-on-one, teachers were able to, "know students better than ever before" (Teacher Questionnaire, January, 2009). In contrast, the basal reading program required monthly summative assessments and the Accelerated Reader program included tests on comprehension after each AR leveled book a student read. A second difference, between the SEM-R and other reading programs, was challenge level of the books students selected and read. The AR program required students to take a pre-test that identified students' current reading levels and resulted in a prescribed "level" for each student to select books from, a level that was the same as their current reading level. In contrast, the SEM-R required students to read books that were challenging so that students would grow as readers. The example from

observations in comparison classrooms that clearly illustrated this difference was the student who was admonished for wanting to read a more challenging chapter book rather than the picture books prescribed by the AR leveling process. Instructional differentiation also took on a different form in the SEM-R as compared to the basal reading program. In the SEM-R students were encouraged to choose books that captured their interest. Each student then participated in conferences tailored to his or her specific learning needs throughout the implementation process (in some cases decoding and in others, unraveling complex plot structures). The primary form of differentiation that occurred in the basal reading program was compacting some students out of certain assessments in areas where they had previously demonstrated mastery. The AR program was somewhat more differentiated than the basal reading program, as students were prescribed a "level" based on their performance on a formal assessment. In the SEM-R, the challenge level of books was based on ongoing informal assessment conducted by teachers, formal assessments of reading fluency and comprehension, content of weekly conferences with students, and informal measures of students' metacognitive awareness.

Conclusion

The overall SEM-R implementation at Rainy Valley School suggested that the teachers wanted to continue to implement SEM-R, but due to time constraints and a lack of district level support, that goal was hindered. The principal, along with teachers and the reading specialist, seemed to be in favor of the SEM-R and consistently recognized the benefits students received by participating in the program. In addition to the positive benefits for students, teachers expressed a desire for continued professional development in the SEM-R and the school level administrative staff regarded the SEM-R as a way to increase resources for classrooms.

It did appear, as the principal explained, that the SEM-R had positively influenced the culture of the school and that reading was a priority in daily instruction. The challenge for Rainy Valley Elementary was to determine how to reconcile what were viewed as conflicting programs within the subject of reading so that the SEM-R could be integrated in the daily reading instruction, rather than being "in addition to" the current district mandated program.

CHAPTER 4: North Pacific School

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The North Pacific School, nestled in a hillside overlooking a busy suburban intersection, is a K-5 school that opened in 2006 as part of re-districting efforts. The North Pacific campus is open, yet separated from the outside world by a steep climb to enter the parking lot and school grounds. Upon entering the office, space appears limited, as the reception desk is just a few steps from the front door. Visitors are immediately greeted with a smile and efficiency is evidenced by the staff's responsiveness to individual needs. While the school is new, the building itself is older, constructed in the late 70's or early 80's. A sense of community pervades the front office and staff room. A homemade jewelry display adorns a table on one side of the office, while a teacher enters bearing "tamales" made by a parent on the other side. Limes, oranges, and lemons are in a basket on the long table in the teachers' workroom with a small sign reading "Help Yourself." This sense of community seems intentional as the principal explains in the 2007-2008 School Accountability Report Card:

> We continue to focus on a strong home/school relationship, knowing there is a high correlation between parent involvement and effective schools. We also encourage active participation by the community in our programs and activities.

Approximately 597 students attend North Pacific and over half (56.6%) are students from culturally diverse population groups, mainly Hispanic or Latino (44.2%), a third of the population (33.0%) are classified as English language learners, and 41.0% are socioeconomically disadvantaged. The North Pacific Elementary School website identifies the school's 2008-2009 goals as: Connecting with the North Pacific community and collaborating as a professional learning community. The website goes on to define the school's focus as "Comprehension" highlighting the need for students to recognize that their thoughts, ideas, and interpretations matter.

The principal and reading specialist served as the primary contacts for the SEM-R study. All teachers in grades 3-5 were invited to participate, and all decided, with the support and encouragement of the principal and reading specialist, to do so to maintain consistency across grades and within grade levels. As full participation in SEM-R occurred with the North Pacific teachers, a similar school within the district was selected for comparison purposes. Reviews of observations by the principal, two days of observation in North Pacific classrooms, a visit to non-SEM-R classrooms in a similar school, teacher questionnaires, and interviews with the reading specialist, the principal, and the media specialist served as the basis for this report. The support and guidance of the principal combined with flexible scheduling on the part of the teachers for SEM-R

time, it was possible for observations to occur in all of the SEM-R classrooms over the course of two days.

The classroom observations provide snapshots of different phases of implementation and variation in the instructional styles of the teachers. Of the ten teachers observed, seven attended a weeklong training at the University of Connecticut in which they participated in five days of SEM-R instruction and related areas of professional development. The three who were unable to attend the weeklong training session were trained by the reading specialist through direct instruction (one half day), receiving the SEM-R instructional manual, and ongoing coaching and feedback from the reading specialist as well as other teachers during the monthly SEM-R meetings. All teachers received notes from the principal after each observation citing strengths and an area for improvement.

SEM-R Classrooms

The third grade class sizes at North Pacific on the days of observation ranged from 14-18 students and five teachers were responsible for teaching a two-hour block of reading and language arts each day. Fourth grade class sizes at North Pacific were larger than third grade, ranging from 27-31 students with an average class size of 29. Three teachers were responsible for teaching fourth grade reading and language arts. During observations, the fifth grade classes ranged in size from 23 to 28, and the School Accountability Report Card identified an average fifth grade class size of 31 for the 2007 to 2008 academic year. Three teachers were responsible for teaching fifth grade, and observations were conducted in classrooms over the course of the intervention and near the end of the intervention.

Mrs. Mallory's Third Grade Classroom

The classroom was organized with desks arranged in rows, side by side. Posted on the bulletin board was a list of strategies identified in the SEM-R manual. The list was identified as "The Strategy Focus" and an arrow pointed to the strategy "Making Connections." There were also reminders about self-regulation and examples of good reading behaviors attached to an adjacent wall. Books were arranged in bins and organized by genre and author series on bookshelves that lined the opposite wall. On this day, the teacher had just completed a Phase One read aloud and students were transitioning to Phase Two positions. These positions (pillows, corners, desks, etc.) were assigned locations that shifted in a regular sequential pattern every week. Students moved quickly to their position and immediately started reading their Phase Two book choices. The room was silent except for the sound of the heater and Mrs. Mallory's whispered questions as she began to conference with a student.

Mrs. Mallory began her conference by reviewing the student's most recent reading reflection in the SEM-R Reading Log. Once she finished reading, Mrs. Mallory

asked about the character, and for the student to, “read a little to me.” Once the student read a few sentences, Mrs. Mallory stopped her with open-ended questions, which tested the student’s comprehension of the text:

1. Why do you suppose she recognized the name?
2. Can you make any connections?
3. That’s good, keep reading.

After a few more sentences, the student stopped and Mrs. Mallory once again began to ask questions. The first question was, “Do you think Scarlett will change?” The student inquired about Mrs. Mallory’s knowledge of the character and Mrs. Mallory responded, “I inferred, having not read the beginning…” This instance provided Mrs. Mallory with the opportunity to use her professional knowledge about reading strategies to ask higher order thinking questions and model the strategy of making inferences, a strategy often used by good readers.

The SEM-R student logs were visible on the majority of desks in the classroom. In one student log, a randomly selected reflection focused on the SEM-R, as one student wrote, “My favorite part of school is SEM-R. My least favorite part is when we have to stop. It is not fun to stop.” Opening to the same date in another student’s reading log, the following was found on the subject: “I truely [*sic*] love SEM-R because you get to discover things that you might not get to in real life.”

During a 12-minute period of time, Mrs. Mallory held conferences with two students. The pattern was the same for both students with Mrs. Mallory reviewing the student’s reading reflection, asking the student to read, and then proceeding to ask questions. There were obvious differences between the two students in reading level (one in a chapter book and the other in a book with pictures). The majority of questions for the second student were content-related whereas the majority of the questions for the first student were open-ended. Despite the variability in the two students, Mrs. Mallory asked higher order thinking questions of both students. Mrs. Mallory explained that she believed the conferences were important and had been working well in her implementation of the SEM-R, “I enjoy meeting with my students and discussing their books. It’s a great opportunity to dig deeper.” Later she explained, “The conferences allow me to gain a wealth of knowledge about the students and their reading abilities.”

On another day, Mrs. Mallory took her third grade class to the computer lab where they engaged in a Phase Three activity using Renzulli Learning Systems. On this day, students took seats at a computer (each student had his or her own computer). Each student had a worksheet with a series of questions about the planets in our solar system. Mrs. Mallory began, “Take your seats. Today we are going to use Renzulli Learning to explore planets.” She proceeded to direct students to answer the questions on the worksheet by going to the activity she had created for them and clicking on the website she had previously linked for them. Students, on this day seemed to be less focused than

they were previously, and many struggled to understand how to navigate through the website that had been linked for them. One student went to a different site, but Mrs. Mallory re-directed him to the prescribed site. He complained that he could not find the answers on the other site.

Mrs. Mallory's implementation of Phase Two provided a smooth transition between Phase One and Phase Two and incorporated differentiated questions into conferences; consequently 100% of her students were focused on reading during the classroom observation conducted. The Phase Three SEM-R implementation differed from Phase Two. For example, only one option was provided for Phase Three time instead of the suggested provision of multiple choices. Additionally, the Phase Three activity was an extension of the science curriculum rather than being an extension of a high interest topic or reading material, and there was no opportunity for creative productivity. Mrs. Mallory was aware that she could improve her implementation of Phase Three by providing choices, as she had identified it as an area for improvement and set a professional goal for herself to achieve this outcome.

Mr. Faulkner's Third Grade Classroom

Upon entering his classroom, Mr. Faulkner was engaged in a conversation with his 18 third grade students, and each appeared to be listening intently with occasional gestures of agreement such as, "oh yeah" and nodding of student heads. It appeared that Mr. Faulkner was expecting to be observed because as soon as he saw the principal and researcher, he greeted them and changed the topic to his Phase One Book Hook. The Book Hook began with Mr. Faulkner talking about the "rummage sale" he went to over the weekend and excitedly showing students a box of books he had acquired there. He pointed out that most of the books were only $0.10 and began withdrawing books from the box to show students the covers. He encouraged the students to stop at "yard sales" and flea markets because, "…there are so many things to see and you can almost always find a book." He emphasized that having books to read does not have to be expensive and reminded them that they should have a library card. He then turned to the side of the classroom, showing students several books they could learn about later in the week, but explained that today he had chosen these books "to hook."

Mr. Faulkner used the same series of questions during the first two Book Hooks. He asked, "Do you know anything about *The Littles*? I don't. What do you think it is about from the picture?" He read the back cover. After reading the cover, Mr. Faulkner turned to the inside and read a paragraph that appeared to have been chosen in advance. He showed pictures from inside the book and identified the genre. He proceeded with the same general process for the second book, *Timmy to the Rescue*. Mr. Faulkner identified the third book as being selected because he thought Ralph, a student in the class, would enjoy it. This book, *Space*, had multiple pictures and Mr. Faulkner said, "This one catches your interest by pictures alone." Mr. Faulkner then introduced a fourth book and ended by reminding students he would introduce more "rummage sale finds" tomorrow.

On this day, the Book Hook lasted for 15 minutes, and Mr. Faulkner was able to keep students engaged and actively listening. Mr. Faulkner expressed enthusiasm for reading and his statements about finding many books for little money may have contributed to students' ability to focus for the full 15 minutes during the Book Hook.

During another observation, Mr. Faulkner conducted conferences with individual students while the rest of his class engaged in reading of their Phase Two choice books. During the observed conferences, Mr. Faulkner used differentiated questions for each student and asked open-ended questions after having students read a short passage. Mr. Faulkner allowed students to volunteer for conferences, and he used the SEM-R Teacher's Log to track the number of conferences that had been done with each student.

Ms. Binney's Third Grade Classroom

Students were gathered around Ms. Binney as she pulled a small stack of orange books from behind the rocking chair in which she was seated. A glance around the room revealed books neatly organized on shelves in baskets ordered by genre and author series. Further inspection drew attention to the colorful bulletin boards with student artwork such as freehand drawings of ships and short essays recommending books for review.

On this day, a Book Hook began as the teacher, showing the students a book they seemed to be familiar with, asked, "What was the big problem in this book?" When a student responds, Ms. Binney asks, "How was the big problem solved?" After listening to the answer, the teacher proceeded to explain, "I selected these books today, because like Muggie Maggie, they have a big problem." She opened the book and began to read from *Ramona Forever* by Beverly Cleary. The students listened intently as Ms. Binney read with feeling. Students laughed at appropriate moments, demonstrating engagement with the text, and appeared to pay careful attention to the teacher as she read. After Ms. Binney proposed a few more open-ended questions, she asked the students: "When you go to the library tomorrow, what kinds of books will earn you points?" Student's hands shot up and multiple students volunteered the answer, "Books with smart solutions." The teacher reinforced the desired answer, "If you can tell me why the book will require a smart solution, you will get points." The points earned students coupons to trade for free time which students could use to go to the library, free reading, games, or other interest-based pursuits. After 20 minutes, the students were directed to pack up their homework as the school day was drawing to a close. In a follow-up interview with Ms. Binney, she explained, "Because of the way the schedule is set up, I do not have time to do Phase One and Phase Two together. Since the kids are more focused in the morning, we do our SIR during the morning block and I do the Book Hooks at the end of the day."

On another day, during a 10-minute period, Ms. Binney conducted two conferences. In one of the conferences, Ms. Binney attempted something she had not tried before. She had previously identified that Jason, a student who consistently

struggled with focus and behavioral regulation, was reading the same book as a boy identified as "a good role model" by the teacher. The model student was consistently high achieving and rarely engaged in off-task behavior, which prompted Ms. Binney to facilitate a conversation about *Eragon*, a book that both students were reading. The facilitated conversation resembled an individualized conference in that there were open-ended and higher-order thinking questions: "What do you think the author's message is in this book? What do you think the author is trying to tell us about love?" In the conference, which lasted slightly longer (7 minutes), both boys' responses were directed to the teacher rather than each other. When asked to use examples from the book to support their answers, one student easily responded, whereas the other hesitated, speaking very softly in an almost inaudible voice.

Ms. Binney explained that she, "…really enjoys conferencing with students about what they are reading. It really helps me understand their level and interests." She went on to elaborate, "Students are excited about reading for the first time and parents are deciding to be more involved in their reading." It is more than just enjoyment, for as she explained, "I do see a lot of growth in my students. One in particular has much better fluency and is much more interested in reading than ever before."

Despite the expressed enthusiasm for SEM-R and the benefits of its implementation, Ms. Binney also faced challenges in implementing the SEM-R related to student book choice. Early in the SEM-R intervention, students consistently selected books that were too easy. She explained, "My challenges occur when allowing the kids to choose their own books. Many times in third grade, their interests are in picture books, not challenging material." After three months of implementation, however, she believed that the challenge related to book choice had shifted as a culture of reading challenging material had infiltrated the classroom, "…my lower readers are choosing books that are too hard and they do not want to read the easier picture-supported chapter books."

During the observations, it was clear that student reflection and record keeping were required as students consistently had their SEM-R logs on their desks, and the logs reflected the wear and tear of daily use with bent and decorated covers as well as entries throughout. In the ways that students reflected, it appeared to be evident that Ms. Binney modeled the behavior as she consistently reflected on her practice, set professional goals, and tried unique approaches to foster increased comprehension and self-regulated behavior in her students.

Third Grade Perspectives in the Focus Group

During a regular monthly meeting time a focus group interview held with third grade teachers resulted in the following general perspectives from the third grade teachers who were implementing SEM-R, as explained from the following quotations:

- My third graders have just blossomed. They read without watching the clock.
- They've turned into a class of readers. When it is time to put books away, I have to remind them to close their books so they won't trip.
- [Sarah] began as a reluctant reader, but now she is reading four books at the same time: A challenge book, a comfort read, and two books at home.

One area of concern expressed by third grade teachers was that there were not enough high interest books for struggling readers and English Language Learners (ELL). The students did not want to read about a "silly" character, but preferred, "more mature books with easier text."

Mr. Champion's Fourth Grade Classroom

In Mr. Champion's classroom it was immediately clear that the 28 students in the classroom addressed independent reading choices in a variety of ways. First, on one bulletin board was a sign, framed with examples of biography book covers, that read: "Wanna [*sic*] Read a "Bio?" Near the biography board were multiple "recommendation cards" enabling students to identify the name, title, author, and genre of a book along with a brief explanation of the merits or faults of the book. Another bulletin board was entirely dedicated to reading strategies with a sign that read: "We are becoming expert readers!" In the center of the board, reading strategies such as visualization, making connections, and predicting were listed with explanations adjacent to the appropriate strategy. Below, students had filled out 6 inch by 4 inch cards, with each identifying one of three types of connections: text-to-self, text-to-world, and text-to-text. On each of the cards, students wrote a short paragraph about a particular connection and used details from the story to clarify the connection. While the bulletin boards focused heavily on reading, the arrangement of different elements was rather haphazard and random. This same approach was used in arranging the classroom library as there was no clear organization of books on the shelves and multiple shelves were at varying locations around the room.

Noticeably, the teacher did not require students to use the reflection section of the SEM-R reading log nor did he make notes for students in the conference section of the log, however, students were required to reflect on their reading and track their progress in multiple ways. For example, multiple "Quick Book Reviews" were kept on students' desks. The book reviews included information about the book that a student was in the process of reading and required the student to identify if the book was a fiction or non-

fiction book. Further, the book review required a brief summary, the identification of three "really cool" things about the book, and a subjective rating of the book with an explanation for the rating. Another tracking and monitoring opportunity was provided as students had to identify their reading level and then select challenge books by choosing books that were one or two levels above their identified level. Additionally, students were asked to list multiple books that fell into the "challenge" category for future interest reads.

On one observation day, Mr. Champion's Book Hook was especially entertaining and exceeded expectations in planning, genre discussion, and student engagement. During this 15-minute Book Hook, ten books were presented from two genres: poetry and biographies. He started by talking about Walt Disney, helping students make the connection between the man and the Disneyland theme park. He then went on to link Walt Disney to Neil Armstrong and Abraham Lincoln by talking about characters: imaginary versus historical. These connections were surprising, but logical and defensible given the way they were presented. He used the contrast of imaginary versus historical to segue into a discussion of poetry as he introduced the character Runny Babbit and ended the descriptive poem by saying: "Did you know that what I just read was a poem?" He then put a fifth book on the document camera so that students could see the illustration and asked, "Did you know Shakespeare was a poet?" reading briefly from the book *Romeo and Juliet*. He moves through a succession of four more books (*Mama Goose, Dirt on My Shirt, A Kick in the Head, and What a Day it Was in School*). Students laughed hysterically and even the principal was moved to joyous tears as his expressive reading enabled students and observers to connect to the text. He suggested that poetry could be serious, funny, or non-sense and pulled another book from the side, handling it with the utmost care. "This," he said in a hushed and almost secretive voice, "is a very special book. It is older than any of us in this room." He placed the book on the document camera where it was revealed that the book was from the 1930's. He read a short poem and talked about how old books needed to be handled with care. He enticed students by saying, "If you are really lucky, I will let you read a poem out of it." He ended by saying, "Poetry is a great way to express yourself and you will get a chance to write your own later this week." Mr. Champion clearly shared his enthusiasm for reading and more than half of the class asked to read the poetry books when the Book Hook ended.

Students transitioned in less than two minutes to their SIR locations and 23 of the 28 students were able to maintain focused reading for the full 40 minutes of SIR time. Mr. Champion used a system for SIR locations in which students alternated between even and odd numbers for choice seating. Today, evens could sit wherever they chose and odd numbered students had to remain at their desks.

During the 40 minutes of SIR time, Mr. Champion held conferences with four students who had varied ability in reading. In the first conference, Mr. Champion began the conference by asking, "What book did you choose?" followed by, "Do you want to read a little to me?" In this conference, Mr. Champion asked multiple comprehension

questions including questions focused on character. He also helped the student with basic reading skills as he helped the boy decode a word by "chunking" it into small parts and helping him to use context clues to understand the meaning of the word. Other skill-based questions addressed genre, plot, setting, and challenge level.

The next student was reading the third book from the *Twilight* series, *Eclipse,* by Stephanie Meyer. Initially the questions were comprehension questions that did not require higher order thinking, however the student consistently volunteered additional information with her answers to questions like:

1. Do you like the series?
2. From which perspective is this one told?
3. Does she make good decisions?
4. Does she have a role in the vampire community?
5. She's not a vampire?

After the comprehension line of questioning, Mr. Champion asked her to read a little. When the student stumbled over the word "intercede", the teacher asked, "Can you make a guess of what that means? So, how would the vampire perceive that?"

A pattern related to conference protocol began to emerge and remained consistent across the remaining conferences. The teacher would first try to get information about the content of the book, then ask the student to read briefly, and follow the reading with a series of questions. Mr. Champion also addressed challenge level in the conferences. All but one of the four students, were well matched (i.e. one to two words that were challenging or addressed complex concepts or ideas). The fourth student was asked to select a more challenging book.

On this day, no Phase Three activities were observed, however, the teacher had developed materials to manage the Phase Three extension projects and had planned conferences to address student choice and progress.

Ms. Stretchberry's Fourth Grade Classroom

Ms. Stretchberry, responsible for reading instruction in both fourth and fifth grade, had a class size of 31 students. The classroom itself had a recommendation wall where students made recommendations for books they had read along with the reason for their recommendation. One wall had a 3-foot tall tree trunk made out of paper and within and throughout the branches were forms, filled out by students, that represented text-to-text, text-to-world, and text-to-self connections. The title above the tree read, "Read and Grow Tree." The classroom library was organized by genre and author, on bookshelves and in bins, around the classroom. The Principal noted, "She is always adding to her classroom library. She is the kind of person that spends her weekends at Barnes & Noble looking for new books for the kids." The reading focused environment provided evidence

of Phase Three activity as student generated book covers and various projects rested atop shelves and tables around the classroom.

On this day, the teacher introduced two books during Phase One; *A Kick in the Head* by Paul Janeczko and *Love that Dog* by Sharon Creech. The teacher opened the Book Hook by informing the students that today, they would be talking about poetry. She then asked, "When you have written poetry, what was it about? What types of poetry have you written? Haiku?" After students responded, she asked, "Why do you suppose people write poetry?" Again, she waited for student responses and then took out the book, *A Kick in the Head*, and explained that the book was a guide to poetic forms. She modeled her thinking as she engaged in a talk-aloud saying, "There are some forms in here that I've never even heard of before looking in this book. For example, I learned that a Clerihew is a poetry form made up of two couplets. Do you remember what a couplet is?" She went on to read from *Love that Dog* and shared with students that she saw the author in the bookstore for a book signing and that when the author read from the book she, "laughed out loud." She ended the Book Hook by showing students some other books she planned to introduce throughout the week, a week dedicated to poetry books.

With a simple statement, "Time to transition to SEM-R", the students scampered across the room to the corner where bins held their reading logs and the books they were currently reading. Students quickly returned to their seats with little discussion or distraction. The teacher instructed students to write the book title they were reading today in the reading log. During the 30-minute observation of the Phase Two SIR time, all 31 students maintained focus and did not look up as other students were called to the side to conference with the teacher. The conferences were close to 10 minutes in length and of the three conferences observed, no students were asked to read. In two of the conferences, the teacher asked questions about a book the students had just finished, whereas in the third conference, the student was near the end. Ms. Stretchberry expressed the conferences had helped her to develop a strong understanding of each students strengths and weaknesses, but admitted that she had a hard time keeping the conferences to 3 to 4 minutes.

During the conferences, Ms. Stretchberry consistently asked comprehension questions with higher order, thinking questions interspersed throughout. For example, in one conference the questions were:

1. What is the mission?
2. What is their role? What was their job?
3. What did she do? What did she make?
4. What did you think when she did that?
5. Was that smart of her?
6. If you were in her shoes would you have done anything differently? What?
7. Has she changed since you started this series? How?
8. What do you think is going to happen in the end?

9. Why do you think they sent her there?

While the questions were comprehension focused and some were higher order thinking questions, the teacher did not explicitly say or use the vocabulary of expert readers, such as prediction, plot, comprehension, or author's purpose.

During interviews, Ms. Stretchberry consistently shared that students' attitudes toward reading were changing and students were becoming more excited about reading and sharing their stories with her and with one another. She stated, "I hear stories frequently about going to the store to get a new book (Teacher Questionnaire; March, 2009)." This enthusiasm may have increased throughout the SEM-R implementation as Ms. Stretchberry had documented a clear trajectory of improvement. In the beginning students were only able to focus for 20-25 minutes on their reading selections. By the end of the intervention, Ms. Stretchberry described the students as "very focused" and students were able to regulate their behavior and maintain focus for the full 45-minute SIR time. Ms. Stretchberry clarified by sharing, "SEM-R is going better than my initial expectations. I am very pleased with my students' progress."

Fourth Grade Perspectives in the Focus Group

During the monthly meeting time a group interview revealed some general perspectives from the fourth grade teachers implementation of SEM-R:

- I have seen an incredible jump in comprehension and enjoyment.
- The interest level is so much greater. They don't want to stop talking book.
- You assume kids have the strategies to pick up a book and talk about it, but they don't. This program has brought this to the classroom.

One area of concern expressed by fourth and fifth grade teachers was the challenge they felt to keep their conferences to three to four minutes so that they could conference with all of their students at least once a week. One teacher stated, "To get to all 32 students in one week is almost impossible, but it is worth the struggle."

Mrs. Bowers's Fifth Grade Classroom

Mrs. Bowers's classroom walls were covered floor to ceiling with colorful student projects that represented a variety of Phase Three products that had been integrated with other content areas. For example, on one wall, numerous hand drawn ships illustrated the artistic talent of students and connected to the Social Studies curriculum. Along another wall was a series of "Independent Mini-Reports" and in another area student illustrated books sat in a row down the length of a table. In addition to evidence of Phase Three, numerous casual reading areas were spread around the room including two sofas, two rocking chairs, and a loft provided for Phase Two SIR time. A myriad of musical

instruments were in a corner adjacent to a rocking chair where students were gathered on a rug for the day's Book Hook.

On this day, Phase One was already in progress as students listened intently to the teacher read from *The End of the Beginning: Being the Adventures of a Small Snail (and an Even Smaller Ant)* by Avi and Tricia Tusa. The teacher read with expression as her eyes opened wide and her voice was loud and sharp representing a surprising moment in the book. Some students responded with physical jolts as smiles started across their faces. After a few moments the teacher ended her reading in what seemed like the middle of a sentence, much to the dismay of the students who wanted to hear more. Mrs. Bowers smiled and began to talk about what she had just read: "This is a quirky book and there is a lot of play on words. Take for example: Caught in a web of their own making…" Before the teacher could ask what that meant, one student's hand shot up and he said he did not understand the phrase. Almost as immediately as the words were said, his pace changed, "Oh yeah! Like stuck in a spider web that you made." The teacher responded by saying, "Yes, that is exactly what it means and the book is full of phrases like that." When she withdrew another book she introduced it by saying, "This is another one of my thrift store finds: *The Tomb of Anak*." She read the back cover and ended with, "it sounds very exciting, doesn't it? Remember, books don't have to be new to be good." The Book Hook lasted approximately 15 minutes and ended with an introduction to a third book, *The Red Kayak* (Classroom Observation, March 9, 2009).

Phase Two started after a 5-minute transition period, in which students gathered their self-choice books and moved to their reading spots. Many students had to refer to the "Reading Spots Rotation Chart," that was posted on the wall. There was a complex rotation system in place, but the students clearly understood, evidenced by the fact that they were able to move swiftly to their reading spot once they had checked the chart. The teacher situated herself in the corner to conduct conferences, calling each student from across the room for their conference time. During the Phase Two, SIR time, the teacher held only four conferences and only 11 students were able to maintain focus for the entire 50 minute period of time (Classroom Observation, March 9, 2009). The teacher expressed frustration with the conferences and process of questioning students about their choice reading material: "Bookmarks with discussion prompts are very limited. I like to probe more deeply into their understanding, so I do. Therefore I only get to three or four students per [SIR] session. I see each student every two weeks." Conferences were approximately 10-12 minutes in length. Students' inability to focus was attributed to the time of day by the teacher. The teacher, in a follow-up interview explained, "We rotate the schedule, so sometimes SEM-R happens at the end of the day, but students love to read so it is easier for them to focus on their choice reading than on many of the other subjects."

Mrs. Bowers provided a unique perspective on the SEM-R student logs. During parent and teacher conferences, she utilized information from each student's log to demonstrate student performance and to begin the discussion with parents about student

accountability and responsibility for learning: “The student journals were invaluable at parent conferences for examining student reading habits. They are an essential piece for holding students’ accountable…” She also reported parent perspectives on the SEM-R and their child’s reading. One parent said that her child was reading at home for the first time without being asked. A second parent reported that her child looked forward to reading in school at the beginning of the day, and a third parent expressed that she was more enthused than ever before about her child’s reading and learning.

Ms. Finey’s Fifth Grade Classroom

The classroom, like others at this school, had clear connections that students have made to text they were reading posted on a board, providing evidence of the importance of comprehension and making meaning of text. During this observation, Ms. Finey engaged students with a brief, 10 minute, Book Hook focusing on the life and experiences of Pocahontas. First, she read about Pocahontas in *Tales of Famous Americans*, and following the read aloud, she opened a calendar with a picture of Pocahontas and read the caption. She compared the two by asking students how they were the same and different. She identified how the information in one is different than the other, but both are accurate. She introduced a third book that was entirely about Pocahontas and shared with students that she had cried every time she read the story.

The class easily transitioned from Phase One to Phase Two as Ms. Finey instructed students to enter the book they were currently reading into their SEM-R Log Books. Students completed this task and began to read their book without further instruction. Over the course of this 50-minute Phase Two time, the teacher held conferences with six students for an average conference time of seven to nine minutes. When asked, the teacher explained her own challenges with conferences, “It’s difficult to see (conference with) all students within the week (32 students). I can usually see four to five students per day.” She also talked about how struggling students receive more conferences than the students who are part of the gifted cluster in her classroom; “I found it’s easy to conference with the same students over and over while others are rarely seen. In response to her challenging situation, she made a concerted effort to address the need to meet with *all* students on a regular basis in the form of a priority list to ensure that she saw a variety of students.

Another area of concern for Ms. Finey was that certain students had difficulty maintaining focus for the entire SIR time. Her strong readers wanted more SIR time whereas her struggling readers wanted less time. She identified a couple of students who were “fake reading” during SIR time, explaining “I have a few students who struggle to stay focused for more than a few minutes (5-10). I try to conference with them regularly… During one observation, within 20 minutes of the beginning of SIR time, three to four students were engaged in off task behavior, but were able to re-focus without direction and return to their reading. After another 25 minutes, seven students

were off task. Ms. Finey finished the conference she was conducting and ended SIR time for that day.

Fifth Grade Perspectives in the Focus Group

During a monthly grade level meeting time a focus group revealed some general comments from the fifth grade teachers regarding implementation of SEM-R. In particular, fifth grade teachers focused on the varying ability level of students and explained how the SEM-R was influencing their learning.

- High readers are really making progress, especially in the homework summative assessments.
- One of my lowest readers is starting to take on the challenge—learning that it is okay not to know every word.

The English language learners (ELL) were a special focus as two teachers indicated that ELL students were becoming more confident and many had moved from short answers to the conference questions to being animated and more descriptive. ELL students had also been connecting to what they were reading and thinking of questions as they read.

Interviews

A meeting and several interviews with the principal provided another perspective about the implementation of the SEM-R at North Pacific School. Specifically, she highlighted the reasons that have led her and the faculty to want to continue implementing the SEM-R in the future, despite the district's prescribed requisite reading program, a basal reading program.

First, she cited the conversations that teachers had in the monthly SEM-R meetings and grade level meetings, "The SEM-R has created deeper, richer conversations about students at grade level than she has seen in the last 10 years."

This statement was followed by further details about the SEM-R meetings. She identified that there was more of a peer-coaching model than she had been able to create in the past and that teachers were functioning with a new level of expertise in reading instruction. While the meetings are co-facilitated by her and the Reading Specialist, teachers often took the lead and meetings planned for 30 minutes turned into 75 minute meetings. She suggested that the teachers really appreciated the opportunity to talk to one another and enthusiasm is generated every time a teacher shares something new that they have tried related to conferences and Book Hooks. She also explained that many teachers had struggled with the Phase Three choice activities, but she felt that anxiety about

implementing choice activities in their classrooms was mitigated when teachers realized that others were facing the same kinds of challenges.

The media specialist and reading specialist shared similar information during brief interviews; citing benefits for teachers and students. The media specialist was particularly enthusiastic about the students:

> I have never seen anything like it. Students have never before checked out so many different kinds of books. They come in and ask for specific authors too. It is really different than anything I've seen in the past. (Media Specialist Interview, March 9, 2009)

The reading specialist, Diane, highlighted student benefits as well saying, "I have seen a great bump up in fluency with the SEM-R." Diane went on to talk about teacher benefits: "SEM-R is exciting because we, myself and the teachers, get to have fun teaching and we are allowed to use our professional knowledge."

Emerging Findings Across Classrooms

Three primary findings emerged from observations and interviews: student benefit, teacher's use of professional knowledge, and book choice and access. The student benefits appeared to apply to all sub-groups in the school from English language learners to talented readers. The second emergent finding was the benefit teachers experienced when they were allowed and encouraged by the program to utilize and apply their professional knowledge. The third finding was related to book choice and selection, which manifested in many forms from access to affordable books to choice in content of reading selections. This finding was a sub-theme in teacher and student benefit.

Teachers' perceived benefits for students included academic improvement through increased comprehension and fluency, increased enjoyment of reading, and increased behavioral regulation with the ability to sustain focus for 40-50 minutes. Most teachers identified book choice as a reason students were able to read for so long. Further, the individualized and differentiated conferences enabled teachers to know their students as readers, better than other reading programs, and enabled them provide instruction that was targeted to specific student needs. Teachers also identified that all students were making progress. ELL students for example were becoming more confident, engaging in the text with more depth, and providing more complex answers to questions about the book they were reading. Talented readers appeared to have made progress as well, and teachers identified the progress as measurable. Another student benefit perceived by faculty, parents, and staff was student choice. The Media Specialist, for example, explained that students had become more sophisticated in book selection and parents pointed out that their son or daughter chose to read at home, an uncommon behavior before the implementation of SEM-R.

The primary benefit for teachers appeared to be the opportunity to use their professional knowledge to differentiate instruction, assess student progress, model desired behaviors, utilize strategy instruction, engage in professional discourse with peers, and set goals for professional development. The Reading Specialist stated most succinctly, “SEM-R is exciting because we, myself and the teachers, get to have fun teaching and we are allowed to use our professional knowledge.

The principal, teachers, and specialists identified the SEM-R as being very beneficial both for them and their students. They communicated that they wanted to continue implementation despite the fact that the district requires teachers to commit two hours each day to the basal reading program.

Given that a large portion of the student population was socioeconomically disadvantaged, providing access to books was a focus for most teachers. Multiple teachers relied on avenues to find books that were inexpensive such as thrift stores, flea markets, and rummage sales (a.k.a. tag sales, yard sales, and garage sales). Other teachers spent off duty time, evenings and weekend days, looking for books in local bookstores. In all cases, the teachers sought books with the students in mind, selecting books for a particular student, interest area, or just something new that would expand and enhance current classroom libraries. Teachers also encouraged students to go to flea markets and thrift stores to find books and reminded students that they could read books for free if they had a library card.

Conclusion

The overall impression at North Pacific School was that they had a positive experience implementing the SEM-R. A few challenges were identified early in the implementation, but teachers were able to utilize their professional community to find solutions and many looked forward to the potential of more advanced training in the SEM-R. The students, however, were the primary focus throughout the implementation at North Pacific School, and student success and enjoyment of learning has guided decision making; those that have been made and those that will likely be made in the future.

CHAPTER 5: Discovery Gifted Magnet School

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Discovery Gifted Magnet School is one of eight gifted centers located in a large, urban school system in the Midwestern United States. Located south of the city's downtown, the school is located in a one hundred-year-old building which sits on a city block amid one way streets, run-down brick duplexes and the local rehab center.

The bright hallways and shiny staircases of the interior provide a stark and happy contrast to the outward appearance of the small school and upon entering, one is greeted by a security guard who sits at the hallway station throughout the day. The primary grade classrooms are located on the first floor of the school, the third and fourth grades on the second floor, and the fifth and sixth grade classrooms are on the top floor of the school. In addition to having one class per grade level, the school has a full time art teacher, Spanish teacher, and counselor.

Perched midway between the first floor and the second is the principal's office; a great place to watch the happenings of a busy, but small school. The office occupant, Bonnie Dixon, is a watchful type of principal. She watches over all of her students and has an expert eye for good teaching. She is mindful of data and can easily recall her school's recent state test scores and improvements over years past when fewer than 100% of the children demonstrated proficiency. She is quick to point out, however, that 100% of her students have met or exceeded the standards on the statewide standardized test in the past couple years.

The school's student population mirrors the population of its surroundings. Data from 2007 indicate that 93% of the students at Discovery Magnet School are Black, while Black students comprise about 19% of the population in other schools in the same district. About 44% of the students at Discovery are from low income families; just slightly higher than the city-wide average of 41%. Like their students, the teachers at Discovery are also ethnically diverse. The teachers in the school do not mind hard work and, also like their students, seem to relish their principal's high expectations of them.

SEM-R Classrooms

Mrs. McGarry's Second Grade Classroom

Mrs. Rose McGarry is a neat and organized teacher. Neatly written charts line the walls and remind students of the behaviors of good readers, how to multiply numbers, or the similarities and differences of characters in a recent read-aloud. Aside from the contents of the second graders' desks, nothing is astray. Her second graders, however, are not nearly as neat and organized as she; pencils and books spill from the insides of their desks and paper piles slide from the top of one desk onto another. Second graders, however, have never really been known for organized or very task-focused. Perhaps this is why Mrs. McGarry's SEM-R implementation is so exciting; she has somehow managed to get her second grade students to read for extended periods of time in books of their choosing.

Prior to this implementation, the SEM-R has primarily been studied in the third through the sixth grades. Being that this is a magnet school for gifted, however, it was decided that Mrs. McGarry's second graders would also participate. When I arrived in Mrs. McGarry's classroom on the morning of my observation, she explained to her students that I'm one of the people in charge of the SEM-R and they lit up and became visibly excited. She explained that they would be changing their normal Monday schedule a bit so that I could see the SEM-R since they would be on a field trip the next day. The students began the day by doing their seat work. They wrote in a daily journal of some sort. As they finished their journal entries, they opened a book and started to read. When everyone had finished the seat work, the teacher asked the children to get out their SEM-R books and journals.

Mrs. McGarry began her Book Hook by telling the students that she'd been thinking about the problems that they'd been having—apparently the students had been saying that there were no books in the classroom library that they wanted to read. She said that there was actually one genre in the classroom library that it looked as if no one had even touched. She said, "I was thinking it might be time to try something new." As she said this, several of her students spoke up to share answers and it became evident what a responsive teacher she is. She was patient as she explained her reasoning behind the genre selection she had made. She discussed the topics that they'd been learning about in class, especially the Underground Railroad. She suggested that they look for biographies about Abraham Lincoln and others that they had learned about in social studies. She went on to discuss how to read non-fiction, including the fact that reading non-fiction includes reading to find the information that one is looking for which often may involve skipping around in the book and not reading the entire book.

As Mrs. McGarry continued with her Book Hook and said "I'm just going to read a little tiny section," it became clear that the students were anxious to begin their own reading. They already had their noses stuck in their own books or their SEM-R journals.

Mrs. McGarry's second graders were certainly energetic and seemed impatient to move beyond the Book Hook, which had gone twenty minutes, well beyond the suggested length of ten minutes for that point in the implementation. When she finished the Book Hook, several of the students indicated that they'd love to read more about Abraham Lincoln demonstrating that Mrs. McGarry had successfully created a Book Hook that motivated her students to read something new.

As they started Phase Two, six students came to the table to sit with her. Several students were also at the bookshelf at the back of the room choosing books. They were noisy in choosing their books and seemed to be distracting others from their reading. At one glance around the room, it was impressive to notice, however, that all of the second graders in her class were reading chapter books.

At the table, one student read to the teacher as the others at the table read silently from their own self-selected books. The teacher had the student's journal and the bookmarks ready. She listened to the student read aloud for a while, and then asked the student to tell her what was going on in the book. The student gave a lengthy summary of the book and the teacher asked several higher order thinking questions. After making notes in the student's journal, Mrs. McGarry moved on to the next student at the table. In her conferences, she was able to provide students with individualized questioning and strategy instruction.

It became apparent that implementing the SEM-R in a room full of energetic and talkative seven year olds had some distinct challenges. The second grade students, more than students at other grade levels in the study, seemed to have trouble maintaining self-regulation of their reading throughout the allotted time. Also, fifteen minutes into the implementation, there were still three students at the bookshelf looking for books. Therefore, it may also be true that younger students may need more guidance in their book selection.

Throughout her teacher's log, Mrs. McGarry noted that some of the students had trouble self-regulating their reading, but that the majority of the class could do so and that all students looked forward to the SEM-R with great anticipation. Student logs also indicated that the students seemed to enjoy their reading. On September 16, for example, one of Mrs. McGarry's students wrote:

> When I read I feel wonderful. I feel amazing, really amazing. I read silent when I'm reading so I can keep the words in my head. It's fun to read. I feel all kinds of emotions when I read, like joyful, happy, amazing, and wonderful.

Another student wrote:

> I feel relaxed when I read because at first I'm like 'Ugh! This is so boring! Like that, but after 5 minutes I feel that it's interesting. I'm a reading [tipe] of child! I was born with it! I love reading! It's so interesting!

Her students' own words illustrate their love for reading and seem to show that even though some continue to struggle with their self-regulation, reading class had been an enjoyable experience overall.

Mrs. Cross's Fourth Grade Classroom

As I walked in to Mrs. Suzanne Cross's fourth grade class, the students were already reading. As I looked around, I saw that most of her 29 students were engaged; with about three exceptions who seemed to be having some trouble concentrating on their books. At the back of the room sat Mrs. Cross and another woman, Mrs. Vicki Pleschefski (who I was later told is the Spanish teacher). Each adult sat next to a student and all four of them seemed to be heavily involved in their respective conversations; they didn't even look up as I came into the classroom and took a seat at the side of the room. I could see that the classroom had a fairly extensive library. Two students perusing the library found their books and quickly returned to their seats.

From where I was sitting, I could hear Mrs. Cross's conference. In her first conference, she began by asking the student to summarize the book that she had been reading. After listening to the summary, she asked the student to read a page from the book and after listening to the easy fluidity with which the student read, she told the student that next time she should choose a more difficult book. From this conference, it was evident that Mrs. Cross knew her readers' capabilities. With the next student, Mrs. Cross spent nearly the entirety of the conference discussing book choices with the student as he, too, had chosen a book that was too easy. This was an appropriate use of the conference time since the student seemed to have difficulty choosing appropriate reading material.

At the end of each conference that they conducted, Mrs. Cross and Mrs. Pleschefski wrote in the students' journals, usually assigning something to be prepared for the next conference. At the end of one student's conference, Mrs. Cross explained "I want you to start drawing some conclusions about what is happening in this book." As she explained, she wrote a short note to the student in his journal about what she wanted him to prepare prior to his next conference. Between conferences Mrs. Cross circulated among her students and checked in with students whose skills in self-regulation required monitoring.

Mrs. Fennert's Fifth Grade Classroom

The fifth grade teacher at Discovery, Mrs. Rebecca Fennert, teaches language arts to both the fifth and sixth grade classes. With a Master's degree in reading, Mrs. Fennert brings a wealth of reading experience to her classroom. She has a wide background of training in reading methods and techniques. In my visit, I noticed influence of her extensive training in the posters of reading strategies affixed high over the heads of the students which were visible from all areas of the room. At the back of the room was a classroom library with about twelve several shelves of books in baskets, as well as three spinning book racks, and two beach chairs. In the middle of a u-shaped desk arrangement was a small table which Mrs. Fennert used as her home base during her conferences. She had obviously taken a lot of time to set up the management of her classroom so that it would run easily and smoothly. Students seemed to know exactly what they should do and they read contentedly for an extended period of time.

Though Mrs. Fennert taught both the fifth and sixth grade reading classes, she did not use the same Book Hook content in each, but tailored her Book Hooks to the needs of each class. In her teacher log, Mrs. Fennert wrote "Phase One is fun… I enjoy trying to hook students in. I used the bookmark prompts for discussion questions in conferences and gained a lot of insight into the books." She also posted a question on the board for each week. During the week of my visit the following question was posted: "How does the personality of one character contribute to his or her success or failure?" She used the questions in her Book Hooks throughout the week, but also used them in her conferences with each of the students. In doing so, she truly wove the strategies she modeled in her mini-lesson into her student conferences.

When Mrs. Fennert started her Book Hook on *Becoming Naomi Leon* for the fifth graders, they were very attentive. It was obvious that was a time that they enjoyed. Mrs. Fennert discussed the fact that we have information about a character based on the details that an author shares with us. She read a section to the class then asked, "How do we know that she's shy? What else could that mean? Do you think that the girls will become friends?" Mrs. Fennert used several higher order thinking skills to teach her students about how readers must make inferences.

In her sixth grade class, Mrs. Fennert modeled the questions that she was wondering about prior to conducting her Book Hook on *My Brother Sam is Dead*. She said, "Even before reading this book, the title makes me wonder about some of the events of the book. For instance, I wonder how the character's brother died. I wonder if they were close to one another. I wonder how his death will affect the story." In doing this, Mrs. Fennert provided a short mini-lesson about what good readers are doing even prior to their reading. She also modeled the fact that good readers then read on to try to discover answers to their questions. She then made a text-to-self connection and explained that someone once read the book to her when she was in fifth grade. She told her students that they would always remember the person who read them a wonderful

book. She reminded them of last year when she read them *The Birchbark House* by Louise Erdrich and they seemed to remember that book with fondness. It was evident that Mrs. Fennert has a high regard for literacy and strives to pass that along to her students.

Throughout Phase Two, Mrs. Fennert demonstrated her ability to differentiate and individualize student conferences to meet the needs of each of her students. At the beginning of each conference, Mrs. Fennert scooted her chair right up next to a student and asked for a short summary of his or her book. She continued by asking the student about the question of the week (from the board) and since the question had been on the board all week, each student was prepared to share an answer. Her implementation of the SEM-R was highly organized and grounded in a solid background of reading knowledge.

Discussion

Treatment Fidelity

The teachers in this school implemented the SEM-R with strong treatment fidelity and consistently met the expectations of the model as evidenced by the observation scale. The SEM-R became the primary delivery mode for reading instruction beginning in second grade and continuing through sixth grade. The early implementation notes indicate that nearly all of the teachers were able to reach the "meets expectations" level on the implementation scale by November. By January, however, most of the teachers remained at the "meets expectations" level, although a few had reached the "exceeds expectations" level in a couple categories. From these results, it may look like the teachers did not make advances in their implementation, but their comments indicate that the teachers' comfort levels and believed proficiency increased greatly.

Success Factors

Several factors at this site reported by the administrators and the teachers, and observed by the researcher, made the implementation successful. Though not necessarily unique to this site, these aspects of this particular implementation were integral to its success.

Administrative Support

Certainly one of the strongest aspects of the SEM-R in this school was the steady principal support that the program received. The school principal attended the initial summer training with her teachers and actively participated, even cheering her teachers on throughout the process. Principal Dixon also made herself available to her teachers during the implementation and helped the teachers seek out the answers to their questions. She also instituted a time for the teachers to meet with the SEM-R coach on a regular basis for discussions on implementation. One teacher wrote in her teacher log about a challenge she had faced in her implementation and indicated that she would

discuss possible solutions with the principal. Her journal entry highlighted the relationship between this principal and her teachers and underscores the fact that they see her as a curriculum leader.

Teamwork

The teachers at this school were a small, close-knit group, evident even at the summer training prior to the beginning of the summer. Conversations with Ms. Dixon indicate that the school's faculty members think of themselves as a family and work to help one another. This philosophy was exemplified by the fact that *all* teachers at Discovery participate in reading instruction. Each classroom had been assigned a specialist to assist during the literacy block and the Spanish teacher, the music teacher, and the art teacher were all observed participating in conferences during SEM-R. Ms. Dixon noted that in this way, each teacher had a responsibility for students' literacy growth; a central goal for the school.

Teachers' Attitudes

The teachers' journal entries from the beginning of the study showed some skepticism and cognitive dissonance about the viability of the SEM-R to replace more traditional methods of reading instruction. One of their main concerns was whether students would receive the reading skills necessary for comprehension. This faculty seemed driven to overcome any challenges they faced in their implementation and this proved to be a major contributor to their success. Motivation to learn the model may have stemmed from the support given by the principal and coach, but the teachers at this school worked together to learn the model evidenced by the fact that they asked questions, observed, and modeled for one another throughout the implementation. The teachers' comments in the post-implementation interviews were overwhelmingly positive and indicate that the teachers are excited about using the SEM-R in the future.

Implementation Challenges

The SEM-R coach's notes from the beginning of the study indicated that the teachers struggled with several issues initially. She noted that they had some difficulty organizing the components of the model and figuring out how all of it worked together. The coach also perceived that many had difficulty giving up control of the literacy block, preferring their former more structured reading instruction methods to the student-centered SEM-R. Finally, she noted that many lacked confidence in their implementation during the first month or two.

When asked, the teachers did not recall specific challenges that were present initially, but their journal entries indicate that many of the things mentioned by the coach may have been problematic. The teachers did indicate several overall concerns that were present throughout the study. An oft-mentioned comment was the difficulty that many

had in conferencing with all of their students. This may be partially due to the fact that the class sizes at this school are larger than those found in other schools in the large, urban district in which it is located. However, at 24 or 26 students per class, they are not a great deal larger than the class sizes in other schools in the study.

Several of the teachers also mentioned that a lack of access to books was a hindrance. Discovery Magnet School is a small school without a full-time librarian. The small library is located on the second floor of the building and houses a modest selection of books, most of which are older. The principal reported that most of the books were leftovers from other schools. Most teachers noted that they rarely used the school library and preferred to stock their own classroom libraries. In their notes and in interviews, however, the teachers noted that the students had "run out of books" for the first time ever. They indicated that most of their students had read so many books during the year that they had exhausted the classroom libraries forcing the teachers to look to new avenues for books including the school library, other teachers' classrooms, and the public library.

Also related to lack of access, the teachers acknowledged that the books that they received for their participation in the study were helpful and targeted appropriately to the reading levels of most of their students, but noted that there were many students for whom the classroom library was still a poor match. In particular, they noted difficulty in finding books that were adequately challenging for their most talented readers. They often struggled in their recommendations as they were uneasy recommending books with content that was too mature for the students' developmental level, but often found that books written at the students' developmental levels were too easy.

Effects on Students' Reading Practices

According to the teachers and the coach, students' reading practices have changed a great deal since the inception of the SEM-R. Teachers indicated that at the beginning of the study, students tolerated reading, but did not seem to read with enjoyment. Initially, they read from a limited pool of genres and often had a specific genre or author that they read.

By November, the teachers were reporting that their Book Hooks had gotten students "interested in books that they would never pick up otherwise." One teacher said, "When I 'hook' a book, students *usually* clamor to be the first to read it." Teachers noticed that many students had found new favorite authors and genres that they enjoyed and many had discovered a real passion for biographies. In addition, they noted that many third graders were reading books 200-500 pages in length.

Several of the teachers remarked that the SEM-R had positive effects on their talented readers in particular. One teacher indicated that her highest readers seemed more engaged that they had previously. A colleague reported, "Many students, especially my

highest readers, are benefitting from reading books at their level instead of the basal reader."

Teachers also shared stories of their students' individual growth and change during the SEM-R implementation. One teacher said,

> One of my students was reading at a level lower than the average. I noticed, however, that she was a focused and dedicated reader during SEM-R. After the second assessment had been administered, her level increased over 200 points. She is closer to being on level. Another teacher said,
>
> One example that comes to mind is a male student who was reluctant to read at the beginning of the year. He now reads enthusiastically. In fact, I have to ask him to stop when we have moved to another subject.

A third teacher said, "Another student has benefitted from the fact that SEM-R encourages reading slightly above an independent level. She has taken that very seriously, and as a result, her level range has gone up tremendously." These stories indicate that teachers saw the impact of the SEM-R on individual students' reading behaviors and that those results were positive.

Summary

The findings at Discovery Gifted Magnet School are interesting in particular because although the SEM-R has been studied in other self-contained gifted classrooms, it has only been studied in one other gifted *school*. Furthermore, the findings are exciting because the school is set in a district in which primarily scripted instruction and low-level practices are used. Observations, journal entries by teachers and students, and interviews with administration and faculty indicate that the SEM-R has had a positive impact on the literacy instruction of teachers and reading behaviors of students at Discovery.

Throughout the interviews, teachers and administrators indicated that their experiences with the model had been exciting and many indicated that the model suited their instructional style. They were overwhelmingly positive about its effects, even in light of several aspects that they had found to be challenging. Teachers shared stories of how the model had improved the reading comprehension and fluency of individual students, but indicated that the greatest aspect had been that most all of their students found reading enjoyable.

One consistent finding at this school that is particularly noteworthy is the fact that so many of the teachers indicated that they had difficulty recommending appropriate book matches for their students, particularly for their most advanced readers. In some of the cases, this may have been due to the fact that teachers were still exploring the genre

of children's literature or young adult literature and had a fairly limited knowledge of books. Several of the teachers acknowledged the fact that they intended to read more children's literature in order to better their future SEM-R implementation. However, in some cases, teachers were very knowledgeable about the field and still had trouble. This may have been particularly challenging to the teachers in this school because they were working with gifted students, many of whom were talented readers. Teachers often find it difficult to make book matches that allow for appropriately difficult text as well as content that is appropriate and not too mature.

These teachers were also at a disadvantage compared with other teachers whose schools had full time librarians. An experienced librarian might have been able to assist teachers with recommending books. These findings underscore the importance of good classroom libraries, in addition to an accessible classroom library with a knowledgeable and helpful librarian.

Another finding unique to this implementation regarded the use of the SEM-R in the primary grades. Because a certain degree of independent reading must take place during Phase Two, the SEM-R is not often used in primary classrooms. This study, however, was conducted with gifted students, many of whom were talented readers. Mrs. McGarry's implementation in a second grade classroom provides evidence that the SEM-R can be used with novice readers. By January, all of her readers were reading "chapter books" and reading with a greater degree of independence than normally seen in seven- or eight-year-olds. Data from her classroom indicate, however, that the SEM-R may look different when used with younger children. Mrs. McGarry spent more time discussing and modeling self-regulation skills than the other teachers and individual conferences often consisted of training students to utilize such strategies.

Overall, the findings from Discovery Gifted Magnet indicate that the SEM-R can be used to effectively develop the literacy skills of all students, but seems to be particularly effective in motivating and challenging talented readers who may otherwise be bored or unchallenged by traditional reading instruction, including the use of the basal reader. This site further shows that the SEM-R can be used effectively at least as early as second grade. In short, one teacher summarized the effects of the study by saying, "Students love to read, and they are motivated to understand what they read. At first I thought this was going to be so much easier, but it's not. But it's so much better."

CHAPTER 6: Nelson Mandela Magnet School

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The Nelson Mandela Magnet School, a sprawling brick building of two floors, was originally a kindergarten through fifth grade school that subsequently merged with a nearby middle school in the 1980's, becoming a kindergarten through eighth grade Lab School. Upon entering the building, a staircase leads visitors to the second floor and wings of classrooms spread out in three directions. Established as a magnet school, the Nelson Mandela Lab School web site explains that it has an emphasis on both Fine Arts and technology. Approximately 537 students attend the Mandela Magnet School, and half are students from culturally diverse population groups, mainly African American. The school's web site explains that, over the years the school has continued to weave both fine arts and technology throughout the fabric of its curriculum at all grade levels, further elaborating that fine arts and technology can serve as powerful tools in energizing and motivating students to perform better in all academic subjects.

The gifted coordinator for the district, who also serves as the district math coordinator, has served as the contact for the SEM-R pilot study. All teachers in grades three to five who were teaching at Nelson Mandela School at the time of the pilot were invited to participate. All fourth grade teachers, one third grade teacher, and one fifth grade teacher implemented the SEM-R. Review of previous observations by district coaches, as well as two days of observations of SEM-R and non-SEM-R classrooms, and interviews with teachers served as the basis for this report. Five teachers in the school were implementing SEM-R and observations were conducted in four of the classrooms, as one teacher was absent. A brief observation of that classroom however, revealed that the students had explained to the substitute teacher what was supposed to have happened for SEM-R that day, and that the substitute had subsequently enabled all students to participate in Phase Two. The substitute teacher explained that she was amazed at how many students read quietly and with focus during the course of the Phase Two SIR time.

The classroom observations provide a rich and varied glimpse of the model in action. Only two of the classroom teachers observed had attended the summer training, while the others were trained on site by being provided with a copy of the SEM-R book, and having the other classroom teachers, the coach and the director of gifted programs for the district available for help and support.

SEM-R Classrooms

Ms. Smith's Third Grade Classroom

In the first classroom, third grade teacher, Ms. Smith, began her double block of Language Arts/Reading with a prepared writing prompt. On a white board, she wrote the prompt: Basketball and baseball are similar and different. How are they different? Use the text and your own ideas. She had evidently read a short piece to the students on the previous day from which the students were expected to make connections via the writing prompt. There were 16 students in the classroom and the students represented diverse populations. The classroom was very organized and quiet. The teacher had effective classroom management, as well as space for a large classroom library; approximately one-third of the back of the room was reserved for SEM-R library space. The bookshelves held 26 bins of books across the side of the room organized by topic and/or genre. Across the back of the room were three smaller book shelves that held 16 smaller white plastic baskets of books similarly organized with labels such as humorous books, chapter books about third grade, mysteries, fantasy, and biographies. On another wall, an additional 10 bins of books held more choices such as heroes and the human body. Books were also arranged in a library display manner on top of all book cases, standing up and opened with the covers facing the children, representing an inviting way of asking students to read. Students' SEM-R logs were neatly organized in the back of the room and writing prompts and bookmarks were scattered around the room.

On a string clothesline, spread across the top of the bins of books, was a series of teacher created posters guiding students to various reading strategies. These included posters with the following titles:

Asking Questions Before, During and After Reading
What We think We Know About NE Woodland Native Americans
Author's Purpose Clues
Problems and Solutions in Reading
Main Idea and Detail
Character, Setting and Plot
Making Connections
When Do You Infer?
How to Comprehend Text
How to Decode Words
Writer's Notebook

As children finished their writing prompt, their teacher directed them to their SEM-R books that were neatly stacked in two bins in the back of the room. Students appear to leave their SEM-R books in the classroom, as each child went to the bin to pick up his or her book as soon as the writing prompt had been finished. Students were also introduced to this researcher when several took the opportunity to explain why they liked

SEM-R. Ben explained that he liked SEM-R because he gets to read and pick his own books. Several of the other students chimed in, and all said they liked SEM-R because they could choose their own books and also because they were able to read for longer periods of time.

Cameron, a short boy wearing a green long sleeved t-shirt, immediately began reading after he finished his writing prompt. After looking at his book for a few minutes, he glanced around the class and struggled with focus for a minute or two. As other students finished their prompts, they walked quietly over to the book bins and selected their books, which had a bookmark in them with their names clearly displayed. Cameron continued to read quietly as time went on, but his distractibility was something that he was aware of and appeared to be trying to control. The levels of reading achievement in the classroom varied greatly. One third grade boy was, for example, reading *Eragon,* while others had shorter, on-grade level chapter books of no more than 20 pages.

No Book Hook was conducted in this classroom on this day and after completing their writing prompt, students moved immediately into Phase Two of SEM-R. Within three minutes of the completion of the writing prompt, all students had their SEM-R book on their desk and were quietly reading. Most were very engaged and only Cameron, who has already been redirected by his teacher several times, appeared to be unable to self-regulate for the long period of time, despite reading an easy book that appeared to be somewhat entertaining to him.

The teacher, who communicated that she had ten years of teaching experience, was very comfortable at conducting differentiated conferences with all students. She moved easily from basic comprehension skills to reading strategy questions, to more advanced questions about literary devices such as plot, theme, and setting. After 40 minutes, the students, most of whom had read quietly and with good self-regulation, stopped reading when their teacher told them that the time was up. In our interview, she explained that she did not do Book Hooks every day, preferring to give students time to read. She also explained that she had conducted many of them in the beginning of SEM-R, but now wanted to use the time for conferences and for reading during Phase Two.

Ms. Smith summarized her reactions to SEM-R by explaining that she has seen students' confidence in reading increase greatly with SEM-R. In particular, she has watched as the struggling readers have gained confidence, explaining that they look forward to reading chapter books. She discussed Michael, a second language learner who arrived in this country last year and explained how he had learned to decode and to engage in reading:

> His exposure to American vocabulary has increased so much this year. I have watched his confidence grow, as I have other children who have struggled with fluency. We finally got a few of those kids on books of high interest and all of them have increased in fluency and comprehension. The exposure of different

types of genres during Phase One also has worked. We started with 10 minutes of SEM-R during the first week and within a month, most kids were able to read for 20 minutes. Within the first two months, by the beginning of December, they were able to read quietly for 30 minutes as well. I try to carefully keep this SIR, Phase Two time in the SEM-R every day to keep a structure every day and keep them reading. When they are finished with SIR, they can also go to picture or easier books, but many of them continue reading books that challenge them.

Ms. Smith reflected that, in the past, she never considered the level of challenge in reading, explaining that reading consultants had always told her that students should read "just right" books on a regular basis. "I always had kids choosing picture books. I used to have students pick books that were in their fluency range and I never thought about challenge. I had a student this year named Matthew who came from another school and he did not have reading skills. I did a Book Hook from *Ramona* and he chose another *Ramona* book from September to December. His comprehension soared and he did well. The books that some of my students are reading are well above the reading levels that I would have expected. Matthew's mom told me that she bought him the easy version of Despereaux and now he wants to read the unabridged version." Again, she told me that the best part of this program was that she has never seen kids feel smart in reading, "My kids who are my lowest readers don't feel like they are low readers anymore."

Ms. Gordon's Fourth Grade Classroom

In the second observation, a fourth grade classroom teacher also began SEM-R without a Book Hook, and appeared to be combining SEM-R with some small group instruction as she was meeting with a small group. In this classroom, 19 students sat at their desks reading quietly during SIR. The teacher began the SEM-R time without a Book Hook, but with a discussion of how to use comparison and contrasting as a literary device. She subsequently explained that the majority of students in the class begin the SEM-R block reading their independent SEM-R books, and explained that she had conducted many Book Hooks in the beginning of the school year, but had used them less often as time went on. Again, there was a very easy transition from the five-minute lesson on comparing and contrasting to Phase Two reading, and students were all engaged and quiet.

The same kind of range of reading levels were apparent in this classroom that had been noted in the previous classroom, with students reading very low easy-read chapter books, to students reading advanced non-fiction books. The room remained very quiet and controlled, books were readily available in bins around the classroom, and children read with focus and attention for almost 50 minutes. Organization of books varied in this classroom, as some books are more loosely organized in crates, not all of which are labeled. Other books were organized by author and genre in small plastic bins with bins labeled with authors' names including Pam Muñoz Ryan, Kenneth Oppel, Louis Sachar,

CS Lewis, Avi, Judy Blume, Gary Paulsen, Lloyd Alexander, Walter Dean Myers, Mike Lupica, Roald Dahl, and Betsy Byars.

After the brief introductory lesson that was independent of a Book Hook, the teacher began Phase Two by having a small group conference with a group of four students who were all reading *Frindle.* She read aloud with them and then conducted some individual conferences with students who appeared to be lower readers, as some of them were unable to read silently but whisper-read quietly to themselves. No behavior problems were evident in this classroom, allowing for quiet conferences that were clearly differentiated, and included questions that varied in focus: vocabulary development, fluency strategies, comprehension, reading strategy use, and literary devices such as plot, theme, setting, and others. The teachers' ability to move effortlessly without bookmarks or prompts throughout the day suggested her ease and comfort with differentiated instruction. The teacher conducted nine Phase Two SIR conferences of approximately 3-5 minutes each during the 50-minute reading block observed. Each was quiet, focused, and differentiated questioning skills were used in each.

The quiet focus in the room continued as students continued to be self-regulated and the class remained quiet and orderly for the majority of Phase Two SIR. The majority of the students read quietly for the entire time, interrupted only by one of the nine teacher conferences. The teacher moved quietly around the room, conducting short, targeted, differentiated conferences. The vast majority of the students remained fully engaged in their books while the conferences were being conducted with other students nearby. Students used the SEM-R logs and there was also evidence of the use of bookmarks and sticky notes for students as they identified questions and unfamiliar words during reading.

Teacher-made posters about purposeful reading, drawing conclusions, and dialogue and writing responses adorned the walls, suggesting that both organization and careful planning are utilized in this classroom.

In a follow-up interview with Ms. Gordon, she explained that she used SEM-R regularly, "every day, five days a week." Ms. Gordon explained that she did not have a lot of difficulty getting her class to begin doing the independent reading of challenging books. She reported that she had started with 10 minutes and worked up to 50. She uses Book Hooks most or many days, and did them every day in the beginning of the year, but has used them less often as she has substituted the district curriculum with the modeled strategies as an introductory activity. She also explained that she uses Renzulli Learning once a week in the computer lab for Phase Three.

Ms. Gordon explained that she "…finds SEM-R a much more joyful way to teach reading for her." In her previous experience with guided reading she found reading instruction to be tedious. She explained that her students are so much more relaxed and happy with SEM-R. She also said that some of these high poverty kids don't have time to

talk about books at home. She also said that her students are proud that they are not in grouped reading. That is, there are no high, medium and low groups, but rather the use of private differentiated instruction. Ms. Gordon also noted that her boys are reading more than in any of her previous experiences. Ms. Gordon has seen leaps and bounds during implementation of SEM-R, explaining that her students love the choice of reading materials. "If they see a male friend of theirs read a book then they borrow a book." Ms. Gordon had been teaching 18 years and used all different types of reading programs. She borrowed some strategies but had never used a program where children have the opportunity to read for so long. Ms. Gordon had been teaching fourth grade for 11 years and had never seen that level of self-regulation. She mentioned the use of post-its as well; she would ask students to write words that confused them, as well as questions that they had about their reading.

She explained that she had in the past "…told kids that they had to follow the five finger rule, but now I enjoy getting the right challenge level and I believe there are so few behavior problems because of the challenge and choice factors in SEM-R."

She also believed that the exposure and advanced training she received at Confratute were highly beneficial. She has been reading more herself, and estimates that she read 60-80 books this year. Ms. Gordon stated that she is also better able to share things about good literature with her students, and subsequently is able to help students recognize literature that is not as strong. She likes the flexibility of SEM-R and understands that all teachers using it do not need to do it exactly the same way. "This has been the best teaching experience and the best teaching of reading I have ever had. My students ask me each day: Can I have SEM-R time? Can we read? I have never seen this before in my many years of teaching."

Ms. Gordon explained that the differentiated reading conferences worked very well for her, as each of her students is on a different reading level. The guided reading model they used last year, according to this teacher, was "horrible." Every Monday, teachers modeled a strategy using an anthology. Then during the week groups of kids who had not mastered the skill were identified and pulled out to do worksheets for targeted instruction in the deficit area. Students were grouped and given worksheets based on ability, and according to the teacher, because of this, all children knew which students were the lowest readers. The teacher said she had considered abandoning the whole program but had to follow district mandates. She also said that she used to have a sick feeling in her gut every day during reading when she had to use guided reading, and now she looks forward to reading in her classroom. Ms. Gordon hoped that if the SEM-R results were good, she would be able to continue, explaining, "…all of my kids have done well on the mid-year assessments and I think we will see good gains on the SEM-R."

Ms. Gordon explained that she has had very few parental contacts this year, and she believes that this may help her in the future. "My kids tell me that they are reading more at home, so at this point, I think that the home connection will be better." In terms

of what she would want to continue with in the future, she explained that she would like to have additional training on Renzulli Learning, which was given to the teachers in this school as part of their participation in the SEM-R.

At the end of the observation, the teacher asked the students to turn around and face me, as I was sitting in the back of the classroom taking notes, and she asked them to share their feelings about SEM-R. The following comments were scripted verbatim from the majority of the students in the class.

- I really like SEM-R because you get so many choices of books. I don't really like the writing that much but it is only once in a while.
- SEM-R helps me understand what books are all about.
- Last year we were doing reading using the guided reading books that were short and small and way too easy for us. We did not learn very much at all.
- I like SEM-R because when we read all of these chapter books, I understand more words cause I have learned to better understand what to do when I come to a word that I don't know.
- I like SEM-R cause you get to read whatever you want. I don't like to write because it gets you off topic.
- I like SEM-R because you don't just have 5-10 minutes to read. You really get a long period of time to read.
- I read my SEM-R book at home because I love it so much.
- I like SEM-R because you get to choose your own books.
- One thing that SEM-R helped me with is that I used to not read very much at all but now I have gotten into the habit of reading in school and at home.
- SEM-R sort of helped me because I have always liked to read and I always read the words but I usually couldn't remember what I read. Now, because of the post-its and the conferences, I have had to learn how to read and remember. My teacher helps me when I read out loud and she asks me questions about how I read.
- I like SEM-R because you get to ask questions without criticisms.
- I like SEM-R because it shows me to new words that I did not understand.
- If you start a book in SEM-R, you have choice if you don't like it. You have to try it for 10 pages, but if you don't like it, you can choose another. And choosing books makes you like them more.
- The McMillan Reading Series was what we used before and everybody knew who the bad readers were. I like SEM-R better.
- I also really like the fact that you get to pick your own book.

Linda, the student who made the comment about the post-it notes, asked me to come over as I was leaving the class and showed me about 30 post-it notes in her book. She explained to me how she asks herself questions using the sticky notes and almost

always can answer them later. Linda said that when you write down questions, you are able to help yourself remember how to look for information that helps you answer the questions yourself without asking your teacher.

Ms. Forter's Fourth Grade Classroom

The SEM-R classroom observation in this room was quite different, as the teacher was doing Phase Three. Students were able to choose one of several activities during Phase Three of SEM-R. One group of students began working on projects immediately. Several others chose to continue with their SEM-R reading books in a corner of the classroom that was filled with inviting books and opportunities for reading. One young girl sat in a big rocking chair reading quietly and sighing with contentment. Another sat on a pink couch in the corner. One lay on his stomach and read on the floor with his book and elbows on a pillow. Groups of students worked with paper mache on the floor building landscapes. Another group of students who were reading from the *The Kite Flyers* by Linda Sue Park sat at a reading table with their teacher. Students read from their books and then had a literature discussion in a literary circle instructional format.

All students showed independence in their choices as well as self-regulation in the work they were pursuing. Classroom sets of books were readily available and the SEM-R books were in bins in the back corner of the classroom, just as they were in the other classrooms. Each group of children was engaged and independent during the Phase Three time. At the conclusion of the 50 minutes of SEM-R-Phase Three, students who volunteered were able to share their perceptions of the Phase Two SIR books they were reading. Most of the other students did not seem very interested during this book share, and only half of the students were listening. This was not a part of the hour for SEM-R and in a subsequent discussion with the teacher, she explained that she did this every two weeks. She also explained that she does Phase Two SIR daily, a practice that was witnessed during the second day of the observation. During that day, all students were found to be reading quietly in different types and genres of books. Several conferences were observed, and they appeared to be brief (3-5 minutes) with targeted differentiation of reading instruction.

In an interview, Ms. Forter explained that she been teaching for over 20 years, and discussed students in her class who had never liked to read before now read all of the time. Students read daily for about 40-45 minutes during Phase Two SIR. Ms. Forter said it had taken a few weeks to get a routine going, but she reached 30 minutes within a month. About five students took until Thanksgiving to reach this goal. She worked with them individually, but they would often stare off into space. This diverse class had been a wonderful experience for her, she explained, as her previous teaching experiences were in an upper middle class school district. Book diversity would be an enhanced goal, but in general her philosophy fit well with SEM-R so she believed it was easier for her. She reported that she had no special training at all, but did know she could ask the other teachers who had attended Confratute for help and support. One of the things that she had

difficulty with was recording notes during and after the conferences. She does not like the Treasures Series from MacMillan at all and does not want to use it next year, feeling that it was a bad match for her. SEM-R had been a welcome change. Ms. Forter also found that her kids started writing better. She brought one of her student's written responses to the other fourth grade teachers and they could not believe how strong the response was. Student improvement over the course of the year using SEM-R astounded her, and she would love to come to Confratute.

Ms. Baldwin's Fifth Grade Classroom

Another SEM-R observation took place in Ms. Baldwin's fifth grade classroom in the middle school wing of Nelson Mandela. As with the other classrooms, this was a large, spacious room with a large metal set of book cases over the radiator and under the large row of windows in the classroom. Although officially a part of the middle school, all students in the classroom spent a double block of reading with this teacher who used SEM-R as a replacement for the entire reading program. Along the row of metal bookcases were a series of plastic bins filled with SEM-R books. The same system was being used as the plastic bins arranged books by genre, author, or collections such as Weird and Amazing Trivia. It was from this bin that the Book Hook was taken, entitled, *Believe it or Not, Bizarre Collections by Ripley's Believe It Or Not*. The section read aloud detailed the similarities between Lincoln's assassination and Kennedy's assassination. The Book Hook was brief and students were enthralled. Over the 6-7 minutes, students remained both engaged and attentive. A built-in, high technology projector was used to show two pages from the text with a list of similarities. Several students asked if they could read the book, the ultimate goal of a strong Book Hook.

The transition to Phase Two SIR happened very quickly and with minimal disruption. Students began reading quietly and all 18 students were immersed in their books. A special education inclusion teacher began a conference with a student in her caseload. The teacher sat at the front of the class and called students up to her for 4-5 minute conferences. Self -regulated reading was evident in all children as most were reading chapter books and as in previous classrooms, a wide variety of books and challenge levels were observed. Students sat at desks arranged in rows across the room. It was very quiet and orderly, despite the fact that school had just begun.

During the 30-minute SIR time, all students in the class except one were fully engaged in reading the entire time. That one student read for 5 minutes, stopped reading, and then started again. The Language Arts/Reading teacher and the special education inclusion teacher conducted six brief differentiated conferences. All of the student logs were utilized, and those examined showed that students in the class had used their logs regularly to record pages read, daily questions, and ideas. It was also evident that students had used the pages at the back of the log to record the books that they had read, as well as the reading list of books they wanted to read. The numbers of books completed in the list varied from a low of four or five to a high of nine or ten. No evidence of Phase Three was

noted in the SEM-R time block that was followed immediately by a literary circle in which students shared key words about the protagonist in the book they were reading, one of the prompts from the SEM-R book marks. The teacher, during a subsequent interview, explained that she loved using SEM-R, believed that she was doing the best reading instruction in her career, and simply could not go back to the previous level of instruction using the basal system.

Ms. Baldwin explained that she had come up with a few ideas for advanced training she would like to have for SEM-R, including double copies for lower readers, so that they can have a copy at home and one at school as well. She loves giving her students choices for independent reading, likes the regulation of a Book Hook and of the skills associated with the Book Hook and the independent reading. She does these every day. She would like to become a trainer for SEM-R if the district sent her back to Confratute. This new program has sustained her, she explained, showing her own notebook with the manual and all of the ideas that she added to her book. Her other ideas for improving SEM-R were to use Renzulli Learning more, as she explained that she used it each week in the computer lab as the Phase Three part of SEM-R, but that the technology teacher actually did most of the work. She also produced a list of every Book Hook she had done since September and asked about more advanced training on the SEM-R so that she could improve her skills.

Comparison Classroom

In a third grade comparison classroom in which the teacher did not participate in the SEM-R training because she was pregnant, the teacher, an experienced young woman who was hired on a one year appointment to replace the third grade teacher began the class with a brief (two minute) mini-lesson on facts. Then the students broke into groups. Two students worked on the computers in the back of the class playing some games, three students (all girls) sat at a round table coloring with colored pencils, four students sat a square table and wrote extended responses to a worksheet that had been previously distributed, one student came and lay down on a carpet next to me and closed his eyes, while another group of three students met for reading group with the teacher at the front of the class. These students worked with the teacher on completing work sheets on reading. One reluctant reader would not respond to the teacher, when asked to respond to the sentence, “A long time ago, traders brought silk and spices to Europe by taking a long journey.” She showed them how to restate a question that might come up on the state assessment and tried to encourage them to enhance their responses using the text.

In another corner of the room, a group of eight students worked on writing responses as well. Several of the boys in that group were off task. In a scan of the rest of the classroom, most children were not working on the tasks they had been given, with the exception of the four who had been called up to meet with the teacher in a reading group. At different times during the reading class, it appeared that only three or four of the

students in the class were engaged in what they were doing. The teacher was frustrated and asked four or five times for kids to be quiet and to become more engaged in the lesson. After 27 minutes, she had met with one group and done one short mini-lesson. She then told students to meet in a whole group in the library area for a second mini-lesson on poetry. The transition was completed in 5 minutes as she waited for students to finish their work, put away their materials, and move to a reading area in the back of the classroom.

Tubs of books were spread across that section of the class with approximately half of the number of books available as compared to SEM-R classes, suggesting that other classrooms had similar classroom libraries until the SEM-R books arrived. She began the second mini-lesson with a poem called *I'm Talking Big* by Colin McNaughton. The poem was already written on a large piece of white paper on a white board in the corner of the room. She read with energy and enthusiasm and asked students about the adjectives in the poem she read.

She asked the students to read the poem aloud with her. There was a lot of conversation about the poem but then one student said something to hurt another person's feelings about a larger student in the group. She had to stop the lesson to point out how and why a person's feelings were hurt.

After reading aloud, she announced that she would meet with the McMillan group, and that she might be able to have time to meet with the Junior Great Book group. It was interesting to note that three of the four students in the McMillan group who went eagerly to the table to met with her were White, while all students in the earlier group who were doing remedial worksheet were Black. The McMillan group was working on worksheets from the program and she reviewed the work they had done which involved some measuring skills as well as some reading word clarifications. When asked about the word "lead" she explained the word by saying, "To lead means to show where to go." The other students in the classroom returned to their group work, including three girls who were drawing, two different students on the computers, and three girls in the corner working on writing skills. All students worked quietly, but no students were reading. All were involved in writing and the two on the computer were playing games that involved some writing. Students worked quietly while she worked with the four students in the McMillan group, then she took out four short books called Exploring in Space. She asked students to go to whatever page sounded most interesting to them and then asked them to read quietly to her. She helped them with words they struggled with, and each student listened as the other student read aloud. During the hour of reading instruction that was observed, no students were observed doing any reading, with the exception of the students in the MacMillan group who read for about one minute each.

Principal Interview

A meeting with the principal elicited a few additional comments about SEM-R. In particular, these quotes highlight the summary of his observations in SEM-R classrooms. Children, he explained, were all reading above level and the Book Hooks were just fabulous. He said that across his observations of SEM-R classrooms, he saw more kids reading for longer periods of time. He was also impressed with the management of the program in which children chart their reading progress, explaining that the reading logs guide students in this process. He indicated that he enjoyed seeing all of the kids reading different books and that he believed that the differentiated conferences were going well. He explained that the majority of negative feedback he received from parents was related to lack of challenge in both math and reading, and that he had not had a complaint from any parent of a high ability reader who was in a SEM-R classroom. He considered this a good endorsement of SEM-R and of the benefits of SEM-R for talented readers.

His only concern related to teachers' use of reading strategy assessment, but he could not elaborate on what his concern was. His summary comment about SEM-R was, "…to see kids excited about reading is what makes this special to me."

Findings

Findings that emerged from observations and interviews included the most frequently mentioned: benefits for students. These student benefits included: choice in reading, differentiated instruction, and structure in reading each day. The second most frequently mentioned theme were the benefits for teachers, suggested by the ways in which they were able to enhance reading opportunities for self-choice books, differentiate instruction, conduct enjoyable Book Hooks, but most importantly to them, watch as their students read regularly and enjoyed the reading process, as well as being able to teach in a more engaging and enjoyable way. Each of these findings appeared throughout all interviews and observations discussed in this case study.

The most prevalent finding that emerged in this case study related to perceived student benefits from SEM-R for all students, from low achieving students to gifted and talented students. These benefits included: choice in reading, differentiated instruction, and provision of a supportive structure in reading each day, resulting in higher student self-regulation. Each SEM-R teacher, the principal, the literacy coach, and the special education teachers who were briefly interviewed in classrooms discussed student benefits without any questions or prompts. In conversations about SEM-R consistency in perceived student benefits was noted. All participants made comments such as the following: "I have seen leaps and bounds from SEM-R. They love the choice of reading materials. If they see a male friend of theirs read a book, then they borrow a book."

Ms. Gordon explained that she has been teaching 18 years and used all different types of reading programs. She borrowed some strategies but has never used a program where children have the opportunity to choose books they want to read and continue to read for so long. Ms. Gordon also mentioned that she has never seen this level of self-regulation exhibited by her students. She also believed that the use of the SEM-R resulted in fewer behavior problems because of the challenge and choice factors offered in SEM-R. Ms. Baldwin also discussed student choice, explaining that she loves giving her students choices for independent reading, likes the regulation of a Book Hook, and of the skills associated with the Book Hook and the independent reading. She does these every day, giving time for thought, individualized instruction and choice of books.

Another teacher who had also discussed choice summarized her perceptions about the benefits of the use of differentiated instructional strategies. The teacher, who subsequently told me that she had ten years of teaching experience, was very comfortable at conducting differentiated conferences with all students. She moved easily from basic questions to more advanced questions about literary devices such as plot, theme, and setting.

Another student benefit that was discussed was student self-regulation. After 40 minutes, the students, most of who had read quietly and with good self-regulation, stopped reading when their teacher told them that their time was up in this classroom. Every teacher discussed increased student self-regulation. One explained that she had started with 10 minutes of SEM-R during the first week and within the first month, most kids were able to read for 20 minutes. Within the first two months they were able to read quietly for 30 minutes. She further explained that, “I try to carefully keep this SIR, Phase Two time in the SEM-R every day to keep a structure and keep them reading. When they are finished with SIR, they can also go to picture or easier books, but many of them continue reading books that challenge them.”

Teacher benefits emerged as a second finding, as each teacher discussed professional benefits they had experienced, such as watching their students read each day, being able to use differentiated teaching practices, and not having to use a basal or the series used the previous year. One teacher expressed discontent with the idea of using a basal reader or a series for reading instruction after being exposed to the benefits of SEM-R. She explained that this new differentiated instructional approach was excellent and benefited not only her students but her own level of professionalism as well. Another teacher explained that she loved using SEM-R, believed that she was doing the best reading instruction in her career, and did not want to go back to the previous type of instruction she has used before with a basal system.

Teachers also discussed plans for improving their use of SEM-R and each had ideas for improving implementation. The teachers who had attended the training at Confratute discussed more advanced training in self-regulation and in the use of Renzulli Learning. Unfortunately, the teachers who had not attended the training at Confratute

training by reading the book that their colleagues had received during the summer. No formal coaching had been given despite this being a request made by all participating schools in the SEM-R study. The two teachers who had not attended the summer training did ask their colleagues who had attended the training if they had a specific question, but no coaching was provided, according to the teachers' perspectives. The two who had not attended the training read the book, sought advice from their colleagues and were able to implement the SEM-R at the levels discussed in this case study.

CHAPTER 7: Kendrick Elementary School

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Kendrick Elementary School serves approximately 450 students in grades K-4 in a small town in New England. The school is surrounded by grass and trees and presents an inviting atmosphere to visitors, with bright decorations, large classrooms, and friendly staff.

The SEM-R was implemented in five classes at Kendrick's, three at fourth grade and two at third grade. The five comparison classes included two at grade four and three at grade three. Mrs. Kerri Alton, a reading specialist at the school, served as the coach and liaison. Just over 1/3 of the students in the school are eligible for free or reduced lunch, a figure slightly above the state average. About 90% of the students are White, and about 2-3% represent each of the large minority groupings of Black, Hispanic, and Asian American.

We visited the school to conduct interviews about the SEM-R implementation in late April. At that time, the formal implementation of the program had concluded, and post-testing had been conducted. Therefore, although teachers were continuing to use aspects of SEM-R in their instruction, the timing was such that our case study visit consisted of interviews and classroom visits but no actual observations of SEM-R in progress.

Kendrick's SEM-R implementation was discussed with Mrs. Alton, the coach, and Ms. Maggie Knight, a fourth grade treatment teacher. Mrs. Alton and Ms. Knight shared their personal experiences with SEM-R and also presented notes from a meeting of all the SEM-R treatment teachers and the external evaluator to provide a broader picture of implementation across classes. Mrs. Julie Burke, the principal, and Mrs. Anna Pope, the district language arts specialist, were present for the conversation, and they shared their perceptions as well. The results of this group interview were combined with review of documents such as observation notes and coach question responses in the preparation of this case study.

Mrs. Alton and Ms. Knight highlighted student enjoyment of reading as an important benefit of the SEM-R program. Ms. Knight explained that students' reading time became "a sacred 45 minutes a day" and that they were upset if they did not get that time. She said that some books became so popular among the students that they would be anxiously waiting their turn for specific titles and asking the librarian for copies; for example, the *Percy Jackson and the Olympians* series was quite popular. In addition,

students formed “book clubs” around certain books, such as *The Divide,* to have more opportunities to talk about the books with one another. She also noted that parents observed an increased interest in reading in their children, and that children had been asking for their parents to get more books for them.

Ms. Knight commented that the books provided for SEM-R implementation included many that were appropriately challenging for her on- and above-level readers in fourth grade. However, she noted that she needed to pull several lower-level books from other sources for her less advanced readers, particularly because she had an inclusion class. Mrs. Burke, the principal, echoed this concern with regard to some of the third grade classes as well, noting that the collection did not include many lower-level books. She also said that she planned to order more copies of some of the most popular books in order to provide access to more students.

Ms. Knight described several decisions she and the other treatment teachers had made about organizing SEM-R at the beginning of the year to introduce it effectively to students. For example, they converted information from the SEM-R sessions at Confratute and the SEM-R manual into posters for their classrooms. These posters included lists of what happens during each SEM-R phase, questions that students should ask themselves to promote self-regulation, and strategies for identifying appropriately challenging books. With the posters in place, the teachers could refer the students to them as reminders of what to do within each phase. The teachers also encouraged students to assess their self-regulation on a daily basis, using an informal system. Ms. Knight explained that the emphasis on self-regulation carried over into other areas throughout the school day and provided the teachers with a common language with which to ask students to monitor their own behavior.

In addition to developing posters prior to the start of the year, the teachers organized the books into baskets by genre and carefully considered ways of emphasizing book choice with students. Ms. Knight explained that she spent a lot of time with students at the beginning of the year working on ways of identifying appropriately challenging books, including using the “five-finger rule,” determining whether the topic was interesting, and assessing the difficulty of the book beyond just the vocabulary. During this time, they did not necessarily read one book. Rather, they were browsed a few books and used a checklist to find titles to add to their lists of “Books I Want to Read Later.”

Beyond this initial emphasis on book selection basics, Ms. Knight also spent a lot of time during conferences in the early part of the year focusing on book selection and match. She highlighted the difficulty of telling a student who was enjoying a book that he or she needed to switch to a different one to increase the challenge level; however, she said, “once they understood, they enjoyed the challenge.” Ms. Knight noted that to support students in making a change to a more challenging book, she often pulled three or four books to have ready to suggest to a student during a conference.

Ms. Knight commented that one of the challenges of SEM-R for her and for other teachers was uneasiness about how well they knew or did not know all of the books in the collection: "I felt overwhelmed when I hadn't read all the books." She described her efforts to try to stay a chapter or two ahead of students in certain popular books in order to feel more comfortable questioning students about the books. Acknowledging that she would not be able to read all the books students would be bringing to conferences, Ms. Knight said, "My colleague and I kind of mastered having them talk while we would scan the book or at least the back of the book—It became kind of an art… It was still stressful, though, when a child came up with a brand new book."

Because of this concern about knowing details of the books students were reading, the teachers found several ways of learning more about the books and checking on students beyond those already mentioned. Ms. Knight mentioned that many websites, including author sites and the Scholastic site, have brief synopses of books available; she and the other teachers used these as quick points of reference for learning about books. She also described a strategy of having two questions prepared for each conference, a more literal comprehension question to be followed be a more interpretive one: "I could see then if they could do the first one, and if they had to fudge it I knew they couldn't do the second one." Mrs. Alton explained that when she visited classes and assisted with conferences, even if she had not read the books herself, she determined that students who were reading books with complicated plots (e.g., *Harry Potter, Inkheart*) were comprehending if they seemed able to manage the general questions she asked: "There was no way they could have made up what they were saying with the questions I was giving them."

Ms. Knight explained how she combined these strategies for checking comprehension with other management strategies, including expectations for what students needed to accomplish before coming to conferences. One key aspect of this was converting the weekly writing activity from a question response into a letter to the teacher, a strategy drawn from reader's workshop. Each Friday, students were expected to work on a letter to the teacher in which they addressed specific questions about the books they were reading. Students had access to two different formats for the letter, one for a book they were in the middle of reading and another for a book they had finished. Each week, the teachers responded to the students' letters by Monday. The students were then expected to review the teacher's letter as a way of helping to clarify their focus before starting to read each day, as well as before each week's conference. In addition, whenever a letter seemed to indicate that a student might be off-track, that student would have a conference on Monday even if that changed the overall conference schedule.

Ms. Knight and Mrs. Alton also described other aspects of planning for SEM-R and integrating related reading instruction. Mrs. Alton explained that the group of treatment teachers talked together at the beginning of the year to determine ways of incorporating things they needed to teach, such as varied genres of literature, into their Book Hooks. In addition, Ms. Knight explained, the teachers incorporated instruction on

such topics as language of response into Book Hooks and into conferences, as they would formerly have done within literature circles.

Ms. Knight commented that time management for each phase was challenging during implementation. She said that she found it difficult to limit the length of her Book Hooks and questioned how much time to spend modeling and teaching in Phase One versus moving into Phase Two, and that all the treatment teachers implemented Phase Three only "once in a while" as the program progressed, because of their concerns about spending sufficient instructional time with students. In addition, Ms. Knight said that she struggled with the length of conferences in Phase Two: "We never got conferences to 5 minutes, let's be honest, and we felt challenged by how much we were giving to them instructionally."

Despite the challenge of limiting conference time and the previously mentioned concerns about knowing students' books well enough, the teachers perceived positive effects of the time they spent working individually with students. The principal, Mrs. Burke, explained "As the teachers became comfortable with what they were doing, the comments came in that they were getting to know their students as readers much more completely." She described a specific child who had been very resistant to reading but seemed to be brought around by the individual attention and choice of SEM-R: "[His teacher] treated him as if he were a reader, and that kind of changed him—he had this independence to read what he wanted to read but still have accountability." Mrs. Burke stressed the importance of this kind of result, even though "his tests might not show that."

Mrs. Pope, the language arts specialist for the district, explained that some of the teachers felt challenged and a bit apprehensive about SEM-R because it represented a change in thinking: "Instead of the traditional teaching of reading, which for some kids is a turnoff, [they] had to be willing to let go of some of the old ways of instruction. So I think they struggled at some level with [integrating] the strategy piece." She explained that the teachers also seemed concerned about whether they were sufficiently covering their CMT strands and would sometimes take days out from SEM-R for some large or small group direct instruction. Mrs. Burke shared her perception that perhaps the first-year teacher who served as a treatment teacher should not have taken on SEM-R in her first year, because she struggled somewhat with trying to work on her management and expectations along with SEM-R: "She did a great job with it, but she didn't have that toolbox of reading strategies, so she was struggling with that in the beginning…. On the other hand, I think it expanded her as a reading teacher—she went much further than she would have done had she picked up a basal or an anthology."

Nevertheless, administrators who were interviewed noted visible effects of SEM-R in the classroom, including student engagement with their books and their ability to talk about what they were reading. Mrs. Pope and Mrs. Burke shared that a group of administrators did a walk-through of the school and noticed a difference in the SEM-R

classrooms, and that led the superintendent to order additional books and SEM-R materials for the district.

Findings

Several key findings emerged from the conversations with school staff and other documentation (e.g., observation notes) of SEM-R at Kendrick. These findings included the enthusiasm for SEM-R among both students and teachers; challenges and concerns among teachers for how to ensure effective conferences; and investment of the school staff in developing strategies and resources for SEM-R management.

All of the school staff who shared their reflections on SEM-R explained that students developed strong enthusiasm for reading as they participated in the program. Several of the interviewees shared stories of particular students who had previously demonstrated poor performance and lack of interest in reading and whose attitudes and achievement improved significantly during their SEM-R participation. The teachers generally attributed this growth to the students' opportunity to select books in their areas of interest as well as to the one-on-one relationships that developed between teachers and students as a result of SEM-R. In addition to student engagement in the classroom, teachers commented that the librarian had noticed an increase in student requests for particular books, and parents had described more discussions about books at home and greater interest in books and willingness to read. The teachers also expressed their own enthusiasm for SEM-R, commenting on their opportunities to enjoy more books, to get to know their students better, and to take some ownership for how to implement the program in their classrooms.

A second finding from Kendrick School was a pattern of particular types of challenges that the teachers perceived in their implementation. The interviewees explained that key challenges included ensuring availability of appropriately matched books for students, some general insecurity about discussing the books with which they were not familiar, and time management with conferences. The teachers and SEM-R coach commented that they had to find many lower-level books to supplement the SEM-R reading list for struggling readers, yet also noted that they had to work extensively with average and above-average readers to ensure that they chose challenging books, rather than the easier ones they initially tended to select. A major concern for teachers at this school was their discomfort with conducting Book Hooks and conferences on books they had not personally read. The teachers described several strategies they used to manage this issue, including quick reviews of the books, available book guides, and online summary sources, as well as questioning strategies that tested student recall of key details, but they remained uneasy about this situation, even after months of practice. A third area of challenge the teachers perceived was limiting conferences to five minutes while still maintaining the integrity and instructional component of the conferences. The teachers and coach explained that they felt a tension between ensuring that each

conference was effective and ensuring that all students received conference time on a weekly basis. The presence of resource teachers in several of the classes was a partial support for this issue, but it remained a concern for the teachers throughout.

The third finding to emerge from data collection at Kendrick was the investment that the staff at this school put into tailoring SEM-R implementation to meet the needs of students and teaching preferences of the teachers—in other words, the degree to which the teachers took ownership of SEM-R. After their summer training but before the start of the school year, the teachers spent considerable time organizing classroom libraries, preparing posters and other displays, and deciding how to introduce students to the SEM-R phases. The teachers spent the first six weeks of school scaffolding the necessary independent behaviors of SEM-R for their students, introducing such concepts as appropriate book selection, self-regulation during Phase 2, and conference expectations in a very deliberate manner. They converted resources from their professional development on SEM-R into classroom posters to remind students about the structure and expectations of SEM-R. They also made extensive use of technology to support implementation, particularly to support their own broad knowledge of the books, the authors, and extension resources. These actions enhanced teachers' comfort with implementing SEM-R, while also providing a richer literacy experience for everyone involved.

CHAPTER 8: McMann Middle School

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Arriving at McMann Middle School, one is immediately struck by the picturesque landscape that surrounds the school. The modern, concrete school buildings form a broad, open campus that is nestled in the rolling hillside of the rural southern west coast. The school's location offers panoramic views of the surrounding hills and valleys and the campus is designed for effective use of the outside environment, offering large courtyards and open green spaces.

McMann, the only middle school in town, is located approximately one mile south of the center of the town. Completed in 2001, it includes 22 acres and it is hoped that it will meet the middle school needs of the district for several years to come. The current enrollment of the school is 760 students, however the school is designed for the future accommodation of 1,400 students with some additional construction. Adjacent to the east side of the campus is land owned by a trust that has been designated as a natural habitat that is used as an outdoor classroom.

The campus includes separate classroom buildings whose doors open onto courtyards. The design of the school makes use of the abundant outdoor space. At the heart of the campus is a separate building that houses the media center and computer labs. The library is a large, almost cavernous space with enormous ceilings and wall-sized windows that allow the natural light to pour in. Tall shelves overflowing with books fill the space.

The school district is one of dozens of small districts located in this area, covering roughly 100 square miles with a large percentage of the students in grades six, seven and eight bussed to and from school daily. According to the school's principal, when the school opened in 2001 the enrollment was approximately 900 students. Since that time enrollment has steadily declined, and now only 760 students attend the middle school in grades 6 through 8. This is the only middle school in the district, because, according to the principal "It is becoming too expensive to live here," due to significant increases in property values and taxes. Thus, the school has experienced a decline in enrollment.

The school motto is "From Possibility to Actuality." The mission statement of the school expresses the faculty/staff's firm belief that all students can succeed and that their job is to motivate and guide that success. The student population includes 1.41% African American, 4.22% American Indian or Alaska Native, 1.02% Asian, 1.92% Filipino, 15.73% Hispanic or Latino, 0.38% Pacific Islander, 74.3% White (not Hispanic), and 1.02% Multiple or No Response. Approximately 10% of the student population is

categorized as socioeconomically disadvantaged and receives free or reduced lunch.

In 2006, 58% of the students at McMann Middle School scored at the proficient and above range in the area of English-Language Arts on the state standardized test. In the area of Mathematics, the percentage of students was 49.

The SEM-R was implemented in grades 6 and 7. Three teachers in each of these grade levels were chose to implement SEM-R. Five of the six teachers and the school's principal attended Confratute at the University of Connecticut during the summer of 2008 and were trained in the use of the model. The sixth teacher was unable to attend and was trained by her colleagues who had attended Confratute. A total of five teachers in grades 6 and 7 were chose to serve as the comparison classrooms for the study.

The onsite coordinator, who also served as one of the treatment teachers, provided support for the implementation of SEM-R. Additional support was periodically provided by the SEM-R research team when requested by teachers. This was facilitated by email and phone communication and regular announcements and updates. Near the end of the implementation of SEM-R, an onsite visitation was conducted by one of the researchers from the project. Classroom observations were conducted in each of the SEM-R classrooms and in comparison classrooms. Interviews were conducted with the school principal, the librarian, the SEM-R coach, SEM-R teachers, comparison teachers, and students.

SEM-R Classroom

Dr. Lowery's Sixth Grade Classroom

SEM-R time began after the students returned from their lunch period. The students entered the classroom and immediately began to determine where they would like to locate themselves for SEM-R time. Dr. Lowery allowed the students to spread out around the classroom. She created a variety of seating areas including a living room-like atmosphere near the bookshelves. The students were allowed to make use of this space on a rotational basis. In addition to the classroom tables and chairs, there are also a number of stools and other chairs scattered around the area. Thankfully, the classroom is a large space given the amount of furniture, materials, and 31 sixth grade students.

The classroom is filled with books and reading materials. The shelves are nearly overflowing with books, as there does not seem to be an organizational system in place. Books are also piled on top of each of the tables and on much of the counter space. Despite this lack of order, when Dr. Lowery asked the students to find a specific book for a student that she was conferencing with, the students were able to quickly locate the book.

Upon entering the classroom, many of the students had difficulty getting settled after their lunch period. No instruction was provided for the students at the beginning of the period other than for the students to find a place and begin reading. Phase One was not incorporated into the SEM-R time. After about five minutes, the majority of the students had settled into their Phase Two reading. Of the 31 students, all but three had a book that they were reading at the beginning of the period. The students were reading a wide variety of materials that were well above grade level.

Dr. Lowery circled around the classroom conducting brief 5-minute individual conferences with the students. The students were not asked to read from their books. Instead the time was used to ask open ended, thought provoking questions of the students. The teacher focused on helping the students to make text-to-text and text-to-self connections. Book choice and challenge were discussed with each student, but conferences did not appear to be recorded, as a record keeping system was not observed. Dr. Lowery spent a good deal of time managing the behavior of a group of four students that were having difficulty remaining focused during reading. During the 45 minutes of reading time, the remaining students were engrossed in their books.

This class includes a cluster group of gifted students that the teacher reported were reading well above a sixth grade reading level. Students were able to fully discuss which books they have enjoyed reading and articulate what they enjoyed about their reading. The students were also comfortable with recommending books to their peers. Dr. Lowery explained that the students would rather hear about book suggestions from their peers than from her. When asked about her use of Phase One, her response was, “I tried that a couple of times. These kids are beyond that.” Book Hooks are now conducted by the librarian during the class’ regularly scheduled visits to the media center every two weeks.

Mrs. Jonias’ Sixth Grade Classroom

Each week, SEM-R begins with the introduction of a new writing prompt for the week. Students have become accustomed to recording this prompt and their responses in their SEM-R logs. For this week, the students were asked to identify a decision or choice made by one of the characters in the book that they were reading. The students had to explain why they agreed or disagreed with this decision. Mrs. Jonias modeled the use of the journals for the students by using overhead transparencies. She also reported that she regularly demonstrated how the journal should be completed and modeled appropriate responses for the students. Phase One Book Hooks, were not observed during any of her classroom observations.

The classroom was very organized and was managed in a business-like manner. Reading journals and books were distributed by student helpers at the beginning of the period and systematically collected at the conclusion of the SEM-R period. The bookshelves were arranged by genre and order was maintained through the use of book

baskets. Students were allowed free choice of the books, but they were required to read at least one book per month from a selected genre. Mrs. Jonias acknowledged, “It has been difficult for me to let go of control, with thematic units, I’m loosening up.”

A goal of 30 minutes of Phase Two reading time was set for the class and the 23 students in this sixth grade class were readers with the lowest reading achievement in the grade. During observation of the SEM-R in this class, 16 of the 23 students were able to maintain their focus in reading for all of the Phase Two period. The use of high interest, lower-level texts was employed, and students were also observed reading with the assistance of audio books.

The teacher conducted conferences with the students throughout the duration of the SEM-R time. Students were not asked to read from their books during any of the conferences. During the classroom observation, Phase Two time was used to discuss book projects that the students had created, and these projects represented what the students had completed during Phase Three time. Students were provided free choice in their selection of the medium and the book for their projects and products included dioramas, posters, and scrapbooks. Students were also asked to explain their projects and how they represented the book that they had read. During the conferences that were observed, students were not asked to read orally and differentiated reading strategies were seldom utilized.

Mrs. Jonias reflected, “Conferencing continues to be a challenge for me. I seldom can conference with all the students in a week.” During the observation, she was able to conference with seven of the students in the class in 30 minutes. However, she admitted that typically her conferences are longer and that more time is spent on managing classroom behavior.

At the conclusion of the SEM-R as the journals and books were being collected, Mrs. Jonias led a discussion of the selection of books that were made that day. Students commented on the books that they were currently reading and openly offered suggestions for other students. Students were asked to articulate why they had chosen a particular book to read. This open book talk created a dialog among the students about reading and literature.

Mrs. Laverty’s Sixth Grade Classroom

The students in Mrs. Laverty’s sixth grade class represented a wider range of ability compared with other sixth grade classrooms. Students began reading without any reminders beyond an initial direction that it was time for SEM-R. The ability of the students to focus on their reading was striking, as there was very little distraction and the students remained deeply engaged in their reading for the duration of the SEM-R time. Students monitored their progress with the use of the SEM-R journals and recorded the

books they had read, reflected on their reading, and created lists of books that they would like to read in the future.

Mrs. Laverty did not use Phase One as part of her daily implementation. Instead, the librarian conducted book talks as part of their regular library time. However, there was discussion of book selection and recommendations by the students at the end of the SEM-R reading period. Mrs. Laverty asked students who might enjoy a particular book that was being read. In this manner, students were exposed to books that were being read by other students, but Phase One was not formally implemented.

During Phase Two, Mrs. Laverty conferred with students that she had selected for the day. Students were aware of the schedule for conferencing and were expected to be prepared. Student reading journals were reviewed to establish what had been discussed previously. During the conferences, Mrs. Laverty used the connections in books that the students were reading to other texts the students had read, to what was happening in the world, and perhaps most effectively to the students themselves. She reported that the Phase Two conferences enabled her to help the students establish a personal bond with the books that they were reading.

The duration of each conference observed was longer than the recommended five minutes and typically approached 10 minutes. During each conference, students were asked to read from their books and respond to a series of high-level questions. On one day of observations, only four of the 27 students had a conference with the teacher. As in the other SEM-R classes in the school, Phase Three was implemented as a monthly book project. Little class time was provided for students to complete their projects. Instead, students were expected to construct their assignments at home. Students were allowed free choice in the type of project for this assignment. Once complete, the students in Mrs. Laverty's class displayed their assignments as part of a book project fair or what was referred to as "The Book Store." Each student was given the task of "selling" their book to other students in the class with the product that they had created. Projects included dioramas of a pivotal scene, an advice column for book characters, and character scrapbooks. In this environment, Mrs. Laverty explained that student's Phase Three projects were able to serve as Phase One Book Hooks for other students.

Through the implementation of SEM-R, the teacher reported that students in her class had become voracious readers. One student explained that she had always liked to read, but "I LOVE to read now!" Another student expressed that she used to not like reading, and after SEM-R she said, "Now, I can't seem to stop." This learned reading behavior extended beyond the SEM-R time. "If I get bored, then I just get a book and start reading." She explained that this avid reading is something that she had watched students develop over the course of the implementation. She recounted a story of one student who had arrived to the school only two weeks prior to the observation. When asked about what he thought about SEM-R, he replied, "It seems really strange. I'm not really sure what is going on with all of this reading. Everyone here loves to read. I just

don't like reading that much." Another student assured him that at the beginning of the year she felt the same way, but that over time, she had learned to love to read.

Mrs. Slatov's Seventh Grade Classroom

Walking into Mrs. Slatov's classroom, one immediately begins to wonder how another person could possibly fit into this space. With 33 students, the teacher, and a part time teaching assistant, the room is filled to capacity. The classroom is organized with long tables in parallel rows that are all facing toward the center of the room. A small bookshelf in stationed by the door and is filled with books of all levels and genres. Every chair and space is full; there is not a single square inch of unutilized space in the classroom.

SEM-R began with Mrs. Slatov establishing a goal for the students from the weekly writing prompts. The suggested writing prompt for this week was: "What lesson does a character learn that will help them to improve their lives?" If the suggested writing prompt does not fit with the book that the students are reading, they are encouraged to set their own goals and develop their own writing prompt. All students monitor their reading and progress in their reading journals. Once the goal for the week was established, the teacher and the assistant created a schedule for which students would have a conference and the skills on which they should focus during each conference. SEM-R bookmarks were utilized to guide questioning, especially by the teaching assistant.

During the 45 minutes of Phase Two reading time, Mrs. Slatov held a conference with eight students and the assistant met with seven students. Using this schedule, students were able to conference with a teacher every other day. During each conference, Mrs. Slatov established a purpose for the conference by reviewing the student's reading log. In most instances, she asked the student to read from the book to check for fluency. A variety of discussions were held in these individual conferences, and included topics such as the use of context clues, advanced vocabulary, book selection, characterization, and exposition. Students experienced the freedom to make their own choices in books and to seek out answers to questions on their own. For instance, two different students were observed using dictionaries to find the meanings of words that they did not know.

The students in Mrs. Slatov's classroom were all identified as gifted and have been clustered together in this class. Students were observed reading an incredibly wide range of books. These included typical adolescent literature like *Eragon* by Christopher Paolini, *Elsewhere* by Gabrielle Zevin, and the books from Stephanie Meyer's *Twilight* series. Some of the more interesting choices of books included *Down the Rabbit Hole* by Peter Abrahams, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* by Oscar Wilde, and A *Midsummer Night's Dream by* William Shakespeare. All of these books were selections that seventh grade students chose to read. With the variety of texts and the range of reading levels present in the classroom, the basal readers were left to gather dust on the shelf.

According to Mrs. Slatov, “The biggest challenge has been to get my students out of easy books. I have gotten phone calls from parents asking for them to be able to read easier books in class. I tell them to let them read the easy books at home.” During two of the observed conferences, students were asked to choose more challenging books. When confronted, the students were aware that they were reading a book that was not challenging for them. In one instance, the student began to giggle when asked if the book she was reading was too easy. A student reading *The Mysterious Benedict Society* by Trenton Lee Stewart indicated that the book was too easy, but she was interested in the story since it dealt with a gifted school and also explained that she could read it in a couple of days. This student stated that she was going to read either a novel by one of the Bronte sisters or Jane Austen next, but that she just wanted to have a quick, fun read.

Perhaps the most interesting choice observed was that of the young man who had selected to read Bill Sammon’s book, *Strategy: How George W. Bush Is Defeating Terrorists, Outwitting Democrats, and Confounding the Mainstream Media*. This student had identified an area of interest and was electing to pursue that interest by reading a book that was most certainly not written with seventh graders in mind.

Mrs. Verplank and Mrs. Bandura’s Seventh Grade Classrooms

The corner of the classroom shared by Mrs. Verplank and Mrs. Bandura had been transformed into an inviting beach scene outfitted with lounge chairs and an umbrella. Groups of three or four students were invited to have a reading day at the beach. Other students were found scattered around the classroom. Some chose to read at their desks, and others chose to read under their desks. Still other students elected to read in a quiet corner and even in the middle of the floor. The range of reading location was almost as diverse as the range of books being read.

Mrs. Verplank and Mrs. Bandura taught separate sections of SEM-R, but shared the same room. The two were true collaborators in their planning, and the structure and implementation of SEM-R was identical for the two teachers. Their classes were made up of 19 and 20 students that were reading either at or below grade level. Each teacher had been assigned a teaching assistant to provide additional support for struggling students during SEM-R.

At the beginning of each SEM-R period, the students would retrieve their books and reading journals from the filing cabinet, and the materials would be returned at the end of every class. The structure and expectations for SEM-R had been clearly established. All of the students gathered their SEM-R materials and began reading with little initial direction. Audio books were also available for students to help support struggling readers. Students were observed both individually and in pairs reading books with the aid of audio books and headphones. One pair of girls chose to buddy read, and would take turns reading orally to one another, pausing only occasionally to discuss or clarify what was happening in the book.

Throughout SEM-R, the focus was on having the students read. Each teacher circled around the classroom conferencing with students. The number of students conferenced with each period was increased with the addition of the teaching assistant who conferenced with the lowest readers for extended conference sessions that typically lasted between 10 and 15 minutes. Conferences by both Mrs. Verplank and Mrs. Bandura began with reviewing the students reading log. A single reading objective from the state reading standards was pre-selected as the focus of the conferences. During the observation, the focus was the stages of plot. While the initial focus of the conferences was on a single objective for all students, the conversations quickly became individualized based on the needs of the students and the books that were being read. At the conclusion of every conference, a goal was established for the next conference and recorded in the student's reading log as a reminder. Both teachers commented that having the individual time to conference with their students was beneficial.

The teachers developed a new bookmark, based on suggestions from the SEM-R professional development training, to help support students during their independent reading time. One side of the bookmark was green and had the six rules of Phase Two: Supported Independent Reading.

1. Stay in your seat.
2. Stay focused. Only reading is happening.
3. Use Active Reading Strategies.
4. No Interruptions.
5. Got questions? Bookmark it! Post it and Flip it!
6. Do your best reading the whole time.

Students were to leave this marker out on their desk on the green side as a reminder of the expected behaviors during Phase Two time. If the students began having difficulty they had been instructed to mark the spot with a Post-It note in the book and flip the bookmark to the other side. The second side of the bookmark had been colored red and was a list of reading strategies and questions for the students to refer to. The red card served as a visual cue for the teachers to quickly scan and see which students might be having difficulty in their reading. When transitioning between conferences, the teachers would scan the classroom to ensure that no red cards were out. If a red card were visible, then the teacher would check in with the student.

Even though these students had been initially viewed as struggling readers, their teachers reported that they had made great progress and because of SEM-R had begun to enjoy reading. One such student resisted reading until he encountered *Inkheart* by Cornelia Funke. Mrs. Verplank said that he "devoured that book" and since then had not slowed down as a reader. One girl in Mrs. Bandura's class began the year by reading the Harry Potter series with the assistance of the audio book. She was now on the last book of the series and reading it independently.

During one observation, a boy was crouched in the corner intensely reading *Guts* by Gary Paulsen. He was visibly excited and kept staring at the book almost in disbelief. He fretfully turned every page and was so engaged by the book that he was anxiously biting his nails. As he finished the book, he reluctantly closed it and uttered a sigh that was of both relief that the situation had been resolved and disappointment that the book was over. After a brief moment, this once reluctant reader arose and marched over to the bookshelf to select his next book.

Comparison Classrooms

Ms. Shakestone's Sixth Grade Classroom

The students in Ms. Shakestone's sixth grade class were studying persuasive writing. The lesson began by asking the students if they knew what propaganda was. The teacher then explained that propaganda and certain advertisements utilized persuasive writing techniques to convince an audience to believe certain things. Ms. Shakestone explained that we must be able to evaluate the reasoning of an argument and be wary of four errors in logic: 1. Overgeneralization, 2. Unsupported inferences, 3. Either /Or thinking, and 4. Circular reasoning.

Each of these four points was defined on a separate slide of the PowerPoint presentation that guided the lesson. Students were expected to take notes by copying the information from the PowerPoint into their notebooks. Examples of each error in reasoning were provided and the students copied all of the examples into their notebooks. Since the students all wrote at different paces, the teacher engaged the students who had finished copying in a discussion by asking them to think of other examples. This portion of the class lasted for approximately 30 minutes. The students were then assigned a worksheet dealing with identifying errors in logic of persuasive writing.

The last portion of the class involved the introduction of the book, *Joyful Noise: Poems for Two Voices* by Paul Fleischman. As part of their study of poetry, pairs of students were to select and then present a poem from the book to the class. Reading of these choral poems was introduced by modeling the reading with one of the students for the entire class. All students were then allowed about five minutes to read from the poems in the book before the end of the class period.

As with the other comparison classroom, Ms. Shakestone indicated that reading instruction was primarily conducted through the use of the basal text and its supporting materials. No class time was devoted to student selected reading. However, students were expected to read for 30 minutes as part of their nightly homework during the week. Also, students were required to complete a project for each six-week grading period on a book that they had chosen.

Mrs. Wheeler's Seventh Grade Classroom

In comparison to the focused, silent reading of the SEM-R classrooms, the seventh grade comparison classroom was frenzy-filled. Mrs. Wheeler's class was immersed in an ongoing study of poetry and figurative language. During the observation, the teacher actively engaged her students with her instruction and provided a series of mini-lessons dealing with a variety of language arts skills. In the first part of the period, the teacher defined verse for the students, and reviewed the principles of rhyming words. The students were given the task to create a poem using at least 10 of their 20 spelling words for the week. This was a regular weekly assignment and no class time was provided to allow the students to work on the assignment. The students zoomed through a brief discussion of synonyms and then completed an activity from their weekly "spelling sheet packets."

As students completed the assignment related to multiple meanings, Mrs. Wheeler began a daily figurative language activity by asking how many students had read the book, *Twilight*. Only three students raised their hands. The teacher had selected a sentence from *Twilight* that contained the phrase, "clear, icy ribbons." The students were asked to identify the metaphor in the sentence.

The majority of the class time was spent completing an activity from the grammar textbook while Mrs. Wheeler reviewed the definition of a clause. Students took turns reading out loud from the grammar textbook about simple and compound sentences. Students were expected to pay attention because they would be randomly called on to read. After completing the reading of the lesson, students completed an activity from their grammar books in which they had to identify whether the sentences were simple or compound. To review the students' work, individual students were called to the board to write their answers.

Mrs. Wheeler indicated that reading instruction is comprised of the use of the basal reading series. The entire class reads the same story and studies it for a week at a time. She makes use of the reading comprehension and support materials that are a part of the reading series. No time is provided for individual reading during the class period. Instead, students are expected to read for 30 minutes as part of their homework on a nightly basis during the school week. Students are also required to complete a project related to a novel that they have read for each six-week grading period.

Interviews

The principal, librarian, and the SEM-R teachers were interviewed during this site visit; each interview was conducted individually and was informal in nature. During this time, each person was given time to reflect on SEM-R and to provide feedback on the program.

The school's principal indicated that she was very pleased with the implementation of SEM-R and the effect that it had had on the attitude toward reading at their middle school. "At this point, we are wondering whether we are going to do this schoolwide. What we are looking for is data to support this." From what the principal had observed, she was certain that there would be a significant difference between the SEM-R classrooms and the comparison classrooms. From being in the classrooms and talking with the students and teachers in the SEM-R groups, she indicated that the clear message is that the students enjoy reading now.

She also noticed a marked difference in what they are reading, "The students are looking for challenge, and they are reading more adult books. We are now running into the problem of students reading books and dealing with more adult themes."

If they were to adopt the SEM-R as a schoolwide approach, the principal recognized that they would need to increase the number of books to support such a program. While this may be a program that they would like to support, she was also realistic about the amount of money that would be required to purchase books to effectively support SEM-R. According to the principal, the school has been under budget constraints for many years. As she described the situation, the school has been "…cutting away at the fat. If the budget gets reduced much more, we will have to begin cutting into the lean." The principal also admitted that as they were looking for areas to trim from the budget, unfortunately money from the library was often one of the first areas to be reduced.

The principal also commented that some of the teachers were slower to start than others, but once they began most began to see results. The teachers had reported to her how the students were changing their habits of reading and that over time the students were able to increase the amount of time that they were able to sustain their reading. With the increased time spent reading in the classroom the teachers also noticed an increase in the students' enjoyment of reading.

"I love to take the Superintendent into the SEM-R classrooms. He is impressed with what he sees there. Most times, the kids do not even know we are in there because they are so engrossed in their reading." The principal summed up her feelings about SEM-R with this statement, "There is supposed to be reading and *really* reading. The SEM-R kids are really reading. This is evident through any observation."

Mrs. Mardue, the librarian, was excited about the program and the change that it had made in the school. "I love this program," she proclaimed. She also reported that she believed that the students were excited about reading and that the SEM-R classrooms have become places of reading. "To see the kids spread out, laying on the floor, or in nooks and crannies is wonderful." According to the librarian, the use of SEM-R had

significantly increased the number of library books checked out. She indicated that more students are coming to the library with greater frequency looking for books.

Each of the SEM-R teachers indicated their general satisfaction with the program. Teachers consistently commented on the positive change in students' attitudes toward reading. As Mrs. Bandura reported, "Students are excited about reading and telling about their books. They are making connections and sharing insights I have not seen in years past with other reading programs."

Teachers consistently communicated that it is not necessarily that students do not want to read, but that students do not have the time to read. Mrs. Slatov recounted an interaction she had with a student during a conference, "One student is very busy with sports, activities and his church recently read *Les Miserables* by Hugo. When we met, he was thrilled about the book and was going on about the relationship between the main characters. He said, 'You know, I've never really read a book like this (huge, complex) because I don't have time at home. Here (in class) it's quiet and I can really get into the story.' It's great!" She summed up this experience as, "Here's a good reader who chose a more complex story because he has a 'real' chance to read it."

For all students in the school there has been a tradition of having the regular nightly homework assignment of reading for 30 minutes. For students in the comparison classrooms, this is the only independent reading time that they have. The parents of the students are expected to "sign off" on the students at-home reading to document on a daily basis. However, many of the SEM-R teachers jokingly referred to this document as the "liar's log." Mrs. Laverty explained that most of the students and parents did not take reading at home seriously and that the parents would often sign the form whether the students had read for 30 minutes or not. Since SEM-R, she was no longer requiring the students to read for homework, but many of the parents were reporting that now their children were reading at home because they had become interested in reading.

The teachers were also concerned with the level of challenge for their students. For the teachers of struggling readers, they wondered whether or not SEM-R was a program that was suitable for them. These teachers raised the question of whether or not the books were too hard for the students, and struggled with how to find material that was of a suitable level for the students without being too juvenile. Teachers of the struggling readers were also worried that these students were not able to focus on reading for more than 20 to 30 minutes.

The level of challenge for students was also a concern for the teachers of the advanced readers. These teachers struggled with how to find books that offered challenge but that were also age appropriate. Teachers of talented readers reported that the greatest difficulty was transitioning students from books that were too easy for them.

Overwhelmingly the biggest concern of the SEM-R teacher was the issue of time. The school day was based on 50-minute periods, but with transitions between classes, each class was essentially reduced to 45 minutes. SEM-R teachers were expecting their students to be able to read for the duration of the class time. With this as a goal, no time was left for Phase One or Phase Three. Teachers also commented on their struggle to conduct conferences with all of the students on a weekly basis. Given the length of the class period, the number of students, and the focus on having students read for the maximum time possible, teachers began looking for ways to trim SEM-R to its bare essentials.

Overall Findings Across SEM-R Phases

Phase One

Schoolwide, a lack of consistent use of Phase One was observed. Instead of regularly conducting Book Hooks as part of Phase One, SEM-R teachers relied on the librarian to conduct book talks for the class during their visits to the media center. The school librarian reported that most sixth grade classes came approximately every two weeks for book talk sessions. For the seventh grade classes, this might happen once or twice a quarter. During the book talks she would introduce 10-12 books by themes, and she reported that this method seemed to be effective. One of the librarian's book talk sessions was observed, and during a period of 15 minutes, a dozen books were introduced on a variety of topics. Five of the books were set in China, which was the country that the class was currently studying in Social Studies. The remaining books were a selection of high interest novels. The book talk consisted of a discussion of the book jackets, not of reading from the book. The students appeared interested in the book talk and afterwards the checked many of the books out. The librarian proudly commented, "I do a book talk and there is a stampede to get those books." She acknowledged that she provided book talks for the students in both the SEM-R classrooms and the comparison classrooms.

When questioned about the use of Phase One in the classroom, the teachers mentioned that they have occasionally conducted book talks to introduce new books to students particularly at the beginning of the year. All of the SEM-R teachers interviewed expressed concern about increasing the amount of time that students were reading during Phase Two. One teacher admitted that to increase Phase Two time, the daily Book Hooks were the first thing to go. The teachers did not seem to value Phase One as an important part of SEM-R. Instead, their personal measure of success of their implementation was based on the total number of minutes that the students read and the number of conferences that they were able to conduct on a daily basis.

Another believed that the students, and particularly the more advanced students, were "beyond Book Hooks and being read to," and that Phase One was not a necessary part of SEM-R. This viewpoint was supported by another teacher who reported that her

students listened more to the recommendations of other students than they did to teacher Book Hooks.

Phase Two

In each of the SEM-R classrooms, students engaged in extended periods of focused reading. Each observation showed students to be reading for almost the entire class period. Typically this was between 40 and 45 minutes. Students were focused in the reading of their selected books. During the observations, the students seemed to be lost in their books. If someone came into the room or there was another interruption few students even looked up from their books. During Phase Two time, the range of reading levels and the variety of texts was noticeable in every classroom. Since the students were reading books that were challenging and interesting to them, the basal reading books often sat on the shelves.

There were mixed feelings about the SEM-R reflection logs on the part of both students and teachers. Many students reported that they did not like the reflection log and that being forced to write weekly reflections distracted from their enjoyment of reading. In direct contrast to this were the students who applauded the reflection log and acknowledged it as an important tool that enabled them to monitor their progress as a reader. Several teachers also expressed concern with the students' use of the reflection logs. Generally, the use of it as a tool for monitoring progress was praised, but most of the teachers questioned the quality of their students' responses to the weekly writing prompts. All of the teachers did, however, utilize the reading logs to aid in the individualization of instruction during conferences.

Phase Three

While options did exist for the independent exploration of ideas that emerged from reading, there was not a high level of implementation of a highly effective Phase Three. The quarterly book projects were implemented schoolwide and were identical in treatment and comparison classrooms. Students were typically given three to four weeks to work on projects. However, most of the time devoted to completion of the project was slated as homework. Little class time was devoted to completion of the projects.

Options for projects did address a variety of expression styles, and listed below are the types of projects that were offered as choices for all students:

1. Artistic interpretation of a scene from the book in medium of your choice
2. Map from the book
3. Interview with book character
4. Dramatic interpretation of scene from the book
5. Research about some aspect of the book

6. Poem/Song
7. Advice column for character from book
8. Or anything else.

Findings

Examining the implementation of the SEM-R at this middle school reveals three clear findings. The overarching finding is illustrated by the phrase "kids are really reading." The second finding that emerges from the data relates to the use of time. A third finding focuses on the individual experience provided by SEM-R. Each of these three findings will be discussed separately.

Kids Are Really Reading

The school principal summarized the effect of SEM-R at McMann Middle School in this way, "There is supposed to be reading and really reading. These kids are really reading." Every classroom observation and interview supported this statement. The amount of reading was evident in every SEM-R classroom. The students' interest in reading has made the library "the" place to be. An increase in the circulation of the library and the number of students found reading in the library during lunch and recess is evidence of this.

Students had developed the ability to discuss books with one another through modeled discussions as part of Phase Two conferences. Students had also begun to recognize books that their friends would enjoy, and felt comfortable recommending these books to their classmates.

Many of the SEM-R students said that they had never liked reading until this year. The enjoyment of reading was not a sentiment that was communicated by students in the comparison classrooms. Teachers and students both indicated that this might be the result of having an opportunity to read during the school day. Mrs. Slatov commented, "I feel that for many of my kids, they have—through SEM-R—finally allowed themselves to 'just read.' Usually, they are multi-tasking when they 'read.' Some of my kids have been amazed that they finished a novel and 'really' liked it!"

Time

The issue of time was a recurrent finding in the observations and interviews. This emerged in two ways: the management and the time to read. A common concern throughout the implementation of SEM-R is summed up by the question put forth by Mrs. Verplank, "How do I do everything?" The SEM-R teachers struggled with how to manage meeting the requirements of the curriculum while putting all of the elements of SEM-R into practice. "I wish that we had an extra period a day to get in all of the

Language Arts and writing objectives," Mrs. Verplank reflected. All of the teachers reported difficulty with learning how to manage five-minute conferences during Phase Two. Observations revealed that most of the teachers had learned to conduct conferences that met the expectations of the SEM-R researchers.

The structure of SEM-R establishes time for students to read during the school day. Prior to the implementation of the SEM-R, self-selected reading was relegated to the 30 minutes of required reading for homework. However, multiple teachers referred to this as the "liar's log" and indicated that this reading was not really happening. The increase in the amount of time that the students spent on reading was significant. Prior to SEM-R, students were expected to read independently four nights a week for 30 minutes, or a total of 120 minutes per week, but as noted this reading was seldom occurring, if at all. By comparison, the SEM-R students are now reading for 45 minutes five times a week for a total of 225 minutes. Teachers and students also indicated that reading outside of class was occurring more frequently than it was prior to SEM-R. As one teacher concluded, students were really reading for twice the amount of time that was being asked of them under the previous system. In addition, students were being asked to read books that were challenging for them.

Individualized Instruction

SEM-R was found to provide opportunities for teachers to individualize instruction for their students, as was apparent in classroom observations. Teachers conducted individualized conferences with their students that they considered to be personalized learning experiences. Because of these brief, weekly interactions, teachers reported an increase in the personal connections that they believed they had with their students. Most teachers indicated that they were aware of things happening in the lives of their students that they would not have known without these regular conferences.

The choice of books during SEM-R demonstrated a wide range of student reading ability and student interests. Students in the same class were seldom reading the same book at the same time. However, students in the comparison classroom were all reading the same story from the same basal reading series. In the SEM-R classrooms, students were observed to be reading books that were both challenging and of interest to them. Conferences enabled SEM-R teachers to check for comprehension and to individualize reading instruction for every student. Teachers were able to teach reading skills and strategies within the context of an authentic literary experience, rather than in isolated whole class instruction.

CHAPTER 9: Rosa Middle School

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Rosa Middle School is located just off the freeway, near several strip malls and other common conveniences of suburban America. Given this setting one is struck by the incongruous placement of a horse farm only two blocks away from the school, which is located in the middle of a subdivision. In contrast, only a mile east is a rural area of rocky hills and picturesque landscapes.

The sprawling campus of Rosa Middle School is bustling with the energy of 1,460 students. Open courtyards with covered walkways are designed to take advantage of the warm year round climate. Classroom buildings form a maze-like environment that while easily navigated by students and faculty, is a bit confusing for visitors. All of the commotion between classes and the weaving in and out of buildings and passageways to reach the first classroom creates an impression of disorder, which is contrasted by the serenity of the SEM-R classrooms. Entering the classroom one is transformed from the chaotic world of middle school into a wonderland of reading.

Students were dispersed around the classroom and were deeply engrossed in reading. Scanning the room, students were observed reading in chairs, on the floor, under tables, in corners, under desks, and in every imaginable nook. The teacher held a conference with a student at a kidney shaped table and did not stop to greet the visitors. Everyone continued to be deeply engaged in reading. A single student arose from her reading place, and joyfully introduced herself and welcomed the visitors to the class. She proclaimed, “Right now it is SEM-R time. The BEST part of the day!”

Rosa Middle School is one of five middle schools in the school district. The school population includes about 38% English Language Learners, 44% of the student population is classified as socioeconomically disadvantaged and receives free or reduced lunch, 51% of the students are from a Hispanic or Latino background, and 38% of the students are from a White (non-Hispanic) background. The remaining 11% is fairly evenly distributed among African-American, Asian, Filipino, and “other” backgrounds.

English Language Arts classes at Rosa Middle School are clustered by ability. Each of the SEM-R teachers has two sections of reading each day. One of the sections is a cluster of identified gifted and talented students. The other class is a regular reading class, and students in this class typically are reading at or below grade level.

Data from the state standardized tests show that Rosa Middle School is on a road to increased achievement particularly in the area of English Language Arts. In 2007, 47%

of Rosa sixth graders scored at or above the proficient level. In 2008, the percentage increased to 50%. For seventh graders, 51% scored at or above the proficient level in 2007, and for 2008 the percentage was 57. Eighth graders also showed an increase. In 2007, 46% scored at or above the proficient level, and in 2008 53% of Rosa's eighth graders scored in this range. Increases in student achievement and the commitment of the school's faculty and staff resulted in Rosa Middle School being honored as a School of Distinction in March of 2009.

Mr. Ian Century, the principal, leads the school like a proud father. He stated, "Rosa is family." Mr. Century takes a personal interest in students and faculty. When observed, he frequently stopped and chatted with students about what books they were reading and how they were progressing in classes. Even with such a large student population, one had the sense that he knew every student and was aware of what was happening in their lives. He would shake hands with students and address each of them by name.

One noteworthy protocol instituted at Rosa Middle was the use of classroom greeters. As soon as a visitor or administrator entered any classroom, a student would welcome them to the classroom by introducing himself or herself, shaking the visitor's hand. The greeter would then describe what the class was doing and what the students were learning. This allowed the teacher to continue with instruction without distraction.

The principal explained that one of the goals of the school is to create a culture of reading. "On this campus, it's plain to see students and staff embrace reading. Rosa is a family of readers." Rather than spending much time talking about the school, Mr. Century allowed the school to speak for itself. "I can't wait to show you what is happening."

Ms. Toni Leachman oversaw the implementation of SEM-R at Rosa Middle School and provided ongoing support for the treatment teachers. Ms. Leachman served as the school's literacy coach and reading specialist. She provided instructional support for struggling readers during half of the school day. The remainder of her time was devoted to collaborating and coaching the SEM-R teachers.

Reflecting on the influence of SEM-R, Ms. Leachman proclaimed, "SEM-R is a wonderful program. The increase in reading has been phenomenal!" Over the course of the implementation, she observed in classrooms and worked closely with the teachers to provide support during conferences, and coached teachers on how to better conduct more timely and meaningful conferences with their students. According to Ms. Leachman Phase One has been successful in increasing the number and variety of books being read by the students. "Teachers are doing an amazing job of delivering interesting Book Hooks so that the kids are clamoring for the new titles."

From the observations of the SEM-R coach, meeting the unique academic needs of students at each end of the ability spectrum has been the real challenge for the teachers. Ms. Leachman communicated, “The challenge has been to find enough books to support struggling readers and allow talented readers to continue to grow.”

SEM-R Classrooms

Mrs. Solomon’s Sixth Grade Classroom

According to Mrs. Solomon, SEM-R had caused her students to be excited about reading, and they also wanted to engage one another in conversations about books that they were reading. The students in the class were eager to share their opinions about SEM-R. One effusively summed up her feelings, “I used to like to read. Now I LOVE to read!” Another student reflected, “I like the logs. They help me to keep track of books I have read and ones that I want to read.”

During the observation, Mrs. Solomon began by hooking students with two books by Wendy Mass that she had just purchased at the school book fair: *Every Soul a Star* and *Heaven Looks a Lot Like the Mall*. She discussed why she selected the books and talked about how she used Amazon to search for books by the same author, or for related books.

A smooth transition occurred between Phase One and Two, as students were invited to begin their Phase Two reading time with the utterance of a simple sentence, “Let’s dive in.” All of the students immediately found a comfortable place to read without any reminder beyond this initial invitation necessary. While some students chose to remain in their desks, the majority of the students chose to find a place on the floor, in the corner, and even under desks.

Each conference commenced by reviewing the students’ SEM-R journals to see what they had been reading since the last conference. Direct questions were asked about the book to establish what was currently happening in the reading. Mrs. Solomon reflected, “I am finding that conferencing doesn’t have to be a formatted or equal experience for all students. Some need modeled questioning strategies while others just need a little inspiration and stimulation.”

Phase Three was reframed as REZ: Reading Enrichment Zone. Students were given a menu of activities from which to choose from. Activities included, but were not limited to: a book club, design a travel journal for the characters in a book, create an artistic interpretation of a book using the medium of their choice, and compiling a character scrapbook. All were related to a book that they were either currently reading or had recently read.

Half of the students chose to be involved in book clubs, reading in groups of 3 or 4 students. In some instances these were books that differed from their Phase Two books.

During this book club time, students were writing questions and developing study guides for their books. The students expressed their enjoyment of having an opportunity to be social and to collectively read a book with their classmates.

Mrs. Morgan's Sixth Grade Classroom

Walking into Mrs. Morgan's sixth grade classroom during SEM-R is like walking into a reading wonderland where students are so deeply engaged in their reading that they do not even bother to look up from their books when a visitor enters the classroom. As deeply engaged as the students were, they were very eager to share their thoughts about what they were reading.

According to Mrs. Morgan, the Book Hooks have gotten students interested in a variety of genres, authors, and novels that would most likely not have known of without Phase One. Mrs. Morgan also believed that Book Hooks presented an opportunity for engaging students in class discussion. "The students in the class want to talk about the books that they are reading and share their ideas and opinions with one another." The teacher also reported that over time that it has become increasingly difficult to conduct original Book Hooks and has had worked to keep Phase One fresh. Having exhausted most of the books provided by the SEM-R study, she began looking for additional sources for book reviews and ideas. Amazon was cited as a favorite resource for reviews and suggestions of books that are related to books that students have previously enjoyed. Additionally, she has sought out books from the school library and bookstores.

The students in this SEM-R classroom are voracious readers possessing high levels of reading comprehension and the conferences, she believes, have developed the ability to critically analyze literature on deeper levels. Mrs. Morgan reported that she still struggles with the length of conferences because she finds that she becomes so wrapped up in the deep discussion with the students that she does not want the conferences to stop. She also found that "the students enjoy the one on one attention and respond to being personally accountable for their own reading and learning." When students are in an individual conference, they have to answer the questions that are being asked. With whole class instruction, students are able to easily avoid questions.

Mrs. Morgan has successfully provided challenge for talented but reluctant readers. She recalled one student that was able to read at an eleventh to twelfth grade level, but was choosing to read books like *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* by Jeff Kinney. After several conferences, discussions and help selecting books, he read *The Swiss Family Robinson*. "He thoroughly enjoyed it, made connections with other books, characters and life. He felt proud and accomplished."

Mrs. Reyes' Seventh Grade Classroom

The implementation of SEM-R looks slightly different in every classroom in this school as each teacher incorporated his or her own personal focus into the model's implementation. Mrs. Reyes demonstrated how SEM-R can be successfully integrated into a content area other than Language Arts. The teacher utilizes Phase One and Phase Three time to create connections to the class's study of Social Studies content. For example, during the observation, students were studying World War II; during Phase One, Mrs. Reyes highlighted books that were set during that time period. Over the course of a week, she introduced books from the time period that encompassed a wide range of reading levels, subjects, and genres including fiction and non-fiction. Students were encouraged to share books that they had read on the topic. The following is a list of books that were presented by Mrs. Reyes to her students:

Because of Romek: A Holocaust Survivor's Memoir by David Faber
Behind the Bedroom Wall by Laura Williams
My Friend the Enemy by J. B. Cheaney
Code Talker: A Novel About the Navajo Marines of World War Two by Joseph Bruchac
Air Raid—Pearl Harbor!: The Story of December 7, 1941 by Theodore Taylor
Heroes Don't Run: A Novel of the Pacific War by Harry Mazer

As a Phase Three activity, students selected a book to read dealing with a topic that they were studying in Social Studies. These students then formed literature circle teams that were responsible for creating a presentation of the book and its content for the whole class. Groups were flexible and changed based on students' interests in the particular topic or time period that they were studying.

Mrs. Sandez's Seventh Grade Classroom

Like the other teachers at Rosa Middle School, Mrs. Sandez teaches multiple sections of SEM-R. Similar to other teachers, she has found that SEM-R is a different experience for the students in her gifted cluster class and the students in her regular reading class. Mrs. Sandez reported that the SEM-R project had been very successful for her advanced and gifted students. The students were reading more challenging books, and they were also reading a wider variety of books and enjoying them tremendously. In addition, because of the Phase Two conferences, Mrs. Sandez reported an increased knowledge and understanding of her students as individuals, "I am learning more about them and their reading needs and strengths."

SEM-R was described as a "very challenging experience" for regular reading students, who well below grade level, usually in the second to fourth grade range. Mrs. Sandez invested a significant amount of time searching for books that were both of interest and appropriate challenge level for these students, and she suggested that, "A

resource for Book Hooks would be helpful." Many of the students in this class envision themselves as street-tough, inner city youth. Books that have captured their interest included *They Broke the Law—You Be the Judge: True Cases of Teen Crime* by Thomas A. Jacobs, *Rumble Fish* by S. E. Hinton, and *Paulo's Wall* by Rachelle Desimone. However, the teacher was concerned about the number of Book Hooks that she conducted as part of Phase One. The regular reading class has the support of two reading specialists who routinely conduct novel studies with small groups of students on a rotating basis. This allows the teacher more time to conference with the remaining students and to provide needed support and encouragement.

Mrs. Sandez believed that SEM-R was making a difference with her students in both classes. For example, one of the lowest readers was reading 43 words per minute at the beginning of the year, and according to Mrs. Sandez likely had not independently read a book in a few years. He started listening to audio books and following along with the text with the first Harry Potter books. He then progressed to reading them without the aid of the audio. He has now completed the series and has gone on to read five novels by Gary Paulson.

Mr. Stephens' Eighth Grade Classroom

The classroom library in Mr. Stephens' room is truly remarkable and something that has to be experienced to appreciate fully. A series of well-organized and fully stocked bookshelves cover every available wall space. With over 4,300 books in his collection, Mr. Stephens jokingly referred to himself as the "school book repository." Even with this phenomenal collection of adolescent literature at his disposal, Mr. Stephens commented that his biggest challenge in implementing SEM-R has been to find books that force his best readers to stretch their reading ability. He estimated that about a third of his students were reading at a post high school reading level. He had been encouraging students to read young adult books like *The Book Thief* and *I Am the Messenger* by Markus Zusak in addition to older classics like *Moby Dick* and *Pride and Prejudice* with more modern classics such as *Catch-22*.

The students in his regular reading class are typically two or more years behind in reading. At the beginning of the year Mr. Stephens stated that most of them had proclaimed that they did not like to read, indicating that they had read few, if any books the previous year. One eighth grade girl informed Mr. Stephens that she had not read a book in the past two years, but by mid-November she had read 18 books and proclaimed herself a reader.

"The firm establishment of a culture of reading is the biggest impact of SEM-R. Not only are the kids reading during Phase Two time, they are sharing and talking about books and forming their own, informal book groups." An avid reader, Mr. Stephens not only possesses an impressive classroom library, but he is himself incredibly well read. He has the uncanny ability to make connections between books. This ability is demonstrated

during the Phase Two conferences conducted as part of SEM-R. Each conference featured a review of books recently read and a series of thought provoking questions that the students were required to answer. Because of his broad knowledge of literature from a variety of genres, including contemporary adolescent literature and classics, Mr. Stephens was able to review the books that his students had previously enjoyed and effectively suggest additional titles. Not only was he able to make these suggestions, but he was also able to retrieve the suggested title from the bookshelf and place it in the hands of the students. The more that the students read, the more they became critical consumers of the literature. "The students are becoming more active in terms of identifying books they choose to read," said Mr. Stephens. "The students are now checking the websites of their favorite authors to see what is coming out, and they are actively sharing their favorite titles and authors with their classmates."

Mrs. Bucknell's Eighth Grade Classroom

Like many of the other SEM-R teachers at the middle school, Mrs. Bucknell reported two different experiences with her two sections of students. Students in the advanced class read with intensity and were prolific in the number of books completed. Meanwhile, students in the structured reading class showed progress, but there was often a struggle to keep students motivated to read and to find books that were both interesting and on an appropriate level.

For students in the regular reading class, Mrs. Bucknell typically chose to focus on a single reading strategy for an entire week. She met with students in small groups of three or four students. This allowed more frequent interactions with the students, and allowed her to help make connections across multiple texts.

Students in both groups were accustomed to using their SEM-R journals during their reading. When asked about the journals, one student commented, "Writing things down is important. It helps me to keep track of my reading and the questions that I have." Other students commented that they would like to see more note pages in the journal. The students were utilizing sticky notes but were finding it easier to record their questions and thoughts in the journal. From the observations, it appears that the reading logs have become important record keepers for both the teacher and the students.

Among Mrs. Bucknell's students was a group of voracious readers who typically read a book a day. The teacher was delighted that the students were reading so much, but she expressed frustration about what should be done with them. These appeared to be fast-talking students who were clearly excited about books. A trio of students had breezed through all of the popular series of books. It was with a sense of pride that one of these students commented that she had read the 800 page *Breaking Dawn,* the latest book in the "Twilight Series" by Stephanie Meyer, in a single day. The other pair of students commented that they frequently ran through novels in a similar manner. While there was pride in the number in of books that could be read in a given amount of time, one of the

students commented that she occasionally came across a book that was so well written that she intentionally did not race to finish it. Instead, she would read it slowly and in short spurts that would ensure that the reading of the book lasted longer. She called the experience "savoring" a book, and the three of them all acknowledged having appreciated a book as art.

Comparison Classrooms

In contrast to the SEM-R teachers, a literature series is utilized for the majority of reading instruction. This typically included weekly stories read by the entire class. Additionally, comparison classroom teachers reported typically using most of the support materials that went along with the reading series. This included a variety of vocabulary activities and reading skill sheets. Students in most comparison classrooms were required to write journal entries on a regular basis. The topics were usually assigned and dealt with whatever the class was reading or studying. Students were required to incorporate words from their weekly spelling and vocabulary words in their writing.

Sustained Silent Reading (SSR) was part of the daily comparison classroom routine. Using this system, students typically read for 20-25 minutes per day from any book that they selected. Occasionally students were introduced to new books using book talks organized by the teacher. Unlike SEM-R, the students were not asked to read a book that was challenging for them, rather, the focus was on sustained silent reading. Individualized instruction using conferencing was not taking place. Also, the length of these conferences was half that of the SEM-R conferences on the same grade level.

Students in comparison classrooms were typically engaged in a genre study every six weeks. During this period of time, students were required to read at least one book from the highlighted genre. Most of the book talks occurred during these genre studies, as comparison teachers introduced students to books that were representative of the genre being studied. Students were required to complete some type of book report or book project and successfully pass the comprehension exam that was part of the Reading Counts computerized program.

While these educational practices were generally true for the comparison classrooms, individual classroom observations helped to further illustrate the carrying out of literacy instruction at the middle school. For example, students in Mrs. Hogan's sixth grade class were involved in a unit on poetry. Students had been studying concrete poems and had drafted and edited their own poems. Mrs. Hogan reviewed some examples of poems that students had created in previous years using the computer. She discussed with the students how changes in font and the size of text could be used to create visual and dramatic effect. Students were instructed on the use of clip art and images to illustrate their poems. The class then transitioned to the computer lab where students worked

independently to type their poems. Students collaborated with one another to visually enhance their products.

Students in Mrs. Mandela's seventh grade class were deeply engaged in sustained silent reading during the observation. Students were reading a wide range of titles similar to those in the SEM-R classroom. While these practices were not observed, Mrs. Mandela also conveyed that she incorporated a good deal of drama into the classroom with the frequent inclusion of plays. She also stated that she frequently employed the use of Raphael's Question-Answer Relationship (QAR) strategies in her reading instruction. One of the things that set this classroom apart from the SEM-R classrooms was a heavy emphasis on writing instruction. Judging by the large number of Thinking Maps and other graphic organizers on the classroom wall, Mrs. Mandela frequently utilized a variety bubble maps to help students organize their thoughts and writing.

During an observation in Mrs. Grant's comparison classroom, the students were all reading from a play adaptation of the *Diary of Anne Frank*. The students began the class by completing a reading comprehension quiz covering the material from the last chapter. Once all of the students had completed the assignment, the students transformed the classroom into a stage, gathered props, and donned costumes. Mrs. Grant directed the students through their reading of the scene from the play. Action was frequently stopped to have the students explain what was happening in the scene, to discuss how the characters might have been feeling, and to enable the teacher to direct the actions and locations of the students in the scene. The teacher read the narration and over half of the class remained seated during the reading because they did not have a part in the scene.

Observations by Phase

The teachers at the school, with the coaching of Ms. Toni Leachman and the leadership of Mr. Century, have worked to successfully implement the SEM-R framework in their classrooms. SEM-R has been utilized to meet the unique individual academic needs of students across the entire spectrum of reading ability. The manner in which SEM-R was implemented did vary as presented in the individual classroom descriptions, however across all classrooms the SEM-R was implemented successfully. The following is an analysis of the implementation by phase across all of the classrooms.

Phase One

All of the SEM-R teachers demonstrated effective use of Book Hooks as part of Phase One activities. Students were exposed to a wide range of titles and genres. Teachers worked to create connections to themes, other books and in some cases content in other subject areas. For example, Mrs. Reyes' use of Phase One time to supplement content being taught as part of Social Studies. Teachers also used Phase One time to model the use of higher order questioning and to facilitate classroom discussion.

Many of the teachers reported constantly finding new books to introduce as part of Phase One as a challenge. For some this was challenging because of the low reading ability of students in their regular reading class, and for others it was the challenge of keeping in step with their most talented readers. Teachers reported that they had to stay current with the changing world of adolescent literature, and that the students typically were interested in only the most current and trendy books. Most of the teachers reported that had begun to rely on Amazon as a source for finding books and reviews to assist them in finding books for Phase One.

Phase Two

Conferences held during Phase Two provided individualized support and instruction for every student in the SEM-R classrooms. In contrast to the comparison classrooms, students were reading self selected books that were both of interest and appropriate challenge level for them. Teachers were providing personalized learning sessions with students lasting about five minutes, focusing on analyzing literature and the integration of reading skills and strategies.

Students were given the opportunity to read a book of their choice during the school day and most openly expressed their gratitude for the experience. Students of all ability levels seemed to be discovering the joy of reading, and many students who had claimed to have never enjoyed reading or were reluctant readers, began happily engaging in reading.

Phase Three

SEM-R teachers at the middle school were beginning to find success with Phase Three, and a range of levels of implementation were present. Most of the Phase Three activities were independent or small group projects dealing with a specific book or genre. This level of implementation was very similar to the book projects that were a part of the comparison classrooms. Others, like Mrs. Solomon and Mrs. Reyes, provided a variety of choices for students to explore. Teachers were beginning to branch out and explore other options for Phase Three. They did mention the use of Renzulli Learning as a support, but the use of Renzulli Learning was not observed and evidence of its use was not present. To extend the use of Phase Three, additional support and training may be necessary. Perhaps with more time and experience, students and teachers will become more accustomed to the open ended, enrichment that Phase Three provides.

Findings

After conducting classroom observations and interviewing teachers and students at Rosa Middle School, three findings emerged relating to the implementation of SEM-R. The dominant finding was that the SEM-R has helped to foster a culture of reading. The

second finding that emerged was related to the challenge of meeting the needs of students at both ends of the learning spectrum. The third finding was associated to the individualization of reading instruction.

The common message that was communicated by the school's principal, coach, and teachers, was that the middle school had developed a culture of reading through its use of SEM-R. Throughout all of the SEM-R classrooms, students were thoroughly engaged in the act of reading. SEM-R helped in establishing clear routines and classroom procedures that served to develop an environment in which reading was expected, encouraged and supported. Phase One of the SEM-R exposed students and teachers to a variety of authors, titles, and genres that would not have be otherwise investigated. Discussion during Phase One also helped to facilitate class discussions of literature. During Phase Two, students were provided with the time and space to become invested in the process of reading. Also, the students were given access to reading materials that were provided to stimulate interests and to challenge them to grow as readers. The SEM-R reading logs also helped to create a level of accountability for the students. The reading logs served both as a document of students' reading accomplishments and as a tool for planning individual instruction and personal reflection.

The second finding represents the biggest challenge reported by the SEM-R teachers. There was a struggle with how to meet the needs of their students at each end of the spectrum of reading ability. Teachers reported some frustration with not being able to keep their most talented readers challenged. These students were swiftly speeding their way through books at a rate faster than the teachers could keep up with. Teachers expressed concern about the lack of challenging and yet age appropriate books for talented middle school readers. Many of the most talented readers continued to read books that were well below their reading ability, and in many of these cases found great pride in the number of books that they could consume in a given period of time. In an effort to increase the challenge for these students, teachers began recommending classic texts to students and encouraged students to begin reading books that are typically read in high school literature classes.

For students in the regular reading classes at the other end of the spectrum, teachers reported a similar challenge. The issue was how to find books that were age appropriate and closer to the reading level of these struggling readers. With many of these students reading well below grade level, the students deemed many of the books that would be of an appropriate level to be simply too juvenile. Additionally, these students were often unable to maintain reading for an extended period of time. Additional support staff provided relief in some classes. SEM-R teachers found the use of audio books to be an effective tool for scaffolding reading. As students began experiencing the act of reading with the aid of the audio recording, they developed the skills to read independently.

In contrast to the comparison classrooms, reading instruction in the SEM-R classrooms was completely individualized. Without the use of basal reading materials or whole class novels, students were required to select books that were of personal interest and challenge to them. Also, students were expected to read during reading class. By comparison, students in the comparison classrooms were not observed to be as engaged in the act of reading for extended periods of time. The selection of books in the SEM-R classroom by the students is representative of the wide range of interests and reading abilities in the classes. Even though multiple copies of many of the titles were available, it was rare that there were two students in any given class reading the same book.

Conferences conducted during Phase Two allowed the teacher to individualize reading instruction for each student. Conferences provided an opportunity to connect with students on a personal level. During these conferences teachers frequently made use of the SEM-R bookmarks to help guide their questions and ensure that appropriate reading strategies were being assessed. The one-on-one dynamic of the Phase Two conferences ensured that the students were personally accountable for answering the questions of the teacher. For example, while higher order thinking questions might be employed in a whole class setting, students can easily hide or avoid these questions. Within the course of a week, they may never have to answer a single question much less a challenging question. With the use of SEM-R Phase Two conferencing, there is no way to avoid answering the difficult questions.

CHAPTER 10: Highland Peaks Middle School

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The Highland Peaks Middle School is nestled on the side of a sloping hill 3,000 feet above sea level amid rocky peaks. The town of Highland Peaks sprawls across the hill and sits about 20 minutes outside of the nearest urban city. Approximately 650 students in grades six through eight attend Highland Peaks Middle, and only about 9% of these are eligible for free or reduced price lunch indicating that the school serves a primarily middle or upper class clientele. Accountability information for the 2007-2008 school year showed that this school performs at the "Excellent" level for "Overall Academic Performance on State Assessments" and outscored the state average by at least 20 points on reading, math, and writing. The 37 teachers at Highland Peaks appear to work closely with their principal, Jeffrey Taylor.

Regular Literacy Instruction

Observations of the comparison classroom teachers appeared to show that teachers used standard literacy instruction at Highland Peaks, with teachers primarily using novel study as the basis of their instruction. Little or no use of basal textbooks was observed in any of the comparison classrooms. In one classroom, sixth grade students and their teacher were reading from the book *Fahrenheit 451*. The teacher frequently asked questions and encouraged discussion with her students to support their comprehension of the novel's advanced themes. The students were required to use higher-order thinking to understand the context of the novel, but were supported by the high level instruction used by their teacher. Just down the hall, another group of sixth graders were reading from the novel, *Freak the Mighty*. Considerably less difficult than the novel read in the other classroom, these students were exploring stereotypes to better understand the character development.

In another sixth grade classroom, a teacher led a Socratic Seminar on a short story. It was apparent that the students had received extensive training on the use of Socratic questioning and were able to use the method to sustain a lengthy and high-level discussion of the story. Midway through the class period, students from the outer ring of a circle of desks switched places with students on the inner ring and the discussion continued with equivalent intensity. The students seemed to enjoy this activity and actively participated, even staying after class to discuss the story further with their teacher.

Off the same hallway, a classroom of seventh graders assembled in small groups to work on the culmination of a project based on the novel they had recently finished. Each group had a large square of cardboard and a stack of papers, and worked to create a board game based on their completed novel. The students' participation could be described as haphazard since they frequently interrupted their own work time to share gossip with their group members or flirt with students sitting at the table next to them. Though a certain degree of this lack of order and discipline occurs in most seventh grade classrooms, it was so rampant in this group that little was getting accomplished on the group projects. Overall, the project seemed to be low level for a seventh grader, requiring only comprehension-level thinking. In the end, it appeared to resemble busywork more than the stimulating experience as the teacher may have intended.

Observations of several comparison classrooms suggested that a good deal of reading happens at this school. Students were frequently observed reading, and seemed to enjoy reading. It can also be concluded that many of the literacy experiences culminate in project-based learning. Some projects appeared to be authentic and a creative means for assessing student learning, but others were ineffective and ill-structured, as they appeared to require only low-level thinking. It was also interesting to note the disparity in the levels of novels used in the same grade level comparison classrooms at the same time of the year. It is unknown whether this was due to ability grouping in classrooms, or just differences in teacher expectations, as no standard set of novels appeared to be assigned in the classrooms in the same grade level.

SEM-R Classrooms

Ms. Leverone and Ms. Mitchell's Sixth Grade Classroom

Ms. Jane Leverone and Ms. Louise Mitchell team taught in a sixth grade classroom at Highland Peaks and often worked with one another as a way to support their implementation of SEM-R. With the help of their strong backgrounds in research-based literacy practice, the teachers were able to integrate necessary reading skills and strategies within the three phases of the SEM-R to replace the novel study units they'd used previously.

As the lesson began, Ms. Mitchell switched from a conversation with her students about their weekends to a Book Hook on *The Founders,* a book of short stories about the Constitution. She copied one of the stories from the book and asked the students to read the story individually with the purpose of writing down what they thought was important to remember about the excerpt. As they finished reading, she explained that they were learning how to determine importance of aspects of their reading. Students then shared what they had written in small groups of two to four students and discussed the difference between what they thought was important and what they believed the author of the text might have thought was important. Students then contributed their ideas to a student-led

discussion about how to determine the important aspects of a text. Although 25 minutes was a bit lengthy for a Book Hook at this point in the implementation, it was particularly effective for teaching the targeted reading strategy.

The students quickly switched gears when she announced the beginning of Phase Two and she immediately began her student conferences. Conference questions primarily addressed the students' use of strategies in their reading, and in each conference, the students were asked to reflect on how they had used determining importance in their reading. Students were also asked to evaluate their choice of reading materials.

To integrate the reading strategies into conferences, the teachers developed a weekly "consider-it" question based on a question from one of the bookmarks. Students reflected on and wrote about the question throughout the week in their logs so that by the end of the week the teachers were confident that each student understood the reading strategy on which it was based, and could demonstrate their ability to apply the strategy in their own reading. The consider-it question is an excellent example of how the teachers used their own knowledge base and creativity to adapt aspects of the SEM-R for their own purposes, while retaining the essential aspects of each phase.

In separate interviews, the teachers explained their perceptions of how the model had affected their students. Both noted that the initial months of the study were sometimes a struggle for the students because they were not used to making decisions about their reading material and self-regulating their own learning behavior. Perhaps the biggest challenge they found was getting the students to really challenge themselves, both in their book choices and in their thinking. Ms. Mitchell noted that when asked a particularly high-level consider-it question, the students would say, "just tell me what you want to know." One student said, "I don't want to consider anything." These responses illustrate the teachers' initial difficulty in teaching the students to think and respond deeply to their reading. Ms. Leverone commented on the differences in instruction when the SEM-R was used and said, "I think we're teaching them how to think in addition to teaching them how to read."

Ms. Walker's Sixth Grade Classroom

Ms. Kendra Walker's classroom is located off the interior hallway of the language arts wing, and is one of a few windowless classrooms in the school. For some students, this would make the classroom a boring place. Evidently that was not the case for Ms. Walker's students; they chatted and laughed as they walked into her classroom. Ms. Walker took a seat on the side of the classroom and said to a student sitting nearby, "Shawn, I know it bothers you when I do my conferences right next to you, so if you want to move, it's okay." As she began her conferences, the students were absolutely silent.

The first conference began with the student's summary of the book, but after listening to her read, Ms. Walker asked the student why she believed that the book had been leveled the way it was and they discussed the features of the text that made it advanced. The student seemed excited about her book and discussed the plot in an animated way. Ms. Walker asked her several other higher-order questions about her book before the student returned to her seat. Ms. Walker continued conducting conferences, occasionally checking a website on the laptop next to her when she needed to check a book's level.

During the conference, the sixth graders read silently, completely engrossed in their books. At one point during the reading period, a student kicked the desk in front of him to get his peer's attention, but the student in front, so engrossed in his book, only said, 'Stop' and the dejected offender resumed his reading. A special education aide circulated among the students and read with several of them during the period. He conducted several short conferences in addition to the five conducted by the teacher.

Ms. Walker's overall implementation was highly organized and effective, despite her own admission in questionnaires and interviews that she had not previously taught language arts. She confessed that the SEM-R program originally intimidated her because of her lack of experience. She said that the Book Hooks were initially the most difficult part of her implementation because she had struggled to effectively integrate the reading strategies due to her limited experience. After several months of implementing the program, she perceives herself to be proficient with the model and says that she feels much more confident about the Book Hooks. She explained that, "it's been a great experience" and said that she "has loved it."

Discussion

Treatment Fidelity

Overall, the implementation at Highland Peaks Middle School was very strong. Both teachers and students were excited about the SEM-R program. Formal observation treatment fidelity checks of SEM-R were conducted several times during the school year and these indicated that teachers ranged from the "Meets Expectations" to "Exceeds Expectations" to the "Outstanding" category in their Phase One implementations. Their scores were slightly higher on the Phase Two implementation and indicate that they were able to reach the "Exceeds Expectations" level in most cases. At the time observations were conducted, four of the five teachers had implemented Phase Three and those doing so were each rated at the "Outstanding" level.

The Phase Three implementation across classrooms was mostly project-based and closely resembled the activity in the comparison classrooms in which students finished reading a novel and then completed a project based on their novel. Although the open-

ended nature of Phase Three does allow for students to complete projects based on their reading, it also does not *necessitate* that they do so, and in some classrooms it was unclear whether students were given choice and control during Phase Three time. At times, project outcomes may have been predetermined such as in the classroom where students' reading culminated in a project on an eminent person. Students read books on an eminent person of their selection and utilized websites and encyclopedias as additional sources to create a report, a presentation, or another application-type outcome. Though similar to a Phase Three activity, the missing aspect of student choice makes this project more closely resemble those assigned in non-SEM-R classrooms than a true Phase Three implementation.

Success Factors

Teachers' Attitudes

Perhaps the most important factor in the successful implementation at Highland Peaks was the quality of the teachers who implemented the SEM-R and their positive attitudes toward the model. Though they had faced challenges in their implementation, they seemed to focus on the benefits of SEM-R for their students. Frequently mentioned in interviews were teachers' perceptions that they knew their students and what they were reading better than they had prior to their use of the SEM-R. They also believed that knowing the students' strengths and weaknesses well allowed them to differentiate instruction in their Phase Two conferences.

The Highland Peaks teachers also showed an ability to change. When asked about her initial implementation Ms. Mitchell said, "I read the whole book after Confratute [the summer enrichment training] and then had a real sense of how to do this in my classroom. We dropped everything else. We dropped our novels, we dropped our units, etc." Another teacher acknowledged that he may have had a deficit in his teaching, prior to using the SEM-R, because he was less familiar with book levels than he should have been. These radical instructional changes and introspective reflections indicate that both teachers had positive self-perceptions of their teaching proficiency, factors that enabled them to take the risk to effectively integrate a new instructional method. Positive principal support was another factor that affected their perceptions.

Across interviews, teachers raved about the SEM-R program. They indicated that it seemed to fit their teaching styles better than other literacy programs that they had used. All teachers believed that the SEM-R would continue to be used in the years to come, long after the study had ended. One teacher said simply, "I love it. I love the whole program."

Teamwork

The ability of the five teachers to support one another in their initial implementation of the SEM-R was essential to their success because it developed their sense of proficiency with the model and enabled them to enhance their own performance. During initial meetings, all five teachers decided to collaborate on book lists and each was assigned the task of developing enough Book Hooks for an entire month of instruction. The teachers seemed to agree that their collaboration on book lists worked well for a while, but believed that it was less needed as the implementation continued, because their Book Hooks became more individualized focusing on the needs of their students, and also because their proficiency with the process had also increased.

Some teachers also provided additional organizational structures in their classrooms to help their implementations and shared their materials with others. The team teaching partners decided to begin a database of books complete with difficulty levels, summaries, as well as books' locations. These teachers also created an alternate reading log which included more space for students to respond to the consider-it question each week. Though the individual teachers in the study felt less of a need to compare notes as the intervention went on, many mentioned that it was helpful just to know that they *could* ask their colleagues for support whenever it was needed.

Administrative Support

Many of the teachers cited principal support as an integral feature of their successful implementation. At the beginning of the implementation, the principal provided substitutes so that the teachers could engage in some common planning time. He also stepped up his support of the program when the SEM-R coach left the district and utilized district support in the form of observations, as well as conducting several observations himself. He said, "I think the program is terrific because not only does it encourage students to read by providing 'Book Hooks' and time, it also sets up a one-on-one coaching situation between student and teacher. This, in my opinion, is where the real learning takes place."

Implementation Challenges

Several challenges occurred early in the implementation at this school that initially made SEM-R more difficult for the teachers to begin. It took several weeks beyond the deadlines to secure the necessary research permissions at the site. During and after this time, construction on Highland Peaks Middle School meant that teachers could not get into their rooms to unpack and organize their books. Then, when both of these situations were taken care of, the person who had been trained as the SEM-R coordinator for the school left the district and the teachers were without a SEM-R coach. Interviews indicate, however, that these issues were more troubling to the administrator than the teachers. Although a colleague and fellow implementer did take the lead as the SEM-R

coach, several teachers believed that it would have been helpful to have someone who could serve as a coach and offer advice, rather than a colleague who was in the same place with her implementation as they were.

Less concerned with the structural issues, the SEM-R teachers mentioned other challenges that they faced in their implementation and concerns seemed to evolve as the study continued. At the beginning of the study, the most frequently cited concern was the Book Hooks. First and foremost, many of the teachers admitted that they were mostly unfamiliar with young adult literature, or at least not familiar enough to have a quantity of books appropriate for their audience which would allow them to conduct at least one Book Hook a day. The teachers also expressed concern over whether they were integrating the reading strategies into the Book Hooks effectively.

As the study continued, concerns about the Book Hooks were replaced with the difficulty of finding adequately challenging reading material for each student. In response, one teacher helped her students determine their own reading level, and then provided a website that they could use to determine a book's level. Some teachers also mentioned the obstacle of having to determine whether content was appropriate for a particular thirteen-year-old. When faced with this situation, Ms. Mitchell indicated that she often called the parents of the student and asked them to examine a book to determine whether it was appropriate for their son or daughter.

Eventually, teacher's concerns were specific to the literacy content of the conferences. One teacher said, "At the beginning of the year, it was hard for them to stretch beyond summaries, main ideas, and characters." Nearly all of the teachers believed that getting the students to think deeply about their reading was a real challenge mostly due to the fact that students were unused to being pushed to do so. Teachers, however, seemed to be effective at integrating the reading strategies throughout their conferences and asking higher-order thinking questions to challenge the students.

Effects on Students' Reading Practices

Even the principal took notice of the effects of the SEM-R on students' reading habits. He said, "We have seen amazing progress. Students are *asking* to read. Because students know that the teacher will be asking in-depth comprehension and clarification questions, they will approach the teacher for help." Ms. Walker also noted that the students had amazed a substitute teacher who believed that they wouldn't be able to sit and read for thirty minutes. But the substitute said he was pleasantly surprised and he couldn't believe that the kids could read like that for such a long time. Even the parents were skeptical about the program initially, but now the program enjoys much positive support from parents who saw their students become passionate about reading.

The teachers have also noticed a difference in the reading motivation of their students. Mr. Rhyner remarked that his students were truly enjoying their reading and his

class. He believed that it was because the students felt that they were in control and in charge of their learning and that it was the first time they had that sense of autonomy. In the words of one student, "For the first time I actually read for fun, instead of for an assignment, because I get to choose my own book."

Aside from becoming more motivated to read, teachers noticed that their students' reading practices had changed. Ms. Mitchell noted that her students became much more aware of the strategies they were using as they read. One student told her, "Now I focus not on how many books I read, but what strategies I'm using as I read." She also said that many students told her that they'd been skipping the parts that they thought were boring and had learned to read those parts and really think about those sections. These comments suggest an evolution of her students from simply reading for pleasure, to reading for increased comprehension.

Teachers were particularly impressed that all of their students were making progress. One teacher mentioned that she hadn't seen a marked difference between her lower and higher readers because all were making efforts to read at challenging levels making them not easily distinguishable because of the fact that they were all reading different texts. She attributed this positive change in the de-leveling of her classroom to both the self-selection of reading materials and the conferencing she'd done.

Time On-task

Although not mentioned specifically in teachers' interviews, a major effect of the use of the SEM-R has to be the increased time that students are spending on-task. In several of the non-SEM-R classrooms, student misbehavior was observed and was generally unnoticed by teachers because they were teaching. Student misbehavior was almost never an issue in the SEM-R classrooms and usually only occurred when students were having a hard time self-regulating their reading behaviors. The issues were typically resolved easily in between conferences. Students generally spent about 30 minutes reading in the SEM-R classrooms. Less than a third of that time was spent reading in the non-SEM-R classrooms.

Summary

The implementation of the SEM-R at Highland Peaks suggests that the SEM-R is an effective model for middle school literacy instruction. Teachers and students at Highland Peaks seemed genuinely excited about the program. The effects were obvious to parents as well, several of who told teachers that for the first time their students had asked for books for Christmas. In addition to a perceived increase in student motivation to read, teachers also believed that students were able to identify and apply reading strategies more frequently and with greater ease.

Important findings emerged from this implementation of SEM-R. At least initially, teachers were unsure of whether they were implementing the model correctly and often sought support from one another. They also worked together to create book lists and generate Book Hook ideas. Therefore, it may be beneficial to have a critical mass of people who can implement the model together. Although collegial support seemed to become less necessary as the project continued, teachers' willingness to implement may be greatly enhanced when they perceive that they have a colleague they can turn to for help if it is needed.

Another interesting finding from Highland Peaks is the prevalence of project work. In most of the classrooms that were not using the SEM-R, the students completed some type of project as a culmination of the novel that they read. Project-based learning, in and of itself, is a wonderful means for making assessments authentic and meaningful. However, not every reading experience must culminate with a project and too much project work can cause the student to become weary of doing projects and lessen the overall importance of the experience. The Highland Peaks teachers seemed more project-driven in their implementation of Phase Three than what was observed in other schools, which seemed to compromise the "choice" factor of that phase. This may have occurred for several reasons. At Highland Peaks, project-based learning seemed to be emphasized and valued so the SEM-R teachers may have been working under a perceived set of expectations. Additionally, the middle school teachers may have required a project so that a grade could be given. One conclusion that can be drawn is that effective grading practices within the SEM-R should be further explored in middle schools.

Overall, this school suggests that the SEM-R can be an effective means for the delivery of literacy instruction, as well as for promoting reading as an enjoyable learning experience. Though the teachers at this school experienced some challenges, they were able to meet them and find creative ways to solve them, often relying on one another for ideas and support. In short, it is obvious that a new model has been effective and has potential for long-term use when the principal says, "I like this so much that I was kicking around the idea of expanding into seventh and eighth grade," and adds "I dig it!"

CHAPTER 11: Jane Addams Middle School

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The steps leading up to Jane Addams Middle School could be leading to any other school within this large city. Many of the city schools appeared to have been built during the same era and therefore shared the same external appearance and interior layout. The entrance was nondescript - the façade was grey granite, and the rest of the building was made of red brick. The building was old but well maintained. Classroom sizes varied considerably, making some spaces very cramped, while others are quite spacious. Teachers, students, and visitors got a workout in the school, as there were four floors and no elevators. A security officer greeted all visitors who entered the building, recorded their names and addresses, and purpose of the visit prior to issuing visitor passes.

Students in this school, which included grades six, seven and eight, were culturally diverse, with most primarily of Hispanic heritage (78%), followed by Black (15%), White (5%), and Asian (2%). Of the roughly 1,100 students, half were male and half were female, fewer than 20% spoke English as a second language, and 12% were identified for special education purposes. This was a Title I school with 89% of students qualified to receive free or reduced price meals.

Comments from the most recent school evaluation, conducted by an external reviewer, indicated that this school continued to realize improvements in student achievement and teacher effectiveness. The school system invested in a variety of initiatives designed to help teachers collect, analyze, and use data to help them plan instruction. Teachers were involved in the review and revision of curriculum to ensure that it covered a broad base of topics and skills, so that students were engaged in relevant learning experiences. This curriculum work and data analyses were most developed in mathematics and English language arts, but the science and social studies areas were in need of improvement.

Despite the curriculum review and revisions, during the most recent year that data were available (2006-2007), the school did not achieve Adequate Yearly Progress under the No Child Left Behind law in the area of English language arts. The school was operating under the designation of "School in Corrective Action" which meant that it was the second year the school had been in need of improvement in English language arts. There was a higher than normal teacher turnover rate after the 2005-2006 school year, but 74% of the teachers currently on staff had more than three years teaching experience. The education level and certification levels were disparate: approximately one third of the teachers had a master's degree plus 30 additional credit hours or a doctorate in education,

yet 19% of teachers had no valid teaching certificate or were not teaching in their area of certification.

Teachers in grades seven and eight participated in the SEM-R study, with two teachers from seventh grade and three teachers from eighth grade who received the SEM-R training serving as the treatment teachers, and one teacher at each grade level who did not receive any information about SEM-R serving as the comparison. The literacy coach received training in SEM-R and was the in-school point person for contact with the SEM-R research team, as well as the facilitator of meetings of the SEM-R teachers, coach for teachers who wanted assistance as they learned how to use the SEM-R model, and she provided training for teachers who were not able to attend the summer training provided under the SEM-R grant. Data for this report were gathered by the school-based literacy coach and included information based on her observations in classrooms as well as feedback from the classroom teachers. In addition to this information, an SEM-R researcher conducted observations in the treatment classrooms and one observation in each comparison classroom, and interviewed all treatment teachers and the literacy coach.

SEM-R Classrooms

Ms. Cortez 's Eighth Grade Classroom

The halls outside Ms. Angelica Cortez's eighth grade classroom teemed with energetic students as they changed classes, but beyond the threshold of her room the mood was dramatically different. Calm filled the air as students filed into the classroom in an orderly fashion. The few conversations that took place were held using quiet voices. Two students immediately retrieved the SEM-R logs from a storage basket and distributed them to their classmates. Their teacher wrote the reading AIM, or goal on the board and the students immediately copied it into their reader's notebooks. While students wrote in their notebooks and recorded the name of their independent reading books in their logs, the teacher went to the classroom library with a student and helped her find a book to read. Students began reading their books as soon as they had entered the information in their reader's notebooks and reading logs. The class was silent and all 28 students were reading within five minutes of entering the classroom. The students' concentration was so deep that an announcement on the school public address system and an interruption by another teacher resulted in only three students diverting their gaze from their books.

The materials in the room were stored in an orderly fashion, just as the students conducted themselves in an orderly way in this classroom. One back corner of the room was devoted to reading materials. The classroom library was in one corner and consisted of two bookcases filled with books neatly arranged in baskets labeled according to genre or type, including the Guided Reading levels Q-Z, the common genres of mystery,

realistic fiction, historical fiction, fairy tales, fantasy, legends, science fiction, poetry, the short story and play formats, classics, and the less common category of Latino literature. Next to the teacher's desk there was a small wire bookrack labeled "Return Books Here." Books on tape, tape recorders, and headphones were stored in two baskets on a desk adjacent to one bookcase.

Examples of students' work was displayed on drawn window shades, on bulletin boards on the walls, and hung from a clothesline that stretched across the room. The pieces on display were all about books the students had read. Hanging from the clothesline were colorfully illustrated posters that had carefully crafted language meant to persuade a classmate to read a particular book. Teacher-created charts also covered the walls and drawn window shades. The ones that pertained to reading included the following information:

<u>Indie Reading Time: Did I Make a Good Choice for an Independent Reading Book?</u>

1. Is the book interesting to you?
    a. Are you familiar with the genre?
    b. Do you like the main character or narrator?
    c. Do you look forward to reading it?
    d. Do the events or information grab your attention?
2. Is the book appropriately challenging?
    a. Is it above your last known reading level?
    b. Do you follow what is happening in the text?
    c. Are there vocabulary terms that are new to you?
    d. Does the text make you think?

If you can check off three for each category, you picked a good book!

<u>What do we do after reading a book?</u>

1. Fill in your "Books I have Read" list
2. Do a Book Proof to place in the reading section of your portfolio. Book Proof choices are:
    a. Exemplary Responses (Revise a response from your Reader's Notebook & type it)
    b. Vocabulary or Context Clue projects (fill out the sheet with new vocabulary)
    c. Creative Responses (examples: poem based on book, alternate ending, graphic version, new story using the characters, PowerPoint presentation)

While students read, Ms. Cortez conducted individual reading conferences. Most conferences lasted about 5 minutes, but one extended for approximately10 minutes. She moved around the room and sat next to each child during a conference. The student immediately handed her his student log and she reviewed the entries he had recorded in the log. During each conference Ms. Cortez asked the student to read aloud a passage from the book and then tell her what was happening in the book. If a student had

difficulty with a word she often supplied the word, but went back once the child had finished reading, to check to see if he understood the meaning of the word. Her questions ranged from low-level factual questions to higher-level questions that involved an evaluation or judgment. For example, with one student who appeared to be a relatively weak reader, Ms. Cortez asked the student to explain what type of person he thought the main character was based on decisions he had made in the story, and followed up that question by asking the student if he liked the book and why.

On this day the students read for 30 minutes and Ms. Cortez conducted her Phase One Book Hook after Phase Two. She chose the book *House of the Scorpion* by Nancy Farmer and asked the students how to say scorpion in Spanish. Some responded with one word and she used another. She commented that the word in Mexican Spanish might be different than that used in other Spanish speaking countries. She continued to activate the students' schema by asking them to identify what a clone is. Two students gave acceptable responses, saying it was a copy or double, and after she acknowledged their responses she used more sophisticated language to give the description by saying a clone is an identical genetic copy. The remainder of the instructional part of the Book Hook consisted of a description of what the book was about and a discussion where the students made predictions about the types of conflicts or problems that might arise in the book. She concluded the class period by reading a section from the book. Several students indicated their interest in reading the book.

Ms. Cortez reported that she read a lot more Young Adult literature as a result of participating in SEM-R. She collected books that featured a common theme and tried to focus her Book Hooks around a theme. This allowed her to expose her students to new themes or genres such as mythology and newer fantasy books. Having a core library of books was helpful not only to her, but it served as a motivator for the students. They were very excited when they saw the new books, and one boy exclaimed, "I can't remember when I've been so excited about getting new books!"

The time devoted to independent reading built students' stamina, and Ms. Cortez felt that the approach with SEM-R increased their motivation to read. Rather than assigning reading as a punishment, Ms. Cortez tried to foster a love of reading with students in her classroom. This appeared to be working because Ms. Cortez said that the students were unhappy when they missed their SEM-R time. They read more and were more conscious of what they were able to read. In the past, Ms. Cortez never heard kids talk about books or had them pester her to make sure they were next in line to read a particular book. That changed this year. She noticed students discussing books on their own time, asking her when they could read a book, and spontaneously looking up from a book and declaring "Ms., this book is really good!" There were still a few students who were reluctant to get through books, but their motivation and confidence were improving. Some students relied on Ms. Cortez to recommend books, and she has worked to reduce their dependence on her and make informed book selections on their own.

Despite the success Ms. Cortez experienced with Phase One Book Hooks and Phase Two supported independent reading, she struggled with implementation of Phase Three enrichment and extension of reading. Everything about Phase Three was a challenge, including scheduling time for Phase Three, the enrichment choices she provided, the management and completion of projects, and the use of technology with Renzulli Learning Systems. Ms. Cortez referred to the SEM-R manual, talked to her SEM-R colleagues in the school, and spoke to the Renzulli Learning representative who visited the school to get more ideas and clarity on how all of the components worked together during Phase Three.

Mr. Malon's Eighth Grade Classroom

Mr. Nick Malon was perched on top of his desk as he read aloud *The Wave* by Todd Strasser. Of the 23 students in this inclusion classroom, 7 of whom were girls, about half seemed intent on listening to the story. The other students were quiet, but not engaged in the Book Hook. Mr. Malon chose this book because the students were learning about World War II in social studies, and he felt that coordinating common themes or content in the English language arts class would benefit the students. The book was about a social experiment conducted by a high school teacher in California who tried, in his classroom, to replicate conditions found in Germany during World War II. Mr. Malon stopped periodically to make personal connections or provide background information to help students understand the context of what was happening in the book. After ten minutes of reading, Mr. Malon stopped to pose the 'Bookmark Question of the Day:' *How does peer pressure affect your way of thinking? Why and how? Is your Independent Reading Book affected by peer pressure?* Three boys responded with examples of peer pressure they recognized in another book that the entire class had read. During this time none of the girls raised their hands to share, nor did they appear to be attending to the conversation. One boy indicated that he wanted to read the book. On a subsequent observation in this classroom a month later, Mr. Malon was again reading aloud from this book during Phase One time.

During Phase Two SIR, Mr. Malon moved about the room and pulled up a chair next to students for their reading conferences. While listening to a student read, Mr. Malon wrote down the title of the book and date of the conference in the student's reading log. He asked a few questions, some of which were about the plot, and others that were higher level and required the student to attend to character traits and motivation. The majority of students were not engaged in reading during Phase Two SIR. They looked at their books periodically, talked quietly to a neighbor, or stared into space. Two girls needed books and spent seven minutes looking for books in plastic bins and on the bookshelf in the back of the room. The books did not appear to be organized in any particular order. Once these students selected their books, they returned to their desks, but one girl never read her book. The other girl read intermittently for eight minutes.

On a subsequent visit to Mr. Malon's classroom, there was more evidence that he was trying to support students' ability to self-regulate during Phase Two SIR time, to choose books that were at an appropriate level of challenge, and to write thoughtful responses in their reading response notebooks. Examples of charts to support these efforts hung from a clothesline across the room, including the following:

Independent Reading Rubric
A—I read my book quietly the WHOLE time. I was focused & engaged with my book
B—I read quietly MOST of the time. I was focused MOST of the time. I Talked 1 or 2 times.
C—I read quietly SOME of the time. I was focus SOME of the time. I talked multiple times.
F—I barely read my book at all. I was unfocused or talking almost the whole time.

What is Your Reading Level?

If your level is	You should be reading
M	N-O
Q	R-S
V	W-X
Z	Z

Reader's Notebook Heading
Date:
Title of Book:
Bookmark Question:
Response: (your response should be at least 1 paragraph with a main idea & several details from the text)

What belongs in our Reader's Notebook?

1. Any text that you read that makes you wonder, think or touches your emotions, you may react or respond by putting your thoughts in writing about that topic
2. Any text that is read to you that you have thoughts or opinions about, you should put in writing to express yourself

Mr. Malon was an advocate of SEM-R because the students were interested in reading books after he did Book Hooks. He had never seen kids so interested in and enthusiastic about reading. He wondered if it was because of the new books or the overall approach in SEM-R. The literacy coach worked extensively with Mr. Malon, who was not able to attend the summer SEM-R training, to acquaint him with the model, help him plan Book Hooks, model Book Hooks and conferences, and manage conferences. Mr. Malon continued to work on finding the right balance during SIR, between providing time for students to read and holding conferences. He saw the conferences as an intrusion on or interruption of students' independent reading, not as an opportunity for one-on-one

instruction. This was the same problem he wrestled with in previous years when setting aside time for conferences with students during silent reading time.

Comparison Classrooms

Observations were conducted in one seventh grade comparison classroom and one eighth grade comparison classroom to compare the English language arts instruction that was normally provided with the SEM-R classrooms. The observation in the eighth grade class lasted 20 minutes. During this time the teacher spent seven minutes discussing how the students had done on a recent state-mandated test. She encouraged them to always try their best, then asked what was hard about the test. One student said the reading was hard because one story was five pages long and another student said the questions were very long. Their teacher verbally reviewed some of the strategies they had been taught during their test preparation. She encouraged them to challenge themselves and pointed out that the students have done things that were challenging in their own lives. Before moving on, she reiterated that students could take Saturday test-prep class. The students were required to pass the state-mandated test to enter high school. There were approximately eight minutes of instruction during the class when the teacher launched into a conversation about a movie the students had seen. She explained that they were going to be looking at persuasion and provided an example from a movie the class had watched. During this time two students actively participated in the conversation with the teacher while the others sat quietly. A few students took notes in their notebooks. For the final three minutes of the class the teacher dictated the following question which the students copied in their reading notebooks: *Did the character encounter an obstacle or what obstacle or problem exists?* One student asked her to repeat the question and another wanted to know how to spell *obstacle*—the teacher indicated the word was on the board, but it was not evident where on the board. The students were expected to respond to the question after doing more reading in their class-assigned novel. During the final minute of class, the teacher admonished the students for not keeping the room clean and noted they could clean the room with the broom she brought for that purpose.

The seventh grade comparison classroom observation lasted 20 minutes. Students entered class and continued to be engaged in personal conversations for two minutes as the teacher struggled to get them to find seats and settle down. This class could best be described as chaotic. Of the 26 students, roughly eight of them followed the directions and copied the AIM from the blackboard into their notebooks. Others continued to talk, turn their back on the teacher, and move from one seat to another throughout the observation. Two girls spent most of the time sharing ear buds and listening to an iPod. At the beginning of the class the teacher, who was in her first year teaching at this school but had two previous years' teaching experience, walked around the room, stopped to talk with some students, but did nothing to redirect students other than to say, "Shhh." After seven minutes, the teacher read the AIM: *How do I identify and describe the elements of setting in a work of art?* She asked students to identify what the setting was in a story.

She then showed the students a black and white copy of the painting Starry Night by Vincent Van Gogh. The image was approximately half the size of a piece of 8 ½ x 11" paper, and could not be seen clearly in the back of the room where several students sat. The teacher asked students where they thought the picture took place. One student went up to look closely at the picture and offered his idea. It was too loud in the classroom for anyone except the few students seated near the teacher to hear what he said. The teacher asked the students to identify when they thought the picture took place and to speculate about the place and environment. None of the students could identify the artist, so she wrote Van Gogh's name on the board. She then told the students that they were going to look at another picture by Van Gogh called Café at Night. One student provided an explanation of what a café was. The teacher had a student hand out a worksheet to every class member. The picture was on one side and questions and prompts on the other. The students were told to look at the picture and respond to the questions and prompts that were designed to elicit thinking about the setting. The prompts included: Time—when does the story take place; Place—Where does the story take place; Environment—How would you describe the place? As the students worked, the teacher stood in front of room on one side. After four minutes she asked students to share their written responses. Students who shared their responses sat in the front of the room. One student responded to nearly every question, while others never began the assignment. At the end of the observation, the teacher said to the students, "Thank you for being *so* good today while we had a visitor here."

Literacy Coach Interview

The literacy coach, who served as the SEM-R coach and observer, characterized teachers' SEM-R implementation as mixed. In her opinion, similarities between SEM-R and elements of the Reader's Workshop format that had previously been followed by teachers at the school, including read alouds, dedicated time for silent reading, and student-teacher conferences, made the transition to using SEM-R easier for the teachers. The length of time that students were encouraged to and able to read was longer in SEM-R, and the structure of conferences and read alouds, in the form of Book Hooks, was different. Three teachers were able to adapt to the differences, while two had difficulty changing their practices. These two teachers did not attend the summer training and were veteran teachers. The literacy coach provided opportunities for all treatment teachers to collaborate and she helped teachers plan all three phases of SEM-R when asked to do so. Of the two veteran teachers who did not attend the summer SEM-R training, one was very receptive to receiving assistance from the literacy coach, while the other was not.

The literacy coach and teachers were appreciative of the books supplied for the classroom libraries, but the coach offered some observations about the book selections. The students craved books that represented issues and topics that were central to their lives. These were not necessarily the types of books that won awards, but came more from the popular fiction realm. None of the students were interested in reading recent

award winners *Invention of Hugo Cabret* or *The Mysterious Benedict Society*. Instead, they liked books such as the *Princess Lessons* series (about the social life of teens) by Meg Cabot, *Crackback* (about football) by John Coy, *Twilight* (about vampires) by Stephanie Meyer, the *Bluford High* series (about culturally diverse teens) by Anne Schraff, books by Sharon Draper, and so-called "baby mama" books that featured teens who were pregnant. The literacy coach summed up the students' book interests this way, "they're not concerned about the world, but they're concerned with themselves and their peers. That's what they want to read about." She recognized that the popular fiction texts, and texts that were high-interest and on a low reading level, could be the entry point to stimulate students' interest in reading, and that their interest in better quality books would come with time.

Findings

Several findings were consistent during the teacher interviews and observations. They included availability of and teachers' familiarity with Young Adult literature, the fit with SEM-R and the traditional way of teaching English language arts, teachers' awareness of students' reading abilities and habits, uncertainty with the unstructured nature of Phase Three enrichment learning, training, and pressure to improve students' performance on standardized tests. Each of these themes will be explored in more detail in the following paragraphs.

The books that were provided for each classroom and the teachers' familiarity with books which were appropriate and interesting for teenagers was discussed by most of the teachers and the literacy coach. They were happy to have the new books for their classroom libraries since the school had not replenished classroom libraries for several years. Teachers' opinions of the books chosen ranged from saying that many books were too easy for the students to read to identifying others as either too challenging or unappealing, such as *Ivanhoe*. Overall, the students were excited about and interested in the new books and in one classroom were 'fighting peaceably' over who got to read certain books. Several of the teachers were motivated to seek out additional books and spent their own money to further augment their classroom libraries. Two teachers indicated that they had read a lot more YA literature as a result of SEM-R, and one of them felt that getting the remainder of the English language arts staff to read and become more familiar with YA literature was essential to their future reading instruction. As one teacher explained, "I need to know something about the book or topic in advance before I introduce it to the kids." One of the veteran teachers appeared to have limited familiarity with current YA literature and depended on the literacy coach to suggest books and model Book Hooks. The other treatment teachers had more up-to-date knowledge of popular authors and series and actively searched for additional books that would interest the students. The teachers were concerned about finding books for high ability readers that were challenging, but not too racy, and they wanted more high-interest, low-reading ability popular fiction for struggling readers.

The second common theme was the way in which teachers adopted SEM-R, or adapted it to make it fit with the practices they had previously used in English language arts instruction. This was exemplified in the way the teachers selected books to share during Book Hooks. At the beginning of the year the teachers adhered to the SEM-R description of Phase One and choose multiple books to hook each day, taking into account students' interests and reading levels. Teachers remarked that students were more interested in the books and they participated more frequently in discussions during Phase One when the books interested them. As the school year progressed, most teachers abandoned the practice of hooking multiple books each day, and instead chose books based on a theme. These teachers were trying to align the Book Hooks with their curriculum by choosing a theme that was related to something covered in a content-area subject, such as World War II or the Civil Rights Movement, or something that they were required to teach in writing, such as persuasion. One teacher remarked that she noticed that students' interest in the books diminished over time, but she encouraged them to be open-minded about the books she was sharing. Observations in the classrooms confirmed the teachers' practice of hooking just one book related to a theme, and the students' lackluster interest in the books. This was not the case in every classroom however, as one teacher chose other types of themes, or genres, to share with students, including myths and fantasy. She collected books related to a theme and hooked some of the books and made others available for the students to read. The students in her class were more involved in the Book Hook and interested in reading the book she shared.

Another common modification to Phase One involved the strategy instruction that should be embedded in Book Hooks. The Book Hooks often became discussions about a topic, such as peer pressure, or mini-lessons where the teacher discussed a literary element or theme in the book. During the classroom observations, no reading comprehension strategies such as predicting, questioning, or inferring were discussed during Book Hooks. Instead, in a majority of the classrooms, the students were engaged in discussion about the story events, characters' motivation, and the theme. One teacher explained that she selected a portion of the text to read where there was a rise in the action or something occurred that related to what she was trying to teach the students. The purpose of the discussion was to see if the students attended to the read aloud, what kinds of skills they used, and how they connected ideas. She used the discussions to help determine whether or not the students would be able to tackle the text on their own. Another teacher often included a pair-and-share during Phase One to allow students to try the Book Hook strategy or make connections to the book they were reading. Her goal was to get the students to be critical thinkers while reading. To accomplish that goal, she often deviated from the Phase One model and chose one book to read from beginning to end over the course of several classes or weeks. She chose one that was above the students' reading level and then led a class discussion of the book. She reverted to this traditional read aloud style because she felt that the students got more out of some books that way.

The most positive theme found among the treatment teachers was their increased knowledge of their students as readers. The teachers were able to speak extensively about

the students' reading stamina, active reading, fluency, motivation to read, and independence when choosing books. They attributed this knowledge to the Running Records that they administer and to the conferences they hold with students. Speaking about conferences, one teacher remarked,

> During this process I've become more aware of what they need as readers. Just because they're a Z doesn't mean that they're done with learning how to read S level books. I've built up a good relationship with them, especially if they like the book. It makes them feel good about themselves as readers. I try to be nice—I use humor a lot. I feel ELA is a personal subject—students are making connections to personal things when they are reading. I try to think about myself as a kid at that age—it's scary to have a one-on-one conversation with a teacher. I think that if I'm a little more lighthearted, they will be more comfortable. They've become more aware of things to look for in a text such as making connections, the narrator. Last year we would do a mini-lesson and assume that they know it. Now we revisit it constantly.

The teachers were able to identify growth in specific students, exemplified by the comments about two seventh grade boys:

> Daniel: He is really smart. I remember him saying, "I really like Harry Potter. I never knew the books could be so interesting. I'm glad you turned me on to it." At the beginning of the year he was a middle of the road reader, and now he really wants to talk about what he's reading. He's really passionate about what is going on in the book—he almost takes what's happening personally. He's actually living it.
> Roman: He'll buy a book and bring it in to show me. He gets really proud when he has read a book. He's a struggling reader, and he's really reading a lot more.

Another theme related to Phase Three. Most teachers described this phase as a challenge. The unstructured nature of the SEM-R time, choosing the kinds of activities or centers to offer, using Renzulli Learning, and managing independent projects all contributed to their anxiety about Phase Three. They wanted to see a successful implementation of Phase Three in a classroom and expressed a desire for more training using Renzulli Learning. The teachers expressed skepticism that the choices they offered during Phase Three were meaningful and worthwhile learning events for the students.

Related to the teachers' unease with Phase Three was the theme of training. The teachers who did not attend the summer training were at a disadvantage and did not implement SEM-R as well as those who attended the training. The literacy coach did not feel that she could replicate the summer training in her school. She felt she needed more training herself in order to adequately train the teachers. The teachers who did not attend the summer training felt overwhelmed at first, and relied on the literacy coach and manual to ease their anxieties.

The final theme had an impact on every aspect of the SEM-R implementation at Jane Addams Middle School. The teachers and administrators felt pressure to improve students' performance on standardized tests because the school did not do well on the state test last year. Weekly test preparation was mandated for all English language arts classes, including the SEM-R classes. The SEM-R teachers chose to do test-prep on one day each week. As winter approached, test-prep increased and SEM-R was stopped during December and January. Teachers occasionally did Phases One and Two during this time, but since the teachers did not feel that SEM-R was supported by the administration, they conformed to the test-prep requirements. One bright spot that emerged during the test-prep time was that the students were unhappy about missing their independent reading time.

CHAPTER 12: Monument Magnet School

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Monument Magnet school, located in a major city, completed its first academic year at the end of the 2007-2008 school year. Leasing one floor of an elementary school, the school began serving approximately 200 students in grades six and seven. The student population was expanded to 300 during the 2008-2009 school year when a new sixth grade class entered the school, resulting in approximately 100 students in each grade. The student body is composed primarily of Asian students, with Caucasian students as the next most populous group. Their families represent a mixture of upper and lower income levels. The students come from the local neighborhood and elsewhere within the district. Students are grouped heterogeneously for all academic subjects except for one self-contained special education class in seventh grade. A special education teacher provides additional support for other special education students in an inclusion model within the heterogeneous classrooms. The school operates using a model that infuses enrichment teaching and learning strategies throughout the curriculum along with the use of innovative uses of technology including videoconferences and connections with students throughout the world. In keeping with the enrichment theme and providing opportunities for students to receive advanced instruction, in the next school year an honors math class will be offered for students who score in the top tier on the state math exam.

Because the school is still new, no test data have been released. Conversations with the school principal indicated that the students have performed well on recently completed state tests and the school is expected to be among the better performing middle schools in the district. Publicly available information about the school budget revealed that out of a pool of more than 2 million dollars, library books were the smallest line item at just over $1,000 for the next school year. This is not surprising since there is no library for the school. In the previous year these funds were used to purchase books for classroom use. The teacher who participated in the SEM-R study is working with the local public library to help students get library cards and they are trying to work out a schedule for walking to the library from school on a regular basis so the students can take out books. The school principal and teachers expressed a desire for a school library, but did not see that funding for the purchase of books, allocation of space, and a library/media specialist would be forthcoming any time soon. If the students continue to do well and the school model is determined to be successful, Monument Magnet School may be able to get an entire building for their use within the next 5 years.

Due to an unexpected influx of English Language Learners (ELLs) at the beginning of the school year, which impacted the English language arts classes, this school decided to modify their implementation of SEM-R and offered it as an after school

option for high ability readers in the eighth grade. The effort got fully underway in November, approximately six weeks later than the other SEM-R schools. The SEM-R class lasted for approximately one hour after school. After trying to include Phase One every week to expose students to more books, and then Phase Two or Three on alternate weeks, the teacher decided to do Phases One and Two every week until the last month of the school year, when she would transition into more dedicated Phase Three time.

SEM-R Classroom

Ms. Lambini's Eight Grade Classroom

The dismissal bell rang at 2:10 p.m. and students filed into the hallways in an orderly manner as most exited the building at the end of the school day. Individual students peeled off from small groups and entered Ms. Carrie Lambini's classroom and ambled toward a desk. Slowly the room filled with eight girls and seven boys. All were seated and Ms. Lambini began a Book Hook at 2:15 p.m. Ms. Lambini chose to share a play with the students because she was trying to expose them to a variety of genres and writing forms. In her introduction to the play *The Laramie Project*, she noted that was not a narrative, and that people may choose to read plays for a variety of reasons. She explained that the play was based on the killing in Laramie, Wyoming of Matthew Shepard, a young gay man. Ms. Lambini noted that a play is written differently than narrative or informational text because it includes dialog and directions for the actors. A transcript from the classroom discussion illustrates the type of exchange that Ms. Lambini cultivated with her students:

Student 1: How do you provide description in a play?
Ms. Lambini: We're going to look at that. There are a lot of ways the author can do that.
Student 2: Maybe the way the author provides the description.
Ms. Lambini: Italics are one way the author lets you know what's going on. Italics are one way that you can see what the author provides for description. In this play there is minimal stage direction. When I read a play, I read everything I can before I read the play, like the book blurb on the back.

Ms. Lambini read the back of the book aloud and encouraged students to search their schema for prior knowledge about *The Laramie Project*. The conversation continued:

Student 3: I saw the movie.
Ms. Lambini: Do you want to share anything about the movie?
Student 3: Umm…

Ms. Lambini: I think that is more of a documentary. The introduction will help me add to my prior knowledge and the visualization that started when I read the back of the book. Close your eyes and visualize.

Ms. Lambini continued by reading from the book introduction. The students were quiet - none had their eyes closed, but they looked thoughtful. Ms. Lambini pointed out how she determined the author's purpose for writing this play, which was to tackle the topic of discrimination, and made a connection to current events and the election of President Obama. She explained that the historical context was often important to know when reading, especially when reading this particular play. She explained how she could visualize the main event, the beating of Matthew Shepard, even before she read the book. Ms. Lambini concluded her Book Hook by explaining that readers should determine the author's purpose and theme while reading. Once the Book Hook was over, she directed students to answer the following questions: Why did the author write this? Why is this story important? She asked students which strategies they would use while reading, and they responded by identifying prediction and questioning.

Phase Two reading took place for the next 35 minutes. Many of the students searched through plastic bins of books for a new book to read, while the remainder of the class began reading. As Ms. Lambini began her first reading conference, a group of four boys talked quietly, but their conversation was focused on the use of sticky notes to mark pages while reading. They shared some information with one another about the books they were reading, and within 5 minutes were all reading quietly. Over the course of the Phase Two time, members of this group would periodically stop reading to share something that they had read with a neighbor. They appeared to appreciate having the opportunity to discuss what they read with someone.

Ms. Lambini conducted four reading conferences during the Phase Two time, with each lasting between 4-7 minutes. During the rest of the time she circulated among the students and held brief conversations with individual students. She checked the books they were reading, reinforced their use of sticky notes while reading to help them identify words or concepts that they needed to clarify, to note their own strategy use, or to mark a part of the text that they wanted to discuss with her or another student. During one such encounter, Ms. Lambini asked a student, who was reading a graphic novel, how he would critique the book. After the student provided a brief plot summary Ms. Lambini acknowledged that she did not have a lot of prior knowledge about the story, which was recently made into a movie. Another boy joined the conversation and provided details about the book to put it in a historical context for her. Ms. Lambini asked the first student to explain the different formats found in the book, which included a graphic novel format along with extended narrative text. The student explained that the alternation between formats was not confusing and he thought the author wanted to provide more information about the characters in the graphic novel parts of the book. Ms. Lambini remarked that a lot of people like the graphic novel format because it draws them into reading. The student responded by saying that he wanted to pick up the Shakespeare graphic novel she

had mentioned to the class. Ms. Lambini told him there are most likely a number of different graphic novels about Shakespeare plays, and that if the student read one now, he would be able to compare it to the original if he had to read it in high school.

To conclude the SEM-R time, Ms. Lambini asked all students to stop reading at 3:05 p.m. She reinforced students' use of sticky notes as a strategy to help themselves as readers, then asked one student to share what she had written in her Reading Log. The student had read *A Short History of Nearly Everything* and explained how she read that the North Star is dying and she made a connection to the slaves who used the North Star as their guide. She made this connection with a book the students had just read that said the North Star a companion to slaves on the run. This student wondered, if slaves were still allowed in the United States today, what they would do without the North Star. Ms. Lambini explained that this student was doing all three things that she had identified as reading goals: making connections, visualizing, and thinking about the importance of topic - why the author was writing about it. Ms. Lambini then asked the other students why they thought this information about the North Star was important. One student shared that people on boats use it for navigation, while another thought it was related to natural pollution and how light pollution was making the stars fade from our view. This student speculated that the author might be trying to get us to think about all the light we use. Ms. Lambini summed up the conversation by reminding students to be patient while reading because they might need to get further along in a book to make connections and reminded them that she wants them to be able to tell why the story or information was important for the author to write about.

Principal and Reading Coach Interviews

Interviews with the school principal and reading coach revealed several common threads about language arts instruction at Monument Magnet School. The principal was committed to the use of enrichment strategies that encouraged students to use higher-level thinking and she saw the SEM-R approach as a big step toward accomplishing that goal in language arts instruction. She was so pleased with the students' reading engagement and thinking that had been reported to her by Ms. Lambini and the reading coach, that she wanted to expand use of SEM-R to all language arts classrooms during the school day in the next school year. Similarly, the reading coach was thrilled to see the students' improved and more sophisticated use of reading strategies. She observed that students were more metacognitive and could identify when books were too easy or difficult for them to read, they were able to independently apply strategies, such as determining the meanings of new vocabulary words from context, and they were able to write about their strategy use in their SEM-R logs. She said that the Book Hooks and conferences during Phase Two allowed Ms. Lambini to focus on students' strategy use, and they now had an arsenal or tool kit of strategies that they were able to use individually and in combination while reading. The reading coach identified the

expanded classroom library as an important factor in increasing the variety and reading level of texts available to the students.

Findings

The beginning of the SEM-R implementation at Monument Magnet School was thrown off schedule due to an unexpectedly large number of new ELL students who impacted language arts instruction. The scheduling difficulties, and subsequent modification of the SEM-R implementation resulted in the emergence of the theme of flexibility. SEM-R is a model that allows for teachers and schools to make modifications as they deem necessary according to their students' needs, administrative dictates such as alignment with standards and preparation of high-stakes tests, and time and space constraints. In this case, the teacher, reading coach, and principal determined that the best way to provide students with the SEM-R instruction was to do it in an after-school class. The willingness of all constituencies, including the teacher, students, parents, and school administrators, to commit to an extended day speaks well of their desire to support students' academic growth. By working in collaboration with the SEM-R team, the teacher was able to modify the frequency of the SEM-R phases. The students were able to receive instruction and support during Phases One and Two for most of the school year, and will do more individual reading and extension of their reading interests in Phase Three at the end of the school year.

The second theme that emerged was that of independence. Ms. Lambini worked with the students to help them become more independent as readers by teaching them to identify books that were at an appropriate level of reading challenge, exposing them to new and varied genres, and encouraging them to read books that were of interest to them. This helped them become more aware of themselves as readers and resulted in the students having lists of books they wanted to read in the future.

The students' independence was further supported by the routines Ms. Lambini established for their reading both during and after the designated SEM-R time. The students knew where to go to get new books, they had access to their SEM-R logs, and they could choose to do their weekly reflection in their logs or type it in a word processing program. The students knew how to keep track of their reading and they regularly shared books with one another, which encouraged more additions to their future reading lists.

The final theme found in this implementation of SEM-R was connected to the students' independence, and that was the theme of higher-level thinking about books. Ms. Lambini wove higher-level thinking strategies into all aspects of the SEM-R time. She explicitly modeled making sophisticated connections between books, how to use multiple strategies while reading, and encouraged students to think about the author's purpose and context to understand characters' motivation in books. By modeling these strategies and

then asking higher-level questions of students during reading conferences, Ms. Lambini established the expectation that students would be employing the strategies at all times while reading. This was further reinforced as Ms. Lambini looked for the depth of thinking in students' written responses based on their reading. An example of how an English Language Learner synthesized what was happening in the book *Dreamland* illustrates how Ms. Lambini's instruction helped all students think at higher levels:

> Caitlin meets an exotic boy named Rogerson and they soon had a relationship, but lately Caitlin just found out another a side of Rogerson. A ferocious monster that hits her and only her but yet she is still attached to Rogerson as if he is her air while she is hopelessly drowning.

Ms. Lambini provided encouragement as students tried more difficult texts and new genres, as the following conference illustrates:

Ms. Lambini:	How's it going?
Student:	Well, I wanted to read this book when I was in sixth grade, but it was too hard for me, but my friend recommended it, so I decided to read it.
Ms. Lambini:	How is the book similar to books you've read before? Rephrase the question for me so that I know you understand.
Student:	You want me to think if this book is like any other books I read. It's science fiction.
Ms. Lambini:	I want you to gather evidence from the text to determine whether or not the book is science fiction or fantasy. I want you to continue since this is a new genre for you, what do you visualize and what can you connect to? And thinking about what I talked about in the Book Hook, why is this important enough for the author to write about this? You're ready to be using more strategies. This is the first time I've seen you read a new genre! Make sure you log this information into your log. Any questions?

This conference also illustrated how Ms. Lambini expected students to utilize multiple strategies while reading to help them, as independent readers, continue to stretch beyond their comfort zone and read more difficult texts.