CLOSE READING IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS

by

Meredith R. Stout

An Abstract

of a research paper submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Library Science and Information Services
in the Department of Educational Leadership and Human Services
University of Central Missouri

August 2015
ABSTRACT
by

Meredith Stout

As the Common Core State Standards mandate that students be capable of reading and analyzing complex texts, close reading has become a common instructional practice in middle school classrooms. Research shows that close reading can be effective if introduced in the elementary grades. This body of research will show the effectiveness of close reading but will also refute criticisms of close reading and shine a light on the modifications needed in order to implement this instruction at the elementary level.
CLOSE READING IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS

by

Meredith R. Stout

An Abstract
of a research paper submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Library Science and Information Services
in the Department of Educational Leadership and Human Services
University of Central Missouri

August 2015
CLOSE READING IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS

by

Meredith R.Stout

August, 2015

APPROVED:

Advisor: Dr. Jennifer Robins

Committee Member: Mrs. Rene Burress

UNIVERSITY OF CENTRAL MISSOURI
WARRENSBURG, MISSOURI
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Completing this research would not have been possible without the patience and encouragement of my two children, Jane and Grey. I am grateful that they “allowed” their mommy to play a few less board games and read a few less books over the course of the past few months. I would like to think Dr. Jennifer Robins for her help and advice throughout the process of writing this paper. Additionally, I am grateful for Rene Burress for being willing to serve as a reader for my paper. Last, being the terrible proofreader that I am, I could not have turned in a single draft without the help of my mother, Susan Kelley, and my sister, Katie Davis.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Statement of the Problem</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Purpose of the Study</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Research Questions</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Limitations of the Study</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Definition of Terms</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Research Design</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Effectiveness of Close Reading</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Criticisms of Close Reading</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Modifications Needed for Elementary Schools</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>How to Begin</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Picture Books</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Role of the School Librarian</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CHAPTER 3: CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Support of Close Reading in Elementary School</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Concerns over Close Reading</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Close Reading in the Elementary School</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>REFERENCES</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Problem

The Common Core State Standards require that students be proficient in reading complex texts to be “college and career ready” (4). To meet this need, educators at the middle school level have embraced close reading as a method to teach students to analyze complex literature. There is concern that waiting until middle school to introduce close reading strategies is a disservice to the students. While close reading may look different at the elementary level, the core aspects; short complex texts, repeated readings, annotation, will remain unchanged.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to identify if research supports close reading being introduced to elementary aged students and what modifications will be required. Close reading is not without critics, and this study looks to provide adequate rebuttals through reliable authorities in close reading. Close reading provides repeated readings of short, complex texts. Students are guided through the readings and given specific purposes for reading during each repeated reading (Fisher and Frey “Informational Texts” 223-225). This study seeks to provide research to support beginning close reading at the elementary level to adequately prepare students for middle school.

Research Questions

The following questions guided the research in this study:

1. Is there current research to support close reading at the elementary level?

2. Can the criticisms of close reading be adequately addressed?
3. How will close reading be implemented at the elementary level and what modifications will be required?

**Limitation of the Study**

This study was limited by the available resources on the topic of close reading in elementary schools in the time frame in which the research was conducted. The term “close reading” yielded many results but adding the “elementary school” component dramatically reduced the amount of peer-reviewed journal texts available. The variety of authors and researchers was an additional limitation. The leading authorities in close reading have well researched close reading in elementary classrooms, but there is not a variety of sources who have conducted this research.

**Definition of Terms**

Close Reading— Repeated readings of short, complex texts that allow students to analyze and deepen their understanding of the text.

Common Core State Standards— Standards adopted across the United States to provide a mutual standard of education across the nation.

Frontloading— The practice of giving students information the teacher deems necessary for understanding prior to reading a text.

**Research Design**

This study was conducted by locating previously published information on close reading in elementary schools. There was no new research conducted. Literature was accumulated, assessed, and analyzed to create a wealth of information on the integration of close reading at the elementary level.
Articles were obtained from the following databases: Academic Search Complete, Educational Leadership, Education Research Complete, EBSCO, and ProQuest. Search terms included “close reading”, “close reading and elementary”, and “close reading studies.” Further articles and books were found using the bibliographies from the articles retrieved.

Conclusion

This study contains three chapters that provide information on current research in close reading in elementary schools and how close reading can be implemented at the elementary level. The following chapter will provide a review of the literature used in this study. Chapter three answers the questions on which the research was focused.
CHAPTER 2
REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

Close reading is a strategy widely embraced by the education community. With the Common Core State Standards requiring "college and career ready students to be proficient in reading complex informational text independently in a variety of content areas" (4), the close reading strategy is useful to educators. While middle and high school teachers have embraced the practice, research shows that teachers at the elementary level can also implement close reading procedures (Fisher and Frey “Elementary Schools” 187). This review will look at studies documenting the effect of close reading, arguments against close reading in elementary schools and rebuttals to those arguments, and the strategies and modifications needed to apply close reading.

Close reading is a strategy used to teach students to move beyond a base level understanding of a text to more complex knowledge. Close reading is the educational practice of taking a short, complex text and using multiple readings to analyze different aspects of the content (Kappes and Brown 2). The teacher models strategies that are gradually released to student responsibility. Close reading focuses on many aspects of the texts such as “vocabulary and how its meaning is shaped by context; attention to form, tone, imagery and/or rhetorical devices; the significance of word choice and syntax; and the discovery of different levels of meaning” (Kappes and Brown 2).

Close reading has several defining characteristics (Fisher and Frey “Informational Texts” 223-225). Students are given short, complex texts to read. The texts should be complex enough to require repeated readings to fully comprehend. Upon rereading, (or re-listening) students are given different purposes for reading, whether it be to ask and
answer questions or to make inferences. Annotation is another step in Close Reading. According to Fisher and Frey, readers’ annotations serve as a scaffold considering that they must slow their reading to annotate and consider the text. Lastly, students are asked to answer text-dependent questions and then discuss the texts with peers and teachers.

Close reading has a place in elementary classrooms. The following sections will look at what current research studies show about close reading. Additionally, criticisms of close reading will be addressed. Finally, modifications and the implementation of close reading will be covered.

**The Effectiveness of Close Reading**

Studies centered on close reading show the effectiveness of this practice. This section will focus on studies that have shown close reading to be beneficial not only in the middle school grades (Fisher and Frey “Intervention” 373), but also for upper elementary school students as well (Carlisle and Katz 325). The results of the research support an effort to teach close reading in elementary schools.

Close reading has been accepted as a successful strategy amongst the middle school community. Douglas Fisher and Nancy Frey, two of close reading authorities, looked at the effectiveness of close reading as an intervention for struggling middle school readers (“Intervention” 368). Their study, conducted in 2014, looked at middle school students from three different school districts, 438 seventh and eighth-grade students qualified for the study, and 100 students were randomly selected for the experimental group.

The findings in this study showed two ways that close reading benefited the students. The control group experienced 30 minutes of after school intervention based on processes the district already employed. Some interventions for the control group were
computer-based, some teacher-led, and others required independent reading. In the experimental group, students were given interventions using close reading. Several outcomes were noted from this study. The experimental group experienced more regular attendance by participants (94% attendance versus the 81% attendance experienced by the control groups). Of the experimental group, 64% of the students progressed at least one or more levels on the annual state assessment. In contrast, in the control group only 12% progressed to this degree.

Likewise, a study was conducted on students with reading difficulties in elementary schools with encouraging results (Katz and Carlisle 325). Three case studies were conducted on fourth-grade students. Over the course of 12 weeks, a researcher met with the students twice a week for 30 minutes sessions. Close reading strategies were introduced one at a time coupled with decoding strategies. At the completion of the twelve weeks, students had made improvements in their reading and comprehension skills. The authors of the study were encouraged by the results and were interested in further study of this program.

With encouragement from studies such as these, Fisher and Frey looked into specific close reading strategies that would be effective in elementary school classrooms ("Elementary Schools" 180). They wanted to observe how close reading could be integrated into already effective reading practices rather than replace what was already working. A case study was conducted with 14 teacher participants who worked in grades kindergarten to six. The researchers also observed 10 secondary classrooms of varying disciplines in which close reading was already being taught. They collected field notes in
both the secondary classrooms as well as in the 14 elementary classrooms as close reading was beginning to be introduced.

From these field notes, Fisher and Frey identified five features of close reading that were not currently being taught in elementary school classrooms. If close reading is to be implemented, Fisher and Frey deduced that these would need to be addressed. The key features are as follows: the use of short passages, complex texts, limited frontloading, repeated readings, and text-dependent questions. Descriptions of and ways to implement these features will be addressed in a later section.

This body of research provides evidence of the effectiveness of close reading in middle school as well as elementary school. These studies guide districts to begin implementing close reading at all levels. Evidence shows close reading has its place in classrooms and will help educators to meet the standards set by the Common Core (Boyles “Closing In” 36; Boyles “Without Tears” 32; Cole 20; Cummins 69; Fisher and Frey “Contingency” 277; Fisher and Frey “Informational Texts” 222; Serafini 229; Shanahan 29).

**Criticisms of Close Reading**

Like most educational strategies, close reading is not without its critics. Not everyone agrees with all of close reading’s practices. In this section, we will take a look at some of these criticisms and address them.

In a review of Thomas Newkirk’s book, *Holding onto Good Ideas in a Time of Bad Ones: Six Literacy Principles Worth Fighting For*, Kathleen Rowlands shares Newkirk’s concern over students lack of eagerness to engage in longer texts (530). Newkirk speaks to close reading’s use of short, complex texts. Newkirk states that “unless we can persuade students that reading is a form of deep sustained pleasure, they will not choose to read, and
because they will not choose to read, they will not develop the skills to make them good readers (117).” While this concern may seem legitimate, it is only so if teachers are exclusively using close reading strategies to teach fiction (Hinchman and Moore 447).

Close reading is not designed to stand on its own in a reading comprehension program (Fisher and Frey “Elementary Schools” 180). It is to be accompanied by other best practices such as think-alouds, guided reading, and collaborative reading. Fisher and Frey point out that not all text warrants the attention close reading requires. Additionally, the reader’s purpose for reading determines what kind of strategy is employed (Shanahan 30). Close reading is needed for informational texts, which are typically shorter than fiction.

Another concern about close reading comes from Frank Serafini. Serafini contends that the Common Core Standards assert the need for close reading because teachers have focused on too much personal response to books and not enough on complex texts (300). He states that close reading moves students further from personal connections and encourages them to “stay within the four corners of the text” (Serafini 300). Serafini asserts that close reading does not allow students to personally interact with the text, rather students focus on the text itself. Close reading strives to weaken students’ dependence on background knowledge and to develop critical thinking skills. Serafini is concerned that not allowing those personal connections and background knowledge to shape how readers view the text will be detrimental.

Nancy Boyles argues that teaching personal connections was dominating teaching of reading and is not necessarily best practice (“Closing In” 37). Fisher and Frey recommend spending less time on personal connections to focus on the information within the actual text (“Elementary Schools” 179). An effective teacher will not have close reading as his or
her only tool in the toolbox of reading instruction, allowing for students to experience the personal connections with text when appropriate (Shanahan 30).

Close reading suggests limiting front-loading, the practice of giving students information possibly unknown to them, to help with comprehension. The goal of limiting this practice is to grow readers who can dive into the depth of a text using only the text itself (Shanahan 30). This practice has garnered some skeptics. For example, when using primary sources, students need the appropriate historical background knowledge to successfully employ close reading strategies and maximize understanding (Neumann, Gilbertson, and Hutton 70). If students are not given pertinent information when faced with a primary source, it is likely that the close reading will not be as successful as the reading could potentially be. Additionally, Catherine Snow suggests “warm, close reading” rather than allowing students cold reads on complex texts (18-19). Snow suggests that cold reading of complex topics in texts at a challenging level often creates frustration rather than the productive struggle and inquiry questions close reading is designed to produce. She claims that frontloading can motivate students and contribute to interest.

Fisher and Frey argue that by too much front-loading and by removing any obstacle that may get in the way of students’ comprehension, opportunities are eliminated for the students to sort out problems they encounter (Text Dependent Questions 13). When implementing close reading, teachers select more appropriate texts that are in reach of students’ independent reading levels. The scaffolds in close reading are employed during the reading and are dispersed throughout instruction.

The last criticism is not necessarily aimed at the strategies and implementation of close reading but at a dramatic shift towards close reading created by the Common Core
Standards (Gewertz 6). Gewertz states that leaders at the Aspen Institute, an educational and policies studies organization, share her concern that the professional development needed to help teachers learn how to implement close reading is not going to occur. While those at the Aspen Institute praised close reading, they feared implementation across the board will have some bumps along the way. Serafini shares these concerns and adds concerns for districts on how to fund this professional development (301). He states that changing teaching requirements and having successful implementation are two completely different things. School districts face the challenge of funding the necessary professional development to equip their staff for implementing close reading.

**Modifications Needed for Elementary Schools**

The application of close reading in secondary schools will not translate well to elementary students without modifications. There is literature available to point educators in the right direction for modifying teaching and scaffolding an emergent reader's needs. In 2012, Fisher and Frey conducted a case study on close reading in elementary schools. One initial step of this study was to determine what features would require modification (Fisher and Frey “Elementary Schools” 180). It was agreed that there were a few aspects of close reading that would require no modification. Complex texts at grade level would still be key. The texts would remain short, and rereading would still be part of the strategy. The shorter, complex texts are a key component in elementary classrooms. Nancy Boyle asserts that shorter texts allow for students of many different reading levels to access appropriate texts (“Closing In” 38). Shorter texts allow for repeated reading. While upper elementary students are capable of reading longer texts, students should still be using short texts in close reading lessons.
Elementary school readers, particularly in primary grades, are not proficient. Therefore, it is unreasonable to think that the students will always be the readers in close reading lessons (Fisher and Frey “Informational Texts” 223). Primary teachers take into consideration how much scaffolding they think students will require, and if necessary, they will read aloud the selection (Fisher and Frey “Complex Texts” 58). A piece of text that requires a high amount of scaffolding will require the teacher to read it aloud. Primary teachers make the first reading, and even subsequent readings. The type of shared reading experience is based on their knowledge of their class (Fisher and Frey “Informational Texts” 223).

Matching texts to student’s ability at the elementary level is an additional challenge. Finding texts that deserve the attention of a close reading at the elementary level is made easier by the use of the Text Complexity Multi-Index (TCMI) (Turner and Danridge 216). The Text Project and the University of California, Santa Cruz developed the TCMI. This four-step process allows teachers to evaluate texts through four criteria which involve gathering quantitative information, such as Lexile level, comparing with benchmark texts, analyzing qualitative features of the text, and identifying the reader’s strengths and needs (Hiebert 1). The developers of the TCMI considered the Common Core State Standards when developing this method so that texts would align with the CCSS.

When considering modifications needed for elementary close reading lessons, the issue of frontloading once again arose. The participants in Fisher and Frey’s study were of varying opinions. It may be unreasonable to think elementary students, particularly in the lower grades, will not require a small amount of frontloading for specific texts. Eventually, study participants established two ideas to guide elementary instruction (2012). A teacher
should not frontload a text to the degree that reading the text is no longer necessary. Additionally, they agreed that frontloading should not immerse students in personal connections during their reading.

The study also drew attention to how elementary teachers asked questions within reading lessons (Fisher and Frey “Elementary Schools” 182). Teachers are encouraged not to use questions that rely on personal thoughts or experiences. Questions are to be text-dependent. Fisher and Frey’s study participants pointed elementary teachers towards the question-answer relationship (QAR) process to help develop this strategy (“Elementary Schools” 183). QAR not only aligns with CCSS but can also be tailored to the text the teacher is utilizing (Boyle, “Closing In” 37).

In Text-Dependent Questions: Pathways to Close and Critical Reading, Fisher and Frey state there are four phases to asking text dependent questions (15-18). Phase 1 is identified as general understanding questions such as “What does the text say?” (15). “How Does the Text Work,” or Phase 2, encompasses authors’ purpose, vocabulary questions, and text structure questions (16). Phase 3 is focused on the meaning of the text and uses intertextual connections. Lastly, Phase 4 is focused on what feelings and ideas the text inspires in its readers. All of these questions should be answered with support from the text and not the reader’s beliefs. Proper modeling and questioning techniques will allow elementary students success in answering text-dependent questions.

Annotation can be taught as a close reading strategy at the elementary level (Fisher and Frey “Elementary School” 186). As this will be a new skill, students require instruction on what kind of texts can be annotated, meaning “do not annotate in your library books” and so forth. Sunday Cummins recommends teaching a coding method to students and
teaching them to use post-it notes (71). Fisher and Frey’s study participants came up with a grade-by-grade list of appropriate annotation strategies (“Elementary Schools” 186). These strategies ranged from allowing kindergarteners to use wiki sticks (yarn like sticks that adhere to almost any surface and can be removed without damaging the surface) to underline in big books. This is phased out by second grade. In second grade students use Post-it notes. In the subsequent grades, students are taught to use different marks for different observations. Newkirk suggests using a legal size piece of paper and pasting the text in the middle, then making photocopies for students (“Art of Slow Reading” 180). This allows for large margins for students to fill with annotations.

In one study, researchers looked at how teachers prepare to scaffold instruction when students fail to find deeper understanding of the text (Fisher and Frey “Contingency Teaching” 278). This case study was conducted through interviews with twelve teachers. The study was comprised of two teachers from grades 3 through 8. The teachers were identified as leaders in close reading instruction within their school. They were interviewed, and their teaching was observed both prior to and post interview. In their observations, Fisher and Frey took field notes on the scaffolds the teachers used during close reading lessons. These were repeated reading, text-dependent questions, collaborative conversations, and annotations.

The researchers then took notes on the contingencies observed when the students did not adequately respond to close reading or when collaborative conversations were stilted. Fisher and Frey’s field notes reflected that the effective teachers commonly re-established their purpose for reading, analyzing questions (QAR), prompting and cueing, modeling, and analyzing annotations (“Contingency Teaching” 282-285). The researchers
found that with these contingencies in place, students in the elementary grades were able to find success in close reading instructions.

Close reading in elementary schools bears a resemblance to close reading in secondary grades. However, to implement close reading in elementary grades, teachers begin with the stepping stones to creating close readers. As with any instructional strategy, the building blocks are set in place in the younger grades.

The following delves into three more areas related to teaching close reading at the elementary level. The first is how to begin teaching students close reading strategies. Next the use picture books in their close reading lessons are described. Finally, the school librarian’s unique role in teaching close reading is discussed.

**How to Begin**

One of the first steps students take in learning to be close readers is learning to self-monitor (Cummins 70). Cummins states that students are taught to be metacognitive while reading (70). Elementary students need instruction, through conversation and teacher think-alouds, to learn to stop and assess when comprehension breaks down and to consider texts that broaden their thinking.

Additionally, elementary teachers set the stage for repeated readings (Shanahan 29). The first reading will be focused on what the text says. The way the text works will be the directive for the second reading. Finally, the students reread the text to analyze and compare the text to other works.

Motivating students to engage is necessary for close reading success (Cole 20). Text selection is paramount to success (Cole 21). Jill Cole suggests not relying on textbook chapters but finding texts that engage students. She also suggests beginning instruction
with an essential question that does not give away too much of the text but will set the
stage for student’s reading. Celebrating student success will keep motivation high.

An integral step in teaching at the elementary level is modeling. Cummins suggests
that teacher’s model frequently (71). Even if the monitoring of student progress comes
from the discussion after the lesson, she recommends that teachers use formative
assessment to determine understanding. This assessment will guide additional modeling
that needs to occur.

**Picture Books**

Boyles suggests that elementary teachers develop picture book text sets (“Without
Tears” 34). The texts center around a theme, an author, a genre, or any other topic a
teacher can incorporate into the curriculum. By developing these text sets, teachers can
scaffold students’ ability to draw connections between the texts. Boyles suggests using four
texts in a set because using too many texts makes the process cumbersome for students
(34). An example of a grade 3-5 text set focusing on the Underground Railroad is *Unspoken*
by Henry Cole, *Minty: A Story of Young Harriet Tubman* by Alan Schroeder and Jerry
Pinkney, *Night Boat to Freedom* by Margot Theis Raven and E.B. Lewis, and *The
Underground Railroad: An Interactive History Adventure* by Allison Lassieur (Boyle “Without
Tears” 35).

Boyles points out that pictures can aid in student abilities to understand the texts.
Likewise, Dean Schneider offers the unique perspective that the illustrations offer an
opportunity to “close read” visual information (12-13). Students can gain much insight into
text by analyzing the illustrations.

**The Role of the School Librarian**
School librarians are increasingly seen as partners to the teachers in achieving curricular goals. Teaching close reading is no exception. School Librarians have the job of collaborating with teachers to ensure close reading is being practiced in the classroom as well as the library (Harris 15). This collaboration includes determining what materials teachers need to be successful in teaching close reading. When collaborating with teachers, school librarians determine what kind of activities would be beneficial to scaffold close reading in the classroom. Harris suggests that the school librarian be involved in grade level meetings where this topic is discussed.

Additionally, Harris presents the idea of having a literacy center in the library to aid with close reading (16). This center can be stocked with materials that lend themselves to delving deeper. This can include Post-it notes, wiki sticks, or text that can be annotated. Opening the library for a night for parents to come experience close reading strategies with their children is a way the school librarian can reinforce close reading at home and school (Harris 16).

**Conclusion**

Close reading is a strategy that helps students become deeper, more insightful readers. Not only does close reading align with the Common Core Standards, it has also been proven to be effective at the middle school level. It is a staple in the current educational environment.

Case studies show elementary students are capable of learning to self-monitor when reading and to practice the various steps of close reading. While there are concerns that a lack of frontloading may prove to be a hindrance, particularly to elementary students, it is suggested that a small amount of frontloading is appropriate. Additionally, educators have
repeated that close reading should not be the only strategy employed by an effective teacher. While many of the Common Core State Standards can be met by close reading, school districts are cautioned at pushing educators to jump in head first. Proper training of teachers and professional development are paramount to the success of the students and teachers alike.

Close reading has a place in elementary instruction. Modifications can be made to close reading to meet the needs of beginning readers, and close reading strategies can be built upon throughout all the years of a student’s education. With effective instruction in close reading, students will more likely meet the Common Core’s desire that they be proficient in reading complex texts and, therefore, be more prepared to meet the demands of college and careers (4).
CHAPTER 3
CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The Common Core State Standards require students to be proficient readers of complex texts. This demand has changed the way educators structure their lessons as close reading has found its way into common practice. Timothy Shanahan states, “Skinny jeans... chunky watches... celebrity chefs... There are few things hotter right now than close reading,” (123). Teachers have used the method of close reading to achieve this goal at the middle school level. In recent years, there have been discussions about the educational community about the prospect of implementing close reading at the elementary level. The purpose of this research is to determine the validity of using the close reading procedures in elementary classrooms. Exploration of this topic has garnered the following questions: Is there sufficient research to support close reading at the elementary level? Can the concerns tied to close reading be addressed? How will close reading be implemented at the elementary level, and what modifications will be required?

**Support for Close Reading in Elementary School**

There is plenty of research to support the use of close reading at the middle school level. Close reading has been shown to improve student’s achievement when used as an intervention with middle school students. The question of elementary success is just beginning to be researched with promising results.

At the middle school level, a study conducted by Fisher and Frey used close reading as an intervention for struggling readers. Close reading was administered to the experimental group while the control group experienced other interventions. Not only did the experimental group experience a higher attendance rate, but the students in the group also progressed at least one or more levels on the annual state assessment.
An elementary school study conducted by Katz and Carlisle resulted in improved reading and comprehension skills among participants. Students who participated in this study received close reading instruction coupled with decoding skills. The decoding skills is of note as evidence suggests that close reading is not the sole reading strategy that should be used by elementary educators.

**Concerns over Close Reading**

Prior to adopting close reading as a strategy, several concerns and criticisms need to be addressed. The majority of concerns can be addressed by the simple notion that an effective teacher utilizes a variety of strategies in his or her teaching. Close reading is not intended to be the sole method of teaching reading comprehension. Close reading is designed to compliment other sound methods of teaching reading.

A benchmark of close reading teaching is short, complex texts. For students to perform repeated readings to delve deeper into the mean of the text, the text itself must be shorter in nature. Some critics have expressed concern that students will lose their desire to connect with longer texts. Some real world scenarios require students to engage in longer text. These concerns will be valid if educators solely use close reading in their classrooms. The reader’s purpose for reading establishes the method of instruction delivery.

Critic’s concern over the length of close reading texts also stems from the desire for students to learn to immerse themselves in reading and develop a life-long love for reading and learning. Critics assert the desire for students to long to find a deep, nourished pleasure in reading. While this is a valid goal of educators, the ability to read complex educational materials is necessary to function in society. Students will need the skills to
understand the abundance of informational texts that are accessible through technological advancements.

Encouragement to make personal connections and use background knowledge has long been standard in reading instruction. Close reading does not encourage connecting students to their background knowledge prior to reading, nor does it promote personal connections. Readers are encouraged to use the text itself to foster questions and acquire new meaning. Critics state that readers’ connections shape how they interact and view the text. Close reading proponents point out that personal connections have begun to dominate instruction. They suggest that close reading strengthens readers’ ability to think critically, while personal connections do not. Personal connections connect the reader to the text. Regardless, this concern is addressed when educators utilize a variety of strategies depending on the purpose for reading.

A major concern over close reading stems from the need for close reading created by the Common Core State Standards. This shift in teaching requirements will require proper teacher preparation. Critics are concerned that if districts do not adequately prepare educators for this shift through sufficient professional development, this will lead to significant bumps along the way. The answer to this concern has yet to be discovered.

Close Reading in the Elementary School

Some aspects of close reading do not need to be adjusted for use at the elementary level. Similar to the middle school model, short, complex texts will be at the heart of close reading lessons. Students will participate in repeated readings of the texts. Each subsequent reading will require students to utilize different strategies to determine the meaning of the text. Students will be allowed to annotate their texts and use questions to
deepen their understanding. Questions given by teachers are text-dependent, meaning the students will need to use the text to support their answer.

However, the way close reading is implemented in middle school classrooms does not translate directly to elementary classrooms. Modifications are needed. Elementary students lack the self-monitoring skills that older students possess. Through think alouds and modeling, elementary students can learn to be metacognitive and think about their own thinking during reading. Additionally, elementary students require instruction on strategies to apply when their comprehension breaks down. Modeling is an essential step to helping young students develop these close reading strategies. Researchers frequently suggest modeling based on formative assessments gathered in post-reading discussions.

Elementary close reading lessons might involve the use of picture books. To help students make connections between texts, picture book sets that are arranged around a common theme can aid instruction. The pictures in books can be analyzed to deepen the reader’s understanding.

Close reading lessons are to contain little to no frontloading. The first reading of the text is the introduction to the text. Researchers agree that at the elementary level this is not always possible. Teachers are best able to determine to what degree frontloading is required for each individual text. Knowledge of individual students and classroom needs guide these decisions.

Fisher and Frey’s case study looked into aspects of close reading that were already employed in elementary classrooms with little modification. Many elementary classrooms use close reading techniques such as, text dependent questions, and questions that require the reader to use support from the text to answer. In addition, the roles of a school
librarian are similar at the elementary and middle school level. The school librarian is seen as an instructional partner. A school librarian can scaffold close reading instruction by collaborating with teachers. This can mean collaborative lessons and a close reading literacy center located in the library. The school librarian’s understanding of the short, complex texts required by close reading is essential in aiding teachers to find appropriate close reading materials.

In conclusion, research and the Common Core State Standards support the practice of close reading. While there are some critics, close reading concerns have been addressed with valid support by respected educators. Rather than wait until middle school to implement close reading strategies, elementary teachers can establish the foundations for close reading even in primary grades. With the appropriate modifications, elementary students will find success using close reading to comprehend complex texts. Like the CCSS, close reading has a strong presence in the current educational climate.
WORKS CITED


*Education Research Complete [EBSCO].* Web. 5 June 2015.