

**Relationship Between Third Grade Teachers' and Students' Reports on Frequencies  
of Interactivity  
During Reading Instruction**

by

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## Abstract

According to many educators “formal education is essentially a social process” (Weinstein, 1991, p. 295) that is most effective when there is a two-way interaction that results in discourse among and between teachers and students. Observations of reading instruction, in particular, suggest that student-teacher interactions may play a major role in students’ literacy learning. Research from two separate, large scale studies revealed that effective reading teachers of elementary age students shared common characteristics that encouraged student-teacher interactivity (Allington & Johnston, 2002; Pressley, Allington, McDonald, Block, & Morrow, 2001). Some of the characteristics included the following: (a) incorporation of many and various reading-related activities; (b) teachers’ engagement with students on a personal basis; (c) respectful exchanges in which teachers allow students to function independently; and (d) freedom for students to discuss ideas about texts and literacy tasks with peers. This study draws on interactive characteristics of effective reading instruction identified primarily in first and fourth grade classrooms (Allington & Johnston, 2002; Pressley et al., 2001) to examine similarities and differences in students’ and teachers’ perceptions about the extent to which reading instruction in third grade classrooms includes interactivity. Parallel questionnaires for teachers and students were administered, and data were compared and contrasted on interactivity in reading instruction.

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## List of Abbreviations

U. S. United States

N.C.L.B No Child Left Behind



## Chapter I. Nature of the Problem

### **Introduction and Background**

In a long running study undertaken to describe teaching and learning in U.S. classrooms after the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), researchers involved in the Study of Early Child Care and Youth Development visited more than 2,500 elementary school classrooms in America. Children in grades one, three and five were observed as researchers recorded features of the opportunities children had for learning in various environments. Results from this study reported by Pianta (2007) included the researchers' conclusions that focusing on test performance and monitoring student learning were features of effective teaching. Conclusions also revealed that interactions fostered social skills, communications, critical thinking, and problem solving. According to Pianta, these types of interactions were characteristics of classrooms with high levels of student learning.

In a study of effective first and fourth grade reading teachers, Pressley, Allington, McDonald, Block, and Morrow (2001) and Allington and Johnston (2002) found common characteristics reflected in classrooms that consistently produced the highest scores in students' reading achievement. Teacher behaviors that were identified as factors promoting successful readers were: connecting the reading to the real lives of the students, modeling how to use comprehension strategies for students, having students paraphrase or summarize text, reading aloud to students, discussing meanings of texts,

and making sure the students understood the content. All of these characteristics of exemplary reading instruction involved interaction among and between the students and teachers and revealed patterns of classroom discourse about reading that were not dominated by the teacher.

In the studies of first and fourth grade classrooms, a prominent feature of instruction for exemplary reading teachers was the approach they took toward meeting each student's individual needs. These teachers were willing to adjust their instruction for students when necessary. The continual focus and concentration on skills children needed resulted in lessons that were appropriate and suited for students whether in whole or small groups. These two studies helped establish a growing body of research indicating that interactive teaching methods may produce greater learning gains in reading and suggesting that teachers should evaluate characteristics and levels of interactivity in their reading instruction and strive to engage students in interactive exchanges that promote learning to read and reading to learn (Allington & Johnston, 2002; Pressley et al., 2001).

For over a decade, teachers have been exposed to research identifying interactivity as an important component of effective reading instruction in professional development sessions and in books and articles for educators. As the researcher, I have received training for 20 years at the elementary school level in reading, along with my colleagues. The training and experiences in the classroom led me to question the types and amounts of interactive activities taking place. Many teachers have followed recommendations and include more interactivity in reading instruction and think of themselves as interactive teachers; however, there may actually be much less student

participation and exchange taking place during reading instruction than the teachers think. Therefore, this study was designed to investigate what students as well as teachers think about the amounts and kinds of interactivity that take place during reading instruction in their classrooms.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to compare students' and teachers' perceptions of interactivity in third grade reading lessons. Observations of reading instruction, in particular, suggest that student-teacher interactions may play a major role in students' literacy learning. Questionnaire techniques involved teachers in reflection about their own teaching and the extent to which they engage students in interactivity during reading instruction. Results provided data that can be used to determine if there are agreements or discrepancies between the teachers' and students' estimates of the amount and types of instruction that characterizes reading instruction in and across the participating classrooms.

### **Research Questions**

The following questions served as the framework for this study's investigation of the perceptions held by third grade students and their teachers about interactivity in reading instruction.

On a scale of one to five indicating frequencies ranging from never to always:

1. (a) How often do teachers say they engage students in a variety of activities that previous research has identified as components of interactive reading instruction, such as using many and varied reading activities, opportunities to

share with the teacher, promoting autonomy as readers, and opportunities to share with peers?

(b) How often do students say their teachers engage them in a variety of activities that previous research has identified as components of interactive reading instruction?

2. How are the teachers' and students' estimates of frequencies for the activities that previous research has identified as components of interactive reading instruction aligned or nonaligned?

3. Which components of interactivity, such as using many and varied reading activities, opportunities to share with the teacher, promoting autonomy as readers, and opportunities to share with peers, do the teachers and students agree or disagree upon as a part of their reading instruction?

### **Hypotheses**

The research design and data analysis for this study are aligned with statistical conventions based on the premise of the null hypothesis (Huck, 2004). Therefore, I predicted that the frequencies of teachers who said they engaged students in a variety of activities that previous research has identified as components of interactive reading instruction would be the same as the students who said that their teachers actually did engage students in a variety of activities that previous research has identified as components of interactive reading instruction. The results from data were subjected to post-hoc analyses to look at which components of interactivity teachers and students agreed or disagreed upon as a part of their reading instruction.

## **Methods**

This study compared the students' and teachers' perceptions of interactivity during reading lessons. Using questionnaires I developed, this research project involved teachers in reflection about their own teaching and the extent to which they engage students in interactivity during reading instruction. This study used questionnaires to examine students' responses to questions about the amounts and types of interactivity that take place during reading instruction in their classroom. Questionnaire results provided data that can be used to determine if there are agreements or discrepancies between the teachers' and students' estimates of the amount and types of instruction that characterizes reading instruction in and across the participating classrooms.

## **Description of Sample**

The elementary school involved in this study was in a small town with grades three through five housed in a rural area of the southeastern U.S. This convenience sample was accessible due to the school's location and it being the school in which I taught. The entire school contained a population of 630 students. All of the participating teachers were required to use the same reading series, Scott Foresman's *Reading Street*, with fidelity to the research-based scripted directions for implementation in the teachers' manual. Since the curriculum sequence, activities and materials for reading lessons were the same in all the classrooms, only the teaching styles should have been different. Students and teachers working with curriculum were asked parallel questions about the various activities and interactions they experience in their classrooms during reading instruction.

Eleven third grade classes were invited to participate in the study. There were 12

third grade classes housed in the school. Since I taught one of the third grade classes, it was not included as a source of data for this study. Therefore, only 11 classes and 11 teachers contributed data to the study. Each classroom typically had about 18 students, so 201 students and 11 teachers were invited to participate in the study.

### **Definitions of Terms**

The following terms were derived from literature related to the interactive teaching under examination in early educational classrooms. I relied on research and definitions published in online dictionaries and professional articles.

*Autonomy* - Independence or freedom, especially as of the will or one's actions (<http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/autonomy>).

*Interactive/Interactivity* - term used to refer to the kinds of exchanges believed to extend thinking and enhance learning. Interaction is viewed as “both a social event and a cognitive process” (Burns & Myhill, 2004, p. 36).

*Peer learning* - “The acquisition of knowledge and skill through the active helping and supporting among status equals or matched companions” (Topping, 2005, p. 631).

*Rich instruction*- Explaining word meanings in student-friendly language, providing multiple examples and multiple contexts, and requiring students to process words deeply by indentifying and explaining appropriate and inappropriate uses and situations and creating multiple contexts” (Beck & McKeown, 2007; p. 254).

*Think-alouds* - Teaching technique in reading instruction which enables teachers to demonstrate verbally for their students when and how to think and comprehend each part of the text (Block & Israel, 2004).

## **Limitations**

The numbers of teacher-student participants and the fact that participants represented only one school and grade level limited the potential to generalize results from this study to other populations. This study was an initial investigation of students' and teachers' perceptions of interactivity during reading instruction, and the findings may not be generalized to other teachers and students in other schools and grades because of the size and the lack of variability in the sample.

A second limitation was due to the fact that this study was done in one small community in the southeastern U.S.; therefore findings may not be generalized to more urban settings or even to other rural sites in other areas of the country. Although the questionnaire items were based on results from previous research into interactivity in reading instruction, the instruments I developed and used in this study have not been subjected to tests of reliability and validity. The use of researcher-generated questionnaires makes this study exploratory in nature and its results must be interpreted with caution but may be regarded as springboards or starting points for additional research on interactivity in reading instruction.

A third limitation involved the sense of constraint that the reading series, Scott Foresman's *Reading Street*, and the school system administration placed on teaching the series to fidelity. The reading series did have some interactive features, such as think-alouds built into the program; however, teachers may have perceived the structure of the program as a hindrance to their own freedom to teach in ways they preferred.

In spite of these limitations, this study has the potential to contribute to the knowledge base and existing body of research on interactivity in reading lessons. In

addition, the participating teachers and students will have the opportunity to evaluate the interactivity.

### **Assumptions**

The following assumptions I made as the researcher in regard to this study:

1. The subjects would provide honest, accurate, and complete answers to the Student and Teacher Questionnaires.
2. The use of one school system in Alabama would provide sufficient data to justify this exploratory study.
3. Participants would understand the survey items in the questionnaires I developed as the researcher.
4. The Student and Teacher Questionnaires were the appropriate tools for the study.
5. Participants' responses to the questionnaires were to some extent representative of responses that may be produced by larger numbers of third grade reading teachers and their students in similar circumstances and with similar curriculum materials and requirements.



## Chapter II. Review of Related Literature

### **Theoretical Framework**

Reading requires learning novel information. Reading comprehension draws upon oral language skills used for constructing and understanding extended stretches of discourse that convey the new information (Dickinson, 2001). The theoretical basis for interactive learning may be summed up like this:

“Theories of learning expounded by, in particular, Vygotsky (1972) and Bruner (1986), and the literature which grew out of this about the importance of talk in developing thinking and learning (Britton, 1970, Wells, 1986, Norman, 1992, Barnes & Todd, 1995, Mercer, 1995) used the term ‘interaction’ to refer to the kinds of exchanges believed to extend thinking and enhance learning.

Learners, they suggest, develop understanding in interactive, social situations, scaffolded by and in collaboration with others as they take on the culturally valued knowledge, and move towards the new learning” (Burns & Myhill, 2004).

Talking about text or getting children to think about the story in the classroom are keys for literacy growth (Beck & McKeown, 2001). These researchers found that listening to book language may be important, but talking about the ideas has proven even more important. Vygotsky (1978) pointed out that the quality of interplay between teacher and student was crucial for providing chances for learning to take place. These opportunities, according to Vygotsky, shaped thoughts, feelings, and experiences. The process involved in communication enhanced the lives of students and results in greater

understanding for students. Vygotsky (1978) also pointed out that the quality of interplay between teacher and student was crucial to affording chances for students to learn. Learners developed understanding in interactive, social situations, and new learning occurs as they collaborate with others using culturally valued knowledge (Burns & Myhill, 2004). Learning develops as students were encouraged to talk and think about their own learning (Bruner, 1986; Vygostky, 1972).

Constructivist theorists, such as Piaget (1965), also saw the need for interaction in the classroom. Piaget believed that no real intellectual activity occurs without free collaboration among individuals. Additionally, Piaget emphasized the necessity of peer interaction for children's cognitive development. Until interactions with peers occur, the child had few demanding situations that would force him to think of others and their intents or views. The importance of peer relationships in a child's development was an enduring theme in the empirical observations and theoretical work conducted by Piaget (1965). Piaget explained the potential impact that peer experiences could have in helping a child realize that his own understanding is overly personal and individualistic.

Constructive feedback from others is important because logic is built up step by step through a child's activities. Therefore, interactive settings enable children to engage in opportunities for greater development of reasoning (Piaget, 1973). Reason required cooperation in order for a child to situate himself with others (Piaget, 1965). Dickinson (2001) reported that in classrooms where there is more total talk, there is also more cognitively challenging talk by teachers and children. He found that in classrooms where there is more total talk, more organizational talking by students and teachers occur (Dickinson, 2001).

Since the benefits of talk, or interaction, exist in research and literature on effective reading instruction, there was a need to examine the perceptions of teachers and students on interactive learning. Often teachers' own ideas and perceptions about their teaching may be challenged by observations of others, even children.

### **Perceptions of Interactions in Reading**

The literature review in this chapter investigated research that has examined interactions between both teachers and students during reading instruction and establishes the theoretical underpinnings for pedagogy that includes interactivity. The search for understanding how teachers' engagement with students affects reading instruction has resulted in this review that is based primarily on four characteristics commonly demonstrated by effective teachers. Characteristics of interactivity exhibited by teachers identified as exemplary due to consistently high gains in student reading achievement include: (a) incorporation of many and various reading-related activities (such as reading aloud to students, using helpful strategies, and integrating activities-such as reading and writing) on a regular basis; (b) teachers' engagement with students on a personal basis; (c) opportunities for students to function autonomously; and (d) freedom for students to discuss ideas about texts and literacy tasks with peers (Pressley et al., 2001). The category headings and sections that follow are related to these four interactive characteristics of effective reading instruction and the content of each presents an overview of research and professional literature published thus far about these aspects of interactivity in reading instruction.

## **Interactivity through Many and Varied Reading-Related Activities**

Investigation of classroom dynamics and how group settings affect teaching has shown that the types of reading-related activities teachers provide are significant. Many important teacher effects occur indirectly through the tasks teachers establish, rather than directly through teachers' actions in the classroom. Often classrooms are filled with people, activity, and interruptions; many events taking place at the same time. Because classroom groups meet regularly, rules evolve for the behavior of teachers and students and decisions at one point have consequences for action in the future (Doyle, 1979). Arrangements of students for teaching reading may consist of whole group, small group, and one-on-one situations.

Additional research of reading activities conducted by Sancore (2005), discovered that in order to foster participation, effective reading teachers consider thoughtful activities such as using literature that promotes conversation and asking questions that stimulate responses from all children. The activities teachers utilize for reading instruction are valuable tools for learning engagement. In a study of first grade students, teachers were exceedingly effective when they used a variety of formats for instruction. Examples of activities identified in this research as lending themselves to active participation and interactivity are as follows: reading aloud to students, using helpful strategies, and integrating activities such as reading and writing (Allington & Johnston, 2002; Pressley et al., 2001).

### **Reading aloud.**

Reading aloud to children has been shown to be an effective method of teaching reading, since benefits from reading aloud include the development of a love of books,

knowledge of conventions of print, vocabulary development, and listening comprehension (Sipe, 2000). “By reading aloud, a teacher has an opportunity to expose students to material beyond their reading ability, develop word and vocabulary knowledge, support their making inferences and predictions, and evoke responses” (Pressley et al., 2001, p. 145).

According to McGee and Schickendanz (2007), “the way books are shared with children matters” when reading aloud (p. 742). Beck and McKeown (2007) described a need for what they call *rich instruction*. Rich instruction is “explaining word meanings in student-friendly language, providing multiple examples and multiple contexts, and requiring students to process words deeply by indentifying and explaining appropriate and inappropriate uses and situations and creating multiple contexts” (p. 254). Reading aloud provides all of these because adult read aloud book activities and conversations have a significant impact on children’s language-learning opportunities (Zeece, 2007).

Comprehension is more challenging for young children since often the ideas go beyond the here and now (Snow & Dickinson, 1991). Since the aural, or listening, comprehension ability of children is higher than their reading abilities (Beck & McKeown, 2001), significant comprehension is gained from hearing books read. Research over several decades has shown that reading comprehension can be enhanced by reading aloud to children (Rosenhouse, Feitelson, Kita, & Goldenstein, 1977). In a 1986 study, students in a read-aloud treatment groups outscored the children in the control group on measures of decoding, reading comprehension, and active use of language (Feitelson, Kita, & Goldstein, 1986).

Depending on the style of teaching, reading aloud may also provide vocabulary development (Brabham & Lynch-Brown, 2002). They stated that “findings confirm teacher explanations and student discussions as critical factors that benefit student’s learning of words and concepts and construction of meaning from texts read aloud in the early grades of elementary school” (p. 471). Research from McKeown, Beck, Omanson, and Pople (1985) reinforced the idea that it takes learning words is not easy. Beck and McKeown (2001) studied how children responded to instruction that required them to make decisions for newly learned words. Cunningham and Stanovich (1997) reported that vocabulary assessed in first grade predicted over 30% of reading comprehension variance in 11<sup>th</sup> grade; therefore, vocabulary instruction is extremely important. A need for teachers to scaffold the vocabulary of children, since there is a well-defined sequence to what words are learned, was reported by Biemiller and Slonim, (2001).

Dickenson (2001) reported that reading aloud was more effective when it involved asking and answering questions and making predictions rather than passively listening. Additionally, Dickinson and Smith (1994) also found that requiring children to reflect on the story content or language helped children understand what was being read; however, opportunities to discuss content and language have proven uncommon (Beck & McKeown, 2001). Giving children the chance to reflect allowed them to reason and this was helped by explanation, especially since children have difficulty interacting with decontextualized language.

### **Using helpful strategies.**

Effective comprehension strategies involved engagement by the teacher and students. Tobin (1984) reported that when teachers posed conceptual questions and

provided time to think, generalizing and conceptual thinking increased. Engaging children in strategies and techniques, such as *think-alouds* in reading instruction enabled teachers to demonstrate for their students when and how to think and comprehend each part of the text (Block & Israel, 2004). During a lesson using think-alouds, teachers stopped during oral reading to offer ideas about what they are thinking, and this was a way of modeling comprehension strategies (Harris & Hodges, 1995, p. 256). Teachers demonstrated the process so students would see how reading works (Israel, 2002; Pressley & Afflerbach, 1995). Thought processes of skilled readers will not be utilized by many students, especially those in the early grades, unless teachers explicitly modeled and demonstrated them (Block & Israel, 2004).

### **Integrating activities.**

Exemplary elementary school reading teachers also found ways to link the reading and writing process to teach skills simultaneously (Pressley, et al., 2001). Combining reading and writing instruction was a way that teachers have demonstrated the creative self expression that allows children to experience text for themselves. The processes of reading and writing were interrelated. These two literacy acts were described in reference to one another as two sides of the same process (Squire, 1983), as similar dynamic processes of meaning construction (Tierney & Pearson, 1984), and as the dual governors of inner speech that changed the way we talk to ourselves, how we feel and how we think (Moffett, 1984).

### **Interactivity through Opportunities for Students to Share with the Teacher**

Communication between the teacher and the student often provided enriching opportunities. Because the teacher's responses played a part in meeting the needs of

students socially and academically, the complexity of communication is a topic that was necessary to be examined and not underestimated (Denton, 2008). Successful teachers provided opportunities for students to share experiences and discuss new ideas during reading instruction (Allington & Johnston, 2002). The communicative experiences in educating young children formed the basis for whether or not a student takes an active role in his or her own education. Students' abilities to participate influenced opportunities to achieve academic success (Weinstein, 1991). The relationship between the teacher and the student determined the action and structure of the behavior patterns of the classroom setting.

Allington and Johnston (2002) found that excellent teachers used dialogue identified as being authentic, or real, to learn about their students. Instruction was more conversational and less interrogational, allowing students to respond with higher levels of thinking instead of fact finding in recall competition. The exemplary reading teachers in the study even admitted to students when they were unsure of answers, and they were willing to look up the correct answer and model reading and inquiry as learning tools. Allington and Johnston (2002) stated, "Their natural demonstrations of *how* literate people think as they read and write- including making errors and self correcting- made their own and their students' thinking available as models and for discussion" (p. 206). Guthrie (2008), too, has emphasized the importance of active exchanges, saying that informational language structure is more than just telling facts to students. He offered the idea that the relationship between teacher and student should be non-controlling and sensitive. Taylor, Peterson, Pearson, and Rodriguez (2002) found that those students whose teachers provided more *coaching* techniques on how to read and learn than *telling*



answers to reading questions grew in reading achievement more than students whose teachers provided more transmission of information than coaching.

Among the various types of interactions between teacher and child, questions played one of the most important roles in comprehension instruction (Parker & Hurry, 2008). Research by English, Margraves, & Islam (2002) revealed that student answers with three words or less were common for 90% of the time. In other words, the teachers verbally dominated all but 10% of the time devoted to instruction. Discussing the meanings of concepts in the stories enabled teachers to evaluate what students really need to learn. Yet, in most classrooms, teachers planned and did the talking.

Hardman, Smith, and Wall (2003) found in their study that the majority of the time teachers' questions were closed and factual and required only factual answers. This occurred, according to these researchers, even though teachers were aware that opportunities for building on background knowledge of students have proven valuable. They also found that 15% of student responses were of more than three words and only eight percent were longer than ten words, indicating that teachers' questions led to little if any use of language and thought by their students.

Parker and Hurry (2008) discovered that constructive teacher communication is crucial for students to reap the benefits of the use of comprehension strategies on text. Some of the characteristics that resulted in readers' becoming successful were the following: (a) connecting the reading to the real lives of the students, (b) modeling how to use comprehension strategies (such as with think-alouds) for students, (c) paraphrasing or summarizing text, (d) reading aloud to students, and (e) discussing meanings of stories to make sure the students understood (Allington & Johnston, 2002; Pressley et al., 2001).

The role of real-world experiences in reading is important because of its contribution to conceptual understandings (Guthrie & Alao, 1997). The integration of content in reading conceptual and real-world contexts helped set the stage for motivation and planning purposes for reading and learning.

Teachers who effectively taught students to relate reading to everyday life, and continued this over time, allowed students the opportunity to gain a belief in their own agency for reading (Ford, 1992). Teachers who provided real-life examples helped students to relate the text to themselves and to their own lives. Research by Douglas (2008) revealed that some of the methods and techniques used by effective early education teachers included making deep and personal connections to students, interacting positively with students, supporting appropriate risk-taking by students, encouraging creativity, and generally setting a positive tone in the classroom.

### **Interactivity that Promotes Autonomy as Readers**

Wilson, Pianta and Stuhlman (2007) characterized a good classroom climate as one that encompasses a warm, child-centered, positive environment in which the teacher exhibits sensitivity to each student's emotional and instructional needs and structures instruction to encourage students' autonomy and self-control. These researchers concluded that autonomy-supportive environments promote cohesiveness and help students feel comfortable rather than neglect and frustrate students (Wilson, Pianta & Stuhlman, 2007). Allowing students the freedom to make decisions was important for young children, but the degree of risk a student was willing to take varied from classroom to classroom (Simco, 1995).

Classrooms also varied in the number of opportunities students have to use self regulation. For example, teachers who work more frequently with small groups than with the class allow students to be more actively involved (Downer, Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 2007). Freedom to make decisions allowed children to feel more confident and interested in reading. Grolnick and Ryan (1987) found that motivation was increased when children were allowed to choose which activities they wanted to participate in. Although choosing activities meant more than just selecting books to read alone, students reported that they enjoyed books more when they had the freedom to select them (Gambrell, Codling, & Palmer, 1996). If students perceived that they have options and feel confident in exercising their freedom, their self direction was more likely to increase, and there was more intrinsic motivation for reading (Guthrie & Alao, 1997).

Reeve (2006) found that “autonomy support revolves around finding ways to enhance students’ freedom to coordinate their inner motivational resources with how they spend their time in the classroom - its opposite is controlling behavior” (p. 231). Teachers’ interactive styles ranged from being extremely controlling to providing high levels of support for student autonomy. Students’ personal interests and integrated values were more likely to be met when they are given the opportunity for autonomy (Reeve, 2006).

Active exchange between teacher and child produced opportunities for autonomous behavior and self extended learning (Reeve, 2006). As ideas were expressed and discussed, autonomy became a functional skill that was learned in the classroom. Self expression was an aspect of reading instruction that helped students become more motivated (Guthrie & Alao, 1997). Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger and Tarule (1986)

stated, “If students are empowered to be self expressive, they view all knowledge as contextual, experience themselves as creators of knowledge, and value subjective and objective strategies for knowing” (p. 15).

Genishi (2001) emphasized that teachers and children interpret what happens in classrooms from their own viewpoints. If students had the freedom to respond to questions, the student was more likely to perceive the teacher as being genuinely interested in the student’s answer. As teachers take an interest in students’ apprehension of text, students responded and took an interest in text themselves (Sandstrom, 2005).

### **Interactivity through Opportunities to Share with Peers**

Even though peer learning can be traced back over centuries, much has changed in the last 25 years (Topping, 2005). “In recent years, there has been much more emphasis upon equal-opportunity involvement, engaging all members of the educational community”, without exception (p. 634). Topping, 2005, defined peer learning as the acquisition of knowledge and skill through the active helping and supporting among status equals or matched companions. Peer learning involved people from similar social groupings who are not professional teachers helping each other to learn and learning themselves by so doing. According to Topping, (2005) the benefits of peer interactions produces explicit reinforcement for learning. “Explicit reinforcement might stem from within the partnership or beyond it, by way of verbal and/or non-verbal praise, social acknowledgement and status, official accreditation, or even more tangible reward” (p. 638). Socializing with peers provided opportunities that no other experience provided.

Although peer learning activities did not guarantee a balance in learning, the thrust of research on peer learning showed that when peers engage in dialogues,

discussions, and even arguments the interactions can be beneficial to students. Evidence showed that enabling a student to interact and co-construct knowledge in the classrooms did not happen readily in whole class lessons (Burns & Myhill, 2004). These researchers suggested that the teachers use “differing forms and functions of language to enable children to think and explore their learning” through real-life dialogue is needed (p. 48). The emphasis was placed on teacher-to-child discourse, which took place in interactive situations (Burns & Myhill, 2004; Galton, Hargreaves, Comber, Wall, D., & Pell, 1999; Hardman, et al., 2003; Hargreaves, Moyles, Merry, Paterson, & Sarries, 2002; Smith, Johnson & Johnson, 1981; Staarman, Krol & Van der Meijden, 2005).

Topping (2005) found that peer learning involves conflict and challenge, at the same time making heavy demands on communication skills. Understanding, as it relates to the task, varied from child to child. Peer learning activities were necessary because no two individuals can ever be at the same level of readiness for a given experience (Weinstein, 1991). Additional research by Brown and Palincsar (1982) found that reading comprehension improved using reciprocal learning methods. Studies of seventh grade readers with reading comprehension problems showed marked increases when students were placed in situations in which they were required to explain and defend their own views. These “situations that encouraged reflection” produced changes in thinking and improved in reading comprehension (Brown & Palincsar, 1986, p. 6).

### **Summary**

In summary, the benefits of talk, or interaction, exist in research and literature on effective reading instruction. Therefore, a need to examine the perceptions of teachers and students on interactive learning was present. Research from two separate, large scale

studies revealed that effective reading teachers of elementary age students shared common characteristics that encouraged student-teacher interactivity (Allington & Johnston, 2002; Pressley et al., 2001). The research-based characteristics which were investigated included the following areas: (a) incorporation of many and various reading-related activities; (b) teachers' engagement with students on a personal basis; (c) respectful exchanges in which teachers allow students to function independently; and (d) freedom for students to discuss ideas about texts and literacy tasks with peers.

## Chapter III. Methodology

### **Introduction**

This study compared the students' and teachers' perceptions of interactivity in reading lessons. Using questionnaire techniques, this research project involved teachers in reflection about their own teaching and the extent to which they engage students in interactivity during reading instruction. Although teachers may have made efforts to include more interactivity in reading instruction and think of themselves as interactive teachers, their students may have different perceptions about interactivity during reading lessons. Therefore this research study used questionnaires to examine teachers' and students' responses to items pertaining to the amounts and types of interactivity that take place during reading instruction. Questionnaire results provided data that was used to determine if there were agreements or discrepancies between the teachers' and students' estimates of the amount and types of instruction that characterizes reading instruction in and across the participating classrooms. Questionnaire items were derived from characteristics of effective teachers of reading in research reported by Allington and Johnston (2002) and Pressley et al. (2001).

Prior to beginning this research project, drafts of the parallel questionnaires for teacher and students were field tested with two classes of fourth graders and one class of third graders. These participants were not involved in the study. The third grade class was my own class who were excluded, and the fourth grade classes had separate goals and objectives in their reading curriculum. The purposes of this field test were to identify

any items and terminology children may have found confusing and to determine procedures requiring students to independently read and respond to the questionnaire appropriate for children. Some minor changes to format and word choice as well as the decision to read the questionnaire aloud to students resulted from the field test.

Permission to conduct the research study was obtained from the principal and the superintendent. The following steps were used to obtain consent from participants, ensure participants' anonymity, and code and analyze the data.

Step 1: Permission from parents of each third grade child was obtained from written consent forms from Auburn University (see Appendix C) before administering the questionnaires.

Step 2: Permission from teachers of third grade at the elementary school was obtained.

Step 3: Since the objective of the study was to determine if the perceptions of teachers and the perceptions of their students were similar or different when they are asked to report on interactivity during reading instruction, it was necessary to code students to their teachers in order to correctly determine outcomes of results.

Step 4: A teacher questionnaire was distributed to each of the eleven regular third grade classroom teachers. The teacher was asked to leave the room to complete their questionnaire while I administered the student questionnaire.

Step 5: A student questionnaire was completed as I read it aloud to the eleven classes of third graders during each session.

Step 6: Students were assigned a number prior to distribution of the questionnaire. Students from the corresponding teacher's classroom were numbered and matched to the



teacher's questionnaire. This helped me match the students to their teachers.

Step 7: Once all of the questionnaires were collected, results were analyzed using the Chi-Square statistical procedure.

### **Sample and Participant Selection**

The data was collected from 11 teachers and 139 students who attended a school in a small town in the southeastern U.S. Teachers were invited to participate and informed that the students in their classrooms would be asked to participate as well. Eleven third grade classes were invited to participate in the study. There are 12 third grade classes housed in the school. I taught one of the classrooms, therefore, my class was not included as a source of data for this study. Eleven classes and 11 teachers contributed data to the study. Third grade was selected because the research used as a background for the study involved first and fourth grade. The third grade level addresses the gap that may exist between beginning readers and those who have become more proficient.

To gather the data on teachers' and students' perceptions of interactivity in reading lessons, each teacher and student was given a questionnaire. I read the students' questionnaires aloud. The teachers were not present when their own students completed the questionnaire. A statistical analysis was performed on the questionnaire data to determine if the teachers' and students' perceptions were the same.

The only criterion for participation in this study was that the participant be a teacher or student in reading classes in third grade in a specific school in Alabama. Teachers were asked to complete the questionnaire while their students were being administered the questionnaire by me. To reduce the possibility that students would

decline to be volunteers and thereby avoid sampling bias, I followed the recommendations of Rosenthal and Rosnow (1975) to improve the rate of assent and student participation as respondents to the questionnaire. These methods include making the appeal for volunteers interesting and non-threatening and emphasizing the theoretical and practical importance of the study. To reduce the chances of falsified responses, each participant was assured that he or she would remain anonymous (Gall, Bor, & Gall, 1996). Confidentiality was accomplished by assigning code numbers based on the number of students and teachers. For example, Teacher A was assigned a range of 1-18 for her students. Participants were also assured that under no circumstances would their individual test data be revealed to anyone other than me or my committee members.

The elementary school where the research was conducted is in a small town in Alabama and houses grades three through five. The entire school contained a population of 630. All of the participating teachers were required to use the same reading series, Scott Foresman's *Reading Street*. Since the curriculum sequence of activities and materials for reading lessons were the same in all the classrooms, only the teaching styles should have been different. Students exposed to the same curriculum were asked questions parallel of those for teachers on the varying activities and interactions in the classrooms during reading interaction. The study took place in May, so the students were knowledgeable about the types and amounts of interactivity taking place in their classes.

Among the teacher participants, all of the teachers were female. Nine of the 11 teachers were Caucasian, and two of the teachers were African American. Every teacher, except one, had at least a Masters' level teaching degree. The average number of years of experience was 19 years. Table 1 represents the data of teacher demographics.

Table 1

*Demographic Data of Teachers*

Categories	(n=11)
<b>Gender</b>	
Female	11
Male	0
<b>Highest Degree</b>	
Bachelor	1
Masters	6
Specialist	4
Doctorate	0
<b>Number of Years Taught</b>	
0-5 Years	2
6-10 Years	1
10- 15 Years	0
15-20 Years	0
More than 20	8

Two hundred one students were invited to participate in the study. One hundred thirty-nine students responded to the survey. Fifty-six percent of the students were African American, 39% of the student population was Caucasian, four percent were Hispanic, one percent was Asian, and one percent was Indian. The population of males

was 51%, and the population of females was 49%. Table 2 represents the data of the student demographics.

Table 2

*Demographic Data of Students*

Categories	(n=139)
<b>Gender</b>	
Female	68
Male	71
<b>Ethnicity</b>	
African American	78
Caucasian	53
Hispanic	4
Asian	1
Indian	3

**Research Design and Instrumentation**

The Teacher Questionnaire Reflecting Teacher Interaction and the Student Questionnaire Reflecting Teacher Interaction were the instruments given to question the teachers and the students. The two questionnaires yielded parallel sources of information. I read all of the questionnaires for students aloud. Teachers read and responded to the questionnaire independently. Each questionnaire was a 20-item paper and pencil measure that typically required only 10-15 minutes completion. The questionnaires used a Likert scale with response choices that ranged from *Never* to *Always*. No names were on the actual

questionnaire, but students were assigned numbers to identify their third grade class.

The instruments have not been extensively researched for validity and reliability. However, the items were derived from research on interactive characteristics of exemplary teachers and instruction previously done by Allington and Johnston (2002) and Pressley, et al. (2001). I created the instruments because resources for students' and teachers' questionnaires on interactivity in reading instruction were very limited. The lack of measures to assess children's perceptions was the reason for creating the instrument. Research on child perception in classrooms is mostly used to assess teacher-student relationships (Mantzicopoulos & Neuharth-Pritchett, 2003; Pianta, 1999).

### **Data Analysis Procedures**

All questionnaires were typed and labeled according to the coding scheme described in Chapter 3. I rated all data according to responses on each item. Chi-Square Tests were computed on response frequencies of students and teachers in order to test whether students and teachers significantly differed with regard to their answers to the questionnaire. Chi-square tests if the frequencies of responses are significantly better than chance. Any significance results were identified in Chapters 4 and 5. Version 18 of SPSS was used to calculate Chi-Square Tests.

## Chapter IV. Results

The main purpose of this study was to compare students' and teachers' perceptions of interactivity in third grade reading lessons. A growing body of research indicates that interactive teaching methods may produce greater learning gains in reading and suggests that teachers should evaluate characteristics and levels of interactivity in their reading instruction and strive to engage students in interactive exchanges that promote learning to read and reading to learn (Allington & Johnston, 2002; Pressley et al., 2001).

In this chapter the research questions were investigated in light of the data. The research questions for the study were designed to address the following topics: how often teachers and students reported engagement in interactive types of reading instruction, how teachers' and students' estimations of interactivity during reading lessons are aligned or nonaligned, and which components of interactivity teachers and students agree or disagree upon as part of interactive reading instruction. The final section provides a general summary of the results.

This research study was conducted using two parallel questionnaires for third grade teachers and their students. Honest responses were expected from each teacher and student about how they perceived interactivity in reading lessons. Items on the questionnaires required answers regarding interactive aspects that were identified in the review of research on interactivity in exemplary reading instruction presented in Chapter 2. The questionnaires contained a scale with which teachers and students rated frequencies for the amount of interactivity during reading instruction for each item.

Several items were constructed as a set for each of four broad categories of interactions during reading lessons, and each of these sets of items made up a subcategory and provided a data set with means for statistical analyses. These subcategories were: (a) the use of a variety of reading activities, (b) opportunities for students to share with the teacher during reading, (c) student autonomy as readers, and (d) peer collaboration during reading.

Table 3 shows the description of the sample and overall statistics of the sample. Table 3 presents the descriptive statistics with the mean scores and standard deviations for students' and teachers' responses. The means and standard deviations were derived by recording responses as high or low. A cut-off point was set at 10 since each question had five options that produced responses ranging from zero to four. For each subcategory (Varied Reading Activities, Students Share with Teacher, Autonomy as Readers, and Students Share with Peers) there were five questions, so there were 20 total points possible for scores within each subcategory. Therefore, a score below 10 was considered low and a score above 10 was considered high.

Table 3

*Descriptive Statistics*

Subcategories	Student			Teacher		
	n	M	SD	n	M	SD
Varied Reading Activities	139	12.83	(3.21)	11	17.09	(1.64)
Students Share with Teacher	139	11.45	(3.39)	11	15.27	(2.97)
Autonomy as Readers	139	10.04	(3.76)	11	13.91	(2.88)
Students Share with Peers	139	10.72	(3.56)	11	13.91	(2.21)

**Findings Related to Research Question 1**

**How often do teachers and their students say they engage students in a variety of activities that previous research has identified as components of interactive reading instruction?**

The first research question related to the frequency or amount of interactivity that teachers and their students perceived as occurring in the classroom during reading instruction. Results from the questionnaire overall showed that teachers' reports were much higher than students' reports when frequencies of interactive reading activities were estimated for the same classrooms (see Table 4). The range of teachers' high responses was from 81.8% to 100%. Teachers' responses indicated that they thought



they used many interactive reading activities almost all the time. Students' high responses ranged from 38.8% to 79.1%, and the spread was much wider and lower than that for teachers, indicating quite a difference in the perception of the amount and frequency of interactions during reading reported by students and their teachers. Table 4 presents the response totals as percentages for each set of subcategory items in the questionnaire.

Table 4

*Percentages for Students' Responses and Teachers' Responses*

Subcategories	Students		Teachers	
	Low	High	Low	High
Varied Reading Activities	20.9%	79.1%	0	100%
Students Share with Teacher	34.5%	65.5%	9.1%	90.9%
Autonomy as Readers	61.2%	38.8%	18.2%	81.8%
Students Share with Peers	48.2%	51.8%	9.1%	90.9%

**Findings Related to Research Question 2**

**How are the teachers' and students' estimates of frequencies for the activities that previous research has identified as components of interactive reading instruction aligned or nonaligned?**

The second research question asked about the extent to which teachers' and students' estimates of frequencies for interactivity during reading were or were not in

agreement. The  $p$ -value measures the likelihood that a finding occurred by chance. A  $p$ -value of  $<0.05$  means there is less than a 5% chance that the result is due to error. The significance level was changed from  $<.05$ , since more than one test was given. For each test, there was a risk of 5% as the Type I Error. Since there were 11 tests, the total Type I Error could be up to 55%. In order to control the Type I Error, the decision was made to divide the Type I Error by 11. Therefore, the significance level was changed to  $0.05/11$ , or 0.005 (not .05). This method is called the Bonferroni's correction method based on Bonferroni's Inequality (Stevens, 1992). Eleven classes responded to the questionnaire, therefore the .05 significance level was divided by 11 for the each subtest (see Table 5).

Results for the subcategory set that included items related to the presence of many and varied reading activities were not significantly different for teachers and students ( $\chi^2 = 2.845$ ,  $df = 1$ ,  $p = .092$ ). Students' and teachers' estimates about frequencies of opportunities for students to share with the teacher were not significantly different ( $\chi^2 = 3.000$ ,  $df = 1$ ,  $p = .083$ ). Additionally, students' and teachers' reports of opportunities for students to share with peers during reading lessons were not significantly different ( $\chi^2 = 6.292$ ,  $df = 1$ ,  $p = .012$ ). Therefore, I failed to reject the null hypothesis in these subcategories.

One subcategory produced statistically significant differences in results for the students' and teachers' perceptions (see Table 5). The subcategory that included items asking about amounts of time students were able to operate with autonomy as readers yielded significantly different responses from teachers and students ( $\chi^2 = 7.726$ ,  $df = 1$ ,  $p = 0.005$ ). Table 5 presents the overall statistics per subcategory and the results of Chi-

Square test comparing students' and teachers' response frequencies. The null hypothesis was rejected for this subtest.

Table 5

*Chi-Square test for whole sample (compare teachers and students)*

Subcategories	$\chi^2$	df	<i>p</i> -value
Varied Reading Activities	2.845	1	0.092
Students Share with Teacher	3.000	1	0.083
Autonomy as Readers	7.726	1	0.005
Students Share with Peers	6.292	1	0.012

### **Findings Related to Research Question 3**

#### **Which components of interactivity do the teachers and students agree or disagree upon as a part of their reading instruction?**

Table 6 contains the Chi-Square test results (comparing students' and teachers' responses) for each subcategory and each class. The third research question asked which components the teachers and students agree or disagree upon as part of their reading instruction. Using Bonferroni's Inequality method dividing .05 by 15 (4 subtests and 11 classes), the level of significance was set at  $p < 0.003$ . Additionally, when the Type I Error (0.05) was divided by 11 ( $p < 0.004$ ) for only the number of classes, the results were the same. In the subtest for varied reading activities, 7 out of eleven classes reported that there was a difference in agreement between teachers and students. Eight classes showed a significant difference in the subtest involving opportunities for students to share with

the teacher during reading lessons. Overwhelmingly, the subcategory called autonomy as readers showed a statistically significant difference in every class. The null hypothesis was rejected for this subtest. The results for sharing with peers revealed that only one class had agreement between teachers and students about interactivity as part of their reading lessons.

Table 6

*Chi-Square test for each class (compare teacher and his/her students)*

Class	Subcategory	$\chi^2$	df	<i>p</i> -value
1	Reading	9.82	1	0.002
	Share	17.45	1	0.000
	Autonomy	27.27	1	0.000
	Peers	69.82	1	0.000
2	Reading	17.07	1	0.000
	Share	38.40	1	0.000
	Autonomy	180.27	1	0.000
	Peers	106.67	1	0.000
3	Reading	17.07	1	0.000
	Share	38.40	1	0.000
	Autonomy	68.27	1	0.000
	Peers	52.27	1	0.000
4	Reading	0.00	1	1.000
	Share	1.11	1	0.292
	Autonomy	40.00	1	0.000
	Peers	10.00	1	0.002
5	Reading	1.06	1	0.303
	Share	17.07	1	0.000
	Autonomy	26.67	1	0.000
	Peers	17.07	1	0.000

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(table continues)

Table 6 (continued)

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Class	Subcategory	$\chi^2$	df	<i>p</i> -value
6	Reading	0.00	1	1.000
	Share	4.57	1	0.033
	Autonomy	18.29	1	0.000
	Peers	10.29	1	0.001
7	Reading	26.39	1	0.000
	Share	51.72	1	0.000
	Autonomy	85.50	1	0.000
	Peers	38.00	1	0.000
8	Reading	9.56	1	0.002
	Share	26.56	1	0.000
	Autonomy	128.56	1	0.000
	Peers	179.56	1	0.000
9	Reading	0.00	1	1.000
	Share	1.09	1	0.296
	Autonomy	69.82	1	0.000
	Peers	4.36	1	0.067
10	Reading	27.08	1	0.000
	Share	39.00	1	0.000
	Autonomy	87.75	1	0.000
	Peers	53.08	1	0.000
11	Reading	17.60	1	0.000
	Share	39.60	1	0.000
	Autonomy	89.10	1	0.000
	Peers	89.10	1	0.000

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## Summary

Finally, the goal of the study was to investigate the perceptions of students and teachers about interactions taking place in reading lessons. The data indicated discrepancies and similarities between students' and teachers' perceptions of amounts and types of interactivity during reading instruction. The first research question reflecting how often teachers and their students said they engaged students in a variety of activities showed differences in perceptions according to percentages. Although the sample size was small, the percentage of teachers' responses were much higher than the students' responses, indicating that the teachers perceived themselves as using interactive teaching methods in reading lessons much more than students reported. For the second research question concerning the teachers' and students' estimates of frequencies for the activities, the subcategories that included items asking about amounts of time students were able to operate with autonomy as readers yielded different responses from teachers and students. Concerning the third research question about whether the teachers and students agreed or disagreed upon the various interactive aspects as a part of their reading instruction, there was evidence of statistically significant differences in teachers' and students' responses in every subtest. Furthermore, autonomy as readers was a subcategory in which every class showed a statistically significant difference in perceptions. Possible limitations to and explanations for these findings, recommendations for further research, and educational implications related to interactivity during reading instruction are discussed in the next chapter.

## Chapter V. Discussion of Results

### **Introduction**

This study explored interactive teaching techniques in third grade classrooms and whether the teachers and students reported similar or different amounts of interactive reading activities and methods taking place in the classrooms they shared. The students and teachers responded to questionnaire items about uses of (a) interactive techniques through many and varied reading activities, (b) the opportunities for students to share ideas with their reading teacher, (c) times for independent, autonomous practice by students during reading, and (d) conversations for students to share ideas about reading with peers. The research questions for this study were based on findings from a group of researchers who observed and recorded interactions exhibited by exemplary teachers of reading in many classrooms across the United States (Allington & Johnston, 2002; Pressley et al., 2001). Each of the four sets of items related to interactivity during reading lessons comprised a category or subcategory for statistical analysis of the data.

### **Summary of the Study and Findings**

Working with the null hypotheses, I predicted that the reports about the degree of engagement in interactive activities and use of interactive strategies during reading instruction would not be statistically different for teachers and their students. However, Chi-Square analyses revealed that every subcategory showed differences in perceptions of teachers and students. One subcategory showed differences in every class' responses.

The data indicated that there was a statistically significant difference in the perceptions of teachers and students in the subcategory titled many and varied activities during reading in seven out of 11 classes. Students and teachers agreed the most about this subtest. This could indicate that the teachers, in general, were using various techniques, such as read alouds and other enriching literacy activities. Although suggestions for such activities are offered in the teachers' edition of Scott Foresman's *Reading Street*, it is the teachers' decision, often influenced by time factors, as to whether or not to include these literacy activities. The activities the students were asked about were: explanation techniques to explain stories, chances to read alone, opportunities for students to write about what has been read, and comprehension strategies which help students build meaning from text.

The data indicated that there was a statistically significant difference in perceptions of teachers and students in the area of opportunities to share with the teacher during reading. In eight out of 11 classes, teachers and students responses differed. The reason could possibly be because most of the interaction took place in reading lessons involving the whole class. Since most students also recorded that they interacted little with peers, the common practice of teacher-dominated lessons may have been the reason for this result.

The data overwhelmingly indicated that there was a statistically significant difference in perceptions of teachers and students about the opportunities for student autonomy during reading. These differences may be due to the way reading lessons are structured and presented in the Scott Foresman's *Reading Street* program. Teachers must follow the teacher's manual and use the textbook in ways that teach the program with



fidelity and consistency across classrooms. Since the reading program and prescribed use of the basal reading anthology gives students little, if any, choices for reading selections, student autonomy during reading may be perceived as minimal by students. However, teachers may have perceived the independent reading activities and options that are included in the program's lessons as autonomy in reading, and that may explain why most teachers thought they allowed autonomy to readers (82%), while only 34% of students agreed they were allowed freedom for autonomy or independence (see Table 4).

The students responded to items that did not only involve the choices of activities, though. The items on the questionnaire asked students if they were allowed to make their own decisions during reading, choose activities on their own, figure out things by themselves, and have the freedom to say what they thought. Students did not perceive themselves as having these freedoms, but the teachers indicated that their lessons allowed the children to make decisions about reading.

The data indicated that there was a statistically significant difference in the perception of teachers and students in the area of opportunities to interact with peers during reading in 10 out of 11 classes. Even though teachers may follow the script, peer interaction could likely have taken place during center times and small groups, which are a required part of the Scott Foresman's *Reading Street* program. Time constraints or rigid classroom management techniques may have caused the discrepancy between students' and teachers' responses to the items in this category or subcategory.

### **Connections Between Present Findings and Prior Research**

According to McCombs (2008) one of the difficulties with the type of research presented in this study is that "few instruments are available to assess young children's

perceptions of their teachers' classroom practices" (p. 28). However, previous research has shown that young children's input can provide a valuable source of information about practices that influence their motivation and learning (Perry, Donohue, & Weinstein, 2007; Perry & Weinstein, 1998; & Weinstein, 1998).

Studies that deal with children's experiences and how they feel about their own abilities are more common than studies that actually focus on students' perceptions about lessons. The emphasis has been placed on teacher-to-child discourse, which takes place in interactive situations (Burns & Myhill, 2004; Galton, Hargreaves, Comber, Wall, D., & Pell, 1999; Hardman, et al., 2003; Hargreaves, Moyles, Merry, Paterson, & Sarries, 2002; Smith, Johnson & Johnson, 1981; Staarman, Krol & Van der Meijden, 2005). Most studies involving student reports are not trying to find out perceptions of teachers and their students, rather investigations of teacher-student relationships in learning environments is more common. Entwistle and Tait (1990) pointed out that student perceptions directly relate to how much is learned and the effectiveness of the learning environment. Trigwell, Prosser, and Waterhouse (1999) discovered that teachers' conceptions of their own teaching influenced ways the students approached learning.

The results of this study presented interesting findings that revealed comparison between students' and teachers' perceptions of the same reading lessons. Teachers tended to consider themselves more interactive in their teaching practices than did their students. Further research of this type is needed to find out more about how perceptions of practices are similar or different for teachers and students and to determine if data from surveys such as the one used in this study may be used to help teachers become

more aware of students perceptions about the extent to which they include interactivity in reading instruction.

### **Implications For Educators**

The importance of student's active participation in learning experiences has been well documented. If teachers are to find ways to make instruction more child centered and interactive, they must be encouraged to access or be introduced to research that reports the benefits of interactive instructive and empirically supports effective ways to include the child in the reading and learning process (Allington & Johnston, 2002; Pressley et al., 2001; Sancore, 2005). Often the best mirror for educators is the image students see. Although students may be young, their perceptions matter and can be valuable sources of data that informs teachers and helps them reflect on and improve their reading instruction.

One implication that can be drawn from the differences in the perceptions of students and their teachers is that more opportunities for interaction on the part of the students may be needed during reading instruction. Teachers tend to dominate conversation and classroom talk (English, Margraves, & Islam, 2002). Although teachers may perceive themselves as being highly interactive in their teaching, there may actually be much less student participation and exchange taking place during reading instruction than the teachers think. Therefore, this study was designed to investigate what students as well as teachers think about the amounts and kinds of interactivity that take place during reading instruction in their classrooms. Perhaps a concentrated effort to allow students more opportunities to talk and share ideas with each other would be a good start. Children often learn by using language, and this informal teaching may be very valuable

for teachers to allow. Teachers have been exposed to research identifying interactivity as an important component of effective reading instruction in professional development sessions and in books and articles for educators. It would be beneficial to allow the freedom for students to share in teaching that offers reciprocal interactions.

### **Limitations of the Study**

The numbers of teacher-student participants and the fact that participants represent only one school and grade level limit the potential to generalize results from this study to other populations. Further, using an alternative analytical procedure other than Chi Square that was more stringent may have affected the present significance findings. This study is an initial investigation of students and teachers perceptions of interactivity during reading instruction, and the findings may not be generalized to other teachers and students in other schools and grades because of the size and the lack of variability in the sample.

A second limitation is due to the fact that this study was conducted in one small town in the southeastern U.S.; therefore findings may not be generalized to more urban settings or even to other small towns in the country. Although the questionnaire items were based on results from previous research on interactivity in reading instruction, the instruments used in this study have been developed by myself, the researcher, and have not been subjected to tests of reliability and validity. The use of researcher-generated questionnaires makes this study exploratory in nature, and its results must be interpreted with caution. The results may be regarded as springboards or starting points for additional research on interactivity in reading instruction.

A third limitation involves the sense of constraint the reading series, Scott Foresman's *Reading Street*, and the school system administrators place on teaching the series to fidelity. Third grade is the first year for children to take part in high-stakes testing, so teachers may have felt pressured to follow the program strictly. The reading series does have some interactive features built into the program; however, teachers may have perceived the structure of the program as a hindrance to their own freedom to teach in interactive ways. In spite of these limitations, this study has the potential to contribute to the knowledge base and existing body of research on interactivity in reading lessons.

### **Recommendations**

The findings of this study are only concentrated on one school at one particular time. During the process of obtaining literature and prior research, a clear need for more research involving perceptions, especially of students, was discovered. This study only presented quantitative data. It would be very effective to research the in-depth aspects underlying the research data. Therefore, more research using qualitative methods would be beneficial for the educational community. Future research could possibly include the following recommendations:

1. Consideration should be given to determine if the teachers have the flexibility within the constraints of the Scott Foresman's *Reading Street* program to adjust their practices to allow more autonomy, including choices for the students.
2. Since research has shown that teachers who work more frequently with small groups than with the whole class allow students to be more actively involved (Downer, Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 2007), maybe small groups could be used for longer periods of time or more frequently.

3. Consideration should be given to determine if the teachers have the flexibility within the constraints of the Scott Foresman's *Reading Street* program to adjust their practices to allow more peer interaction for the students. Perhaps modifications could be made within the same structure of the small group times to ensure the children share ideas with each other more.

4. Similarly, a closer look into what is required and expected from the administration may give teachers more freedom to allow more autonomy and peer interaction. This could possibly occur without major changes to curriculum or class structure. An emphasis on these research-based constructs could be made.

5. Professional development opportunities may be offered for providing more autonomous and peer-related activities in third grade level classrooms. Teachers may need ideas in order to incorporate these constructs into their teaching. The ideas could include simple ways to create more involvement among students.

6. This study should be replicated in other school systems in order to determine whether the interactive strengths and weaknesses are common in other situations. Additionally, it would be beneficial to replicate the study in systems that utilize the Scott Foresman's *Reading Street* series.

7. Future research should determine if making changes to either the mindset of teachers or the manipulation of the reading curriculum produces different results.

8. Since this is only a quantitative study, the perceptions of teachers and students could be studied qualitatively and possibly be used for assisting college students and educators in the future.

## **Conclusions**

The teachers in the study apparently tried to supply a variety of literacy experiences in reading lessons. The presence of reading activities, such as reading aloud, discussing new words and ideas, having chances to write about what they have read, and being provided with enriching discussion about new words and ideas in reading was the category that showed the most agreement between teachers and students. In Beck and McKeown's (2007) description of rich instruction, they found it was important to explain meanings of words and create multiple contexts in which children identify appropriate and inappropriate uses and situations to use words. Rich instruction was evidently taking place.

Students were given opportunities to ask the teacher questions. The teachers evidently had given the opportunities for this sharing on a regular basis. Successful teachers provide opportunities for students to share experiences and discuss new ideas during reading instruction (Allington & Johnston, 2002). Therefore, in the area of communication with the teacher, the students and teachers were at least somewhat successful.

Wilson, Pianta, and Stuhlman (2007) characterized a good classroom climate as one that encompasses a warm, child-centered, positive environment in which the teacher exhibits sensitivity to each student's emotional and instructional needs and structures instruction to encourage students' autonomy and self-control. Although there was evidence that the teachers in the study did listen and try to engage students in meaningful conversation and instruction, the students overall reported that they did not experience opportunities to make their own decisions about their learning in reading. They did not

report that they were free to choose which activities they wanted to do during reading instruction. The items on the questionnaire dealt with the freedom to think for themselves and freedom to say what they thought. Perhaps the structure of the reading program did not allow for these types of opportunities, or maybe the structure of the classroom itself did not allow for these choices or decisions to be made.

According to the results of the questionnaire, students did not think they were allowed to work with other students very much during reading lessons. Items on the questionnaire focused on letting students ask each other for help in reading, letting students work in groups without the teacher, and generally being given time to work with other students during reading. The importance of peer relationships in a child's development was an enduring theme in the empirical observations and theoretical work conducted by Piaget (1965). Piaget emphasized the necessity of peer interaction for children's cognitive development. Until interactions with peers occur, the children have few demanding situations that would force them to think of others and their intents or views. Therefore, peer involvement and interaction without the teacher is an important part of reading instruction, especially since more ideas and language experience could have been shared if more people were involved.

Peer interaction was not emphasized. Although the reading series included the use of small groups, it might be deduced that the teacher did most of the talking during those groups. Perhaps center times were not a sharing time for students either. Structure and time restraints may have ruled out opportunities for students to share with each other. Research has shown that teachers who work more frequently with small groups than with



the whole class allow students to be more actively involved (Downer, Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 2007).

In summary, teachers of young children may think they use interactive activities often in their lessons. Yet, students' perceptions differ in some aspects of reading instruction. Teachers' feedback from students helps them to understand and reflect on their own teaching methods and behaviors. As teachers become aware of how their own teaching is perceived, reading instruction will give children more opportunities for interaction.

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Appendix A

Teacher Questionnaire Reflecting Teacher Interaction

PLEASE MARK ONE BOX FOR EACH STATEMENT.

	Never	Almost Never	Sometimes	Almost Always	Always
I encourage students to stop during and after reading new text to connect it to real life.					
Students have opportunities to read independently.					
I read aloud and encourage student questions and comments and discuss new words and concepts in my reading class.					
Students have opportunities to write about what they have read.					
I model and demonstrate new skills and strategies for my students.					
My students are encouraged to ask questions during reading instruction.					
I hold conferences with the students to help them understand difficult					

reading work.					
My students feel free discussing ideas with me during reading.					
I allow my students to share their own experiences during reading.					
I consider myself a good listener.					
	Never	Almost Never	Sometimes	Almost Always	Always
My students have freedom to make decisions in my classroom.					
I give my students choices of activities during reading times.					
I encourage independence in my classroom.					
My students take risks because the classroom environment is positive.					
Students talk to me about problems they are having in reading.					
	Never	Almost Never	Sometimes	Almost Always	Always

Opportunities for students to work together are a part of my reading instruction.					
I encourage students to work together to solve problems, rather than always asking me for help.					
Time is given for students to talk together in small reading group.					
Small groups are a priority.					
I allow children to work out verbal disagreements during reading lessons.					

Appendix B

Student Questionnaire Reflecting Teacher Interaction

PLEASE MARK ONE BOX FOR EACH STATEMENT

	Never	Almost Never	Sometimes	Almost Always	Always
When my teacher is teaching reading, she stops to explain what stories are about.					
I have chances to read alone.					
My teacher reads out loud and discusses new words and ideas.					
I have a chance to write about what I have read.					
My teacher gives me examples during reading lessons.					
	Never	Almost Never	Sometimes	Almost Always	Always
My teacher wants me to ask questions when she is teaching reading.					
My teacher takes time to talk to students by themselves.					

I share my ideas with my teacher during reading.					
My teacher lets me share information about my own experiences during reading.					
My teacher is good at listening to the students' ideas.					
	Never	Almost Never	Sometimes	Almost Always	Always
My teacher lets me make decisions in my classroom.					
I am allowed to choose which activities I want to do during reading times.					
My teacher tries to make me think for myself and figure out things by myself.					
My classroom is a good place to say what I think.					
	Never	Almost Never	Sometimes	Almost Always	Always
If I have a problem in reading, I feel free to talk to my teacher.					

Children work together during reading lessons.					
My teacher lets me ask other students to help me when I don't understand during reading class.					
We work in groups <i>without</i> the teacher.					
We have small group reading lessons in which there are only about 6 children or less.					
My teacher lets the children work out problems we have with each other during reading.					