



Research article

Cultivating Independent Literacy Skills in Elementary Classrooms

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Abstract

Even with extensive literacy research, routines, and policy modifications, many elementary students are not provided with the needed tools to develop independent literacy skills. Therefore, the purpose of this qualitative case study was to examine what independent literacy behaviors are developing in first through fourth grade students to determine whether the Daily 5 framework is developing the desired independent literacy skills in those students. Based on Vygotsky's social development theory, the Daily 5 literacy routine teaches students five essential habits to develop independent literacy abilities across various grade levels. This qualitative study's research questions were developed to examine what independent literacy behaviors have been observed by teachers and how student learning is reflected based on Vygotsky's zone of proximal development. The study included nine participants comprised of teachers and parents of students at the study site. The data collected through open-ended interviews, email questionnaires, lesson plans from teachers, and documentation were then coded using Atlas.ti. Emergent themes were identified through data analysis, and the findings were validated through member checking, triangulation, and researcher reflexivity. The findings revealed that while some independent literacy behaviors are reported, additional support is still needed. The findings led to the development of a professional development project centered on literacy professional development activities that build collaboration. This study and project facilitates positive social change by defining how the Daily 5 routine is promoting independent literacy skills at the research site, which builds



communities of readers and positive reading experiences that circulate within the school and home. **Copyright © WJER all rights reserved.**

Keywords: Literacy, independent literacy skills, reading, elementary school.

Introduction

Research has indicated that providing students with a wide range of reading instructional strategies can increase motivation and improve key literacy skills such as comprehension, background knowledge, vocabulary fluency, and writing (Allington 2013). According to this research perspective, student motivation throughout literacy instruction can lead to engagement in related independent literacy tasks (Klauda& Guthrie, 2014). Daily 5 is a research-based literacy framework founded by elementary teachers Boushey and Moser (2014) who aspired to find new ways to engage and motivate students in reading and writing tasks. The five principles of the Daily 5 literacy routine allow students frequent daily opportunities to exercise independent literacy skills including:

- Read to self
- Read to someone
- Work on writing.
- Word work.
- Listen to reading during a literacy block.

Daily 5 postulates that within these five areas, students should be working independently during a literacy block instead of changing regulated centers or completing worksheets (Boushey& Moser, 2014).

Summit Academy, a pseudonym, an urban private school in the southeastern United States, implemented the Daily 5 routine, but school leaders do not yet know whether implementing the Daily 5 literacy routine has fostered independent literacy behaviors among the first through fourth grade students at the school. According to the Morrow, Kunz, and Hall (2018), independent literacy behaviors include: reading for interest or knowledge, writing original ideas, reading independently for extended periods of time, having confidence in reading and writing, and demonstrating increased comprehension. Teachers at Summit Academy originally used literacy “scripts” that were included in the traditional curriculum instructional packages. These scripts provided rote instruction with accompanying worksheets. There were few opportunities throughout the school day for students to use independent literacy skills or to have freedom to choose meaningful literacy activities.

This problem exists at Summit Academy using data from a curriculum management tool, literacy state standardized test scores, personal communication from teachers, and documentation from curriculum team meetings. The school first implemented the Daily 5 literacy routine in 2012 as an extension of the literacy curriculum after a review of documentation was complete. The documentation noted gaps in skills required for successful daily literacy concepts such as: motivation, comprehension, fluency, persistence, and writing between each grade level. According to one of the teachers, before implementing Daily 5, the literacy routine at Summit Academy consisted mostly of teacher-led novel studies, basal readers, and worksheets. The decision to implement the Daily 5 was based on evidence supporting independent literacy skills validated through research from Routman (2014). In the classroom, students must be provided with sustained reading and writing time every day using meaningful texts. This sustained time reading and writing helps develop students into independent readers, writers, and thinkers (Routman, 2014). Thus, proficiency in literacy means students must spend a majority of the school day using independent literacy skills while reading and writing authentically.

The lack of independent literacy skills at Summit Academy was also evident in lagging literacy score results from the district that were documented in the state-mandated testing results. According to the state report card, 34.6% of elementary students met the literacy requirements in 2010, and in 2015 only 26.1% of elementary students from Summit Academy’s district met the state requirements in literacy (State Department of Education, 2016). In 2016, the state was ranked in the bottom third nationally in literacy with only 34% of fourth grade students performing at grade level throughout the state (Education Week, 2016).

The following research questions for this project study helped identify what independent literacy behaviors teachers and parents have observed developing in students since the implementation of the Daily 5:

RQ1: What independent literacy behaviors have the teachers and parents observed in first through fourth grade students since the implementation of the Daily 5 literacy routine?



RQ2: How do teachers’ descriptions of the development of independent literacy behaviors reflect students’ learning in the zone of proximal development?

Materials and Method

A qualitative case study design was used to identify the independent literacy behaviors teachers and parents have observed developing in students since the implementation of the Daily 5. According to Yin (2014), qualitative researchers focus on analyzing and understanding the meanings people have constructed and how they make sense of their worlds and experiences. The case study design provided a comprehensive platform to elicit the perceptions of teachers at Summit Academy and brought a clear understanding of what independent literacy skills they are observing. Researching the experiences and the perspectives of the teachers at Summit Academy provided pertinent information on the impact of the Daily 5 literacy routine on independent literacy behaviors.

A purposeful sample was used to select participants from a private school in urban southeastern United States. The goal of qualitative research is to gain rich details of the phenomenon being studied, so my choice of participants was relevant to the problem and research questions of this study (Polkinghorne, 2005). Since the participating teachers and parents are immersed in the Daily 5 literacy routine, they were able to provide accurate rich descriptive information about the routine. Parents who participated in this study provided a distinct perspective on the Daily 5 literacy routine based on their knowledge of the routine from their children’s actions outside of school. Table 1 identifies grade levels of teacher and parent participants as well as the experience of the teaching participants.

Table 1: Teacher and Parent Participants

Teacher participants	WM	MT	BH	BM	LB	HC	GE
Grade level	3 rd	3 rd	4 th	1 st	1 st	2 nd	2 nd
Teaching experience	25 years	31 years	4 years	7 years	10 years	6 years	12 years
Experience with Daily 5	5 years	5 years	3 years	5 years	7 years	5 years	3 years
Parent participants	TL		SC		AE		
Number of children	1		2		3		
Grade level	3 rd		2 nd and 4 th		1 st , 2 nd , 4 th		

Teachers. There are 11 first through fourth grade teachers at the study site, and each teacher received an invitation to participate with the listed criteria for the study. The criteria for participation selection included: (a) currently teach in a classroom in first through fourth grade at Summit Academy, (b) have had at least two years of experience with the Daily 5 literacy routine, and (c) are willing to provide lesson plans and participate in an interview. Having some prior experience with the Daily 5 literacy routine may have helped the teacher participants throughout the interview process since they possibly had more knowledge about the routine. All teachers who met the criteria and accepted the invitation were invited to participate in the study. Even though all 11 teachers were invited, only 7 teachers agreed to participate. The goal of this study was to have 8 teacher participants, but since 7 teachers met the requirements of the study and agreed to participate, I proceeded with the data collection process.



The 7 teacher participants represented first through fourth grade classrooms at the study site with variation in teaching experiences: two first grade teachers, two second grade teachers, two third grade teachers, and one fourth grade teacher agreed to participate in this study. There is equivalent representation across first through fourth grade teachers in the teacher participants who participated in this study. The teacher participants were diverse in their classroom teaching experiences and knowledge of the Daily 5 routine. Classroom teaching experience of the participants ranged between 4 and 31 years. Only two of the teacher participants had experience with Daily 5 before teaching at the study site. The other 5 teacher participants began their experience with Daily 5 at the study site. Five of the teacher participants have had 5 years or more of Daily 5 experience, while the other 2 have had only 3 years of Daily 5 experience.

Parents. An invitation letter was sent to each potential parent participant recommended by the administration at Summit Academy. The goal was to have at least 4 parent participants who were willing to participate, but after sending out the invitations, only 3 parents agreed to participate. The 3 parent participants represented students in first through fourth grade. One parent participant had children in first, second, and fourth grade, another had children in second and fourth grade, and the final parent participant had a child in third grade. Parent participants were valid for this study because parent involvement in a child’s education has been consistently found to be a positive force in a child’s academic performance (White, Hall, & Barrett-Tatum, 2016). Involving parents in this study provided information about Daily 5 from a different perspective.

The data collection process for this case study included teachers’ perspectives on the Daily 5 literacy routine collected through interviews, open ended email questionnaires, lesson plan review, and documentation from curriculum team meetings. The data collection process took place in the spring of 2018 and students had been actively engaging in the routine all school year. At the time of this data collection, Summit Academy had officially implemented the Daily 5 routine for 5 years as part of the required literacy block.

Using multiple methods of data collection will enhance the credibility of the study results (Creswell, 2014). Table 2 provides the timeline for the data collection process along with the research questions that were specifically addressed.

Table 2:Data Collection Timeline

Steps	Data collection method	Research question addressed
Step 1	Teacher and parent interviews	1
Step 2	Open-ended email questions	1&2
Step 3	Review of documentation (lesson plans and curriculum team)	1&2
Step 4	Follow-up teacher interview	1

A series of two interviews with each teacher-participant focused on the implementation and effectiveness of Daily 5. The interviews took place at Summit Academy and lasted approximately 45 minutes. All interviews lasted between 30-45 minutes. The first interview included open-ended questions, about the literacy routine, and the second interview provided a follow up time for teachers to expand on any additional observations or perceptions since the first interview. The second interview was scheduled for three weeks after the first interview. Yin (2014) noted the two jobs of the researcher during the interview: “(a) to follow your own line of inquiry, as reflected by your case study protocol, and (b) to ask your actual (conversational) questions in an unbiased manner that also serves the needs of your line of inquiry” (p. 110).

The interviews provided specific insights from the teachers and parents at Summit Academy about independent literacy skills and the Daily 5 literacy routine. All interviews were recorded on the telephone, so the researcher could focus on the conversation during the interview and not take handwritten notes. Yin’s (2014) interview protocol was followed and conversational questions were asked in an unbiased manner. At the end of each interview, participants were asked if they would like to make any additional comments or statements. Each interview concluded with me reassuring the participants of their confidentiality and thanking them for taking time to participate in this study (Creswell, 2012).



Teacher participants also participated in follow up interview three weeks after the initial interview. Teacher participants were again allowed to pick the time and location for the final interview. The final interviews with teachers lasted between 15-20 minutes each. During this interview, teacher participants were able to share any additional information, observations, or questions with me. Bogden and Biklen (2007) emphasized the importance of the conversation during the interview to gain information from the other person. The final interview was also recorded on my phone to eliminate any bias throughout the transcription process and allowed me to engage more actively with the interviewee.

After the first interview, an email was sent to teacher-participants that included open ended questions pertaining to Daily 5 and independent literacy behaviors in their classroom. The questions in the email documented literacy behaviors, challenges, and other details from the Daily 5 literacy block that were not discussed in the interview. Asking open-ended questions was an important aspect throughout the qualitative data collection process. The open-ended email questions allowed teacher participants time to reflect on the first interview and make additional observations in their classrooms during the Daily 5 literacy block. This process provided triangulation to the data collection process because the teacher-participants were able to expand on any information from the interview. The email questionnaires were one piece of evidence used to corroborate the data collected from the interviews, lesson plans, and team documentation. A follow up email was sent four days after the first email if the teacher participant did not respond to the initial email. After the initial request and one reminder email, 5 of the 7 teacher participants responded to the email questionnaire.

Yin (2014) asserts that rich data offers an in-depth examination of the central phenomenon and adds validity to the overall study. In addition to the teacher and parent interviews and email questionnaires, a teacher selected sample of lessons plans and documentation from two recent curriculum team meetings was also reviewed. These multiple data sources provided a means of triangulation. The first curriculum team meeting reviewed was held at the end of the 2017-2018 school and the second curriculum team meeting reviewed was held at the beginning of the 2018-2019 school years. This review schedule created by the administration at Summit Academy determines what curriculum the team discusses at the meetings. The curriculum team was formed to support the administration in reviewing curriculum while providing teacher perspective. A teacher leader is appointed by the administrator to facilitate the meetings, take minutes of the meeting, and work alongside the administration to review curriculum as teacher liaison. Currently there are 6 teachers on the team and 3 members of administration. The curriculum team meetings are held every other month.

Documentation from the curriculum team meeting following the Daily 5 implementation helped determine what conversations the team has had about Daily 5 and independent literacy behaviors. A reflexive journal was used to log relevant information from the lesson plans and documented minutes from the curriculum team meeting, as well as documentation of my thoughts and learning during the data collection process. The documentation determined that the curriculum team was discussing materials and curriculum that is needed for Daily 5, but not independent literacy skills. Since the curriculum team was primarily discussing ELA curriculum, the notes provided valuable information regarding the established phonics and grammar curriculum. The meeting notes are not detailed but did specify that the established phonics and grammar curriculum would be renewed for another three years. Another record in the notes indicated that teachers would continue utilizing the curriculum alongside Daily 5. The information in the curriculum team documentation was not as valuable to my findings as the interviews, email questionnaires, and lesson plans. The meetings' notes contained specific information about curriculum and not independent literacy skills.

Merriam and Tisdell(2016) asserted almost every case study can benefit from the use of documents as a significant part of data collection. The meeting minutes from two recent curriculum team meetings provided background information on how different areas of instruction are assessed based on the curriculum that is used. The study site has a curriculum review schedule that determines which curriculum must be reviewed every year. The ELA curriculum was reviewed throughout the 2016-2017 and 2017-2018 school years. Since the curriculum team is mostly made up of teachers who use Daily 5 in their classroom, reviewing this particular documentation helped me answer my first research question regarding teacher perception of the development of independent literacy skills. Even though the documentation did not indicate a specific conversation on independent literacy skills, there were notes about how various classrooms were building in specific set times for independent reading and how any curriculum revisions must accommodate this essential part of Daily 5. There was also a note about an increase in upper elementary student participants in the reading buddy program. This is one example of how students are demonstrating independent literacy skills by voluntarily participating in a program that encourages younger students to read by reading with a buddy.



Likewise, reviewing the lesson plans provided support for both of the research questions guiding this study. Reviewing the lesson plans provided a unique opportunity for analysis of how teachers are scaffolding instruction in accordance to Vygotsky’s Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) (Matherson& Windle, 2017). For example, the lesson plans demonstrated how teacher participants are scaffolding instruction by first teaching a mini lesson on a topic and then providing time for students to work on the skill through both guided and independent practice. The lesson plans from one teacher participant indicated that a mini-lesson on the diagraphs sh, ch, and wh would be taught first, and then students would be reading a book focused on the diagraphs in guided reading and building words with these diagraphs in the word work rotation. In the lesson plans, there were other examples of mini-lessons and an emphasis on read alouds in their classrooms. The lesson plans provided evidence demonstrating how the read alouds were used in the classroom to support comprehension and fluency during the Daily 5 rotation. These examples from the lesson plans align with the transcripts from the interviews with the teachers.

Results and Discussion

Creswell (2014) described data analysis as “peeling back the layers of an onion” (p. 195). Rich textual data came from the transcription from the interviews and examination of the lesson plans, curriculum team documentation, and email questionnaires. To begin data analysis, the transcribed interviews, interview recordings, and the reflexive journal, which contained notes from the lesson plans, email questionnaire, and curriculum team documentation, were gathered. Each interview recording was reviewed a second time to ensure accuracy in transcription. Listening to the interviews a second time revealed similarities and differences that proved to be a critical component in the analysis process. All of the transcriptions and notes multiple times were re-read. At this point, I was looking for words and phrases that were frequently repeated on the interview transcripts and reflexive journal. This process took several weeks which helped me discover the emerging themes.

Throughout the data analysis process, identifying information such as real names, grade levels, and locations were protected under pseudonyms. An inductive approach helped establish clear links between the research questions and findings throughout the data collection process (Thomas, 2006). Inductive coding begins with a close reading of the findings to find multiple meanings that are in text segments. A label for each text category is given and additional text segments are added to the most relevant category (Thomas, 2006). Reading through the transcripts several times identified the themes and categories. A total of thirteen categories emerged from the codes. Each code and category is listed under the corresponding theme below in Table 3.

Table 3:Summary of Codes, Categories, Themes, and Data Sources

Data Source	Codes	Categories	Themes
Interviews	Meeting with students	Conferring with students	Classroom Routine
	Conferring		
Lesson Plans	Writers Workshop	Students reading independently	Planning for Daily 5
	Choice Writing		
	Free choice reading		
	Independent reading		
	Instructional Planning		
Curriculum Team Documentation	Guided reading groups	Planning for literacy	
	Basal readers		
	Novel studies		
	Setting up rotations		
Email Questionnaires	Literacy curriculum planning	Planning for literacy	
	Basal readers		
	Novel Studies		
Interviews	Independent reading	Read alouds	Read Alouds
	Rotation schedule		
	Mentor texts		
	Interactive read aloud		



Lesson Plans	Shared reading Novel studies Text Connections	Novel Studies	
Interviews	Just right books Listening to reading Reading stamina Writing stamina Leveled readers Accelerated Readers	Independence in reading Stamina in reading and writing	Stamina
Email Questionnaires	Reading to someone Timed reading Journal writing Library	Book choice in the classroom library Stamina	
Interviews	Classroom observations Mentoring Collaborate Sessions Daily 5 Conference	Collaboration Professional Development opportunities	Professional Development
		Mentor Teachers	

All transcripts were read through by me and a subsample of each interview was sent in an email to each teacher and parent participant. Participants were given the opportunity to review the sample and ensure the transcripts were accurate. All participants in the study agreed that the email subsample accurately represented their interview. Table 3 illustrates the theme, categories, codes, and data source. After all interview participants confirmed the subsample, the transcribed interviews were uploaded into Atlas.ti and the researcher used color coding repetitive words and phrases, which began the coding process. Examples of repetitive words and phrases found in the transcribed interviews are: reading aloud, students reading independently, accelerated reader, plan time, shared reading, shared writing, routines, rotations, set up, partners, collaboration, help, professional development, and reading together. At this stage, the codes were organized based on the pseudonymous initials given to each participant. The codes showed how many times a teacher or parent participant mentioned a certain word or phrases which could be developing into a code.

The data was coded by sorting it and constantly comparing and expanding the emerging codes. The highlighted statements were given a code label and color coded to represent the corresponding theme that was emerging. Free choice was a code that developed and was highlighted with a dark green color. In the interview transcripts and lesson plan data, free choice related to free choice independent or partner reading or writing time when students were able to choose their own book or writing topic. Conferring was another code that developed from the interview transcripts, email questionnaires, and lesson plan data. Conferring was highlighted with a light green color and referred to any mention of conferencing with students throughout the day about their reading and writing process. Other code highlights: Accelerated Reader was highlighted orange, novel studies was highlighted yellow, plan time was highlighted gray. The coding process helped the researcher with collapsing the information and grouping it into themes.

Based on the analysis of the coding of the data, the themes that were emerged were: professional development, stamina, reading aloud, conferring, classroom routines, and phonics/grammar curriculum. One emergent theme from the interview transcripts, email questionnaires, and curriculum team documentation was the mention of the established phonics and grammar program used in first through fourth grade classrooms. After reviewing the documents again, there were 44 mentions of the phonics and grammar program compared to the 121 mentions of classroom routines. Even though the phonics and grammar code was significant, it did not develop as one of the major themes since it was not referenced to as often as the other major themes. Significant information about the phonics and grammar pattern as well as the major themes is included in the Data Analysis Results section below.

The next read through of the analyzed data was straightforward since the transcriptions were already color coded and easy to reference. I also printed out the document that I created with each code on separate pages. In this



process, I began learning more about the perspective of the teacher participants based on all of the combined data instead of just the interview transcripts. I began to learn how much the teachers emphasize read alouds and choosing a just right book in their classroom routines. Every teacher participant talked about different read alouds and how their classroom library was set up. The read alouds were used in writing projects as well other literacy activities. By rereading the analyzed data, I learned the heart of Daily 5 for the teachers at Summit Academy is creating time and space for teachers to read aloud often to the students.

According to Lodico, Spaulding, and Voegtle(2010), “coding categories can include setting, activities or actions, concepts, perspectives of participants, and cultural context” (p. 183). It was important to represent the multiple perspectives and different viewpoints from the teachers and parents in the data analysis. For example, both teacher and parent participants discussed read alouds in the classroom and the lesson plans indicated that teachers are implementing daily read alouds. This information helped determine if the findings from this study revealed support for the Daily 5 literacy routine or proposed a rival explanation (Creswell, 2014). This inductive approach also allowed the teacher and parent perspectives to be compared with the raw data collected from the lesson plans.

Emerging categories were developed by studying the transcripts and reflexive journal repeatedly while considering how the categories could fit into developing themes (Thomas, 2006). Many of the highlighted codes promoted understanding of my study and could be developed into themes. First, the highest number of codes to determine what similarities and differences could be found were reviewed. Some of the codes that had developed into categories began merging into a theme. Free choice, conferring, daily schedule, daily routine became the first major theme, classroom routines. Since all of these activities fit into the daily classroom routine and how the teacher structures the day, it made sense to collapse the codes into this theme. The importance of daily read alouds and the desire for professional development was evident in the interview transcripts and was written down early in the analysis phase as an emerging theme.

During the first round of interviews, several teachers expressed the desire for more professional development about Daily 5 and more understanding of how other teachers in the school structure the Daily 5 block. While transcribing and rereading the interviews, the need for a professional development category was required. This was not a category that was initially not expected to emerge from the data since this study focused on independent literacy skills. A total of seven categories emerged from the codes: classroom routine, established phonics and grammar routine, read alouds, professional development, stamina, novel studies, and small group instruction. Table 4 in the data analysis results section reveals how the themes align with the research questions guiding this study.

Table 4:Research Questions and Themes

Research questions	Theme Abbreviation	Themes
RQ 1. What independent literacy behaviors have the teachers and parents observed in first through fourth grade students since the implementation of the Daily 5 literacy routine?	CB, RA, S	Students are exhibiting more confidence in literacy, reading and writing independently for longer periods of time, and choosing books on their level. Teachers are implementing a variety of read alouds in their classroom on a regular basis.
RQ2. How do teachers’ description of the development of independent literacy behaviors reflect students’ learning in the zone of proximal development?	CB, RA, PD	Teachers are scaffolding instruction during the routine and are supporting students through the routine. Teachers need more professional development in Daily 5 to continue developing independent literacy skills in students.

Note: Classroom Behaviors (CB); Read Aloud (RA); Stamina (S); and Professional Development (PD).



Theme 1: Classroom Routines

The first major theme that emerged during data analysis was labeled classroom routines. This theme is broad and covers a variety of codes that are consistent with the student or teacher behaviors that were noted in the classroom during the Daily 5 literacy block. The patterns categorized under this theme include: choice, role of the teacher, mini lesson, writing, and planning process. During the teacher interviews, all of the participants revealed that since the implementation of Daily 5, they have a better understanding of what a literacy routine is and why it is an essential part of the classroom routine. For example, one teacher participant (WM) noted that since the implementation of Daily 5, she has set up a daily literacy routine that incorporates more choice for students and has given her students more independence in the classroom. WM found that her students “enjoy choosing a book on a topic that interests them to read independently or with a friend.” Another teacher participant (MT) noted that her role during small groups had changed since the implementation of Daily 5. Prior to Daily 5, MT assigned seatwork for her students to work on independently while she led small reading groups. In the first interview, MT shared, “While I am leading small leveled reading groups, the students who are not reading with me are rotating through literacy centers that are independent and collaborative working on listening to reading, reading to someone, working on writing, or completing grammar assignments.”

During the interviews, each teacher participant described how hard they work to create a classroom routine that engages students in literacy activities. They each described how the routine is managed in their classroom and how they have chosen to implement core concepts Daily 5 into their daily and weekly plans. While the teacher participants were describing their classroom routines, it became clear that each teacher had their own unique way of implementing the Daily 5. Four of the teacher participants indicated that their students completed the Daily 5 rotations four or five times a week, while other teachers indicated that their students would only complete the routine two or three times a week. BH stated, “sometimes we only have time to complete the routine twice a week and it is easier for me to do a whole group lesson and then pull students who need extra support.” While BM stated, “I try no matter what to have Daily 5 time four times a week. Even if I have to adjust the time we spend on Daily 5.”

Another difference was how each teacher had the rotation set up in their classroom. Some teachers allowed students to choose which Daily 5 rotation to engage in, while other teachers had students rotate around the room in set groups and centers. One teacher participant (GE) indicated that she varied the routine dynamics the beginning of every school year. WM assigns her students to certain stations “so I can plan activities for students on different levels or have them work on a skill that they need to practice.” Reviewing the lesson plans also helped me have a better understanding of how each teacher implemented the routine throughout the week. The lesson plans highlighted what rotations the teachers were implementing throughout the week.

Six teachers described their mini lesson procedures and how they established the procedures for the Daily 5 routine in their classroom. For example, one of the teacher participants (LB) has a set rotation for her students to follow after mini lesson. “My students are young, so I try to focus their attention on a certain skill like a new word blend I have put in the word work center.” Every day, the students in LB’s class, engage in small reading group instruction, word work, and work on writing. During their word work and work on writing rotations, students can choose from a variety of options to practice word work and writing skills. BL sets aside time “later in the day for students to read to self, read to someone, or listen to reading.” Another teacher participant (HC), conducts a mini lesson, and then her students independently chose which rotation to engage in while she works with students that need extra support. Each teacher participant described working with small groups, but how the students engaged in the routine was varied between each participant. The majority of the teacher participants discussed completing a mini lesson before the Daily 5 block.

Another classroom routine that emerged in the data analysis phase was an emphasis on independent free choice writing. According to one teacher participant (MT), “incorporating choice in writing has been very beneficial for my developing writers who sometimes do not like writing activities.” Since incorporating choice in writing, MT has observed her students creating comic strips and Minecraft instruction manuals. Her students are authentically writing and enjoying the process. One teacher participant (WM), recalled “before Daily 5 there was no writing routine, and our students did not have a daily writing routine it just happened when it happened.”

Students only wrote about topics from the curriculum and were not given opportunities to choose their own topics. Now, WM has a writing station set up in her classroom, and students are allowed to write short stories or create books on any topic of their choice. Since the implementation of Daily 5, WM has observed her students choosing to spend additional time working on their stories and writing for fun outside of the daily writing time. to



Another teacher participant (HC), allows her students to write in their journals every day on any topic. Before daily 5, she gave her students a topic to write about, and now her students are more engaged in the writing process.

One of the interview questions asked teacher participants about the planning process for Daily 5. The majority of the teacher participants indicated that the initial set up for the Daily 5 routine at the beginning of the year takes a considerable amount of time and planning, but once the students understand the routine, planning becomes easier and more streamlined. This is consistent with the claims made by the founders of the Daily 5 routine who contend that if the first few weeks of school are dedicated to launching the Daily 5 routines and instilling literacy habits, teachers will have not need to spend as much time planning literacy activities for students because they will know effective literacy habits (Boushey& Moser, 2014). One teacher participant (MT) has noticed that “I rarely have to put out fires or deal with students misbehaving or not following the rules during Daily 5 after just a few weeks of launch.” She is very organized and intentional about setting the expectations for Daily 5 at the beginning of the year and uses the suggested anchor charts for students to reference.

Theme 2: Read Alouds

Another major theme that emerged during data analysis was the significance and emphasis of reading aloud to students. This theme emerged while transcribing the interviews and reviewing the lesson plans. Every teacher who was interviewed shared during the interview about books they read aloud every day with their students. One teacher participant (MT) noted that when she read aloud to her students, she observed that students who did not usually enjoy reading were more engaged.

MT shared a story about a student who “usually does not like to read ever in class brought in a silver dollar to show everyone in class because we were reading *The Chocolate Touch* which talks about a silver dollar.” This showed her that he was connecting to the story even though during the literacy block he usually struggles to read independently or make a connection to the text. Another teacher participant (GE) noted that when she read aloud to her students, she was able to read more difficult texts and get her students excited to engage in reading practice with the goal of reading more difficult chapter books.

This theme was also present during the parent interviews. All three parent participants indicated their children loved to be read to at home by a parent or sibling. CW said her son “begs to read with her every night and also tells me often how to choose a just right book even though we do not have as many science books as they have at school.” Parent participants indicated they were encouraged by their child’s teacher to read together at home. One parent participant, (TL) noticed that after the second year of Daily 5 at school, her child was no longer a reluctant reader. “I noticed that she was reading the menu or at least trying to read the menu at restaurants and telling me how the pictures on the Starbucks menu match some of the words.” Before Daily 5, her child never wanted to read together at home, but now her child will often bring home books from the classroom library to read.

Novel studies were coded under both classroom routines and read alouds. Almost every teacher and parent participant delineated how novel studies were used in the classroom. One teacher participant, (MT) believes novel studies are an essential element of a literacy routine even though the Daily 5 framework discourages the use of novel studies. In her classroom, MT uses novel studies as a teacher read aloud and assigned student reading. Another teacher participant (GE), shared similar insights during her interview about novel studies. She uses novel studies to promote partner discussions, independent reading, small and whole group shared discussions and reading. Both participants (MT and GE) align their novel study with the current social studies unit. Novel studies discouraged within the Daily 5 framework because students do not have a choice in what book they are reading (Boushey& Moser, 2014). Yet, teacher participants (MT and GE) contend the rich discussions and student engagement during the novel study are unparalleled in exclusive independent reading.

Theme 3: Stamina

The third major theme that emerged was increased reading and writing stamina in the students. Reading and writing stamina is the ability to focus and read or write independently for increasingly longer periods of time (Boushey& Moser, 2014). Since stamina is word commonly associated with the Daily 5 literacy routine, the teacher participants and most of the parent participants used this word frequently throughout the interviews and open ended email questionnaires. Teacher participants described how students in their classrooms are able to pick out just right books, read books independently, listen to reading, read with someone, and write for longer periods of time since the implementation of the Daily 5. One parent participant (SC) found that her child “ really enjoys going to the library



and picking out books to read together at home or in the car.” During the interview, this same parent participant reflected on a recent trip to the library where her child was able to pick out a just right book independently. She did not know what a just right book was, but her child explained to her what a just right book was and why it was important. She went on to say, “he was telling the librarian at checkout that there are so many just right books but he can only take home 3 at a time.”

Six teacher participants believe that the Daily 5 routine encouraged them to create intentional time every day to read and write. One teacher participant (WM) described how before Daily 5, “I did not have students read independently unless they were reading to me during guided reading or maybe while reading a poem in class.” Now her students have book baskets with just right books that they can spend time reading throughout the day and during Daily 5. Another teacher participant (BH) keeps track of how her students’ stamina to read and write builds throughout the year. At the beginning of the year, her students can read for three minutes and write for five minutes without any interruptions. She sets a timer, and the majority of her students are able work consistently until the timer goes off. By the end of the year, her students are able to read for 20 minutes and write for 25 minutes without interruptions. Building their stamina is a practice that she implemented after being introduced to Daily 5.

Several teacher participants described how they now have a listen to reading routine since the implementation of Daily 5. Summit Academy is a 1:1 iPad school, so students have access to an iPad throughout the day. Many of the teachers discussed how the EPIC app has supported listen to reading in the classroom. EPIC allows students to choose a book to listen to, and some of the books have comprehension quizzes for students to complete. During the Daily 5 block, students can choose to listen to reading and find fiction and nonfiction books on the EPIC app either with a partner or independently. MT recounted several occasions where her students have asked her if they could listen to books outside of the Daily 5 block.

Theme 4: Professional Development

The final major theme that emerged was the desire for more professional development. Every teacher participant indicated that they desired more professional development about Daily 5 and how to create and implement effective literacy routines in the classroom. When Summit Academy first launched the Daily 5, the school sent several teachers to a two-day professional development with the founders of the Daily 5 literacy routine. Since then no professional development in Daily 5 has been offered, and several of the teachers who attended the training are no longer employed at Summit Academy.

Only two of the seven participants in this study attended the professional development, thus the other five participants have never received any professional development on Daily 5. The two teacher participants who did attend the professional development indicated the training was very helpful getting Daily 5 started, but they would like to learn more advanced strategies and new information. In fact, MT, one of the teachers who attended the professional development stated, “I barely remember the training because so much happened and changed since we went. I really would like to go through it again now that I have tried to incorporate what I learned- or some of what I learned- at the conference.”

As I read the interview transcripts and reviewed the lesson plans, I noticed how almost every teacher participant mentioned the desire to learn from one another. This led me to believe that the teachers not only supported collaboration in their classroom but desired a more collaborative learning experience between the teachers as a form of informal professional development. During one interview, a teacher participant (HC) expressed concern because she has little experience with the Daily 5 literacy routine and feels that she implements the routine very differently than the other teachers. HC indicated that she would like to not only observe other teachers at Summit Academy but also attend a professional development training on Daily 5. Even though MT was able to attend the Daily 5 professional development training, “I would really like the chance learn from other teachers and observe their classroom and how they handle Daily 5.” Another teacher, GE, mentioned the desire to collaborate with other teachers to learn how they plan for Daily 5 and reach students who are struggling.

Conclusion

Implementing an effective literacy program that not only improves reading skills but also builds a genuine love of reading is a significant challenge educators face. Summit Academy faced this challenge by implementing the Daily 5 literacy routine that offers students five choices that build independent literacy skills. This qualitative case study research was designed to investigate what independent literacy behaviors teachers have observed since the implementation of Daily 5. Teachers and parents were both invited to participate in this qualitative case study to



determine what independent literacy skills are being observed at school and at home. The sample for the study was a purposeful, homogeneous sampling of teacher participants who were all certified teachers in 1st-4th grades at Summit Academy, and the parent participants had children in 1st-4th grades.

The goal of this project was to provide the teachers with new knowledge about the Daily 5 literacy routine, and also to provide a structured framework that allows teachers, academic coaches, and administration to work together. The professional development sessions will promote collaboration and were designed based on teacher perception. Throughout the professional development project, teachers will have set opportunities to observe other teachers during Daily 5 both in their grade and in other grades. The following final section provides my reflections and concluding thoughts on the completed study and project creation.

Future researchers may be interested in researching how the professional development built around teacher perception influenced student literacy achievement. This type of targeted research could determine additional areas of professional development and reveal if the teachers were able to apply the knowledge from the sessions effectively. Another interest of future researchers could be applying the parameters of the professional development project to other literacy skills or content areas. Guided math groups are becoming increasingly popular in classrooms and could also use a similar examination based on teacher perception.

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