An Evaluation of Extensive and Intensive Teaching of Literature: One Teacher’s Experiment in the 11th Grade

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More than four generations ago, Nancy Coryell’s (1927) study revealed that an extensive approach to reading instruction is more effective than an intensive approach, yet the reading establishment then continued to promote intensive, close reading methods. Recently, the writers of the Common Core State Standards renewed this debate by advocating that teachers implement more intensive, close reading strategies. I replicated a portion of Coryell’s (1927) study to determine the effectiveness of intensive and extensive reading instruction; to do so, I examined the impact each method had on students’ comprehension and analysis of literature. The study used a quasi-experimental, nonrandomized, pretest-posttest comparison group research design. I used t test procedures to measure the difference in pretest-to-posttest scores within and between both groups for both comprehension and analysis. No statistically significant differences existed in the gains on the subtest measuring reading comprehension; however, statistically significant differences in gains on the subtest measuring analysis of literature were found within both instructional methods. At a time when policy seems to drive English instruction toward an intensive approach, this study suggests that we need more research before the field of English education can properly debate the issue.

While the controversy about what literature to teach and how to teach it has always been a part of language arts history, the debate concerning the teaching of literature did not reach its height until the 1930s (Applebee, 1974). The Commission on English (1931) weighed in on the argument at that time with the following statement:

It is true that for some students even very guided intensive study serves chiefly to create a distaste for the work in question, but for many in each class it may mean a real revelation of what great literature has to offer, both in content and form. To these latter the school is surely being unfair, if it sends them out without some training in methods of intensive reading, and without the thorough familiarity with some great works that can come only from such reading. (p. 208)

Obviously, the Commission on English (1931) was in favor of “guided intensive study” of “great works.” However, four years before the Commission on English (1931) published its report, Nancy Coryell (1927) published what is now considered...
the first English education study (Applebee, 1974; Bernard, 1981), concluding that extensive reading of literature is just as effective, and in some cases more effective, than the guided intensive study of a few great works for enhancing comprehension and analysis of literature.

Yet the debate about extensive versus intensive teaching of literature prevails today, close to a century later. We see this in the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) initiative, which created a set of standards for success in every school and have been rather quickly adopted by 45 states and the District of Columbia (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010). The CCSS lists specific texts as “Texts Illustrating the Complexity, Quality, and Range of Student Reading 6–12” (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010), but more importantly, nine of the ten “Anchor Standards for Reading” require analytical reading of a text (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010). With these standards in place, teachers are focusing on teaching their students to perform close reading analyses and simultaneously questioning the complexity of the texts they teach and how they teach them.

The issue of close, intensive reading has been integrated into the implementation of the CCSS from its inception. One of the writers of the CCSS and president of the College Board, David Coleman, attempted to answer this question about text complexity and how to teach it in a speech given in April 2011 at the New York State Education Building. In his presentation, Coleman (2011) summed up the ELA standards by saying, “They require you to read like a detective and write like an investigative reporter” (p. 11). Furthermore, in response to a question from the audience about career and college readiness, a cornerstone of the CCSS, Coleman (2011) said that we should consider “far longer amounts of classroom time spent on text worth reading and rereading carefully, a kind of diligent close attention” (p. 16). To emphasize his point about what it means to “read like a detective,” Coleman (2011) told his audience that a lesson on “Letter from Birmingham Jail” by Martin Luther King Jr. “is at least six days” long (p. 16). He further noted that he had created an exemplar lesson for Lincoln’s “Gettysburg Address” that “is for three days of instruction on those three paragraphs and that is not by bringing in other resources yet. That’s by focusing on the text itself” (Coleman, 2011, p. 16).

Coleman obviously favors the intensive approach, mostly referred to as close reading, for teaching literature. His position is similar to what the Commission on English (1931) advocated 85 years ago, even though research at the time did not overwhelmingly support its conclusions. With a focus on the debate on intensive versus extensive methods of teaching literature, I replicated a portion of the research described in Nancy Coryell’s (1927) work titled An Evaluation of Extensive and Intensive Teaching of Literature: A Year’s Experiment in the Eleventh Grade. I attempted to determine the effectiveness of intensive and extensive reading instruction by examining the impact each approach has on students’ comprehension and analysis of literature.
Review of Relevant Literature

In order to further distinguish between intensive and extensive reading methods, this review of literature will first set out to define the two approaches and then discuss the research that suggests the benefits of each method. While there are empirical studies similar to my work here, they will not be listed in this section. When discussing the results of my research, however, I will align the conclusions from my work with those of similar studies. Moreover, this review will discuss comprehension and analysis through the lens of engagement and achievement; for a more extensive review of the theories that frame this lens, see Anderson and Pearson (1984), Freebody and Luke (1990), and Rosenblatt (1995).

Benefits of Intensive Reading

Close reading can be traced back to I.A. Richards, who introduced a method of studying English that “made a decisive break between language and literature” (Barry, 1995, p. 15). Barry (1995) further notes, “This made a close study of literature possible by isolating the text from history and context” (p. 15). This movement was labeled Practical Criticism—which is also the title of I. A. Richards’s 1929 book—in Britain during the 1930s to the 1970s, and labeled New Criticism here in America during the same time period (Barry, 1995, p. 30).

New Critics, however, were formulating a theory of literary criticism and said less about pedagogy. This has not stopped close reading advocates, such as David Coleman, from contextualizing the approach within reading instruction. Today, experts in the field have yet to come to a clear, concise, agreed-upon definition of close reading as a pedagogical approach (Fisher & Frey, 2014). Elder and Paul (2004) argue that “to read well is to engage in a self-constructed dialog with the author of a text. Really good reading requires close reading” (p. 36). They summarize their definition by claiming, “Close reading requires specific intellectual work on the part of the reader” (Elder & Paul, 2004, p. 36). Along those same lines, Boyles (2013) attempts to specify the task by stating, “Close reading means reading to uncover layers of meaning that lead to deep comprehension” (p. 37).

The present study defines intensive reading as reading the minimum number of texts required by the syllabus with a focus on the details, and these details include the analysis of vocabulary, word choice, syntax, structure, and how these elements and other literary and rhetorical devices contribute to the layers of meaning that make up the text. With this in mind, the best definition for the purposes of this discussion is the following:

Close Reading of text involves an investigation of a short piece of text, with multiple readings done over multiple instructional lessons. Through text-based questions and discussion, students are guided to deeply analyze and appreciate various aspects of the text, such as key vocabulary and how its meaning is shaped by context; attention to form, tone, imagery and/or rhetorical devices; the significance of word choice and syntax; and the discovery of different levels of meaning as passages are read multiple times. (Brown & Kappes, 2012, p. 2)
However we decide to define close reading, what does the research suggest about its efficacy? As Hinchman and Moore (2013) point out, close reading “has received little notice in recent professional and research literature devoted to adolescents’ literacies … and we have been unable to locate individual empirical studies that overtly investigate its use with youths” (p. 443). My own search found the same, with the exception of a study that targeted student and teacher perspectives of close reading, concluding that the participants “recognized that close reading was useful in helping deeply analyze a text” (Fisher & Frey, 2014, p. 25).

Despite a limited amount of empirical research, scholarly literature does argue for the benefits of close reading. There are many professional development books from some of the biggest names in the field with excellent classroom strategies for close reading, many of which I have used (to name a few: Beers & Probst, 2012; Fisher & Frey, 2011; Gallagher, 2004). Moreover, many research-based strategies fall under the close reading approach used in this study, such as questioning the text (Beck, McKeown, Sandora, Kucan, & Worthy, 1996) and the use of dialectical journals (Berthoff, 1981). They also include the use of dialogic teaching that comes from the questioning of a text, because the teacher and students work together at times to engage “in a generation and evaluation of new interpretations of texts” (Reznitskaya, 2012, p. 446) with the intent to “gain a fuller understanding of the world, [them]selves, and one another” (Burbules, 1993, p. 8, as cited by Reznitskaya, 2012).

We also see research-based close reading strategies for content area texts, such as functional language analysis. This approach, developed by Fang and Schleppegrell (2010), “draws on functional linguistic perspectives to offer ways of engaging students in exploring meaning in content area texts” (p. 588). This method is intended to help “students connect language of the text to an interpretation of the work” (Fang & Schleppegrell, 2008, p. 84). The researchers also claim that what “distinguishes this approach from others is that it stays close to the language of the text” (Fang & Schleppegrell, 2008, p. 86). Fang and Schleppegrell (2010) argue that the use of functional language analysis helps students better comprehend the text while “they gain a better understanding of how language is used to present content, infuse perspectives, and organize specialized texts” (p. 596).

More importantly, referring to the close reading inherent in the Common Core Standards, Calkins, Ehrenworth, and Lehman (2012) claim “they value deep comprehension and high-level thinking skills” (p. 25). Research suggests that by effectively and continuously teaching higher-order thinking skills, like those targeted in the close reading of a text, “we may reasonably expect the kinds of improvement in our students’ thinking that will also lead to their greater academic success” (Beyer, 2008, p. 230).

Benefits of Extensive Reading

According to Carrell and Carson (1997), extensive reading “involves rapid reading of large quantities of material or longer readings (e.g., whole books) for general understanding, with the focus generally on the meaning of what is being read than on the language” (pp. 49–50). Their definition attempts to distinguish between a
focus on comprehension and a focus on “the language,” the latter lending itself to
the close reading approach. Allington (2009) makes a broad stroke with the term
volume reading, which he defines as “how much reading practice students experi-
ence over a certain time period” (p. 34). This definition includes the terms “reading
practice, reading time, independent reading, voluntary reading, print exposure,
amount of reading, and so on” (Allington, 2009, p. 34).

With these definitions in mind, the two most common classroom practices
of extensive reading are free voluntary reading and independent reading. While
both are student-directed, independent reading involves more guidance from the
teacher and free voluntary reading is simply allowing students to engage in reading
whatever they want during a predetermined amount of time in class or at home
(Allington, 2009; Krashen, 2004). Most schools and classrooms that implement free
reading call it sustained silent reading (SSR) or drop everything and read (DEAR).

Research has consistently shown that time spent reading is highly correlated
with student reading achievement (Anderson, Hiebert, Scott, & Wilkinson, 1985;
Cunningham & Stanovich, 1998; Hepler & Hickman, 1982; Krashen, 2004; National
Reading Panel & National Institute of Child Health and Human Development,
2000). More specifically, these gains are seen in studies that look at summer read-
ing (Entwisle, Alexander, & Olson, 1997; Heyns, 1978; Kim, 2004; Phillips & Chin,
2004) as well as in-class independent reading and free voluntary reading, such as
SSR and DEAR (Krashen, 2004; Manning, Lewis, & Lewis, 2010).

Research also suggests that wide reading improves vocabulary (Cunningham &
Stanovich, 1998; Herman, Anderson, Pearson, & Nagy, 1987). In a more impressive
and recent linear regression analysis of the British Cohort Study on vocabulary
acquisition, Sullivan and Brown (2014) conclude that reading for pleasure was
positively linked to vocabulary progress, as well as cognitive progress up to age
16. Moreover, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
(2010) has indicated that reading widely is a skill necessary for students if they
are to become proficient readers, and the National Assessment for Educational
Progress has concluded that “the more you read, the better your vocabulary, your
knowledge of the world, your ability to read, and so on” (National Reading Panel

The Replication of a Study

Because this study replicated a portion of Nancy Coryell’s (1927) work, it is im-
portant to understand the details of her study to better see how this research com-
pares. Nancy Coryell’s (1927) landmark study, which is considered the first major
research study in English education (Applebee, 1974; Bernard, 1981), attempted
to determine whether the extensive method of teaching English literature or the
intensive method of teaching English literature was more effective for improving
comprehension and analysis of literature by 11th-grade high school students. The
purpose of the present study was the same as Coryell’s (1927).

I defined extensive reading instruction as reading more, with less focus on details
and more focus on the amount of reading; intensive reading instruction is defined as
reading the minimum number of texts required by the syllabus with a focus on the details. **Comprehension** is defined as the basic understanding of culturally diverse written texts, while **analysis** is defined as demonstrating not only understanding of the effects of literary elements and techniques in culturally diverse written texts, but also the ability to analyze and critically evaluate culturally diverse written texts and visual representations. The definitions of both comprehension and analysis are limited to how both these skills are defined by the pretest/posttest used in my study, which was the English language arts Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) exam.

Coryell (1927) identified **intensive reading** as analytically studying the literature required by the syllabus and defined **extensive reading** as “the rapid reading of a comparatively large amount of literature with general comments and discussions in class” (p. 2). The most important variable in the latter approach is quantity. In contrast with student-driven extensive reading strategies such as free reading and individualized reading, the reading material in the present study was completely determined by the teacher. Here, as in previous similar studies, I put together a syllabus that required a large amount of reading compared with a normal syllabus for the same given year.

Coryell’s (1927) yearlong study demonstrated that the extensive approach is as effective or more in both comprehension and, what she termed, appreciation. She implemented a research method that blended qualitative and quantitative information, as well as a variety of measurements, which included multiple-choice tests, stenographic notes, and analyses of student responses to literature. In Coryell’s (1927) study, the participants of the extensive reading classes did as well as the students in the intensive reading classes in all six tests on the literature studied. In the extensive reading classes, subjects wrote three times as much to objectives, which call for analysis of poetry. Improvement of comprehension was equal within both groups, but the greatest improvement occurred among the low-achieving students assigned to the extensive reading classes.

Coryell (1927) also reported that participants from the low-achievement extensive reading group made recitations in length and in quality that were better than those from the intensive reading group. This supports the idea that the extensive method of reading literature is as practical and valuable for classes of low-achieving students as it is for high-achieving students. This is further supported by data that show the total number of words spoken by the students in the extensive reading classes was considerably larger than the total for the intensive study classes. This was most noticeable in the low-achieving group. Looking at pupil activity under the two methods reveals that the extensive reading students were more active than the intensive reading group in relation to the amount of pupil and teacher interaction. Most impressively, Coryell’s (1927) results show the extensive reading method, though more demanding, was better liked by the students.

**Background of Present Study**
Because of the limitations set forth by the district in which I was teaching at the time, along with the 89 years separating my study from Nancy Coryell’s (1927),
I note the differences between the two studies. The most pronounced differences were the measurements for vocabulary and the qualitative approach to measuring the students’ writing and talk about literature. Because of the district restrictions, I was only able to access the grade-level, teacher-created unit exams and the state assessments. These exams were objective, multiple-choice exams, and the questions on vocabulary attempted to measure text comprehension, while the major writing component on the state exam was a personal narrative that did not address the reading of literature.

**Research Design**

I attempted to answer the following two research questions:

1. Is the intensive or extensive teaching of literature more effective for the improvement of reading comprehension?
2. Is the intensive or extensive teaching of literature more effective for the improvement of analysis of literature?

To answer these questions, I implemented a quasi-experimental, nonrandomized, pretest-posttest comparison group research design. Additionally, I implemented four separate assessments, each given every 9 weeks throughout the year, and I conducted *t* tests on each 9-week assessment to compare the intensive and extensive groups. I used this design because (a) the research was intended to find a potential cause-effect relationship; (b) the independent variable could be manipulated; and (c) the study compared two different treatment conditions. A true experimental design could not be used since randomization was not possible.

The method of teaching literature served as the independent variable: (a) one group underwent intensive methods of teaching literature; and (b) one group underwent extensive methods of teaching literature. The dependent variables were reading comprehension of literary works and the analysis of literature. Both dependent variables were measured with multiple-choice tests.

The use of a pretest-posttest design allowed for a more precise evaluation of the treatment effects by taking into account students’ entering achievement on the measures of interest—comprehension and analysis of literature. The 9-week assessments allowed me to measure specific content as it related to comprehension and analysis within each unit of study.

**Participants**

The 114 participants of the study were drawn from the population of 415 eleventh-grade students attending a large urban high school who were eligible to attend regular language arts classes. Of the 1,951 students at the high school, 76% were Hispanic, 12% were White, 7% were Black, 3% were Asian or Pacific Islander, and less than 1% were multiracial. Among its students, 66% were economically disadvantaged; 13% qualified for special education; 5% received gifted and talented services, and 16% had limited English proficiency (National Center for Education Statistics, 2012).
The participants in both groups were selected through the high school scheduling process, and I had no input into student assignment. Students who qualified for special education, as well as students in Advanced Placement classes, were not a part of this study. However, students labeled with instructional or behavioral modifications as well as students with limited English proficiency were included in the study.

Instruction took place in the same classroom all year—a single classroom that seated up to 35 students. The school ran on a seven-period bell schedule for the 2011-2012 school year. I was in my 10th year of teaching; I taught six classes and had one conference period. I taught using intensive methods during Periods 2 ($n = 19$), 4 ($n = 16$), and 6 ($n = 17$) and used extensive methods during Periods 3 ($n = 22$), 5 ($n = 18$), and 7 ($n = 22$). The intensive classes ($n = 52$) and extensive classes ($n = 62$) were staggered throughout the day to eliminate the threat of the extraneous variable that the time of day poses. I assigned the teaching methods prior to any testing so that gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and/or results of student scores would not affect the selection of methods used in each of the six periods.

To ensure that the results of the study were from participants who had been exposed to solely the extensive methods classes or solely the intensive methods classes, the results of students whose schedules had necessitated their transfer from one group to another were not included in the data analyses.

Following approval from the proper authorities in the school district, the building principal, and the University Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects, all participants were given an introduction and explanation of the research by a teacher not involved in the study. To address the threat of diffusion, students were asked not to discuss the elements of the study outside of class. Participating students signed a letter of assent, and parents signed a letter of consent at the start of the study.

**Instrumentation**

Two different types of instrumentation were used. Tests measuring student achievement of predetermined learning goals set by the state and district were given at the completion of each 9-week unit. These tests were created with the help of the Holt McDougal Exam Generator, software that accompanied the textbook, and the 11th-grade teachers. The questions created by the 11th-grade teachers and Holt McDougal software were intended to target specific skills and content set out by the district and the state at a comprehension and analytical level.

Each of the 9-week exams consisted of 20 multiple-choice questions, and each question on the Holt McDougal tests was labeled with the specified Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills it was intended to measure. For questions generated by the 11th-grade teachers, a consensus was reached with regard to the objective each question measured both before and after the implementation of the assessment. Test items that were already flagged by both the Holt McDougal assessments and the state assessments were used in determining the objectives for test items created.
by the 11th-grade teachers. I conducted \( t \) tests on each of the 9-week exams to compare results between the intensive group and the extensive group.

The second instrument used was a pretest-posttest measure. The school district allowed me to use a released ELA TAKS test implemented on November 30, 2011, as the pretest, and to use the actual ELA TAKS exam required by the state on March 7, 2012, as the posttest. Both the pretest and the posttest consisted of 2 reading selections, a visual representation, and 28 multiple-choice questions. Of the 28 questions, 8 measured comprehension and 20 measured analysis. Of the 20 questions that measured analysis, 8 questions measured students’ understanding of the effects of literary elements and techniques in culturally diverse written texts, and 12 questions asked students to demonstrate their ability to analyze and critically evaluate a text.

Each item on both instruments measured one of three objectives: (1) the student would demonstrate a basic understanding of culturally diverse written texts; (2) the student would demonstrate an understanding of the effects of literary elements and techniques in culturally diverse written texts; and (3) the student would demonstrate the ability to analyze and critically evaluate culturally diverse written texts and visual representations. These objectives came from the state exam (TAKS), and the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills are aligned with these objectives. In each of the unit exams, the questions that aligned with TAKS Objective 1 were used to measure comprehension, while questions that aligned with TAKS Objectives 2 and 3 were used to measure analysis.

Questions aimed at measuring comprehension included, for example, “Which of these is the best plot summary of the selection?” and “In paragraph 8, the word \textit{brusquely} means . . . .” Questions attempting to measure analysis included “Why is the setting of the story important?” and “The author uses sentence fragments at the beginning of paragraph 1 and at the end of paragraph 3 to . . . .” The student was given four answer choices and asked to select the best.

A stratified coefficient alpha was used to measure reliability of the TAKS, which was .87 to .90. The validity of the TAKS was supported through field testing, writing questions to specified objectives, and review by university experts and educators (http://www.tea.state.tx.us/).

**Treatment**

The treatment discussed here details the time between the pretest and the posttest. This section outlines the differences in the amount of literature read and the instructional methods used in both the classes during that time. While the examples are not exhaustive, they do represent the differences between the methods and the amount of reading that took place throughout the school year.

As shown in Table 1, in the time between the pretest and the posttest, the extensive group read six times more literature than the intensive group, which is the same ratio reported by Coryell (1927). The groups read their respective list of works in Table 1 during class time. I read the selections aloud to the whole class, or the participants read aloud in smaller groups, or the students read the texts silently. The intensive group read with a specific focus on certain details of those
texts, while the extensive group read with a focus on the amount of reading. The extra readings of the extensive group were linked to the readings of the intensive group by at least one of the following: theme, genre, common literary elements, and/or skills taught within the literature. While the approach in the intensive classes included analytical questioning of the text, the teacher’s role in the extensive classes, like Coryell’s (1927), was mainly to help the students understand what they read.

### Table 1. Reading Lists for Intensive and Extensive Classes between Pretest and Posttest

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Intensive</th>
<th>Extensive</th>
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| *The Things They Carried* by Tim O’Brien  
  • “Ambush”  
  Personal narrative  
  • “How It Feels to Be Colored Me” by Zora Neale Hurston  
  Background information – Harlem Renaissance  
  • Students were assigned one section to summarize for the class:  
    ◦ The Jazz Age  
    ◦ The Great Depression  
    ◦ New Directions  
    ◦ Harlem Renaissance  
  Langston Hughes – Harlem Renaissance poetry  
  • “Harlem”  
  • “The Negro Speaks of Rivers”  
  • “I, Too”  
  • “Let America Be America Again”  
  Dialogue  
  • “Hills Like White Elephants” by Ernest Hemingway  
  Sensory details and imagery  
  • “The Tell-Tale Heart” by Edgar Allan Poe  
  Satire  
  • “The Princess and the Tin Box” by James Thurber  
  • “Count Dracula” by Woody Allen  
  • From *The Onion*: “Brave Lion Fends Off Group of Hikers”  
| *The Things They Carried* by Tim O’Brien  
  • “Ambush”  
  • “Style”  
  • “Speaking of Courage”  
  • “Notes”  
  • “In the Field”  
  • “Good Form”  
  • “Field Trip”  
  Personal narrative  
  • “How It Feels to Be Colored Me” by Zora Neale Hurston  
  • From *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave* by Frederick Douglass  
  Topics related to Harlem Renaissance  
  • “Fifty Years among Black Folks” by W. E. B. DuBois  
  • “Negro Four Years Hence” by Booker T. Washington  
  • Martin Luther King Jr. – PBS interview with Kenneth B. Clark (1963)  
  • Malcolm X – speech to the Northern Negro Grass Roots Leadership Conference, Detroit (Nov. 1963)  
  • Martin Luther King Jr. – sermon at Temple Israel, Hollywood, CA (Feb. 1965)  
  Langston Hughes – Harlem Renaissance poetry  
  • “Harlem”  
  • “The Negro Speaks of Rivers”  
  • “I, Too”  
  • “Let America Be America Again”  
  • “Life Is Fine”  
  • “Madam and the Phone Bill”  
  • “Mother to Son”  
  • “Cross”  
  • “Dinner Guest: Me”  
  • “Justice”  
  • “As I Grew Older”  
  • “Bad Morning”  
  • “Children’s Rhymes”  
  • “Democracy”  
  • “Dream Variations”  
  • “Dreams”  
  Dialogue  
  • “Hills Like White Elephants” by Ernest Hemingway  
  • “The Lottery” by Shirley Jackson  
  • “The Model” by Bernard Malamud | **continued on next page**
When I, for example, implemented an intensive approach to teaching Poe’s use of imagery within “The Tell-Tale Heart,” I required three days of reading the text aloud, stopping periodically to question the text and analyze paragraphs or even sentences; I also coupled small-group discussions of excerpts that create different images with this analysis. The final activity involved the students coming together as a whole class to discuss Poe’s unique craft. Conversely, during those same three days, when I implemented an extensive approach, I required the students to read “The Tell-Tale Heart,” along with three other short stories and a news article (see Table 1 under “Sensory Details and Images”), and had the students discuss the use of imagery in all the works more generally.

The lessons I designed for the intensive classes are also described by Hinchman and Moore (2013), who identify six different representations of close reading: (a) finding a deeper meaning; (b) grappling with meaning within a complex text; (c) how the parts make up the whole—strength within the text is in the details; (d) extracting correct meaning through analysis of patterns; (e) transforming meaning to the reader’s experience; and (f) text-based questioning.

The last two representations (transforming meaning to the reader’s experience and text-based questioning) I implemented through the use of dialectical journals or reader response journals. For some lessons, students wrote questions and comments concerning different aspects of the text—first identifying the quotation or portion of the text being referred to—in their journals in a meaningful way. The goal of this writing was that they would clarify, or in some cases reconsider, their perspectives (Beck, McKeown, Hamilton, & Kucan, 1997). Sometimes journal
assignments focused on elements such as theme while other times students were simply asked to make connections and to question the author. Many days, the intensive classes were simply required to read fewer pages and write more entries than the extensive classes. For example, when working with *The Things They Carried*, the intensive classes read seven pages and were asked to write four dialectical journal entries focusing on how O’Brien develops the theme of “war’s impact on the human spirit,” while the extensive classes were required to read twenty pages and write one entry on the same topic.

Tables 2 and 3 further highlight the differentiation between the two approaches in teaching different aspects of literature.

**Table 2. Intensive and Extensive Approaches to Teaching Dialogue within “Hills Like White Elephants” by Ernest Hemingway**

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<tr>
<th>Teaching Method</th>
<th>Description of Implementation</th>
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| **INTENSIVE**   | The teacher reads the story aloud. Students read the story again and work in groups to answer the following discussion questions:  
1. What does the dialogue reveal to the reader?  
2. What does the dialogue tell you about the characters? Describe the characters and use the dialogue to support your answer.  
3. How does the dialogue create the conflict? What external conflict is revealed through the dialogue? What internal conflict is revealed through the dialogue? Find evidence.  
Groups then work together to place their responses on anchor charts and post them around the room. Groups read each other’s posted responses and add commentary using posted notes. To close the lesson, the teacher reviews each anchor chart and facilitates a whole-class discussion. |
| **EXTENSIVE**   | The teacher reads aloud “Hills Like White Elephants” by Ernest Hemingway. Small-group discussion: How does the dialogue of the story reveal conflict and character? The teacher reads aloud “The Lottery” by Shirley Jackson. Small-group discussion: How does the dialogue develop the plot? The teacher reads aloud “The Model” by Bernard Malamud. Small-group discussion: How does the dialogue work to help tell the story (characterization, plot development, conflict development, etc.)? |

**Table 3. Intensive and Extensive Approaches to Teaching Harlem Renaissance Poetry**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teaching Method</th>
<th>Description of Implementation</th>
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| **INTENSIVE**   | Discuss the following questions about “The Negro Speaks of Rivers” by Langston Hughes:  
1. Is the speaker of the poem Langston Hughes? How do you know?  
2. What associations do you make with the colors used in the poem?  
3. How does the denotative meaning of the word “bosom” help convey meaning? (Use your phone to look up the word.)  
4. What comparisons does Hughes make?  
5. What associations are made with the rivers to which Hughes alludes?  
6. Considering everything you’ve discussed with your group, how does Hughes celebrate his heritage? |
| **EXTENSIVE**   | Read the following six poems by Langston Hughes. Then, in groups of four, discuss how Hughes celebrates his heritage. |
Data Collection and Analysis

For the pretest-posttest scores, I conducted $t$ tests to analyze the gains within each group of 11th-grade students in both reading comprehension and analysis of literature. A 95% confidence level ($p < .05$) was the criterion set for determining statistical significance. To conduct these analyses, I first created a variable that identified the gain scores (posttest minus pretest). I then used the split file feature in SPSS to sort out the grouping variables and ran a one-sample $t$ test on the differences between the pretest and posttest within each group. To look at between-group differences, I conducted an independent $t$ test to compare the differences in gains.

In addition to the tests run on all participants’ performance on the pretest-posttest, I also ran $t$ tests within and between the intensive and extensive groups comparing low-performing students and high-performing students, using the pretest scores as the basis for forming achievement groups. Students whose scores were in the bottom third of the pretest scores within the intensive group and the extensive group were labeled low-performing, and students whose scores were in the top third of the pretest scores within the intensive group and the extensive group were labeled high-performing. Furthermore, for each of the four 9-week assessments, I conducted $t$ tests to compare the two groups to provide an overview of student performance on all teacher-created assessments within the school year.

Results

The results of the pretest-posttest analysis reflect only the scores of students who completed both tests. Any students who switched groups owing to schedule changes were not included in the results of the pretest-posttest. Similarly, the results for each of the 9-week assessments reflect only the scores of students who remained in the same group for the entire 9 weeks of instruction corresponding to that assessment.

Nine-Week Assessments

Table 4. Descriptive Statistics for the Total Score on Each 9-Week Assessment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>First 9-Week Assessment</th>
<th>Intensive</th>
<th>Extensive</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>$M$</td>
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<tr>
<td>$SD$</td>
<td>.15</td>
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<tr>
<td>$n$</td>
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<tr>
<td>$M$</td>
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<th>Third 9-Week Assessment</th>
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<td>$M$</td>
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<th>Fourth 9-Week Assessment</th>
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<tr>
<td>$M$</td>
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</table>
Table 4 reports mean scores on each of the four assessments, which are almost identical between groups, and none of the measurements yielded a statistically significant difference between the groups’ scores. Even when the questions that attempted to measure comprehension and analysis were disaggregated, the results showed no statistical significance between any of the assessments. Considering that there were no statistical differences between the scores, these results suggest that within these measures, neither reading approach was more effective than the other.

Pretest-Posttest Results

Table 5. Pretest and Posttest Results for Questions Measuring Comprehension and Analysis of Literature

<table>
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<tr>
<th></th>
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*aThis difference is significant at a level of 0.05.
I found no statistically significant gains within any of the groups on questions measuring comprehension, and no statistically significant gains within the high-performing groups on questions measuring analysis of literature. However, there were statistically significant gains between the pretest and the posttest on analysis of literature scores for both the intensive group ($t = 3.619$, $p < .001$, Cohen’s $d = 1.17$) and the extensive group ($t = 2.220$, $p < .032$, Cohen’s $d = .67$). The gains were even more pronounced in the low-performing intensive group ($t = 5.224$, $p < .000$, Cohen’s $d = 3.01$) and in the low-performing extensive group ($t = 5.146$, $p < .001$ Cohen’s $d = 2.75$). Moreover, the independent $t$ test revealed no statistically significant differences in gain scores between any of the groups on either comprehension or analysis of literature.

**Discussion**

In the time between the pretest and the posttest, students in the extensive classes read six times more literature than those in the intensive classes. Even though the extensive group read a larger amount of literature than the intensive group, the results of this study suggest that for the purpose of improving the comprehension of literature, both the intensive and extensive methods are equally effective. This is similar to the findings of Coryell (1927), Dean (1933), Williams (1929), and Yost (1980).

Within this study, the results from the questions that measured analysis on the pretest and posttest also align with Coryell’s (1927) conclusions that the extensive approach is as effective as the intensive approach for improving the ability to analyze literature. Overall, these results corroborate those of Coryell (1927), Dean (1933), Manicoff (1939), and Williams (1929).

**Limitations and Direction for Future Research**

Though having a single teacher within a single study means that several basic teacher characteristics remain constant (experience, gender, etc.), research has shown that teaching style can differ for the same teacher in different classes (Caughlan & Kelly, 2004). This poses a significant limitation since I taught all six classes and therefore was responsible for teaching both methods with fidelity. A teacher’s bias toward one method over the other can also influence student learning, which in this case is a student’s response to the literature. However, as the teacher of record and the researcher, I was interested in truly testing the alternative approaches under equally rigorous implementations. Moreover, even though no fidelity of implementation data were collected, such as videos or observations, both groups showed a statistically significant growth in their posttest scores, suggesting that both implementations of the methods were effective.

In addition, the intensive approach was the preferred method advocated in the resources provided by the district and the campus English department. This is one possible explanation for these results, particularly the value of devoting more time to reading literature, since the extensive alternative may have been welcomed,
eliciting a more positive attitude toward literature. This is even more probable for low-achieving students. Students are labeled “struggling readers” by their scores on the state exam, which were used as the pretest-posttest measurements. Given their status as struggling readers, these students are often more likely to be provided with intensive reading-comprehension instruction.

The role of the teacher can also create a conflation between his or her intended outcomes for reading a text and an instructional method for approaching a text. The distinction here is focused on the degree to which students need to conform to the teacher’s instructional method with regard to procedural display of competence as opposed to simply differences in ways of reading—the latter is what the study purports to measure. For example, by guiding students to respond to a text using specific strategies, the teacher focuses the students more on conforming to his or her instruction than on formulating responses that reflect their own experience with the text. This is the difference, Aukerman (2013) claims, between “comprehension-as-outcome pedagogies” and “comprehension-as-sense-making pedagogies” (p. 2). Aukerman (2013) attempts to make the case that the former limits student responses by emphasizing what is “right,” while the latter “values the actual (creative, surprising) meanings readers make of text, regardless of ‘rightness’” (p. 2).

Limitations also come from the fact that a pure implementation of both intensive methods and extensive methods was not possible. Part of my philosophy as an approach to teaching reading is that students will see reading as an alternative recreational activity. With the knowledge of historically notable research (Appleby, 1967; Krashen, 2004; LaBrant & Heller, 1939; Norvell, 1941; Willis, 1961), I felt ethically obligated to implement an individualized reading program as part of the curriculum for both groups; this included 30 minutes a week of free reading. (Students were given the freedom to choose their own books, as I minimally guided them by their level of reading ability.) Keep in mind, though, that the individualized reading approach prioritizes students’ attitudes about reading, with the hopes of having a positive impact on reading achievement as a result, while the teacher-assigned reading that my study implemented prioritized the impact on reading comprehension and analysis of literature. Nonetheless, research that targets a stricter implementation of both methods is warranted.

Finally, because this is a study restricted to a single teacher at a single school with small effect sizes and sample sizes, and no control group, there are obvious implications for external validity and generalizability. This is simply a small-scale, low-power study, so there is a need for replication before generic inferences about the instructional methods can be made with much confidence. Moreover, in small-scale experiments it is useful to identify and measure student-level covariates that might confound the results and include those in statistical models. However, due to district regulations, I was not able to identify any of the student demographics within the results of the study. Therefore, it is recommended that controls for family background and other student variables be included in future similar studies.
Implications
This study has implications for how we define extensive reading in the classroom. Most of the research on extensive reading methods involves student choice for selecting texts. Works cited by Krashen (2004) showing the benefits of free reading, LaBrant and Heller’s (1939) research on individualized reading, and Appleby’s (1967) work suggesting that individualized reading has positive implications far beyond the classroom are all studies in which students were allowed to select their reading material.

But the extensive method primarily used for this study is unique in the field of what is considered wide reading. All the pieces that the students read are noted for their literary quality, and the participants did not have a choice in the reading selections. Because the present study attempted to mimic the precise amount of reading students completed in Coryell’s (1927) research, the extensive method used simply involved students reading more assigned texts. While this approach is much different from the more notable extensive methods that involve student choice, the results play a distinct role in supporting the research on the other extensive methods.

More importantly, concerning the differences in effectiveness between the two methods, this study only tells us that we need more research on the topic. I am only one teacher who experimented within my own classroom with the implementation of fundamentally different approaches to teaching literature. At a time when much policy seems to be driving English instruction toward an intensive approach, this study suggests that we need more research before the field of English education can properly debate the issue.

Closing Thoughts
So if research does not overwhelmingly support the implementation of close reading, why do the CCSS and its writers, like David Coleman, advocate so strongly for an intensive approach? The answer can be traced to the goal of the standards, which is “college readiness.” Since a college literature course is likely to study works of literature intensively, then—the reasoning goes—so should the high school student to be college ready. However, what the writers of the CCSS seem to dismiss is that students in a college American literature course who analytically dissect the pages of A Farewell to Arms during two class meetings in a week are also required to read about 12 to 15 more books assigned that semester outside of class. This would indicate that in college literature classes, a healthy balance of intensive and extensive reading is implemented; Coleman seems to prefer only the intensive approach for high school students. But if high school students read only intensively, they will not be prepared for the extensive reading demands of university classes in not only literature but other subjects as well. Their intensive reading in the high school class will mimic only one aspect of the college classroom: they will not be prepared to read extensively at the college level.
What is lost in the argument of the official suggested implementation of the CCSS is a trust in the act, or the experience, of reading itself. Rosenblatt (1995) argues that “the students valued literature as a means of enlarging their knowledge of the world, because through literature they acquire not so much additional information as additional experience” (p. 38, emphasis in original). A close reading approach, or questioning the text intensively, can place more emphasis on information, instead of the experience that Rosenblatt (1995) outlines. Extensive reading offers more opportunities to have these experiences, allowing the reader more opportunities to challenge himself or herself against the characters, the author, and, sometimes, other readers. And in these challenges, readers hope to “see more clearly who they are and how they feel, react, and think” (Probst, 2004, p. 31).

The extensive classes in this study were given more opportunities to experience the literature, to live through the experiences in the text. At times, students spent an entire class period immersed in some of the greatest works American literature has to offer. In the intensive classes, by contrast, students were forced to stop periodically—sometimes during climactic parts—only to question the text, or discuss certain literary qualities. This break in the story is not authentic. Implementing an intensive reading method every day only gives students more opportunities to lose focus on the text, the story, in front of them. The students may miss the intended purpose of some selections, which is simply to enjoy and experience the literature.

As Coryell (1927) claims that the students in the extensive group she studied enjoyed the class more than the intensive group, I heard the same praise, though anecdotally, being given more in the extensive classes than in my intensive classes. I observed students in the extensive classes remaining quietly enthralled as they turned the pages simultaneously while I read aloud the stories. This was a sharp contrast to having to stop periodically and hearing kids moan in disappointment because they were going to have to discuss a certain aspect of the reading or complete a dialectical journal entry.

As a profession, we need to see more research on close reading before we can properly debate the amount of time we devote to an intensive approach in our English classes. The research has not defined the effectiveness of one approach over the other, but the research does reveal benefits of both close reading and wide reading. Therefore, any policy debate at this time should be about a more balanced approach to the teaching of literature.

NOTE

1. To readers examining Coryell’s original work: she called text analysis “appreciation,” using the terminology of the era.
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