Increasing Reading Comprehension and Fluency Through the Use of Read Naturally

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Increasing Reading Comprehension

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Approval for the Faculty

_____, Faculty Advisor

_____, Date

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to examine if students made progress in reading fluency and comprehension using Reading Mastery or Read Naturally curriculums. Students' test scores were compared to see the amount of growth gained over two academic years. Results of this study showed students made an average of 27% gain on their reading scores between winter 2009 and winter 2010 when Reading Mastery was taught. Students' test results between winter 2010 and winter 2011 showed students made an average of 78% gain on their reading scores when Read Naturally was taught. The researcher found Read Naturally to be more effective when teaching reading fluency and comprehension.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Background for the Project

Millions of children nationwide were unable to read well, resulting in a growing population of students who were at a higher risk for academic failure. The long-heated debate of how to teach this group of students had gone on for countless years. Many interventions had been tried over time, which had contributed to some children's success in reading. The types of interventions and programs used were as vast as the different kinds of fruit in the world. The debate over which curriculum and interventions were successful had been an ongoing and often heated discussion for decades.

Teaching a child how to read was a complex task, no matter what curriculum or tools were used. Studies had shown the importance of phonemic awareness skills in the development of reading (National Reading Panel, 2000). A student had to master certain pre-reading and reading skills, creating a foundation before moving on to higher level tasks and higher level thinking. Students started with letter recognition and letter sounds. Once a student had mastered the letter recognition and phonemic sounds, they had the basic knowledge to decode known and unknown words. Students then could read words and sentences and begin to create meaning from the text.

Statement of the Problem

An elementary school in southeastern Washington State had been in school improvement for the past five years. The state had pressured the school to improve test scores. The students in the researcher's classroom were delayed in one or more academic areas, and had not passed the state assessment. The researcher recently changed the program used to teach reading to a selected group of seven students. The previous program was called Reading Mastery, which was a phonics-based program. Having used Reading Mastery for several years, the researcher was very much aware that students' test scores were low in the areas of reading fluency and comprehension. The new program used was called Read Naturally, which was a reading fluency program incorporating comprehension questions.

Purpose of the Project

Many students had difficulty reading. Deciding what reading program to use had been an issue that was discussed and debated over time. The purpose of this quantitative study was to see if students made a higher percentage of growth in the area of reading fluency with the new Read Naturally program compared to the Reading Mastery program. The researcher intended to see if there was a difference in reading score gains with the same group of students over a period of time using one program versus the other program.

Delimitations

The study focused on winter 2009 to winter 2010 and winter 2010 to winter 2011 Developmental Reading Assessment scores. All participants were students in attendance at an elementary school in southeastern Washington State. The seven students ranged in ages from seven to eleven years of age. The same groups of students were with the researcher for both academic school years. The setting of the research was conducted in a special education resource room. Materials used in the research were the Read Naturally and Reading Mastery curriculums.

The school demographics included, as of May 2010, 649 students who attended the elementary school in southeastern Washington State. Fifty-two percent of the student populations were male, and 47% were female. Two point seven percent of the populations were Asian/Pacific Islander, 3.5% were Black, 63.8% were Hispanic and 28.5% were White. Sixty-six point nine percent of the school population qualified for free or reduced-price meals. Fourteen point nine percent of the population received special education services, 32.4% of the populations were transitional bilingual, and 6% of the students were from migrant families. The school had 37 certified classroom teachers with an average of 13.4 years of experience, with 62.2% having a master's degree. One-hundred percent of the teachers who taught at the school were considered Highly Qualified Teachers according to No Child Left Behind (OSPI, 2010).

The assumption was made that students regularly attended school and were the same group of students in both years of the study, which allowed students the same opportunity to access materials and instruction. The teacher and para-educator were consistent both years. The materials and curriculum used were the same with all students. The learning environment of the classroom was well structured so that students felt safe and comfortable. Developmental Reading Assessment scores were standardized and administered in a quiet testing environment.

Hypothesis

Students made a higher percentage of gain in reading fluency and comprehension on the Developmental Reading Assessment when taught using the Read Naturally program than when taught using the Reading Mastery program.

Null Hypothesis

Students did not make a higher percentage of gain in reading fluency and comprehension on the Developmental Reading Assessment when taught using the Read Naturally program than when taught using the Reading Mastery program.

Significance of the Project

The debate over what curriculum helped students learn to read had been a long and heated discussion. The researcher hoped to find the project results to be positive, showing improvement in reading fluency and comprehension scores with the use of Read Naturally, compared to the use of Reading Mastery. This project

had the potential to provide important information and data about student growth using specific curriculum. This data could be used to make decisions on how to better help students who were struggling readers.

Procedure

The groups of students chosen for the study were with the researcher for two or more consecutive years. All participants qualified for special education services, which were received in a resource room setting. The participants were taught each year using the same curriculum. Participants in the study had received at least one year of Reading Mastery instruction and two trimesters of Read Naturally instruction.

The Developmental Reading Assessment was administered using a standardized testing method. The testing was administered in a one-on-one setting with a certified teacher. The test scores examined were from winter 2009 to winter 2010, and winter 2010 to winter 2011. Test scores from all participating students were gathered and compared to the individual's growth over time. Students received Reading Mastery instruction in the 2009-2010 school year and Read Naturally instruction in the 2010-2011 school year.

Definition of Terms

Developmental Reading Assessment. The Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA) provided teachers a tool for assessing and documenting students' reading progress over time. The purpose was to identify students'

reading level, in which students met specific reading criteria in the areas of accuracy, fluency, and comprehension.

Read Naturally. The Read Naturally strategy was an effective tool for improving reading fluency in struggling readers. Three strategies were combined to improve fluency: teacher modeling, repeated reading, and progress monitoring.

Reading Fluency. Reading fluency was the ability to read accurately, and quickly. A person was able to read at a reasonable rate, 250-300 words per minute.

Reading Mastery. Reading Mastery was a reading program which was designed to teach basic beginning reading skills. Lessons and activities were taught in a carefully programmed sequence.

Acronyms

ADHD. Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder.

DRA. Developmental Reading Assessment.

IEP. Individualized Education Program.

MSP. Measurement of Student Progress.

NRP. National Reading Panel.

OSPI. Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction.

PA. Phonemic Awareness.

RM. Reading Mastery.

RN. Read Naturally.

SLD. specific learning disability.

SpEd. Special Education.

WPM. words per minute.

CHAPTER 2

Review of Selected Literature

Introduction

Teaching a child how to read was a complex task, no matter what curriculum or tools were used. Specific subtopics researched in this section included: Phonemic Awareness and Phonics Reading Instruction, Reading Fluency and Reading Comprehension, and Whole Language. Discussed in each section was a definition of each subtopic, and a brief description of the specific method of reading instruction.

Phonemic Awareness and Phonics Reading Instruction

The ability to read required the understanding and knowledge of letters and sounds, also known as phonemic awareness. The National Reading Panel (2000) stated, "Phonemes are the smallest units composing spoken language" (p. 7). Phonemic awareness (PA) instruction taught students to manipulate phoneme sounds into spoken words and language (National Reading Panel, 2000). "Letter sound relations require a child to perceive individual sounds and associate the sounds with letters. This two-fold task encompasses both phonemic awareness and beginning phonics instruction, crucial prerequisite for mastering the alphabetic code" (Cihon, Gardner, Morris & Paul, 2008, p. 139). "PA instruction qualifies as phonics instruction when it involves teaching children to blend or segment the sounds in words using letters" (National Reading Panel, 2000, p. 7).

Phonics instruction occurred in the early stages of reading, generally when students were in kindergarten, first and second grade. Students learned the connection between sounds and letters and used the knowledge to read and spell (Tindall & Nisbet, 2010). According to the National Reading Panel (2000), there were three types of approaches to teach phonics, which included synthetic phonics, analytic phonics, and embedded phonics. The synthetic phonics approach taught students to link individual letter or letter combinations with the correct sound, then blend the sounds to form words. Often the synthetic approach was taught through direct instruction. An analytic approach taught students the whole word, followed by instruction to link letters in the word to sounds. The embedded phonics approaches "are less explicit and use decodable text for practice less frequently, although the phonics concepts to be learned can still be presented systematically" (National Reading Panel, 2000, p. 9).

The National Reading Panel (2000) stated "Systematic synthetic phonics instruction enhances children's success in learning to read and that systematic phonics instruction is significantly more effective than instruction that teachers little or no phonics" (p. 9). Students who struggled to learn had shown benefits and growth when the systematic synthetic phonic approach was taught (National Reading Panel, 2000). With systematic synthetic phonics, students gained a sense of alphabetic knowledge and showed improved reading skills (National Reading Panel, 2000).

The Reading Mastery (RM) program used systematic phonics when lessons were taught. The RM teacher's guide (2008) stated that reading lessons were taught in a specific sequence including "prereading exercises, activities associated with beginning decoding, work with symbol identification, rhyming, and comprehension activities" (p. 1). With the knowledge gained through the RM program students were able to manipulate individual sounds and form the sounds into words. Tindall and Nisbet (2010) explained how instruction was maximized by "teacher model, students' response with teacher, student echo response, student choral response, and student partner response" (p. 3). The RM program embedded each of these elements into the daily lessons.

Several methods of teaching phonics included a kinesthetic connection to letter sounds.

Sound/Visual Phonics is a unique intervention tool that provides a hand sign for every phoneme in the English language. The hand signs mimic some aspect of the mouth, tongue and throat movements one makes when producing the sound and, in some cases, provides visual or kenethetic links to letter shapes. (Cihon et al., 2008, p. 140)

Reading Mastery included these elements in the daily lessons. The complex vowels and irregular spellings were linked together using shapes. The shapes and linking lines showed students a visual picture of how words were blended together. Teachers modeled new content to the students and students

responded by practiced hand motions, linked to the kinesthetic aspect of phonics. Students then practiced individually the new concepts, and students had the opportunity to apply what they had been taught (Reading mastery. what works clearinghouse intervention report, 2010).

Reading Fluency and Reading Comprehension

Reading instruction was the fundamental cornerstone of academics, because reading was imbedded in every academic task. The ability for students to understand what they had been taught required reading fluency and reading comprehension. "Fluent reading is what most good readers do most of the time when they read almost anything" (Grabe, 2010, p. 72). For students to be fluent readers they needed to have had exposure to print with large amounts of reading, accuracy in comprehension, and instruction provided at their ability level. "Fluency itself, as a concept, is complex, involving rapid and accurate processing" (Grabe, 2010, p. 72). Students who had gained strong reading fluency skills had instruction which was very intentional and strong with repetition which occurred over a period of time (Grabe, 2010). A "strong relationship between oral passage reading fluency and reading comprehension" had been found in many case studies (Grabe, 2010, p. 74). According to the National Reading Panel, "Fluency is one of several critical factors necessary for reading comprehension" (National Reading Panel, 2000, p. 11).

Students showed the need for guided reading practice to promote reading fluency and comprehension. "One guided repeated oral reading encourages students to read passages orally with systematic explicit guidance and feedback from the teacher" (National Reading Panel, 2000, p. 12). The U.S. Department of Education stated the Read Naturally program used "repeated reading of text for developing oral reading fluency, teacher modeling of story reading and systematic monitoring of student progress by teachers and the students themselves" (Read Naturally[R], 2010, p. 1). When students were able to recognize words accurately and rapidly, they were able to grasp the concepts more quickly, resulting in a greater understanding and comprehension level of the text (Iwahori, 2008).

Students corrected their mistakes throughout the lessons by using three types of corrections, which included meaning-based corrections, phonics-based corrections, and modeling. Meaning-based correction was when students were prompted to think about the mistake made and tried to make sense of the word in context. Phonics-based correction involved students sounding-out the incorrect word. Modeling was when students were told by the teacher what the word was after a short amount of time (Watson, Fore, & Boon, 2009).

When students had practiced reading the material several times, results showed improvement in reading comprehension (Grabe, 2010). "Comprehension is critically important to the development of children's reading skills and therefore to the ability to obtain an education" (National Reading Panel, 2000, p.

13). Students gained knowledge about reading, and increased their fluency level which led to increased accuracy and comprehension (Grabe, 2010).

Whole Language

Whole language was an approach to learning which was focused on students who identified whole words from a reading instead of fragmented sections, and created meaning from the word which was read (Jones, 2011). The teacher's role in a whole language classroom was to act as a facilitator for students' understanding, instead of imparting their past knowledge on students (Johnson, 2004). "Teachers who endorse whole language encourage the process of language acquisition by finding meaning in children's oral and written attempts to communicate" (Johnson, 2004, p. 75). Language was used "in functional and meaningful ways such as daily journals, letter writing, and writing workshops" (Johnson, 2004, p. 75).

"With each language encounter, whether oral or written, the child constructs knowledge about the world, the function of symbols, and communication strategies" (Johnson, 2004, p. 74). Students wrote and made connections from their past personal experiences or observations (Kitagawa & Kitagawa, 2007). Students used their knowledge to help them create meaning from the text. Whole language focused on students as learners who had come to school with past knowledge and experience (Cambourne &Turbill, 2007).

Creating a classroom community was important in a whole language classroom (Kitagawa & Kitagawa, 2007). Each student contributed their piece of knowledge in creating a classroom community. The classroom environment was also "rich in simple printed texts" (Lemann, 1997, pp.128-134). Students were able to gain more knowledge from their text-rich environment.

Summary

The debate had continued over time about which method of reading instruction was appropriate for students. Phonics and phonemic awareness instruction provided students with the ability to segment words into phonemes, which "are the smallest units composing spoken language" (National Reading Panel, 2000, p. 7). Phonics instruction was considered an early intervention used when students were in kindergarten, first and second grade. Whole language focused on reading words as a whole, not segmenting words, or sounding out words as in the phonics reading approach. Students who learned from the whole language approach had a student-centered classroom environment, which drew from students' past knowledge and experience (Cambourne & Turbill, 2007). After students gained the ability to decode or read words, instruction was focused on reading fluency and comprehension of text. When students were able to recognize words accurately and rapidly, they were able to grasp the concepts more quickly, resulting in a greater understanding and comprehension level of the text (Iwahori, 2008). "Comprehension is critically important to the development

of children's reading skills and therefore to the ability to obtain an education" (National Reading Panel, 2000, p. 13).

Chapter 3

Methodology and Treatment of Data

Introduction

The study included a group of seven students in grades two, three and four, in which all students qualified for special education services in the area of reading. Each of the students was with the researcher for two or more consecutive school years. The reading curriculum which was used during the 2009-2010 school year was Reading Mastery, and the reading curriculum used during the 2010-2011 school year was Read Naturally. In the study, Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA) test scores from the winter 2009 to winter 2010, and winter 2010 to winter 2011 were compared to show the amount of growth using the two reading programs.

Methodology

The research method for this project was quantitative and used an experimental study design. "In experimental research, at least one independent variable is manipulated, other relevant variables are controlled, and the effect on one or more dependent variables is observed" (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2009, p. 11). The variable manipulated in this case study was the reading curriculum. Reading Mastery was used in the 2009-2010 school year and Read Naturally was used in the 2010-2011 school year.

Participants

The participants in this study were elementary students ranging in ages seven to eleven, and grades two, three and four. Each of the participants qualified for special education services, which were received in a resource room setting. The participants all qualified for special education services in the area of reading, as well as other areas not related to this study. The Reading Mastery curriculum was taught to all the participants in the 2009-2010 school year, and Read Naturally curriculum was taught in the 2010-2011 school year.

Instruments

Each trimester the Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA) was administered to each student in the school. The DRA was an assessment that was administered at the child's ability level. The assessment revealed students' overall reading abilities, which included reading comprehension and reading fluency. Students were given a score based on passing the assessment at 90% accuracy. The test was standardized by using a script all teachers must follow. The Read Naturally program had a graphing exercise built into the procedures. Students graphed their cold score (unpracticed reading) and hot score (practiced reading) of the passage. The graphs were used to show progress in reading skills.

The DRA and Read Naturally program were both found to hold reliability and validity. According to *Educational Research: Competencies for Analysis and*

Applications, reliability was "the degree to which a test consistently measures whatever it measures" (Gay et al., 2009, p. 605), and validity was "the degree to which a test measures what it is intended to measure" (Gay et al., 2009, p. 608). The DRA assessment and Read Naturally program did assess and measure what it was intended to assess and measure.

Design

This study used an experimental research project design. The same group of students was with the researcher for two or more consecutive years. The DRA assessment was administered in the same way each year. The variable which changed was the use of the reading curriculum. During the 2009-2010 school year Reading Mastery was used, and during the 2010-2011 school year Read Naturally was used. Student's DRA scores were compared between the two years of instruction. The researcher wanted to see if there was higher growth in reading fluency using the Read Naturally program.

Procedure

The students in the study qualified for special education services in the area of reading, as well as other academic areas. The seven students who were chosen for the study were students who had been with the researcher for two or more school years. Three times each school year the DRA was administered to students. The assessment scores from winter 2009 to winter 2010, and winter 2010 to winter 2011 were used in this research project. For each school year the

reading scores were compared to observe the amount of growth in reading for the winter testing time period. The amounts of growth from the two school years were compared to see the amount of growth in each reading program. The students in this project were instructed in reading during the 2009- 2010 school year with the Reading Mastery program. During the 2010- 2011 school year the students were instructed with the Read Naturally program. Students also tracked their growth when using the Read Naturally program. Students graphed their cold score, unpracticed reading and hot score, practiced reading. Over time students were able to show their daily growth in the area of reading fluency.

Treatment of the Data

Test scores were examined from the students. The amounts of growth between the two time periods were compared. The scores were used to see which reading program produced the greatest amount of growth in the area of reading fluency. The data was presented in graphs which showed the students' progress in reading fluency.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to show if students made more growth in the area of reading fluency using one reading curriculum versus a different curriculum. Seven students were chosen to participate in this study, all of whom qualified for special education reading services, and struggled with reading. The seven students were with the researcher for two or more school years. The

curriculum used during the 2009- 2010 school year was Reading Mastery, and during the 2010- 2011 school year the students were instructed with the Read Naturally program. The DRA scores from winter 2009 to winter 2010, and winter 2010 to winter 2011 were compared to show the amount of growth students had made. Data from the Read Naturally program were also used to show growth in reading fluency over time.

CHAPTER 4

Analysis of the Data

Introduction

Many approaches to reading instruction were used over the years, and students continued to struggle with reading. Different instructional methods taught a variety of skills, which contribute to reading successfully. The researcher examined test scores from two different school years with the same groups of students. The instructional materials used each year were different. The researcher wanted to compare the testing scores from both years to see the amount of growth in reading comprehension and fluency.

Description of the Environment

The environment in which the research took place was an elementary resource room. The students in the resource room ranged from grades kindergarten to fifth grade; however the student in this study were in grades two, three, and four. The study focused on seven students' test scores from winter 2009 to winter 2010, and winter 2010 to winter 2011 using the Developmental Reading Assessment. All participants were students in attendance at an elementary school in southeastern Washington State. The seven students ranged in ages from seven to eleven years of age. The same groups of students were with the researcher for both academic school years. Students were instructed in small groups of three to

six students with one teacher. Materials used in the research were the Read Naturally and Reading Mastery curriculums.

The school demographics included, as of May 2010, 649 students who attended the elementary school. Fifty-two percent of the student populations were male, and 47% were female. Two point seven percent of the populations were Asian/Pacific Islander, 3.5% were Black, 63.8% were Hispanic and 28.5% were White. Sixty-six point nine percent of the school population qualified for free or reduced-price meals. Fourteen point nine percent of the population received special education services, 32.4% of the populations were transitional bilingual, and 6% of the students were from migrant families. The school had 37 certified classroom teachers with an average of 13.4 years of experience, with 62.2% having a master's degree. One-hundred percent of the teachers who taught at the school were considered Highly Qualified Teachers according to No Child Left Behind (OSPI, 2010).

Hypothesis/Research Question

Students made a higher percentage of gain in reading fluency and comprehension on the Developmental Reading Assessment when taught using the Read Naturally program than when taught using the Reading Mastery program.

Null Hypothesis

Students did not make a higher percentage of gain in reading fluency and comprehension on the Developmental Reading Assessment when taught using the Read Naturally program than when taught using the Reading Mastery program.

Result of the Study

The result of the study showed students made an average of 27% gain on their DRA scores between winter of 2009 and winter of 2010 when the Reading Mastery program was used. Each student gained one to six points on their DRA score during this time period. Table 1 showed the students' DRA scores from winter 2009 and winter 2010 and the point and percentage gain made by each student. Some students made more growth than others, but they all progressed in their reading abilities.

Table 1 Winter 2009-Winter 2010 DRA Test Scores

Student	DRA Winter 2009	DRA Winter 2010	Point Gain	Percentage Gain
A	10	14	4	28.5%
B	2	3	1	50%
C	3	4	1	25%
D	4	10	6	60%
E	1	3	2	66.6%
F	8	14	6	42.8%
G	16	20	4	20%
		Average	3.428571429	27.5%

Students made an average of 78% gain on their DRA scores between winter of 2010 and winter of 2011 when the Read Naturally program was used. The average point gain for the seven students was 7.4 points, which was 78%. Students who had made minimal growth while using Reading Mastery made more growth while using Read Naturally.

Table 2 Winter 2010-Winter 2011 DRA Test Scores

Student	DRA Winter 2010	DRA Winter 2011	Point Gain	Percentage Gain
A	14	24	10	71.4%
B	3	4	1	25%
C	4	6	2	50%
D	10	20	10	100%
E	3	10	7	23.3%
F	14	18	4	28.5%
G	20	38	18	90%
		Average	7.428571429	78.3%

Students B and C made the lowest growth on their DRA score in both school years, however they had made the most gain on their daily Read Naturally fluency tests. Students graphed their daily lesson cold and hot scores. The Read Naturally program used cold scores, which were calculated by the number of words read per minute without the student ever seeing or previously practicing the text. The hot score was calculated by the number of words a student had read correctly after the student practiced the story several times. Before the hot score was calculated the students listened to the story passage three times with an audio

recording, and practiced it several more times independently. In table three the researcher calculated what the students' cold scores were when they started the program in fall of 2010, and compared those scores to April 2011 cold scores. Students showed they gained an average of 30.8 more words per minute compared to their fall cold scores. The same was done for the hot scores, comparing students' scores from fall of 2010 to April 2011. Throughout the year they gained an average of 25.6 points on their hot score. Overall students showed growth in reading fluency during the 2010-2011 school year.

Table 3 Students' Average Daily Lesson Scores from Read Naturally

Student	Cold Score Gain	Hot score Gain
A	35	16
B	23	50
C	49	65
D	57	7
E	12	17
F	21	11
G	19	13
Average Gain	30.85714286	25.57142857

Findings

The findings in this study were that there was a 78% higher rate of growth in reading skills when the Read Naturally was used compared to the Reading Mastery. The null hypothesis was rejected. Students showed a significant growth in their reading abilities. Students on average gained 31.8 words per minutes

when asked to read text for the first time, and 25.6 words per minutes when asked to read familiar text. Students' DRA scores increased on average 78% more while using the Read Naturally curriculum than when they were using Reading Mastery. The hypothesis was supported because the data showed students made a higher growth in reading based on the Read Naturally curriculum compared to the Reading Mastery curriculum.

Discussion

This project was researched to see if Read Naturally had an impact on students' DRA test scores. The research stated in Chapter two discussed how reading was a complex task, requiring skills in phonics, reading comprehension and reading fluency. Read Naturally had reading comprehension and fluency activities built into the design of the program. Students had repeated exposure to the text in different formats. The text was provided for them to read independently. The reading passages were also read aloud to them using an audio recording while students followed along in the text. For students to become fluent readers they needed to have had exposure to print with large amounts of reading, accuracy in comprehension, and instruction provided at their ability level. The Read Naturally curriculum provided opportunities for the students to become fluent readers, while instructional materials were provided at their unique ability levels.

The students who participated in this study all had a learning disability. The learning rate for these students was often delayed compared to their same age peers. Students who had a learning disability generally started to show more academic growth during their third and fourth grade years. During the second year of this study, all of the students were in third and fourth grades. This could have contributed to why the students showed such great progress during the second year of research.

A limitation that could have affected the results of this study was that the researcher was absent due to an injury during the fall of the 2010-2011 school year. The researcher was not in the classroom for over a month. During that time there was inconsistency with a substitute being provided to cover the class. Students did not receive consistent instruction during this time period.

Summary

Analysis of the data showed a significant growth in students' reading abilities. Students on average gained 31.8 words per minutes when asked to read text for the first time, and 25.6 words per minutes when asked to read familiar text. Students' DRA scores increased on average 51% more while using the Read Naturally curriculum than when they were using Reading Mastery curriculum.

CHAPTER 5

Summary, Conclusions and Recommendations

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to research different methods of reading instruction, and review which method of instruction was more effective. This was an experimental study design, which examined student test scores from two different school years in which two reading curriculums were used.

Summary

Teaching a child how to read was a complex task, no matter what curriculum or tools were used. The purpose of this study was to examine the DRA test results and determine if students made more growth in reading fluency and reading comprehension while using Reading Mastery or Read Naturally curriculums.

The Reading Mastery was a phonemic and phonic based curriculum. Phonemic awareness (PA) instruction taught students to manipulate phoneme sounds into spoken words and language (National Reading Panel, 2000). "Letter sound relations require a child to perceive individual sounds and associate the sounds with letters. This two-fold task encompasses both phonemic awareness and beginning phonics instruction, crucial prerequisite for mastering the alphabetic code" (Cihon et al., 2008, p. 139). "PA instruction qualifies as phonics

instruction when it involves teaching children to blend or segment the sounds in words using letters" (National Reading Panel, 2000, p. 7).

Read Naturally incorporated an instructional focus on fluency and comprehension. For students to be fluent readers they needed to have had exposure to print with large amounts of reading, accuracy in comprehension, and instruction provided at their ability level. "Fluency itself, as a concept, is complex, involving rapid and accurate processing" (Grabe, 2010, p. 72). Students who had gained strong reading fluency skills had instruction which was very intentional and strong with repetition which occurred over a period of time (Grabe, 2010). A "strong relationship between oral passage reading fluency and reading comprehension" had been found in many case studies (Grabe, 2010, p. 74).

The result of the study showed students made an average of 27% gain on their DRA scores between winter of 2009 and winter of 2010 when the Reading Mastery program was used. Students made an average of 78% gain on their DRA scores between winter of 2010 and winter of 2011 when the Read Naturally program was used.

Conclusions

The literature which was reviewed in this research project stated phonemic awareness and phonics were the cornerstone of how to teach students to read. Phonics instruction occurred in the early stages of reading, generally when

students were in kindergarten, first and second grade. Students learned the connection between sounds and letters and used the knowledge to read and spell (Tindall & Nisbet, 2010).

Students in the first year of this study had a foundation of phonemic awareness and phonics instruction. Students had the knowledge of how letters created sounds, and how the sounds blended together to create words. During the second year of this study students were able to apply the word reading and decoding skills and increased their reading fluency and comprehension skills through repeated reading practice. "One guided repeated oral reading encourages students to read passages orally with systematic explicit guidance and feedback from the teacher" (National Reading Panel, 2000, p. 12). The U.S. Department of Education stated the Read Naturally program used "repeated reading of text for developing oral reading fluency, teacher modeling of story reading and systematic monitoring of student progress by teachers and the students themselves" (Read naturally[R]. what works clearing house intervention report, 2010, p. 1).

Students made an average of 27% gain on their DRA scores between winter of 2009 and winter of 2010 when the Reading Mastery program was used. Students made an average of 78% gain on their DRA scores between winter of 2010 and winter of 2011 when the Read Naturally program was used. The result of a 78% gain in reading scores may have been due to a strong phonemic

awareness and phonics background resulting in significant growth in reading scores during the 2010-2011 school year.

Recommendations

Based on the conclusions of this study, results showed students made a 27% gain in their reading scores while using Reading Mastery, and a 78% growth in their scores using Read Naturally. The results may show greater growth while using Read Naturally because the reading foundation was created using Reading Mastery. The researcher would recommend further investigation into the two reading programs. The two programs both have strengths and weaknesses. A larger study group would need to be established to examine the strengths and weaknesses of each program. The time period in this study was limited. A long term study would provide the researcher with more information about the topic and produce more data to compare over time.

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