

Increasing Kindergartener's Achievement in Reading

Using the Read Well Curriculum

A Special Project

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FACULTY APPROVAL

Increasing Kindergartener's Achievement in Reading

Using the Read Well Curriculum

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ABSTRACT

In the last decades, students continued to struggle with reading. Learning to read had become critically important to young children. President G. W. Bush created the No Child Left Behind Act to improve the quality of public education. Teachers became accountable for all students' education. The researcher chose to determine if Read Well instruction in kindergarten improved scores in Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills.

The researcher collected data from kindergarteners in a rural Eastern Washington town. A survey was given in spring to determine if students liked reading. Using the Statpak program, the researcher compared fall and spring Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills scores to determine if Read Well positively impacted kindergarteners' achievement. After running the *t*-tests, the researcher found significant differences in students' reading performance.

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Chapter 1

Background for the Project

In recent years federally imposed policies and mandated practices, initially from President George Bush's No Child Left Behind Act, were adopted by the state boards of education and local school districts to monitor standards of academic performance and student learning. By using standards, teachers became accountable for all students' education. Teachers were responsible for improving achievement of minority students in low-income, migrant and English as a Second Language families (No Child Left Behind, 2001).

Children continued to fall behind in reading and had difficulty passing the reading portion of the Washington Assessment of Student Learning assessment, which indicated a significant deficit in reading proficiency. Teachers were faced with new challenges that demanded increasingly effective and appropriate techniques in reading instruction. Schools wanted to adopt a curriculum that improved instruction and increased students' achievement in reading. The studies of the research group of Rosenhouse, Feitelson, Kita & Golstein (1997) showed early exposure to literature contributed to the students' reading growth and positively affected vocabulary acquisition, world knowledge and increased students' reading comprehension. Without a good foundation in reading, children often experienced difficulty learning in school and reaching benchmarks. Learning to read had become critically important to young children; especially kindergarten students.

Statement of the Problem

Students in kindergarten exhibited a lack of decoding and phonetic skills according to the

Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills assessment in a small town in Eastern Washington in the fall of 2008. A majority of the kindergarteners had a lack of knowing Initial Sound Fluency and Phoneme Segmentation Fluency in the fall of 2008 in the school where the study took place. Would Read Well curriculum strategies help to raise scores of kindergarten students enabling the children to meet benchmark reading levels by the end of the school year as measured by Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills assessment?

Purpose of the Project

The purpose of the study was to investigate the effects of the Read Well curriculum on phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary and comprehension in reading; not only regarding good readers, but more specifically on helping readers with deficits in reading and with English Language Learners. Teachers used Read Well curriculum to give reading instruction to students through the academic school year in kindergarten. At the beginning, middle and end of the academic school year kindergarteners were tested by the Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills test to measure student growth in reading.

Delimitations

The study was completed in a school district located in a small town in Eastern Washington. The population for the whole district, K-12, was 484. The students came from low income families and received free meals during school time. The district's free and reduced lunch rate was 95%. The ethnic mix of the school district was 73.6% white, which included a high Ukrainian population in the district, 23.6% Hispanic, 0.6% Black, and 2.3% American Indian/Alaskan Native. The population of the school district also contained 9.1% special education students, 23.1% bilingual students and 3.0% migrant students. The elementary school had a population of 213 students (Washington State Report Card, 2008). The town had very

limited businesses such as restaurants, gas stations, tourist attractions and motels. Many parents/legal guardians of the students were working out of town on nearby agricultural farms.

The study included twenty-three students in two kindergarten classrooms. Both kindergarten classrooms were taught by two teachers in order to maintain small classes. Between the two classrooms there were fourteen boys and nine girls. The total number of English as a Second Language Learners was fourteen students. One student was unable to speak any English, four of the students spoke fractional English and nine students were fluent English learners at the beginning of the school year. Ten students attended preschool before kindergarten. Sixteen students lived with both parents, seven students lived with only one parent and three students lived with one parent and one step parent.

The study began in September of 2008 and ended in the spring of 2009. Pre and post data was collected using the Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills and a student survey. The initial placement of students was determined according to the children's Read Well assessment and Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy test administered at the beginning of the school year by properly trained professionals. The author's study was meant to apply the Read Well curriculum strategies to improve kindergarteners' achievement in reading. The findings of the study were meant to enable kindergarten teachers to choose an effective curriculum to prepare pupils to meet the benchmarks and become proficient in reading in a timely manner.

Assumptions

The researcher believed the kindergarten teachers were highly qualified based on Washington State Certification Requirements, and able to teach and make judgments regarding placement of children in reading groups. The researcher assumed the students were taught the

same curriculum and treated equally. All professionals that worked with the children were assumed to have proper training in the use of the Read Well curriculum and Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills assessment. The author assumed the teachers followed the 90 minute reading block for reading each day in the classroom as strongly encouraged by the school district under Title I in the No Child Left Behind Policy. The author believed kindergarteners in the classrooms consisting of diverse population and abilities would learn phonemic awareness, phonics, comprehension strategies, vocabulary and oral language skills quickly in English using the Read Well curriculum.

Hypotheses

Kindergarteners participating in Read Well curriculum will make greater than expected growth in Letter Naming Fluency from fall to spring using pre and post Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills scores as measured by a *t*-test.

Kindergarteners participating in Read Well curriculum will make greater than expected growth in Word Use Fluency from fall to spring using pre and post Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills scores as measured by a *t*-test.

Null Hypotheses

Kindergarteners participating in Read Well curriculum will not make greater than expected growth in Letter Naming Fluency from fall to spring as measured by a pre-post Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills test using a non-independent *t*-test with a significance level of $p < .05$.

Kindergarteners participating in Read Well curriculum will not make greater than expected growth in Word Use Fluency from fall to spring as measured by a pre-post Dynamic

Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills test using a non-independent t -test with a significance level of $p < .05$.

Significance of the Project

The No Child Left Behind legislation stressed the importance of passing a state test in order to graduate from high school in 2008. One of the Washington Assessment of Student Learning tests was a reading test. Many students did not pass the reading exam. Teachers needed to help students improve reading skills and prepare students for a productive life in the advanced world. Learning to read was the most significant and powerful accomplishment in students' lives. If students had a great foundation in reading then students had increased fluency and comprehension skills in reading across content areas. In most children's lives reading skills originated in kindergarten (Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction, 1998).

The research study focused on using the Read Well curriculum to increase kindergarteners' achievement in reading. Kindergarten teachers chose the Read Well curriculum to meet the individual needs of each student. Students learned letters/sounds and blending at an accelerated pace in order to reach the expectations of the state, and meet the benchmark in kindergarten in reading.

Procedure

Two kindergarten teachers provided intensive, specific alphabetic and phonemic awareness instruction through teaching, modeling, and activities that used visual, kinesthetic, and auditory strategies. The teachers expected students to increase knowledge of letter recognition and letter sounds, beginning, middle and ending sounds in words, decoding and blending words, developing the rhyming concept and becoming fluent readers at the end of the school year by following the Read Well curriculum.

The research data provided a three way viewpoint. First, the researcher used the teachers' assessments which gave the level of the learner at the beginning of the school year. Second, the researcher collected Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills scores which measured phonological awareness, letter naming and sounds, and fluency with connected text, specifically in kindergarten. Finally, students took a survey on the experience and learning received throughout the teaching period. The author's data offered a wide perspective that reflected true learner experience and learning.

The investigator collected three assessments throughout the year. First, the author collected initial assessment data, which showed beginning students' skills at the first of the year in areas such as letter naming and sounds of the letters. The students received the same assessment in the middle of the year and at the end of the year. During the school year, the Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills scores were collected three times to provide formative assessment of the students' progress. The researcher observed the students regularly as teachers asked questions, modeled and practiced with students which led to discussion of the curriculum and teacher assessment of comprehension. At the end of the research the author completed a survey with each student that covered the experience of the instruction and the learner's accomplishment within the learning experience.

Each lesson regarding a letter took five days or more if needed. The schedule depended upon the students' progress, school schedule and absenteeism of students. The teachers provided whole group instruction for 90 minutes of uninterrupted instruction in the classrooms solely using Read Well materials. The teachers used the model of "I say/do", "we say/do", and students repeated information individually or as a group consistent with Read Well curriculum. During whole class instruction, students learned diverse information about cultures through stories using

cooperative learning strategies. The Read Well curriculum built a foundation for phonemic awareness, phonics, oral language skills, comprehension strategies, and vocabulary through cautiously chosen read-aloud stories, songs, poems, art projects, games, pocket chart activities, journal and white board writing. Students sang an alphabet song in different versions every day (Sprick, Jones, Dunn, and Gunn, 2004).

Teachers instructed another half hour a day, providing small group instruction. Each child was individually assessed and placed in the correct reading group based on prior knowledge and/or ability level. A large percentage of the themes from the whole class instruction were revisited in the small groups, where children used prior knowledge to make connections with new instructional material. During small group instruction, teachers monitored students and provided individual assistance as needed.

On the first day of whole class instruction, teachers introduced a letter and the corresponding sound by using a wall card and an alphabet cheer verse. Students learned a new poem (on a poster), providing increased practice using the new letter and sound, phonemic awareness skills, and oral language. Students practiced writing and tracing letters in the air and on white boards. Learners listened to the daily story and participated in discussion during and after the story. Pupils learned a new song or reviewed previously learned songs. Students created an art project and chanted the verse from the Read Well curriculum which provided a connection with the letter and sound. Students decorated a block letter by coloring/drawing and tracing a letter on white paper, having fun while improving fine motor skills and independent working skills. Mid-year, students began bumpy and smooth blending with the letters or words, listened to dictation and counted the sounds in words using small and whole group instruction.

The next day, students reviewed the letter cheer verse, the poem, and handwriting in the air

and on white boards. Students continued to listen to the theme story specific to the unit and discussed vocabulary, and beginning, middle and end of the story contents for each unit. Students played a variety of games which provided additional practice for the specific letter being learned. As reading skills increased; students began bumpy and smooth blending with the letters or words. On the second day of the unit, students completed a letter trace page by tracing the letters and coloring each picture using at least three colors on white paper to complete the letter practice project. Also, students were challenged to find and circle the hidden letters within a specific activity.

Every third day, the students reviewed the letter cheer verse, the poem, and handwriting in the air. Students continued to listen to the theme story in the unit followed by discussions. Students began a new journal at the beginning of the year, drawing only pictures at first, and later on students wrote sentences or a story at the bottom of the pictures. Students learned a new song or reviewed one previously learned in earlier units. Teachers provided a guided instruction to assist in students' recall regarding the beginning, middle and end of the story using the pocket chart cards. During retelling story time, students reinforced comprehension skills. As previous learning skills increased, students created a story retell book by coloring, cutting, sequencing and pasting pictures showing the beginning, middle, and end of the story using stories which were learned prior to the instruction.

The fourth day, students reviewed the letter cheer verse, the poem, and handwriting in the air. Students reread and discussed the story and made better connections with different settings. Every fourth day, students worked on an ABC scrapbook. Students practiced writing the letter and created a personalized scrapbook page with a letter. Students reviewed the letter and sound association for the letter. Students learned a new song or reviewed the one already learned in

earlier units. Students practiced bumpy and smooth blending with the letters or words. Students did the letter book page which helped to make letter and sound association by coloring pictures of items that began with the specific letter.

On the last day, students reviewed the letter cheer verse, the poem, and handwriting in the air and on white boards. Towards the end of the school year students had dictation and counted the sounds in words. Teachers read and discussed a story with the students. Students practiced bumpy and smooth blending with the letters or words. Students created sentences using picture words at the beginning of the year, later students used words to build sentences and repeated words and sentences as a whole class or individually. Students practiced making and reading sentences on the sentence scramble page.

In small group instruction, each lesson had a five day plan or a six to twelve day plan. The teachers made a decision about how long the students would spend with each unit. Every day in small groups, students practiced stretching, shrinking and blending sounds or words, did dictation, read daily stories and played games. At the end of each unit, teachers assessed each student and placed the child in a group which corresponded with the students' skills growth in reading and meeting kindergarten benchmarks.

Definition of Terms

Annual Yearly Progress. Adequate Yearly Progress was the measure by which schools, districts, and states were held accountable for student performance under Title I of the [No Child Left Behind Act of 2001](#) (Adequate Yearly Progress, 2004).

benchmark. Benchmark was the beginning and end of year goals for fluency for each grade level.

comprehension strategies. Reading comprehension strategies have been divided into

vocabulary, text comprehension and teacher preparation and comprehension strategies instruction.

duet. Duet was a shared reading format between the teacher and the students. Initially, teacher text provided the rich content and information needed to make a story interesting and informative. With each sound that students learned, the number of words they read in the story. As students progressed through the program, students gradually read more and more of the text, and the teacher read less and less of the text.

Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills. Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills was the assessment instrument that measured how well a child was progressing in important skills (indicators) that were predictors for early success in reading.

fluency. Fluency was the ability to recognize words in text accurately, quickly and with proper expression (Fluency Instruction, pp.1-2, 2006).

intensive level. At the intensive level of reading, students needed explicit instruction in all reading areas with reading substantial intervention.

oral language skills. Oral language skills were communication with other people which involved thinking, knowledge, and skills with practice and training.

phonemes. Phonemes have been the smallest units composing spoken language. (NRP, 2000, p.7).

phonemic awareness. Phonemic awareness was a subset in which listeners were able to hear, identify and manipulate phonemes, the smallest units of sound that can differentiate meaning between words. (Wikipedia Encyclopedia, 2009).

phonics. Phonics was a widely used method of teaching reading and decoding of words by sound and print (Wikipedia Encyclopedia, 2009).

progress monitoring. Progress monitoring was a method to determine if students made effective progress in reading at the current grade level or to determine if other interventions needed to be in place to reach benchmark. Progress monitoring was done using Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills.

Reading First. Reading First was the Federal Grant for low performing schools to improve reading proficiency.

strategic level. At the strategic level of reading, students needed specific instruction in certain reading areas with intervention.

vocabulary. Vocabulary was a list of words and often phrases of a language, arranged alphabetically and defined or translated. (The American Heritage College dictionary).

WASL The WASL was Washington's statewide test that measured students learning of the state's academic standards. Students were tested each spring in grades 3-10 in reading and mathematics students also were tested in writing in grades 4, 7, and 10 and science in grades 5, 8 and 10 (OSPI, 2008).

Acronyms

AYP. Annual Yearly Progress.

DIBELS. Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills.

ESL. English as a Second Language.

ISF. Initial Sound Fluency.

LNF. Letter Naming Fluency.

NCLB. No Child Left Behind Act.

NRP. National Reading Panel.

NWF. Nonsense Word Fluency.

ORF. Oral Reading Fluency.

OSPI. Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction.

PA. Phonemic Awareness.

PSF. Phoneme Segmentation Fluency.

WASL. Washington Assessment of Student Learning.

WUF. Word Use Fluency.

Chapter 2

Review of Selected Literature

Introduction

The author reviewed a variety of resources regarding reading. First, the researcher looked at new requirements for schools in reading, which were created by the state boards of education and local school districts. The requirements were initiated by President Bush's No Child Left Behind Act to improve each student's academic performance. The mandate influenced curriculums from kindergarten through twelfth grade by requiring research based programs in schools. The program "Reading First" was established to focus on early reading instruction because of the high percentage of students who were failing in reading. Next, the researcher provided information on assessment and instructional tools for younger readers. In the younger grades DIBELS was used to record children's progress and the Read Well reading program was used to support student achievement. Finally, the researcher examined the significant reading components that were required for successful early reading development (National Reading Panel, 2000).

Mandates

Continuous change required more and more complex professions and the education of each student became more challenging. President George W. Bush created the No Child Left Behind Act to improve the quality of education in public schools and close the achievement gap between poorly and highly performing students. The No Child Left Behind Act maintained the seven performance-based titles: Title I – improving the academic performance of disadvantaged students (Part A: closing the achievement gap for disadvantaged students, Part B: improving

literacy by Putting Reading First), Title II – boosting teacher quality (Part A: Grants for improving teacher quality, Part B: - improving mathematics and science instruction), Title III – moving limited English proficient students to English fluency, Title IV – promoting informed parental choice and innovative programs, Title V – encouraging safe schools for the 21st Century (Part A – supporting drug and violence prevention and education for students and communities, Part –B enhancing education through technology), Title VI – increasing funding for impact aid – rebuilding schools for Native Americans and children from military families, Title VII – encouraging freedom and accountability. The government provided federal funds, which were foreordained for the neediest schools and districts. If elementary schools chose research based programs, which lowered deficiency in reading from kindergarten to second grade, the schools were eligible for grants under Title I, Reading First. Funding demanded evidence of accountability. Schools became more accountable to improve students’ education and set high standards. Each school assessed reading and mathematics annually. Parents were provided with information about student progress. Schools set goals to meet adequate yearly progress. If a school failed to make progress for three years, that school came under corrective action. The programs required the most effective reading instruction in the early grades and helped students not to fall behind classmates in reading (No Child Left Behind, 2001).

The 2000 report of the National Reading Panel, *Teaching Children to Read: An Evidence-Based Assessment of the Scientific Research Literature on Reading and Its Implications for Reading Instruction—Reports of the Subgroups*, indicated that many children in America failed to reach grade level reading skills, which affected children’s performance later in school. *Put Reading First* (2003) stated the children had to learn the reading skills first in order to read well. The National Reading Panel (2000) concluded the most successful instruction was to

teach students to read with a variety of methods. The National Reading Panel found the significant years of reading instruction occurred from kindergarten through third grade which established the students' reading achievement in higher grades. Reading First provided a combination of instructional approaches and curriculum choices to prevent early reading failure. Under Reading First, Title I -B, the schools chose the research based curriculum to improve children's performance in reading from kindergarten through second grade. Research based curriculum, such as Read Well, was assessed by DIBELS, with progress monitoring in the State of Washington that was recommended by Reading First. The measures were developed for the important early literacy areas discussed in the National Reading Panel (2000).

Defining DIBELS

The acronym DIBELS stood for Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills. The assessment was created by the Institute for Research on Learning Disabilities at the University of Minnesota (Good & Kaminski, 2008). The DIBELS assessment was designed to help educators assess reading skills from kindergarten through third grade and to use the results in the classroom to address students' needs in reading. Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills measured five components of reading: phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension. All the components were connected together and the results predicted success in later reading (Howard, 2005). Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills assessed pupils' ability to hear individual sounds (phonemes) in words, to decode words and to read related text. In kindergarten, phonemic awareness was assessed by Initial Sounds Fluency, which assessed students' ability to identify and produce the initial sound of a given word; Phoneme Segmentation Fluency assessed students' proficiency to produce the individual sounds within a given word; Letter Naming Fluency, which assessed how quickly students

named letters per minute; and under phonics assessment - Nonsense Word Fluency, assessed students' expertise to identify letter sound correspondence and blend the sounds together to say "nonsense" words for each grade-level (Good & Kaminski, 2008). Under Word Use Fluency, teachers assessed if students knew how to use the vocabulary. In first through third grades, the educator monitored students with Oral Reading Fluency to find out how many words per minute students read correctly. The purpose of DIBELS assessment was to determine the progress of all children individually (Howard, 2005). Many studies have been done to determine the reliability and validity of DIBELS.

According to James Eck (2004),

The reliability of DIBELS for Phoneme Segmentation Fluency ranged from .88 to .96, and the validity ranged from .73 to .91, Initial Sound Fluency – the reliability ranged from .65 to .90 and the validity ranged from .44 to .60, Letter Naming Fluency -- the reliability ranged from .93 to .98 and the validity ranged from .72 to .98, Nonsense Word Fluency -- the reliability ranged from .92 to .98 and the validity was .84, Word Use Fluency -- the reliability ranged from .65 to .90 and the validity ranged from .42 to .71, Oral Reading and Retell Validity ranged from .73 to .81 (pp. 24-25)

Hall (2006) stated,

Alternate form reliability of the DIBELS measures is generally considered adequate, ranging from .72 to .94 for the various indicators. The lowest reliability measure is for the ISF at .72. By repeating this measure five times on five days using multiple alternative forms, the resulting average score would have a reliability of above .90 (p. 283).

Defining Read Well Curriculum

The research based curriculum Read Well was designed by Sopris West Educational Services for kindergarten, first grade and struggling second grade students. The Read Well curriculum had been divided into three parts: Read Well K, Read Well 1 and Read Well Plus. Each part was divided into whole class instruction and small group instruction. Whole group instruction included a lot of sound practice, cheers, songs, stories, rhymes and other reinforcing components to help students understand and gain greater levels of skills in reading. In small groups, students were monitored and assessed individually which gave the educator an opportunity to determine if acceleration, remediation or intervention was needed. In small groups, children spent fifteen minutes on decoding practice and ten minutes on story reading and comprehension. Each lesson had a theme. The lesson had a decodable book with duet stories for the educator and student which contained simply decodable words, higher level thinking questions and a solo story for a student to read independently to build fluency. Read Well curriculum provided foundational basics in reading to meet individual needs despite different backgrounds and abilities. The Read Well program used systematic and explicit instructions in phonics. Read Well used a variety of comprehension strategies to help students make predictions, to assess student background knowledge, and make connections and summarize facts of the story elements. Curriculum was designed for each child to receive age appropriate literacy instruction and to meet individual learning needs (Wahl, 2007).

The Read Well program addressed the major research-based reading components articulated by the National Research Council. Wahl (2007) stated, “Read Well ... incorporates research-based practices that have proven to be effective for diverse learners” (p. 3). A field

study conducted by the Sopris West Educational Services came up with results for kindergarten, first and second grade in Alabama's public schools, Oregon's Westridge Elementary School, Mississippi's public schools and Washington's public schools. The results of Read Well curriculum were significant. The reports showed the schools with Read Well instruction excelled over non-Read Well schools. The findings of the studies concluded that students who attended schools using the Read Well curriculum learned basic reading skills faster than students who attended schools that did not have the Read Well Program (Sopris West, 2009).

No official validity and reliability scores were found for the Read Well Reading Program. According to Shirley Dickson (2007):

Phonological Awareness. For DIBELS PSF, the results indicated a significant main effect of time ($F(1,57)= 52.67, p<.001, MSE= 10337$), a significant time \times group interaction ($F(1,57)= 29.44, p<.001, MSE= 5779$). To explore the significant interaction, post-hoc paired-samples comparisons revealed that the *Read Well* students showed statistically significant growth from mid- to end of year (mean difference= 36.12; $t(16)=9.81, p<.001$) whereas the comparison group did not (mean difference=5.21; $t(41)=1.58$; see Figure 3). The effect size is 1.47, indicating a strong benefit for *Read Well* instruction relative to the instruction provided in the comparison group. The *Read Well* group scored at the 43rd national percentile at mid-year; by end of year the *Read Well* group scored at the 90th percentile, increasing their standing relative to all students in the national DIBELS system by 47 percentile points. By contrast, at mid-year the comparison group scored at the 58th percentile; by end of year, the comparison group scored at the 65th percentile increasing their relative standing by 7 points. (p. 18).

Relations Between Five components in Reading and Early Reading

Reading has been required for success in the world. Research showed students in America failed because children did not read well enough to compete economically (Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998). All children needed to learn to read printed or written text with understanding. Students had to have the proper exposure to literature and participate in literacy activities at an early age to have a large vocabulary. Students had to develop both phonemic skills and an understanding of word meanings to be able to read (Sawyer, 2000). The report, *Research into Practice: An Overview of Reading Research for Washington State* (1998), published by the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction stated classroom instruction in reading was essential for children in kindergarten and first grades. The National Reading Panel created a report in 2000 that responded to a mandate to help educators, parents, and policymakers find important skills and methods to support reading achievement. After reviewing numerous research studies on reading, the NRP developed a list of the most successful reading instructional programs for early reading development. The National Reading Panel determined teacher education, preparation and a variety of instructional strategies on phonemic awareness and phonics, fluency, vocabulary instruction and text comprehension were significant for early success in reading.

During the preschool years, most children learned sounds of the primary language (phonology) and how to make correct sentence structure (syntax) and use sentences in different surroundings (pragmatics). One of the most important early elements has been phonemic awareness. The smallest parts of sound in a spoken word, called phonemes, made a difference in the word.

Adam stated (as cited in Stahl, S.A., Osborn, J., & Lehr, F., 1990),

Knowledge of letters and phonemic awareness have been found to bear a strong and direct relationship to success and ease of reading acquisition, and both seem to do so regardless of the instructional approach through which reading is taught. And, it seems further that some special magic lies in the linking of these two basic skills (p. 44).

The NRP (2000) stated that “teaching PA skills to children has a greater long-term benefit for reading than teaching only one PA skill or teaching a global array of skills”(p.7). If students had the ability to manipulate phonemes, children had an easier time learning to read and spell than students with limited phonemic awareness skills. Students understood that the sounds of speech worked together to create words (Put Reading First, 2003). The teachers needed to build a clear understanding of how to integrate different reading activities in phonemic awareness to improve the effectiveness of instruction for students. Teaching phonemic awareness was defined as training in letter-sound relations and blending or segmenting the sounds in words. The result showed that teaching learners to manipulate phonemes in words was extremely successful under a combination of teaching methods. The study worked with a diversity of students across a range of grade and age levels. Teaching phonemic awareness to children significantly increased the ability to read, more than instruction without any attention to PA (National Reading Panel, 2000).

Languages used pictures or symbols. The English language used letters which represented individual sounds in words. The English language was not entirely standard, as some sounds did not always correspond to letters in irregular words. Adams stated (as cited in Stahl, Osborn, & Lehr, 1990), if students understood the relationship with the sounds in words;

the students were successful beginning readers. The majority of children developed reading skills through stages (Ehri, 1995). After phonemic awareness, beginning readers learned how letters correspond with sounds through phonics instruction. The National Reading Panel (2000) pointed out phonics instruction helped young readers to have a better understanding about relationships between the printed letters and individual sounds of spoken language. Children learned to decode words with explicit phonics instruction. Additional research studies confirmed the significance and effectiveness of systematic phonics instruction in kindergarten. Armbruster, Lehr & Osborn, (2003), stated “Systematic phonics instruction produces the greatest impact on children’s reading achievement when it begins in kindergarten or first grade. Systematic and explicit phonics instruction significantly improves children’s reading comprehension” (p.14). Additional research supported higher student achievement after learners had explicit phonics instruction (Stahl, Osborn, & Lehr, 1990), almost certainly because “systematic and explicit phonics instruction significantly improves children’s reading comprehension” (Armbruster, Lehr, & Osborn, 2003, p.14). Children in kindergarten and first grade gained knowledge from systematic phonics instruction and were capable of learning phonemic and phonics concepts (NRP, 2000). The National Reading Panel indicated systematic phonics programs needed to be implemented at younger grades. At the beginning of reading skills, the majority of young students had passable language comprehension but learners needed help to decode words fluently and accurately (Stahl, Osborn, & Lehr, 1990). The National Reading Panel derived from a variety of studies that phonics instruction was effective even in the classrooms with typical teachers and English speaking students of different ages, abilities and with a variety of backgrounds and socioeconomic levels. A different study stated that when phonics curriculums

had enough time with reading practice, students learned the letter sound relationships better so recognition of words happened automatically (Stahl, Duffy-Hester, & Dougherty Stahl, 1998).

Fluency was an important component in reading because fluency provided a connection between word recognition and comprehension. Fluent readers recognized words in text accurately, quickly and with proper expression (Fluency Instruction, 2006). Researchers investigated important instructional methods related to fluency (Fluency Instruction, 2006). The first approach used repeated and monitored oral reading. In the second approach students chose the reading literature. At first students read slowly because learners tried to decode and blend letter sounds into recognizable words. Students showed higher fluency scores with a passage that had familiar words. Learners that read and reread texts out loud with guidance and positive reinforcement became better readers (Armbruster, Lehr & Osborn, 2003; National Reading Panel, 2000).

Blau (2006) used five strategies for developing reading fluency: students were exposed to the sound of fluent reading, students reread a passage, students used phrased reading in class, students read with tutors and students made a Reader's Theater in class. In the first strategy individuals listened to an adult or tape which provided a model of fluent reading and helped with word recognition. Second, students reread the text chorally or with partners. The third method had students read phrases or poems to show how words flowed together better. In the fourth, educators provided tutors for the struggling students. In the fifth strategy, learners practiced reader's theater in class where individuals could express colorful intonation. Put Reading First (2001) mentioned similar techniques to teach fluency and to monitor student progress in reading, to assess the effectiveness of the teaching and set instructional objectives for students individually in the class.

Students needed to know enough vocabulary to communicate effectively in school orally and in print. Students used oral vocabulary during speech. Listening and reading vocabulary were used with print. Students needed to know the meaning of the words and understand how to use the words (Stahl & Murray, 1994). When students knew the meaning of the words, children developed proficiency that helped to understand texts better (Neuman & Dwyer, 2009). Senechal, Oelette, and Rodney demonstrated the critical contribution of a rich foundation of vocabulary knowledge to reading comprehension and achievement (as cited in Neuman and Dwyer, 2009, p. 384). Students recalled and remembered words easily if enough guided and extensive practice occurred.

Students needed vocabulary instruction to gain the meaning of words, the usage of words and to improve children's language production and comprehension (Beck, McKeown & Kucan, 2003). Students needed enough opportunities to use new words in the classroom in order to completely grasp the meaning of words. Educators provided a variety of books and engaged students every day in oral language to help build vocabulary. Teachers had to assess students on vocabulary to determine the effectiveness of the instruction and set goals so students made appropriate progress (Gumm & Turner, 2004; Armbruster, Lehr & Osborn, 2003).

Good readers understood what was read.

The National Reading Panel (2000) stated,

Comprehension instruction can effectively motivate and teach readers to learn and to use comprehension strategies that benefit the reader. There are comprehension strategies that yield increases in measures of near transfer, such as recall, question answering and summarization of texts (p. 6).

Research also concluded that educator questioning strongly reinforced and improved children's learning from reading. Answering questions gave children a reason to read, helped students to think enthusiastically, gave confidence to monitor children's understanding, gave opportunity to learn and helped children relate to what students already knew (Armbruster, Lehr & Osborn, 2003).

According to Armbruster, Lehr & Osborn (2003),

Even teachers in the primary grades can begin to build the foundation for reading comprehension. Reading comprehension is a complex process that develops over time... Teachers should emphasize text comprehension from the beginning, rather than waiting until students have mastered "the basics" of reading (p.55).

Summary

In all, the above research indicated the new requirements for schools in reading, which were created by the state boards of education and local school districts, affected teaching to improve early reading requirements. First, the researcher looked at new requirements for schools in reading, which were created by the state boards of education and local school districts. The requirements were initiated by President Bush's No Child Left Behind Act to improve each student's academic performance. The researcher examined how important early reading components were influenced by the new NCLB requirements. Students needed to be ready to learn when children entered kindergarten; otherwise children fell behind academically.

Teachers assessed and monitored students with DIBELS. The assessment was required in early grades by the Title I, Reading First. Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills was a valid and reliable assessment in younger grades.

Read Well was a scientifically-researched reading program that proved to work well with children of diverse abilities, interests, and the backgrounds. The Read Well program focused on the five of most important topics identified by the National Reading Panel. The topics were phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension. Read Well curriculum aligned with all the requirements of the state and addressed all five reading components to meet individual needs. Teachers needed to find innovative and effective methods of motivating children learning to read and enjoying literature. Teachers needed to take into consideration students were made of individualized complex systems that varied from student to student, so one way did not work for all children.

CHAPTER 3

Methodology and Treatment of Data

Introduction

The researcher wanted to evaluate the effectiveness of using the Read Well program in kindergarten to increase students' DIBELS scores and to determine if reading was a joyful experience for children in kindergarten. Kindergarteners received pre and post Letter Naming Fluency and Word Use Fluency testing using the DIBELS test. The author used DIBELS scores of 23 kindergarteners. Kindergarten students from each classroom were taught from the Read Well program in a whole group setting for a 90-minute block in the morning and six small groups for a 30-minute block in the afternoon, five days a week. The two kindergarten classrooms were tested in September of 2008 and May of 2009 using the DIBELS Letter Naming Fluency and Word Use Fluency tests. The author compared the pre-test and post-test scores of DIBELS. Students also received a short survey at the end of the year to determine how well students liked coming to school and reading books. The questions on the survey had yes and no answers so the researcher could calculate the results.

Methodology

The purpose of the study was to determine the effectiveness of the Read Well curriculum in kindergarten and to determine if the reading course helped kindergarteners make greater than expected growth on DIBELS scores. The study was done using qualitative research. The researcher used quasi-experimental design since a control group was not used. Quantitative pre-test and post-test data was gathered. Data contained fall and spring DIBELS scores and

student surveys. The DIBELS data was compared and evaluated after using a non-independent t -test. A Stat Pak program was used for computation of the data.

Participants

The participants in the two kindergarten classrooms were students enrolled and remained the entire school year between September 2008 and June 2009 in a school district located in a small rural town in Eastern Washington. The population of both kindergarten classrooms was ethnically varied, as was the population of the school district. The population for the whole district, K-12, was 484. The students came from low income families and received free meals during school time. The ethnic mix of the school district was 73.6% white, which included a high Ukrainian population in the district, 23.6% Hispanic, 0.6% Black, and 2.3% American Indian Alaskan Native. The population of the school district also contained 9.1% special education students, 23.1% bilingual students and 3.0% migrant students. The elementary school had a population of 213 students (Washington State Report Card, 2008).

The study included twenty-three students in two kindergarten classrooms. Each classroom contained a small kindergarten group taught by a full time teacher. Between the two classrooms there were fourteen boys and nine girls stayed the entire school year. The total number of English as Second Language Learners was fourteen. One student was unable to speak any English, four of the students spoke fractional English and nine students were fluent English learners at the beginning of the school year. The teachers provided uninterrupted whole group instruction for 90 minutes in the morning using solely Read Well materials. During whole class instruction, students learned diverse information about cultures through stories using cooperative learning strategies. Also, both teachers used the model of “I say/do”, “we say/do”, and students

repeated information individually or as a group consistent with Read Well curriculum (Sprick, Jones, Dunn, and Gunn, 2004). The teachers instructed another half hour a day providing small group instruction consistent the Read Well curriculum.

The initial placement of students for small groups was determined according to the children's Read Well assessment and Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy tests administered at the beginning of the school year. Of the 23 students, five met the benchmark to be considered at grade level in September, 2008, according to the DIBELS tests, 11 were strategic and needed some additional intervention in certain areas of reading and five scored intensive which was even further below grade level and needed substantial intervention. Of the 23 students, five students performed at grade level and 18 kindergarteners were below grade level.

The students were placed in six groups. The first group was at benchmark, four groups were strategic and one was an intensive group. In the final data analysis, the author did not use DIBELS scores of the students not in attendance for the entire school year. The researcher had an issue with several participants who enrolled at school part way through the school year. A few children moved out of the district before the end of the year or came later in the school year. The majority of the students were from lower socioeconomic standing and the children's families had to move due to employment reasons.

The researcher collected data for the study from all groups that included 23 students. Student Letter Sound Fluency and Word Use Fluency growth was compared from the fall of 2008 to the spring of 2009.

Instruments

The most important instrument used for assessing the kindergarteners' Letter Sound Fluency and Word Use Fluency scores was the Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills test. The second assessment was the small group placement of the Read Well curriculum. At the end of the research the author read a student survey with students individually that covered the experience of the instruction and the learner's accomplishment within the learning experience.

The DIBELS assessment was administered by a reading coach or paraprofessional who had proper training. Students were tested individually for one minute on recognizing and naming of uppercase and lowercase letters (Letter Naming Fluency) arranged not in alphabetical order on a page. Kindergarteners were assessed for one minute on vocabulary usage (Word Use Fluency) by counted numbers of words spoken in response to target words. For the DIBELS assessment, the assessor used a booklet, timer and pencil. The Read Well assessment was done by the teachers who taught in the classrooms. The two teachers used the small group assessment provided by the Read Well curriculum to place students in groups based on individual student progress.

The DIBELS was an assessment created by the Institute for Research on Learning Disabilities at the University of Minnesota. (Good & Kaminski, 2008). The DIBELS assessment had been designed to help educators assess reading skills from kindergarten through third grade and to use the results in the classroom to address students' needs in reading. The DIBELS measured five components of reading: phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension. All the components were connected together and the results predicted success in

later reading (Howard, 2005). Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills assessed pupils' ability to hear individual sounds (phonemes) in words, to decode words and to read related text. In kindergarten, phonemic awareness was assessed by Initial Sounds Fluency, which assessed students' ability to identify and produce the initial sound of a given word; Phoneme Segmentation Fluency assessed students' proficiency to produce the individual sounds within a given word; Letter Naming Fluency assessed how fast students named letters per minute; and under phonics assessment - Nonsense Word Fluency, which assessed students' expertise to identify letter sound correspondence and blend the sounds together to say "nonsense" words for each grade-level (Good & Kaminski, 2008). Under Word Use Fluency, teachers assessed if students knew the vocabulary of stories. In the first through third grades, the educator monitored students with Oral Reading Fluency to determine how many words per minute students read correctly. The purpose of the DIBELS assessment was to determine the progress of all children individually (Howard, 2005).

According to James Eck (2004),

The reliability of DIBELS for Phoneme Segmentation Fluency ranged from .88 to .96, and the validity ranged from .73 to .91, Initial Sound Fluency – the reliability ranged from .65 to .90 and the validity ranged from .44 to .60, Letter Naming Fluency -- the reliability ranged from .93 to .98 and the validity ranged from .72 to .98, Nonsense Word Fluency -- the reliability ranged from .92 to .98 and the validity was .84, Word Use Fluency -- the reliability ranged from .65 to .90 and the validity ranged from .42 to .71, Oral Reading and Retell validity ranged from .73 to .81 (pp. 24-25)

Hall (2006) stated,

Alternate form reliability of the DIBELS measures is generally considered adequate, ranging from .72 to .94 for the various indicators. The lowest reliability measure is for the ISF at .72. By repeating this measure five times on five days using multiple alternative forms, the resulting average score would have a reliability of above .90 (p. 283).

The researcher also created a survey to be used in the research. Each survey consisted of six questions. The researcher surveyed students separately in a small room with no interruptions. Every child answered yes and no questions. The survey's importance was to assess the kindergarteners' general interests in reading and the students' comfort zone in learning to read.

Design

The author examined all the students in kindergarten during the 2008-2009 school year. The students received 120 minutes of reading instruction from the Read Well curriculum five days a week; a 90-minute block in the morning for the whole group instruction for both kindergarten classrooms and a 30-minute block in afternoon for small group instructions.

The study was done using quantitative research. The researcher used quasi-experimental design since a control group was not used. Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills tests were administered to all kindergarteners in September and May. The tests were administered by a reading coach or paraprofessional with proper training. The fall and spring tests were administered in the same small room by the kindergarten classrooms. DIBELS scores were collected as data in the fall and spring. Quantitative pre and post data was gathered from kindergarten classrooms. Pre-test scores were gathered in September, 2008 and were compared to posttest scores that were collected in May, 2009. The survey's data was collected at the end

of the year. The survey consisted of six simple questions with yes and no answers. The writer administered the survey questions to the kindergarteners, because not all students read fluently.

Procedure

The research data provided a three way viewpoint. First, the researcher used the teachers' assessments which gave the level of the learner at the beginning of the school year. Second, the researcher collected Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills scores which measured Letter Naming Fluency and Word Use Fluency. Finally, students completed a survey on the experience and learning received throughout the teaching period. The author's data offered a wide perspective that reflected true learner experience and learning.

The researcher began collecting data for the quasi-experimental study in September 2008. The DIBELS tests were collected and stored by a reading coach at the school. Directions for the tests were followed exactly. The investigator collected three assessments throughout the year. First, the author collected initial assessment data, which showed beginning students skills at the beginning of the year such as letter naming and sounds of the letters. The students received the same assessment in the middle of the year and at the end of the year. During the school year, the Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills scores were collected two times to provide formative assessment of the students' progress. The test was given in a small empty room that was by the two kindergarten classrooms. Two kindergarten teachers provided intensive, specific alphabetic and phonemic awareness instruction through teaching, modeling, and activities that used visual, kinesthetic, and auditory strategies followed the Read Well curriculum. The researcher observed the students regularly as teachers asked questions, modeled and practiced with students which led to discussion of the curriculum and the teacher was able to assess the

students' comprehension. At the end of the research the author completed a survey with each student that covered the experience of the instruction and the learner's accomplishment within the learning experience.

Each lesson regarding a letter took five days or more, if needed. The schedule depended upon the students' progress, school schedule and absenteeism of students. A 90 minute reading block was uninterrupted instruction in the classrooms using solely Read Well materials. The students had an extra half hour a day for small group instruction. Each child was individually assessed and placed in the correct reading group based on prior knowledge and/or ability level. Small groups started in October of 2009. Both kindergarten classrooms were divided into six small reading groups. The most intensive students, who needed substantial interventions, were taught by the teacher. The other groups, which were at benchmark and strategic students were taught by the paraprofessionals who received training on Read Well. The second highest group was taught by the teacher. Many of the themes from the whole class instruction were revisited in the small groups where children used prior knowledge to make connections with new instructional material. During small group instruction, teachers monitored students and provided individual assistance as needed.

On the first day of whole class instruction, teachers introduced a letter and the corresponding sound by using a wall card and an alphabet cheer verse. Students learned a new poem (on a poster), providing increased practice using the new letter and sound, phonemic awareness skills, and oral language. Students practiced writing and tracing letters in the air and on white boards. Learners listened to the daily story and participated in discussion during and after the story. Pupils learned a new song or reviewed previously learned songs. Students created an art project and chanted the verse from the Read Well curriculum which provided a

connection with the letter and sound. Students decorated a block letter by coloring/drawing and tracing a letter on white paper, having fun while improving fine motor skills and independent working skills. Mid-year, students began bumpy and smooth blending with the letters or words, listened to dictation and counted the sounds in words using small and whole group instruction.

The next day, students reviewed the letter cheer verse, the poem, and handwriting in the air and on white boards. Students continued to listen to the theme story specific to the unit and discussed vocabulary, and beginning, middle and end of the story contents for each unit. Students played a variety of games which provided additional practice for the specific letter being learned. As reading skills increased; students began bumpy and smooth blending with the letters or words. On the second day of the unit, students completed a letter trace page by tracing the letters and coloring each picture using at least three colors on white paper to complete the letter practice project. Students were challenged to find and circle the hidden letters within a specific activity.

Every third day, the students reviewed the letter cheer verse, the poem, and handwriting in the air. Students continued to listen to the theme story in the unit followed by discussions. Students began a new journal at the beginning of the year, drawing only pictures at first, and later on students wrote sentences or a story at the bottom of the pictures. Students learned a new song or reviewed one previously learned in earlier units. Teachers provided a guided instruction to assist in students recall regarding the beginning, middle and end of the story using the pocket chart cards. During retelling story time, students reinforced comprehension skills. As previous learning skills increased, students created a story retell book by coloring, cutting, sequencing and pasting pictures showing the beginning, middle, and end of the story using stories which were learned prior to the instruction.

The fourth day, students reviewed the letter cheer verse, the poem, and handwriting in the air. Students reread and discussed the story and made better connections with different settings. Every fourth day, students worked on an ABC scrapbook. Students practiced writing the letter and created a personalized scrapbook page with a letter. Students reviewed the letter and sound association for the letter. Students learned a new song or reviewed the one that was already learned in earlier units. Students practiced bumpy and smooth blending with the letters or words. Students did the letter book page, which helped to make letter and sound association by coloring pictures of items that began with the specific letter.

On the last day, students reviewed the letter cheer verse, the poem, and handwriting in the air and on white boards. Towards the end of the school year students had dictation and counted the sounds in words. Teachers read and discussed a story with the students. Students practiced bumpy and smooth blending with the letters or words. Students created sentences using picture words at the beginning of the year, later students used words to build sentences and repeated words and sentences as a whole class or individually. Students practiced making and reading sentences on the sentence scramble page.

In small group instruction, each lesson had a five day plan or a six to twelve day plan. The teachers made a decision about how long the students spent on each unit. Every day in small groups, students practiced stretching, shrinking and blending sounds or words, did dictation, read daily stories and played games. At the end of each unit, teachers assessed each student and placed the child in a group which corresponded with the students' skills growth in reading and meeting kindergarten benchmarks.

As soon the data was gathered in the fall and spring, the researcher used a program called Stat Pak software to conduct the *t*-test. The data from fall was compared with spring data by using a *t*-test to find if Read Well program made any significance difference in kindergarteners' performance between fall and spring scores.

Treatment of the Data

The researcher gathered fall and spring DIBELS Letter Naming Fluency and Word Use Fluency scores of 23 kindergarteners during the 2008-2009 school year. The DIBELS assessment was used for the pre-test and posttest of kindergarten classrooms. The data was treated by conducting a non-independent *t*-test from the program Stat Pak to determine the results. The data from fall was compared to spring data to see if the Read Well program made any significant difference in kindergarteners' performance between fall and spring scores. The survey was given to each student. The surveys were collected in May, 2009. The survey had six questions with yes and no answers. The writer administered the questions to the kindergarteners outside the classroom in the small room individually, so there was no interruption during the survey.

Summary

The author examined all the students in kindergarten during the 2008-2009 school year. The students received 120 minutes of reading instruction from the Read Well curriculum five days a week; a 90-minute block in the morning for the whole group instruction for both kindergarten classrooms and a 30-minute block in afternoon for small group instructions.

The research study was done using a quantitative research. The researcher used quasi-experimental design since a control group was not used. Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early

Literacy Skills tests were administered to all students in kindergarten in September and May. The tests were administered by a reading coach or paraprofessional with proper training. The fall and spring tests were administered in a small room by the kindergarten classrooms. Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills scores were collected the in the fall and spring. Quantitative pre-test and posttest data was gathered from kindergarten classrooms. Pre-test scores were gathered in September, 2008, and were compared to posttest scores collected in May, 2009. The data was treated by conducting a non-independent *t*-test from the program StatPak to determine the significance of the results. The data from fall was compared to spring data to see if the Read Well program made any significant difference in kindergarteners' performance between fall and spring scores. The survey was given to students individually.

The surveys were collected in May, 2009. The survey had six questions with yes and no answers. The writer administered the questions to the kindergarteners outside the classroom in the small room individually, so there was no interruption during the survey.

CHAPTER 4

Analysis of the Data

Introduction

The researcher wanted to determine if kindergarteners' DIBELS scores significantly increased after receiving Read Well instruction in the 2008-2009 school year. Benchmark, strategic and intensive students from both kindergarten classrooms were included in the study. The two kindergarten classrooms participated in the Read Well curriculum five days a week for 90 minutes in the morning as whole groups and for 30 minutes in the afternoon as small groups. The students were assessed using the DIBELS Letter Naming Fluency and Word Use Fluency tests in September of 2008 to gather pre-test results. In May of 2009, the author collected posttest results using the DIBELS Letter Naming Fluency and Word Use Fluency tests. The data from fall was compared to spring data to see if the Read Well program made any significant difference in kindergarteners' performance in reading using a non-independent *t*-test. Students also received the short survey at the end of the year where the researcher tried to determine how well students liked coming to the school and reading books. The questions on the survey had yes and no answers so the researcher could calculate the results. The author computed the percentage of the "yes" and "no" answers for questions separately.

Description of the Environment

The research study was done in a school district located in a small rural town in Eastern Washington. The population for the whole district, K-12, was 484. The elementary school had a population of 213 students. The majority of the students came from low income families and received free meals during school time. The ethnic mix of the school district was 73.6% white which included a high Ukrainian population in the district, 23.6% Hispanic, 0.6% Black, and

2.3% American Indian Alaskan Native. The population of the school district also contained 9.1% special education students, 23.1% bilingual students and 3.0% migrant students. The population of the two kindergarten classrooms were ethnically varied as was the population of the school district (Washington State Report Card, 2008). The town had limited businesses such as restaurants, gas stations, antique stores and motels. Many parents/legal guardians of the students worked out of town on nearby agricultural farms.

The participants for the research study were students that were enrolled and completed the entire school year between September 2008 and June 2009. The two kindergarten classes were taught by two teachers. Educators had been trained in using the Read Well curriculum. The kindergarten teachers taught the same curriculum. For small group instruction, students were grouped based on Dynamic of Basic Early Literacy Skills and Read Well assessments from the September of 2008. Children were placed into six groups; one benchmark group, four strategic groups and one intensive group. Students were placed individually in the reading groups based on prior knowledge and/or ability level. The intensive group was taught by the teacher. The second highest was taught by the second teacher and the rest of the groups were taught by the paraprofessionals with proper training in the use of the Read Well curriculum. During small group instruction, teachers monitored students and provided individual assistance as needed.

The twenty three kindergarteners were given the DIBELS pre-test in September and posttest in May. The subtests on the pre-test contained Initial Sound Fluency, Letter Naming Fluency and Word Use Fluency. The posttest reassessed the areas of Letter Naming Fluency and Word Use Fluency; however, the students were tested on Phoneme Segmentation Fluency and Nonsense Word Fluency in May of 2009. The author used the tests that were assessed in

September and reassessed in May; Letter Naming Fluency and Word Use Fluency. The complete figures of the kindergarteners' scores were displayed in the Appendix.

The researcher used the non-independent *t*-test samples to determine if the Read Well curriculum made significant difference in improving DIBELS scores. The *t*-test was calculated using the Stat Pak statistical software. The Stat Pak program computed all of the results and produced the necessary statistical figures that were needed to carry out the statistical analysis, which was compiled into Tables 1 and 2. The data was compared and evaluated. The researcher first conducted a *t*-test to determine if there was significant difference between the pre and post tests on Letter Naming Fluency, then Word Use Fluency.

At the end of the research the author created the survey which had six questions. The researcher interviewed each student with a survey that covered the students' experiences during instruction in the classroom. The goal of the research survey was to determine the learner's accomplishment within the learning experience. The survey was done in a small room beside the kindergarten classroom. After the survey the researcher tabulated scores of the surveys. The author calculated the percentage of the "yes" and "no" answers. As shown in figure 4 for the calculated amounts.

Hypotheses

Kindergarteners participating in Read Well curriculum will make greater than expected growth in Letter Naming Fluency from fall to spring using pre and post Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills Scores as measured by a *t*-test.

Kindergarteners participating in Read Well curriculum will make greater than expected growth in Word Use Fluency from fall to spring using pre and post Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills Scores as measured by a *t*-test.

Null Hypotheses

Kindergarteners participating in Read Well curriculum will not make greater than expected growth in Letter Naming Fluency from fall to spring as measured by a pre-post Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills test using a non-independent *t*-test with a significance level of $p < .05$.

Kindergarteners participating in Read Well curriculum will not make greater than expected growth in Word Use Fluency from fall to spring as measured by a pre-post Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills test using a non-independent *t*-test with a significance level of $p < .05$.

Results of the Study

Table 1.

t-test for Pre-Post Fall to Spring DIBELS Letter Naming Fluency Scores for Benchmark Strategic and Intensive students in Kindergarten

Test	N	Mean	Standard Deviation
Pre	23	9.70	12.70
Post	23	39.30	15.54
df = 22		<i>t</i> = 9.81	$p < .001$

The study carried out by the researcher indicated there was significant difference between pre and post Letter Naming Fluency tests according to the first table; the t -value was 9.81 and the degree of freedom was 22. The t -value appeared to be significant beyond the .001 probability level. Kindergarteners made greater than average growth from the pre-test given in September, 2008 to the post-test given in May, 2009 after using the Read Well curriculum.

The null hypothesis was rejected. The kindergarteners participating in Read Well curriculum did make greater than expected progress in Letter Naming Fluency from fall to spring as measured by a pre-post DIBELS test using a t -test.

Secondly, the researcher conducted a t -test to determine if significant differences existed between the pre and post tests on Word Use Fluency. The following differences were noted.

Table 2.

t -test for Pre-Post Fall to Spring DIBELS Word Use Fluency Scores for Benchmark, Strategic and Intensive students in kindergarten

Test	N	Mean	Standard Deviation
Pre	23	5.87	7.46
Post	23	31.48	14.30
df = 22		$t = 8.23$	$p < .001$

Resultant data indicated there was significant difference between pre and post Word Use Fluency tests according to the second table; the t -value was 8.23 and the degree of freedom was 22. The t -value appeared to be significant beyond the .001 probability level. Kindergarteners made greater than average growth from the pre-test given in September, 2008, to the posttest

given in May, 2009, after using the Read Well curriculum. The researcher found that the Read Well curriculum did significantly improve students' performance.

The null hypothesis was rejected. The kindergarteners participating in Read Well curriculum did make greater than expected progress in Word Use Fluency from fall to spring as measured by a pre-post DIBELS test using a *t*-test.

The researcher computed scores of the surveys that were given to the kindergarteners. Please refer to figure 4 for the calculated amounts. All "yes" cells had a high percentage compared to the "no" cells. Most of the students enjoyed coming to school and had positive attitude toward reading.

Findings

The researcher concluded that using Read Well curriculum kindergarteners made greater than expected growth as measured by the DIBELS Letter Naming Fluency and Word Use Fluency assessments. The pre-test showed a mean Letter Naming Fluency score 9.70 per minute and a mean Word Use Fluency score 5.87 per minute for the study group. The post-test conducted in May demonstrated a mean Letter Naming Fluency score of 39.3 per minute and a mean Word Use Fluency 31.48 per minute for the study group. The survey was answered positively about school experiences by the majority of the students. In kindergarten 14 out of 23 students met benchmark, three out of 23 were strategic and six out of 23 were intensive at the end of the school year using DIBELS scores. The findings supported the use of the Read Well curriculum for kindergarteners.

Discussion

The researcher's findings indicated that kindergarteners improved scores in DIBELS (Letter Naming Fluency and Word Use Fluency) by using the Read Well curriculum. The t -value appeared to be significant beyond the .001 probability level. Where study was done, the majority of the students were from low income families and received free meals during school time and had success in reading using the Read Well program.

The results supported the finding of Sopris West Educational Service (2009) years of study in Alabama and 2006 year of study in Mississippi) and Florida Center for Reading Research (2009). Sopris West Educational Service and Florida Center for Reading Research found that using Read Well in the kindergarten classroom with high percentage of low socioeconomic and minority students improved reading achievement.

Summary

The researcher used the DIBELS results from the 2008-2009 school year and compared fall scores with the spring results. After running the t -tests, the researcher found significant difference in student reading performance. Students in both kindergarten classrooms demonstrated improvement in reading in DIBELS scores from September of 2008 to May of 2009. The findings of the study supported the hypothesis.

CHAPTER 5

Summary, Conclusions and Recommendations

Introduction

In recent years students in schools and districts with ethnically and socioeconomically diverse populations were failing to master essential reading skills. Policies and mandated practices were created in schools after the No Child Left Behind Act. The mandates were created to improve reading scores in United States of America. Schools were eligible to receive grant money to improve student reading skills by using comprehensive reading programs anchored in scientific research from kindergarten to second grade (Armbruster, Lehr & Osborn, 2003). Students from early grades benefited from the grants. The Read Well curriculum and Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills assessments were approved by Reading First.

The researcher observed the two kindergarten classrooms in the school that received the Reading First grants. The author wanted to know if the DIBELS scores would increase after the kindergarteners received Read Well instruction throughout the 2008-2009 school year. The kindergarteners were tested in September, January and May using the DIBELS assessments. The author compared only September scores with May scores. The outcomes were positive, the kindergarteners made greater than expected growth in Letter Naming Fluency and Word Use Fluency results.

Summary

In order to perform the study, the researcher collected data from the school where the study was completed. The fall of 2008 and spring of 2009 DIBELS scores were gathered and compared to find out the growth of kindergarteners in the areas of Letter Naming Fluency and

Word Use Fluency assessments. The data allowed the researcher to determine if the Read Well program significantly improved kindergarteners reading skills.

In the first chapter of the research paper, the writer stated schools faced new standards and teachers were accountable for all students' education. The researcher introduced the purpose of the study, hypothesis, null hypothesis and described the procedure done during the study. The author predicted kindergarteners would make greater than expected growth from fall to spring on Letter Naming Fluency and Word Use Fluency scores.

The author had to research literature to be used as background information and support for the study. The second chapter contained the discussion of the literature and the significant concepts related to the research study. The literature showed students needed to have a good foundation in reading at a younger age to have a joyful experience in schooling. According to Armbruster, Lehr & Osborn (2003) reading skills at a younger age affected students' school performance in later grades. The study completed by the researcher convinced the researcher that reading had become critically important to young children; especially kindergarten students.

The study was done using quantitative research. The research was quasi-experimental since a control group was not used. Fall and spring DIBELS results were collected as data. Pre-test results were collected in September, 2008 and were compared to posttest results collected in May, 2009. The results were compared using a non-independent *t*-test. The third chapter contained details on the quasi-experimental method, information on the participants, details on the instruments used for data collection and analysis.

The author provided the statistical portion of the report and the study's results in chapter four. Within the fourth chapter, the reader could find descriptions of the environment, the results

shown in tables and the findings of the study. After analyzing the findings of the data from the *t*-tests, the researcher discovered the kindergarteners participating in the Read Well Curriculum made greater than expected growth as measured by the DIBELS Letter Naming Fluency and Word Use Fluency assessments. In the summary, the current study showed evidence that the Read Well curriculum provided growth of early reading skills in kindergarteners.

Conclusions

The conclusions drawn from the research study was that both kindergarten classrooms using the Read Well program made greater than expected growth in Letter Naming Fluency and Word Use Fluency scores. The hypothesis was supported by the study. Tables 1 and 2 demonstrated there was significant difference between the pre-test and posttest when the kindergarten teachers used the Read Well curriculum. The kindergarteners' results in Letter Naming Fluency and Word Use Fluency during the 2008-2009 school year increased after having the Read Well program which demonstrated signs that the teachers should continue to use the curriculum over the next years.

The surveys given to the kindergarteners pointed out students participating in the Read Well curriculum were enjoying learning to read. The data indicated positive school experiences for a majority of the students. Most of the students enjoyed coming to school and had a positive attitude toward reading. Students seemed to show increased amount of confidence in reading. Many parents seemed amazed that the kindergarteners could read a passage with familiar words at the end of the school year. The majority of the kindergarteners had a great experience with reading during the 2008-2009 school year which impacted students' futures in a positive way. The researcher observed kindergarteners demonstrated love and appreciation toward books and

reading after children's experiences with the Read Well program.

Recommendations

Based on the data collected from surveys and DIBELS scores, the researcher recommends using the Read Well curriculum as a valid and reliable program to use in reading instruction. The Read Well program uses continuous assessments in order to inform instruction and meet kindergartener's instructional needs. Each unit includes objectives that can be differentiated to meet all readers' needs. The program uses many types of visual tools and tips to help students learn English; not only for fluent speakers, but for English Language Learners as well. The writer believes the kindergarten teachers should continue to use the Read Well program as the main reading program for kindergarten students. The DIBELS Letter Naming Fluency and Word Use Fluency assessments were helpful in assessing individual kindergartener's progress.

The researcher recommends having more lengthy studies on the Read Well program to provide reliability and validity of data. Future study can be done with focus groups of students, such as newcomer ESL students or with the intensive reading students in higher grades to see the effectiveness of Read Well program.

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APPENDIX

Figure 1

DIBELS Letter Naming Fluency assessment results for benchmark, strategic and intensive kindergarteners for the 2008-2009 school year.

Students	September 2008	May 2009
A	0	30
B	6	59
C	25	47
D	0	25
E	0	30
F	25	50
G	0	26
H	39	69
I	3	49
J	6	28
K	0	14
L	0	57
M	0	8
N	0	51
O	2	37
P	8	48
Q	16	15
R	5	36
S	0	48
T	0	27
U	22	48
V	35	53
W	31	49

Figure 2

DIBELS Word Use Fluency assessment results for benchmark, strategic and intensive kindergarteners for the 2008-2009 school year.

Students	September 2008	May 2009
A	0	11
B	15	47
C	1	25
D	22	34
E	0	32
F	13	46
G	0	8
H	0	62
I	0	38
J	0	52
K	0	27
L	2	29
M	0	12
N	17	24
O	8	4
P	2	31
Q	1	22
R	8	41
S	0	22
T	9	34
U	3	37
V	24	38
W	10	48

Figure 3

Survey

Answer the questions using yes and no answers.

	YES	NO
I like to come to school.		
I like reading books.		
I like looking at the books.		
I like someone reading books to me.		
I like small reading groups.		
I feel comfortable in small reading groups.		

Figure 4

Survey results

	Number of Students said YES	Number of Students said NO
I like to come to school.	23 (100%)	0 (0%)
I like reading books.	19 (83%)	4 (17%)
I like looking at the books.	20 (87%)	3 (13%)
I like someone reading books to me.	22 (96%)	1 (4%)
I like small reading groups.	18 (78%)	5 (22%)
I feel comfortable in small reading groups.	19 (83%)	4 (17%)