

The Gateway to Literacy: Literature Circles vs. Whole Class Novel Reading Instruction

A Special Project

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FACULTY APPROVAL

The Gateway to Literacy: Literature Circles vs. Whole Class Novel Instruction

Approved for the Faculty

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ABSTRACT

The project involved a quantitative experimental study. The purpose of the project was to identify the similarities and differences in student attitude related to reading motivation and reading comprehension between two groups of 7th grade students taught by different instructional methods. The two groups of students participated in a novel study unit over the course of three weeks. The first group was taught by a whole-class novel, direct instruction approach, and the second group participated in literature circle cooperative learning. Data was gathered in the form of pre and post-unit reading comprehension assessments and pre and post-unit student reading attitude surveys. Although a slight increase in mean scores in both groups was observed, results indicated no statistical significance.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Background for the Project

The implementation of the No Child Left Behind Act, approved by President George W. Bush in 2002, established stringent standards of academic achievement for America's students and high expectations for teachers. In the era of high stakes testing, educators used "research-based education" to ensure student learning and academic achievement (Department of Education, 2007, p. 1). Ensuring all students learned at high levels in reading and mathematics remained a priority. More important was the necessity for students to learn to function and thrive not only in school, but also in a fast-paced, global society. "We want our students to be lifelong learners, to feel and be empowered by their ability to read, to be well equipped as citizens of a knowledge society" (Greef, 2002, p. 312). Literacy became paramount and stipulations induced by No Child Left Behind pressured educators to enhance student reading success in school. The Reading First initiative mandated constant reading improvement to "ensure that all students read at grade level in English by 3rd grade" (Department of Education, 2007 p. 1). Effective teachers, who zeroed in on the strategies that yielded the most significant positive effect on student learning, reaped the benefits of improved student learning.

The state of Washington kept up with No Child Left Behind's annual testing requirement and adapted the already existing statewide test, the Washington Assessment of Student Learning, an evaluation measuring student progress in reading, writing, science, and mathematics. The modified purpose of the Washington Assessment of

Student Learning was to help educators improve teaching strategies and promote student achievement. Reading well was crucial in determining if students passed the Washington Assessment of Student Learning.

Reading teachers faced intense pressure to ensure research-based teaching strategies were utilized to enforce student achievement. Student motivation remained a large factor in the determination of student reading skills. Best teaching practices suggested that authentic learning opportunities made a significant impact in increasing student literacy attainment. Research suggested the correlation between reading motivation, reading comprehension, and student achievement in reading was significant. Guthrie, Wigfield, Humenick, Perencevitch, et al., stated, “Students who experience more interest-based reading episodes will have a greater increase in reading comprehension than will students who experience fewer interest-based reading episodes” (2006, p. 236).

The middle school where the author completed the project was located in southeastern Washington, in the lower Columbia Basin. In October 2006, the school population equaled 887 students in grades 6-8. The ethnic breakdown of the school was 75.2% White, 17.8% Hispanic, 3.0% Asian, 3.0% Black, and 0.7% American Indian.

Statement of the Problem

Adolescent literacy was mistakenly viewed as an unimportant issue and many people assumed that, at the middle school stage, students were literate. Adolescent literacy, a critical issue in education, commanded attention because adolescent literacy served as the transition period between beginning and intermediate literacy and advanced literacy. “Literacy development is an ongoing process, and it requires just as much

attention for adolescents as it does for beginning readers” (International Reading Association, 2007, p. 1).

Cultivating a positive outlook on learning helped students’ attitude, learning level, and academic performance improve. Students lacking reading skills typically struggled with comprehension and motivation. Guthrie et al. conducted research studies on the relationship between student reading motivation and comprehension. Findings of the studies showed that the level of engagement in reading directly influenced the level of reading comprehension. “Motivation for reading is an important contributor to students’ reading achievement and school success” (Guthrie et al., 2006, p, 232). Researchers also suggested effective literacy instruction strategies to produce an increase in intrinsic motivation and reading engagement. Cooperative learning structures and opportunity for student choice were recommended (Guthrie et al., 2006). Involving students in real-world discussions cultivated more intense reading motivation (McPherson, 2007).

Purpose of the Project

The purpose of the project was to identify the similarities and differences in student attitude related to reading motivation and reading comprehension between two groups of 7th grade students. Two instructional methods were used. The first group, taught as a whole class, completed a novel unit scheduled by the author. In the first group, the author used direct instruction. The second group, taught in small literature circle groups, read books of choice and set a group schedule for completion. In the second group, the author employed the cooperative learning strategy. The two groups of 7th grade students did not differ significantly in terms of demographics or ability levels.

Delimitations

The project took place in January 2008, during the 2007-2008 school year and involved sixty 7th grade students from the middle school. Thirty students made up the first block of students and 30 composed the second block. The author supplied novels, instruction handouts, literature circle session schedules, and a teacher-created whole-class novel study timeline. Each class was seated in small groups of 4 or 5 students.

The age and maturity level of the students was a delimitation. The students were in early adolescence, a time period where attitudes fluctuated and hormonal changes affected behavior. Social situations were a delimitation because 7th grade sociability was ambiguous (Tierno, 1991). An additional delimitation was that the project involved above grade level students and was not an accurate sample of a typical 7th grade class.

Assumptions

The author believed learning was a social activity and middle school students benefited from interactive learning. The author also believed that modern research indicated that cooperative learning strategies proved to be highly effective learning tools. As an educator, the author utilized and applied effective teaching strategies. Literature circles were a strategy the author had experience with in the past and the author was aware of the student learning and classroom management benefits of literature circles.

Hypothesis

Seventh grade students, given the opportunity to participate in literature circles and choose reading material, would have an improved attitude toward reading and reading comprehension would increase or stay the same as students taught a novel as a whole class as measured by pre and post student attitude surveys and pre and post reading Washington Assessment of Student Learning stem prompts.

Null Hypothesis

Seventh grade students, given the opportunity to participate in literature circles and choose reading material, would not have an improved attitude toward reading and reading comprehension would not increase or stay the same as students taught a novel as a whole class as measured by pre and post student attitude surveys and pre and post reading Washington Assessment of Student Learning stem prompts.

Significance of the Project

In the present time, adolescents needed to be more literate than ever. The complexity of the modern world created a need for critical thinkers, readers, and writers. “Adolescents need high levels of literacy to understand the vast amount of information available to them, and to fuel their imaginations as they help create the world of the future” (International Reading Association, 2007, p. 1). Effective teaching strategies served as the gateway to reading instruction to improve adolescent literacy.

This project was significant because the emphasis was on the demonstration of the effectiveness of literacy instruction strategies. Cooperative learning activities such as

literature circles had the potential to promote high standards for literacy instruction. Utilizing literature circles in the middle school classroom could cause an increase in student reading motivation and comprehension and an improvement in classroom climate. This type of critical literacy had the potential to challenge students and extend the depth and continuation of learning.

Procedure

Student reading attitude surveys were conducted prior to the literacy instruction. A reading Washington Assessment of Student Learning stem question pretest was administered to measure student reading comprehension before the units were taught. The preliminary surveys and pretests were collected and stored in color-coded folders.

The two groups of students participated in a novel study over the course of three weeks. The first group was taught with a direct-instruction, whole-group teaching approach. The author chose the novel and every student read the novel. The author determined the timeline for completion of the novel and the topics of class discussion related to the novel. The students participated in daily whole-class discussions.

The second group was taught by a cooperative learning approach and participated in small group literature circles. The second group of students was presented with seven novel choices and students selected three top choices. Students were placed in small literature circle groups of four or five students and assigned one of the students' three novel choices. The literature circles determined a session schedule that served as a timeline of completion and signified how many pages were read per day. The literature

circles participated in daily small group discussions. Literature circle members fulfilled rotating role tasks as discussions were facilitated by a discussion leader. Other role tasks consisted of connector, vocabulary enricher, literary luminary, and illustrator/recorder. The author chose role tasks based on a list of suggestions from the book, *Literature Circles: Voice and Choice in Book Clubs and Reading Groups*, by Harvey Daniels (2002, p. 100).

After literacy instruction took place, the same student reading attitude survey was conducted. A similar reading Washington Assessment of Student Learning stem question was administered as a post-test, measuring reading comprehension. The post-instruction surveys and post-tests were also collected and stored in color-coded folders.

The pre and post literacy instruction reading attitude surveys were examined and shifts in student reading attitudes were compared. The pre and post Washington Assessment of Student Learning reading comprehension questions were also scored according to the Washington Assessment of Student Learning scoring guide and the results of the pre and post tests were considered.

Definition of Terms

adolescent literacy. Adolescent literacy was the reading comprehension and critical thinking skills related to literature of adolescents.

authentic literacy. Authentic literacy was student-created understanding and meaning in learning.

collaborative literacy. Collaborative literacy was working together to understand and discuss literacy.

cooperative learning. Cooperative learning was an interactive instructional technique allowing students to work in small groups to complete learning tasks.

critical literacy. Critical literacy was engagement in critical thinking about literature.

literature circle. A literature circle was a cooperative learning book study, also called book club, where students met regularly in groups of four or five and discussed a chosen book.

role tasks. Role tasks were jobs each student was responsible for in a literature circle. Examples of the jobs were discussion leader, questioner, connector, illustrator, vocabulary enricher, and literary luminary.

Acronyms

IRA. International Reading Association

NCLB. No Child Left Behind

WASL. Washington Assessment of Student Learning

CHAPTER 2

Review of Selected Literature

Introduction

Best practices in literacy instruction entailed strategies that cultivated learning differentiation and interpersonal skill-building, fostered critical thinking and an affection for reading, and encouraged student-centered activities at the middle and high school levels. Literature circles were a research-based strategy that originated from cooperative learning activities. Literature circles were a dynamic and effective instructional practice that provided students with the learning choices and the opportunity for collaboration, an important skill that helped to ensure student success in the present, in later education, and beyond.

Literature Circles

The early 1980s was when literature circles were first utilized by educators as a literacy strategy. Literature circles, also referred to as book clubs, were defined as “smack, peer-led book discussion groups” (Daniels, 2006, p.10). Over the past 20 years, educators and researchers conducted additional practice and experimentation with literature circles, an effective cooperative learning strategy. Findings indicated that the collaborative literacy skills encouraged by well-implemented literature circles had a profound influence on student engagement in reading, which produced a positive impact on student reading motivation and comprehension.

In order for students to become motivated to read, students participated in engaging activities, cultivating an appreciation and affection for reading. Often classroom routines allowed little time for a positive attitude toward reading to develop. Engaging activities incorporated elements that positively impacted the learner's environment and stimulated the learner. Literature circles provided students with an opportunity to participate in meaningful cooperative learning, positively impacting attitudes about reading (Burns, 1998).

A journal article by Bonnie Burns (1998) outlined the benefits of using literature circles to increase student reading motivation and comprehension. The teacher introduced literature circles by doing quick book talks, briefly outlining each book's story line. Afterwards, the teacher gave students the opportunity to pick the top two books of interest and make other learning decisions. "Students were offered a choice of book, homework pace, and group roles" (Burns 1998, p. 125). Using literature circles involved providing students with plenty of choice, which fostered a sense of learning ownership. During class, students participated in cooperative learning group discussions, fulfilling one of five role assignments for the day. The five role assignments included "Discussion Director, Vocabulary Enricher, Passage Picker, Illustrator, and Question Chooser" (Burns, 1998, p. 125).

Student commentary and feedback generated during Burns's study specified that participation in literature circles increased motivation and cultivated a "congenial setting," a more positive classroom atmosphere where students felt comfortable taking

learning risks (Burns, 1998, p 125). When educators effectively implemented literature circles, educators constantly encouraged critical discussion and positive social interaction skills such as “active listening, asking follow-up questions, disagreeing agreeably, dealing with ‘slackers,’ and more” (Daniels, 2006, p. 11).

Cooperative Learning

Cooperative learning, a teaching strategy that utilized small, mixed ability groups of students to complete learning tasks for the benefit of the individual as well as the group, was noted as an effective teaching practice (McCracken, 2005). Known to increase student achievement as well as encourage a better classroom climate, cooperative learning was “a strategy that can be used in early childhood classes through adult learning” (McCracken, 2005, p.12). Also defined as a mode of active learning, cooperative learning engaged students in meaningful tasks and promoted individual learning along with teambuilding.

Five elements of cooperative learning ensured that this strategy remained effective. The first element, positive interdependence, held each group member accountable for individual contributions that benefited the group. The purpose of particular role tasks during a cooperative learning activity reinforced positive interdependence. Face-to-face interaction, the second element of cooperative learning, employed interactive discussions. The second element possessed connections to higher level thinking as well as fostering an encouraging learning climate. The third element, individual and group accountability, helped to establish the cooperative learning activity as a group effort. When groups had a manageable amount of members working toward

the learning, the individual and the group benefited. Interpersonal and small group skills, the fourth element of cooperative learning, emphasized necessary social skills that the educator must teach as part of the cooperative learning activity. The fifth and final element of cooperative learning, group processing, allowed group members to think and evaluate how activities went and how they made choices in order to solve problems (Cooperative Learning, 2007, p. 2-4).

Adolescent Literacy and Reading Motivation

Reading to Achieve: A Governor's Guide to Adolescent Literacy was published by the National Governor's Association in October 2005 in response to the estimated "eight million struggling readers in grades 4-12," needing additional help in reading (Christie, 2007). The National Governor's Association advocated for improvement in adolescent achievement in reading and recommended five strategies to support adolescent literacy. The five strategies were "build support for a state focus on adolescent literacy, raise literacy expectations across grades and curricula, encourage and support school and district literacy plans, build educators' capacity to provide adolescent literacy instruction, and measure progress in adolescent literacy at the school district and state levels" (Christie, 2007, p. 421). Often viewed as already literate students, adolescent readers were often overlooked and beginning literacy viewed as more critical than adolescent literacy. Current research in combination with the National Governor's Association's publication indicated that researchers and policy makers paid closer attention to adolescent readers. The IRA affirmed that "adolescents need high levels of literacy to understand the vast amount of information available to them, and to fuel their

imagination as they help create the world of the future” (2007, p. 1).

A drop in student reading motivation has been documented as students ascended through middle and high school. Traditional reading instruction at the middle and high school levels, such as reading text books and the “whole-class novel,” was studied and found to be a hindrance to adolescent reading motivation (Fisher & Ivey, 2007). Fisher and Ivey (2007) recommended that student-centered instructional strategies were more effective than teaching the whole-class novel. Finding one book that met the needs and interests of each student in a classroom was impossible.

What exactly motivated adolescents to read remained a question unanswered for many educators in the past. Modern research suggested that instructional practices were successful in improving adolescent achievement in reading when “what motivated adolescents to read” was taken into account (Pitcher et al., 2007). Motivation is defined in terms of “beliefs, values, needs and goals that individuals have” (Guthrie & Wigfield, 1997, p. 5). Pitcher et al. (2007), in an article focusing on a study on adolescent reading motivation, affirmed that adolescent literacy instruction could be improved and reading achievement increased, if educators paid attention to what motivated students to read. Findings showed that student choice in books and other reading material, as well as types of projects and methods of completing tasks, was an overwhelming motivator for adolescents.

Collaborative Literacy

“Humans are innately social creatures and naturally want to interact with others”

(Steineke, 2002, p. 2). Socialization was a high priority for most middle and high school students. Having an “already overwhelming desire” to converse with one another rather than listen to a teacher lecture, adolescents greatly benefited from literary activities that involved collaboration with peers. Not only a high motivator, collaboration with others was a life skill students not only used inside the classroom, but a skill students transferred into later schooling and successful employment situations (Steineke, 2002, p. 3).

Our highly advanced, global society, required effective communication and cooperation skills and made it essential for students to engage in positive interactions with others if students were going to be productive members of society. Collaborative literacy was defined as an activity where students worked together cooperatively and interactively to understand and discuss reading material. Literature circles and other cooperative learning reading activities incorporated interactive and positive communication skills and were described as collaborative literacy in action (Steineke, 2002, p. 3).

Summary

A comprehensive view of effective literacy instruction required an examination of many factors from student reading motivation to creating activities that capitalized on student engagement in literacy and made a positive impact not only on student reading achievement, but on students as lifelong readers and learners. More educators utilizing these research-based, best practices had the potential to make lasting improvements on literacy instruction.

CHAPTER 3

Methodology and Treatment of Data

Introduction

The author performed an experimental study on 7th grade reading students. The experimental study involved a T-Test of independent samples of pre and post-unit reading comprehension assessment and pre and post-unit student reading attitude survey results. The purpose was to determine if students who participated in literature circle cooperative learning had an improved attitude about reading and a reading comprehension that remained consistent or increased versus students who participated in a whole-class novel study.

Methodology

The quantitative research method used in the study was experimental. “In experimental research, the researcher manipulates at least one independent variable, controls the other relevant variables, and observes the effect on one or more dependent variables” (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2006, p. 233).

Participants

The sample of participants for the study incorporated sixty above grade level 7th grade middle school students, approximately 12 to 13 years of age. One group consisted of 30 students taught using a whole-class novel instructional approach. The other group was comprised of 30 students taught using a cooperative learning, literature circle instructional approach. The study took place during the 2007-2008 school year during the month of January.

Instruments

One of the data-gathering devices consisted of pre and post-unit reading comprehension assessments. The pre and post-unit reading comprehension assessments were comprised of WASL stem questions aligned with a 7th grade reading grade level expectation.

Reliability and validity issues were examined. Reliability was defined as “the degree to which a test consistently measures whatever it is measuring” (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2006, p. 139). Obtained from support materials from the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction, the pre and post-unit reading comprehension assessments were reliable because the pre and post tests measured the same grade level expectation and WASL-related reading comprehension skills with different questions. Adding to the reliability, the same text was also used for the pre and post-unit reading assessments. Validity was defined as “the degree to which a test measures what it is supposed to measure and, consequently, permits appropriate interpretation of scores” (Gay, et al., 2006, p. 134). The validity was lowered because the pre and post tests were intended to measure only reading comprehension, but measured reading comprehension and analysis, a higher level reading skill.

The other data-gathering device included pre and post-unit student reading attitude surveys. The surveys were created by the author and used a Likert scale. “A Likert scale asks an individual to respond to a series of statements by indicating whether he or she strongly agrees (SA), agrees (A), is undecided (U), disagrees (D), or strongly

disagrees (SD). Each response is assigned a point value, and an individual's score is determined by adding the point values of all the statements" (Gay et al., 2006 p.130). Intended to measure students' preferences and opinions about reading, the survey was reliable because the pre and post-unit surveys were identical. The surveys were valid in the study because each item connected to students' likes or dislikes about available reading options. The surveys consisted of eleven questions. Eight of the survey questions inquired about activities associated with literature circles. Three of the survey questions were not included in the study because literature circle data was not obtainable from the three survey questions, but was necessary information to obtain from students for instructional purposes.

The author acknowledged that the participants in the study were above grade level reading students, the results of the study might not be typical, and the data-gathering devices might not provide the same results with another 7th grade sample of students. The finding lowers the reliability of the pre and post-unit reading comprehension assessments and student reading attitude surveys.

Design

The author conducted an experimental study for the design method and used pre and post-unit reading comprehension assessments and pre and post-unit student reading attitude surveys. The author wanted to find out if students given the opportunity to participate in literature circles would have an improved attitude about reading and a consistent or higher reading comprehension than students instructed by the whole-class novel approach.

Procedure

Student reading attitude surveys were conducted prior to the literacy instruction. The author also administered a reading Washington Assessment of Student Learning stem question pretest to measure student reading comprehension before the units were taught. The preliminary surveys and pretests were collected and stored in color-coded folders.

The two groups of students participated in a novel study over the course of three weeks. The first group was taught with a direct-instruction, whole-group teaching approach. The author chose the novel and every student read the novel. The author determined the timeline for completion of the novel and the topics of class discussion related to the novel. The students participated in daily whole-class discussions.

The second group was taught by a cooperative learning approach and participated in small group literature circles. The second group of students was presented with seven novel choices and students selected three top choices. Students were placed in small literature circle groups of four or five students and assigned one of the students' three novel choices. The literature circles determined a session schedule that served as a timeline of completion and signified how many pages were read per day. The literature circles participated in daily small group discussions. Literature circle members fulfilled rotating role tasks as discussions were facilitated by a discussion leader. Other role tasks consisted of connector, vocabulary enricher, literary luminary, and

illustrator/recorder. The author chose role tasks based on a list of suggestions from the book, *Literature Circles: Voice and Choice in Book Clubs and Reading Groups*, by Harvey Daniels (2002, p. 100).

After literacy instruction took place, the same student reading attitude survey was conducted. The author also administered a similar reading Washington Assessment of Student Learning stem question as a post-test, measuring reading comprehension. The post-instruction surveys and post-tests were also collected and stored in color-coded folders.

The pre and post literacy instruction reading attitude surveys were examined and shifts in student reading attitudes were compared. The pre and post Washington Assessment of Student Learning reading comprehension questions were also scored according to the Washington Assessment of Student Learning scoring guide and the results of the pre and post tests were considered.

Treatment of the Data

The T-Test on Stat Pak (2007) software was used to conduct statistical calculations. Pre and post-unit reading comprehension assessments were used to see if students that participated in literature circles had a more consistent or higher reading comprehension than students that did not participate in literature circles. Student reading attitude survey results were also used to determine if student reading enjoyment increased in students who participated in literature circles.

Summary

The author used pre and post-unit reading comprehension assessments and student reading attitude surveys to determine if literature circles positively influenced reading comprehension and student enjoyment of reading. The statistical data for the experimental study was gathered by the assessments and surveys and calculated by the T-Test on the Stat Pak (2007) software.

CHAPTER 4

Analysis of the Data

Introduction

Seventh grade students were involved in the experimental study. The parameters discussed were students' age, maturity level, social situations, and academic performance level. The data from the T-Test of independent samples of post-unit reading comprehension assessment and post-unit student reading attitude surveys was analyzed and results of the study were discussed.

Description of the Environment

The project took place in January 2008, during the 2007-2008 school year and involved sixty 7th grade students from the middle school. Parameters of the project included age, maturation, and sociability. The students were in early adolescence, a time period where attitudes fluctuated and hormonal changes affected behavior. Students' reading preferences and assessment performance might have varied more if students were not in adolescence. Another parameter was the students involved in the study had above grade level abilities and were not an accurate sample of a typical 7th grade class.

Hypothesis/Research Question

Seventh grade students, given the opportunity to participate in literature circles and choose reading material, would have an improved attitude toward reading and reading comprehension would increase or stay the same as students taught a novel as a whole class as measured by pre and post student attitude surveys and pre and post reading Washington Assessment of Student Learning stem prompts.

T-Tests for independent samples were conducted for pre and post-unit student reading comprehension assessments. A total of 8 points were possible for the pre and post-unit reading comprehension assessments. Group X was the group instructed by the whole-class novel approach and Group Y was the group instructed by literature circle cooperative learning. Findings for pre-unit assessments, found in Table 1.1, indicated a mean score of 6.13 for Group X and 6.73 for Group Y. Mean scores for post-unit assessments, found in Table 1.2, increased for both groups resulting in 7.00 for Group X and 7.63 for Group Y, however, the probability was calculated and no significance was found.

T-Tests for independent samples were also conducted for pre and post-unit student reading attitude surveys. The surveys were composed of a Likert scale and contained 8 questions in support of literature circle cooperative learning. Results for pre-unit surveys, in Table 1.3, involved a mean score of 29.33 for Group X and 29.50 for Group Y. Mean scores for post-unit student reading attitude surveys, in Table 1.4, resulted in 29.27 for Group X, and 31.10 for Group Y. No significance was discovered in the statistical analysis for the surveys.

Null Hypothesis

Seventh grade students, given the opportunity to participate in literature circles and choose reading material, would not have an improved attitude toward reading and reading comprehension would not increase or stay the same as students taught a novel as a whole class as measured by pre and post student attitude surveys and pre and post reading Washington Assessment of Student Learning stem prompts.

According to the T-Test of independent samples for the pre and post-unit reading comprehension assessments and student reading attitude surveys, no significance was found. As a result, the null hypothesis was accepted.

Results of the Study

Table 1.1

Pre-Unit Reading Comprehension Assessment Results

Group	N	Sum of Scores	Mean
X	30	184	6.13
Y	30	202	6.73

t-Value = -1.61 df = 58

Table 1.2

Post-Unit Reading Comprehension Assessment Results

Group	N	Sum of Scores	Mean
X	30	210	7.00
Y	30	229	7.63

t-Value = -2.62 df = 58

Table 1.3

Pre-Unit Student Reading Attitude Survey Results

Group	N	Sum of Scores	Mean
X	30	880	29.33
Y	30	885	29.50

t-Value = -0.19 df = 58

Table 1.4

Post-Unit Student Reading Attitude Survey Results

Group	N	Sum of Scores	Mean
X	30	878	29.27
Y	30	933	31.10

t-Value = -2.03 df = 58

Findings

Results of the study were not in support of the hypothesis. The data drawn from the T-Test for pre and post reading comprehension assessments was not in support of the part of the hypothesis about reading comprehension and the null hypothesis was accepted. Pre and post-unit student reading attitude survey data results also did not show significance in an improvement of student reading attitude in students who were instructed with literature circles versus students instructed with the whole class novel approach.

Discussion

The author knew that the two instructional methods, whole group novel instruction and literature circle cooperative learning, were both effective instructional strategies. When the pre and post-unit reading comprehension assessments were scored, the data was analyzed by a T-Test and no significance was found.

Summary

The experimental study was conducted with 7th grade students to determine if students that were taught by one instructional strategy, literature circle cooperative learning, had an increase in or consistent reading comprehension and an improved attitude about reading than students who were instructed by a different strategy, the whole-class novel approach. Age, maturation, adolescent sociability, and academic level were parameters. Data obtained from the T-Test of independent samples on pre and post-unit reading comprehension assessments revealed no significance. The first part of the hypothesis pertaining to reading comprehension was not supported and the null

hypothesis was accepted. Furthermore, when the same statistical analysis was performed with student reading attitude survey results, significance was not found and the second part of the hypothesis concerning student reading attitude was not supported and the null hypothesis was accepted. Overall results of the study suggested that the two instructional strategies were similar in the impact they had on student reading comprehension. In summation, the outcome of the study pointed out that students instructed with literature circles do not necessarily have an increased or consistent reading comprehension level or improved attitude about reading.

CHAPTER 5

Summary, Conclusions and Recommendations

Introduction

Conclusions and recommendations were made and results were summarized about the study based on the data that was gathered and analyzed. The tables that displayed the data showed more of an increase in student reading comprehension assessment scores and student reading attitude survey scores for students who participated in literature circle instruction, however, no statistical significance was found. The author explained recommendations relative to the conclusions that were recognized.

Summary

The purpose of the study was to identify the similarities and differences in student attitude related to reading motivation and in reading comprehension between two groups of 7th grade students. Two instructional methods were used. The first group, taught as a whole class, completed a novel unit scheduled by the author. In the first group, the author used direct instruction. The second group, taught in small literature circle groups, read books of choice and set a group schedule for completion. In the second group, the author employed the cooperative learning strategy. The two groups of 7th grade students did not differ significantly in terms of demographics or ability levels.

Best practices in literacy instruction entailed strategies that cultivated learning differentiation and interpersonal skill-building, fostered critical thinking and an affection for reading, and encouraged student-centered activities at the middle and high school levels. Literature circles were a research-based strategy that originated from cooperative

learning activities. Literature circles were a dynamic and effective instructional practice that provided students with the learning choices and the opportunity for collaboration, an important skill that helped to ensure student success in the present, in later education, and beyond.

The quantitative research method used in the study was experimental. Data was gathered in the forms of pre and post-unit reading comprehension assessments and student reading attitude surveys. A T-Test of independent samples was performed. The author wanted to discover if statistical significance existed that supported literature circles when the data was analyzed.

Conclusions

After results were calculated, findings were entered into tables displaying the mean scores for the pre and post-unit assessments and pre and post-unit students' reading attitude surveys for both groups of students. A slight increase in mean scores of both groups between the pre and post-assessments and surveys was observed. Further analysis revealed that no statistical significance existed between students taught by cooperative learning literature circles and students taught by the whole-class novel approach.

Recommendations

Based on the conclusions, the author understood that even though statistical significance was not found in the study, an increase between mean scores of pre and post-unit assessments and surveys did occur. Literature circle cooperative learning and whole class novel instruction, when properly implemented, are beneficial strategies that foster high quality literacy instruction.

The study could not be generalized for all 7th grade students because the students in the study were above grade level and not a sample of typical 7th grade learners. The author acknowledges that above grade-level students might already possess an affection for reading and high success with reading comprehension, making it difficult for any other external force to increase these factors. Results of the study might have been different if the study was performed on below grade level students or a more heterogeneous group of readers.

The reading comprehension assessment might have been a factor in the insignificant statistical findings. The author, providing rigor to the above grade-level students involved in the study, chose a more difficult reading comprehension assessment. Not only did the questions involve comprehension, they required analysis, a more difficult reading skill. If the author had chosen a more basic assessment that only focused on reading comprehension, results of the pre and post-assessments might have been different and significance might have been found.

To replicate the study, a researcher would need to follow similar methodology and procedures. To obtain statistical significance in the analysis of data, the sample of students involved in the study should not be above grade-level readers and a more basic reading comprehension assessment should be utilized.

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