Using Reading Recovery Techniques in Small Group Instruction to Increase First Grade Developmental Reading Assessment Scores

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A Special Project

Presented to

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Using Reading Recovery Techniques in Small Group Instruction to Increase First Grade Developmental Reading Assessment Scores

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this project was to see if the interventions provided, helped the three students with the lowest Developmental Reading Assessment scores at the beginning of the school year acquire on or above reading level by February 2014. Four students were offered reading recovery, and eighteen students were provided small group reading recovery intervention methods by the researcher. Students were instructed how to build fluency, accuracy, and comprehension strategies through means of guided reading; based on reading recovery techniques, reading recovery one-on-one, and reading fluency practice. The results showed that the first student was placed in a special education after receiving no reading growth. After this study the second student was being considered to receive an IEP (Individualized Educational Plan). The second, third, and fourth students were still reading below level when tested in February yet received positive reading growth. The researcher concluded: the selected reading methods were an effective means of intervention that helped struggling readers, who were not placed in the special education program, raise their reading scores.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Background for the Project

According to ED.gov the US Department of Education (2002) the implementation of No Child Left Behind Act by President Bush in 2001 brought changes that every state has been required to incorporate, "to ensure that all children have a fair, equal, and significant opportunity to obtain a high-quality education…aligned with challenging State academic standards" (the no child left behind act of 2001, 2002, p. 15) in which teachers can measure each students progress. Furthermore, the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) required teachers who taught core academic areas to be "highly qualified" by acquiring college degree, as well as pass federal and state requirements for certification to teach in the state one resides. Essentially this meant those who teach middle school and high school are required to complete state tests to demonstrate competency in their discipline; to ensure a better education for each child. In addition to the NCLB, teachers must implement the Common Core State Standards (CCSS); which provided a clear roadmap of benchmarks, for student achievement grades K-12, regardless of where they live in the United States.

Washington State was among the 45 states, four territories, Department of Defense Education, and the District of Columbia who have adopted the CCSS.

The Standards provide educational benchmarks for mathematics, English language arts, and general skills, needed to succeed in the students' academic career, and in the workplace. In order to help teachers meet their goals the *Smarter Balanced* assessment consortium located at: http://www.smarterbalanced.org/k-12-education/ worked with: state policymakers, teachers, and administrators alike, to create an online test; and implemented it during the 2014 – 2015 school year. The tests included multiple choice questions, as well as performance tasks, to allow students to demonstrate the skills achieved. Teachers' were also required to administer interim tests to monitor each student's progress, in order to make instructional adjustments to help students succeed. This program also included an online reporting system to allow parents, teachers, the school, the school district, and the state alike, to help students meet their potential (Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium, 2012).

These directives created more rigorous requirements for teachers to assure the student's academic growth in all core areas. In so doing it noted the importance for students to not fall behind academically. With the national, state, district, and building increased requirements and accountability through the ongoing summative testing in reading, math, and science. It is crucial students do not fall behind in reading in first grade so that when they reach third grade they could change over from learning how to read to read to learn.

Since many states were required to provide specialized tests, there was an urgency for the researcher to utilize the successful reading recovery program in order to help struggling readers meet grade level standards. Furthermore the teacher-researcher took advantage of this method since there was an active reading recovery program in the school in which the teacher-researcher taught. In order to ensure a growth within the students' progress the teacher-researcher provided the four focus students the opportunity to participate in small reading groups which utilized reading recovery methods twice daily. The four focus students received small group instruction by the teacher-researcher and trained para educator.

Statement of the Problem

The importance of first grade students' being able to read on grade level was crucial for the pupils' future reading career. The four lowest level reading students had difficulty reading for a variety of reasons. The two students at the lowest reading level spoke Spanish at home and knew less than eight letters or sounds in English. It is important to note, the teacher-researchers district kindergarten expectation was to know all twenty-six letters and sounds in the English alphabet, and read and write twenty-five sight words in English. The next two lowest students recognized less than fifteen letters and sounds. The teacher-researcher performed a Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA) test on all of

her students and found that 8 out 18 students were a level 2 or lower which is below grade level expectation at the time of entering 1st grade. Furthermore, the teacher-researcher noted the Reading Recovery Teacher only had 4 spaces for students to receive services. So as a result, four students who needed the reading recovery assistance would not be able to receive it and would also need additional assistance beyond the reading recovery scope. Which proves the urgency for the teacher-researcher to provide a small group reading recovery program for small groups within the classroom.

Purpose of the Project

The teacher-researcher's purpose was to help the lowest four students in reading be able to achieve grade level reading expectations by February 2014 using Reading Recovery methods during guided reading time. The DRA was used to assess the students reading level in August, October, and again in February. The teacher-researcher was interested in exploring if using Reading Recovery Techniques in a small group setting may be effective in raising reading scores of the four lowest readers in the classroom.

Delimitations

The study was limited to a first grade classroom with twenty to sixteen students located in eastern Washington. This classroom had a 33% turnover within the school year. 97% of the students in the school qualified for free and

reduced meals. The elementary was a K – 5 building composed of 719 students as of May 2013. The student population was composed of 49% male and 51% female, 95% Hispanic students, 3% white, 0.6% black, 0.2% Asian / Pacific Islander, and 1% other. 13% of the student population was identified as Special Education, 70% as transitional bilingual, and 16% as migrant according to the OSPI 2012-2013 records.

The first student, diagnosed with ADHD, spoke Spanish in the home and took medication. The second student repeated first grade; the third student repeated kindergarten and was placed in the special education program (during this action research project) and spoke Spanish in his home. The fourth student spoke Spanish in the home and received speech services.

The small group Reading Recovery reading intervention methods were provided to all students, which were the intense daily one-on-one program with a qualified teacher to increase students reading ability. However, four students received one-on-one reading recovery intervention from a qualified reading recovery teacher. The other four lowest students received small group Reading Recovery reading intervention 15 minutes daily from the researcher, and 15 minutes from a para educator during the regular reading block. On Tuesday's and Thursday's they received an additional 15 minutes of small group Reading Recovery intervention. The teacher-researcher was trained through reading the

reading recovery texts, observations, and briefing sessions with the Reading Recovery trained teacher. The teacher-researcher observed trained Reading Recovery teachers in researcher's school and other schools with similar demographics within the same school district. Researcher debriefed these sessions with four Reading Recovery trained teachers. The para educator was trained by the teacher-researcher. Specifically, the teacher-researcher and para educator were trained in how to implement the basic elements of reading recovery.

Assumptions

The teacher-researcher read two texts, Teaching Struggling Readers: How to Use Brain-Based Research to Maximize Learning, (2003), and Literacy Lessons, (2005). The teacher-researcher also discussed in length the process of reading recovery with the qualified reading recovery teacher on a regular basis and observed a reading recovery session October 1, 2013. The teacher-researcher did not receive the extensive training the Reading Recovery teacher experienced; due to limited budget and schedule. The teacher-researcher trained and supervised the para educator who led students in small group guided reading using Reading Recovery techniques. Also, the teacher-researcher was trained to administer the DRA's to students in kindergarten and first grade which are the assessments used school wide.

The interventions used during the study were based on each individual students' needs based upon their summative DRA scores, and ongoing formative assessments.

Research Question

Will the use of Reading Recovery methods as well as one-on-one interventions increase the lowest four first grade students' DRA reading scores from September to February to grade level expectations?

Null Hypothesis

The use of Reading Recovery methods as well as one-on-one interventions will have no effect on the lowest four first grade students' DRA reading scores from September to February so they are not at or above grade level.

Significance of the Project

With much closer attention given to: local, district, state, and national student achievement since implementation of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), teachers were increasingly held accountable for expanded student performance in the core academic areas including reading. The increased teacher accountability brought the urgency to intervene with struggling students. The teacher-researcher understood that purposeful interventions with the struggling students would help close the gap. Which was crucial for the students' lifelong academic and real world success. The teacher-researcher observed the four lowest students and

concluded in order to read at or above level they needed more than one small group reading recovery intervention daily. So the teacher-researcher used one-on-one and other small group interventions which were necessary to insure all students could read at or above grade level and close the gap.

Procedure

To conduct the research project the teacher-researcher first received permission to gather action research. After the teacher-researcher received permission from all necessary parties, the teacher-researcher tested all students in the classroom using the DRA to determine the students reading levels. Due to reading recovery program rules the reading recovery teacher was not able to service the students with the three lowest scores. The student with the lowest score was enrolled in kindergarten twice and placed in the special education program in December. The student with the second lowest score had less than 50% attendance during her kindergarten year. The student with the third lowest score never attended kindergarten and repeated first grade. This student attended 1st grade in a private school the previous year before attending public school in the author's classroom. The fourth lowest student entered my classroom shortly after the Reading Recovery Program began. The four qualifying students began services of half hour sessions five days a week with the Reading Recovery teacher during the second week of school.

Every day the author provided small group guided reading sessions for each of the seventeen students in the class using reading recovery techniques. The interventions took place during the classroom reading time. The four lowest students not only received the guided reading sessions by the teacher-researcher, but by the para educator as well who was trained by the teacher-researcher. The par educator also worked with the four low students one-on-one or in pairs assisting them to write their first and last name, and their letter and sound recognition. These four students were given extra one-on-one or small group opportunities for learning the other students were not.

The families of the two lowest students spoke Spanish at home. The teacher-researcher had a translator help discuss the situation after school, and during conferences. The guardians of these two students agreed to read the books sent home daily. The books sent home are ones in which the students practiced during our guided reading session.

The other two students spoke Spanish and English at home. These students were in the same guided reading group as the previous two students.

Definition of Terms

benchmark. Grade level benchmarks were predetermined levels in which a student was able to perform.

fluency. Was the ability to read a text accurately and smoothly.

guided reading. Guided reading was the small group instruction to provide differentiated teaching that helped students read proficiently.

reading recovery. Was the intense daily one-on-one program with a qualified teacher to increase students reading ability.

Acronyms

CCSS. Common Core State Standards

DRA. Developmental Reading Assessment

ELL. English Language Learner

GLE. Grade Level Expectations

GR. Guided Reading

NCLB. No Child Left Behind

OSPI. Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction

RR. Reading Recovery

RTI. Response to Intervention

WASL. Washington Assessment of Student Learning

CHAPTER 2

Review of Selected Literature

Introduction

Literature selected for this research study included effective intervention practices, and strategies, to educate the teacher-researcher on methods which would provide the highest Developmental Reading Growth in first grade students. The basis for the research was the use of assessment testing, namely the Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA), to enable an instructor to select the most appropriate differentiation strategies and intervention practices, to ensure high levels of achievement for all assessed children. With the knowledge gained, one could observe impressive positive growth in the students reading level, if implemented correctly. The researcher first applied DRA's in order to measure the students' growth progress.

Developmental Reading Assessment

The Developmental Reading Assessment2 (DRA2) was created to be performed by the K-8 classroom teacher, one-on-one with a student, as a tool to: "(1) assess a student's independent reading level; and (2) diagnose a student's strengths and weaknesses in relation to reading engagement, oral reading fluency, and comprehension skills and strategies" (DRA2 K-8, 2011, p.6). The assessment

was designed to enable teachers to use the test results to help them differentiate learning instruction, in order to help the student succeed in reading.

In response to the 1983 U.S. Department of Education article, *A Nation at Risk,* describing the decline in the student reading abilities. The "State of Ohio undertook a competency-based educational reform initiative in 1986 that required districts to identify students who were at risk of failure in reading." (*DRA2 K-8 Technical Manual Developmental Reading Assessment Second Edition,* 2011, p.7). Ohio created a broad researched based study to first begin testing students K-3, and then in 2000 they began to create a DRA for grades 4-8. In 1999 they began to create a Spanish DRA for grades K-8. "In 2004–2005, the DRA K–8 was revised, expanded, field-tested, and published as the Developmental Reading Assessment, Second Edition" (*DRA2 K-8 Technical Manual Developmental Reading Assessment Second Edition*, 2011, p.8). The research provided validity to the DRA test when the researcher used it as a student's baseline, and measure of progress. Next, the researcher focused on various reading strategies to implement them into whole class and small group instruction. The first strategy focused on was how guided reading improves student reading skills.

Guided Reading

Guided reading was a small group instructional setting in which the teacher grouped students according to reading ability, from the beginning of the

school year until the end of September in their initial reading group. These groups were fluid, so that when students gained reading skills they were able to move to another group in which they were challenged, according to their reading capabilities. The teacher identified the focus of the guided reading lessons by leading the discussions. The teacher provided running record assessments every day, with at least one student in each reading group, in order to assess the students' fluency and comprehension level. Assessments aided in selection of texts at an appropriate level for each reading group. As Swain stated, "Its success hinges upon effective assessment for learning as the teacher priorities what needs to be taught and selects a text that can be accessed at instructional level" (2010, p. 132). When the teacher selects the text within the students' zone of proximal development, the student is able to gain skills, expand their knowledge, and grow positively in their zone of proximal development.

Guided reading was performed within a 30 minute time frame in which a teacher shared learning objectives, modeled key strategies, gave students opportunities to practice strategies, and asked questions in order to help students assume responsibility for their own learning (Taylor, 2003, p. 24). Elbaum (2000) found, "that when highly qualified teachers implement a well-designed intervention, the academic benefit to students is the same, whether students are taught individually or in a group of two to six students" (p. 616). According to

Harn, Parisi, and Stoolmiller, (2013) they found the impact of implemented reading lessons with fidelity, provided an average of 90% consistent results (p. 187). The area in which the teachers, involved in the study, varied was in student engagement. After learning that highly trained and well-designed small group interventions were as effective, as one-on-one interventions when students were engaged, the research naturally moved into the effects of higher level thinking within student reading growth.

Higher Level Thinking

A study to observe reading growth in high-poverty schools across the United States comprised of 88 teachers and 9 randomly chosen students in each of these classrooms. This study has shown that when students are engaged in higher level thinking about text, they create connections to prior knowledge, consider thematic elements of text, and interpret characters' motives and actions. As a result, the students' ability to solve reading problems increases (Taylor, 2003, p. 6). Within low income homes there is less back and forth communication between parent and child, as well as fewer explanations within simple sentence structures, greatly limiting the child's word exposure (Jensen, 2009, p. 35). For example, one can observe a low income child touch an avocado while shopping, and the parent will often tell the child to stop, and this is often the end of the conversation. Whereas when a child from a higher income home touched the avocado the parent

may say, “That is an avocado which starts with the letter A. What other words start with the letter A?” The higher income parent may be more likely to use it as a learning experience for the child, which will greatly increase the back and forth communication between the parent and child. Hart, and Risley (1995) inform us that welfare parents provide fewer “utterances” with less quality features. Whereas, professional parents provided more than twice the amount of responses filled with: nouns, modifiers, and declarative sentences, than provided by the welfare parents (p. 124). Thus, “The result was that welfare children received in each hour of their lives less than half the language experiences of the working-class children.” According to Hart and Risley (1995) the childrens’ lack of language experience results in a slower vocabulary acquisition growth rate (p. 10).

Jensen (2009) further expresses that “reading skills need to be explicitly taught, and growing brains need to be challenged (p. 37). Hart and Risley (1995) confirmed through their research that children growing in welfare homes do not have opportunities to engage in challenging conversations as sighted in their findings below:

> The average child in the professional families provided with 215,000 words of language experience, the average child in a working-class family provided with 125,000, and the average child of welfare family provided

> with 62,000 words of language experience. In a 5,200-hour year, the amount would be 11 million words for a child in a professional family, 6 million words for a child in a working-class family, and 3 million words for a child in a welfare family. In four years of such experience, an average child in a professional family would have accumulated experience with almost 45 million words, an average child in a working-class family would have accumulated experiences with 26 million words, and an average child in a welfare family would have accumulated experience with 13 million words (pp. 197-198).

Which demonstrated students' that grew up in professional homes had exposure to 73% more words by the age of 4 than children who grew up in welfare homes. Children with lower language acquisition suffered from the lack of exposure to higher level questioning experiences. In one study, first grade "students improved more in comprehension and fluency when their teachers were coded as asking more higher-level questions than other teachers" (Taylor, 2003, p. 19) which confirms the argument one must continue to engage in more purposeful dialogue with students for meaningful growth.

Kempe, Eriksson-Gustavsson, and Samuelsson (2011) stated, "children with initially low levels of achievement should show a lower rate of progress in academic learning compared to children attending school with normal or high

levels of initial achievement" (p. 181). This illustrates the Matthew effect, which in many occasions is used as a metaphor to "describe a widening gap between good and poor readers over time" (p. 181). The researcher found studies have agreed that the Matthew effect, among low income homes, continues to widen with students verbal abilities, word recognition, and reading comprehension with varying degrees of home literacy activities (Kempe, Eriksson-Gustavsson, & Samuelsson, 2011, p.181).

From the information gathered, it is clear that the Matthew effect will cause a decline in poverty students' higher-level thinking abilities with their lack of exposure to the exercise of verbal back and forth communication. The researcher found in order for the brain, and nervous system, to give a person their potential for lifelong learning, they need to engage in meaningful positive interactions as well as have the motivation to learn and relearn when necessary (Lyons, 2003, p. 23). It has been mentioned that poverty homes do not provide an enriched learning environment in order to develop higher level thinkers within the home.

Furthermore, "Effective reading instruction… encompasses teachers who challenge students with higher-level thinking and the application of reading strategies…" (Taylor, 2003, p. 24). Classrooms that provided enriched learning environments implementing higher level thinking strategies, as intended by those

conducting the research project, created a positive growth effect within the students reading skills. Taylor (2003) found that it is important for teachers in grades K-1 to explicitly model, and provide, phonetic practice activities. However, when students are taught using phonetic activities in grades 2-5 the students' growth in reading achievement is lowered. However, when the teachers in grades 2-5 challenge their students to think about what they had read, and emphasized character interpretation, making various connections caused the students to engage in a higher level of thinking, thus resulting in higher levels of comprehension (pp. 22-23). The author has concluded it is important to provide ample phonetic activities in first grade, with a direction to introduce higher level thinking throughout the year, to prepare them for grades 2-5. The author then began to examine Reading Recovery more closely in order to learn if this was a more effective tool in increasing students reading levels in the first grade.

Reading Recovery

It has been argued that since the Reading Recovery (RR) was implemented early in the child's school career (first grade), when the student was just beginning to struggle with reading, that this is the reason for its success within low income schools (Reynolds, 2009, p. 33). Furthermore, research has found Reading Recovery has "positive effects on students' alphabetic skills and on general reading achievement" (Schwartz, 2009, p. 6) as well as potential

positive gains in fluency and comprehension. Schwartz (2005) also mentioned that RR "intervention was effective in reducing the gap between the first-round at risk children and their average peers by raising at-risk students' literacy levels to a point where they can benefit from classroom instruction and other literacy experiences" (p. 266). Schwartz (2005) concluded that when a school implements an effective early intervention, such as RR, they "can close this achievement gap and substantially reduce the number of students who need long-term literacy support" (p. 266).

The What Works Clearinghouse (WWC) was established by the US Department of Education in order to determine which education innovations show positive results (Schwartz, 2009, p. 5). Schwartz (2009) looked at statistical reports in order to make his claim, "There is more than enough experimental evidence in the WWC (2007c) report to conclude that RR can make a large and significant increase in the early literacy learning of the most at-risk group of students" (pp. 9-10). The researcher found, that studies have agreed, that RR is an effective tool to use for the Response to Intervention (RTI) program in order to decrease the gap between some of the lowest performing students, in order to help them make high gains. It was also effective in separating the two categories of students, of those who did not make gains, and those who showed numerous difficulties in reading. This separation helped all parties involved in the students'

RTI plan make further decisions to provide a positive schooling experience (Schwartz, 2009, p. 10).

Parent Involvement

Lyons (2003) suggested that parent involvement for their child's education must begin before they enter school, and that one should have provided the child opportunities to have positive responses while they are learning, in order to help them persevere. Whereas children who had negative responses tend to avoid a task (p. 31) Studies prove that a child with strong parent attachment has more intrinsic motivation, and is less likely to be anxious, so they can focus on higher level thinking (p. 81). Hart and Risley (1995), found within their studies that professional parents began preparing their children with symbolic problem solving opportunities since birth. They observed professional families,

> "using responsiveness and gentle guidance to encourage problem solving; we saw them providing frequent affirmative feedback to build the confidence and motivation required for sustained independent effort…But we saw only one third of the working-class families and none of the welfare families similarly preparing their children (pp. 203-204).

These findings confirm the belief that professional families intentionally prepared their children for success in their academic career beginning at birth.

Scientific research indicates there is an increased rate of adolescent arrests between the hours of 2-6 when parents are at work (Bender, Brisson, Jenson, Forrest-Bank, Lopez, & Yoder, 2011, pp. 320-321). When students were not engaged in meaningful conversations, and or, educational activities after school, they had a chance in which they may have gotten involved in questionable activities and slipped academically. Within the study performed by Bender, Brisson, Jenson, Forrest-Bank, Lopez, & Yoder (2011) they found the parents most involved positively affected the students' academics. They also found that the afterschool programs, which were strategically facilitated, also helped students reading growth while the parent was at work (pp. 320-321). This illustrated the importance of parent involvement, and or, positive influences in a child's life, in order to help them continue to grow academically.

Research has shown that parent educational support increases the likelihood of academic success. Lee's (2010) research supports that when "parents and teachers support one another's efforts or both are actively and fully engaged in their role in each setting it can help improve the children's reading ability" (p. 215). Lee (2010) further claimed that the research "provides support for evidence to suggest that there is a strong relationship between parent-child-teacher interactions in the classroom and literacy skill development" (p. 219). This proved why it was important for teachers to form a positive relationship with

the students, and parents alike, in order to form a partnership in which they work together, as expressed by Lee.

A child's interest in reading is positively motivated when parents supply many books, create active home literacy experiences, as well as promote reading as a source of entertainment. When parents read with, and in front of, their children the child is more likely to become intrinsically interested in reading (Lee, 2010, p. 214). Parents who read to their children at very young age provide an environment, in which students can begin to read at an earlier age, all of which provides them an advantage in school,

> "The sooner children learn to coordinate the left-to-right movement of their eyes to follow the words on a page while listening to stories and attempting to write their name, which is also a controlled sequence of actions, the earlier they will learn to read and write" (Lyons, 2003, p.13).

This provides support that it is important for parents to actively, and consistently, read to their child. According to Esptein (2009), reading homework is not to be done alone by the student, but instead should engage in interactive activities shared with the child's family, and or home community; such as reading a book created by the class and adding to it. This involvement brings positive results in the child's reading (pp. 85-86).

Esptein, had conducted a five year research study in order to learn

how family involvement enriched student achievement. The study indicated, "That, across the grades, subject specific interventions to involve families in reading and related language arts, positively affected students' reading skills and scores" (Sheldon & Epstein, 2005, p.86). In summary the more that families are actively involved, the more the students will receive positive academic benefits. After looking at the benefits of parent involvement, the researcher was directed to the importance of providing leveled books for students during the guided reading group sessions with the students.

Leveled Books

Literature impressed upon the researcher the importance of carefully assigning leveled books to meet the developmental needs of each child in the guided reading program. Within the guided reading program, students are placed within the four stages of reading: early emergent readers, emergent readers, early fluent readers, and fluent readers, and within these stages are leveled books to match each stage. Researchers have found teachers may avoid providing challenging books, but instead they encourage educators to carefully choose challenging texts and, "use instructional support to help students gain access to a more challenging reading experience" (Glasswell & Ford, 2010, p. 57). It was suggested that: when using books above the students' independent reading level,

the use of scaffolding during these experiences has helped the student/s to "grow stronger as a reader" (Glasswell & Ford, 2010, p. 58).

However, it was also noted that the chosen reading levels are not always to be challenging, yet always purposeful. When students did not have prior reading experience on the topic of bats. It was suggested to select many text within similar content. This way, "Readers will make connections effectively be-tween easy and more difficult texts and word flexibly across a number of levels building skill and confidence to accelerate growth. Easier books with similar themes and language for-mats will help you build context for other texts that you might have seen as too difficult for some readers" (Glasswell & Ford, 2010, p. 59).

Cunningham, Spadoricia, Erickson, Koppenhaver, Sturm, & Yoder (2005) completed a research project to understand if the century and a half view that graded leveled texts were truly an essential component of reading instruction or not (p. 410). Throughout the research they found that the adoption of leveled text program originated, and was essential to, the reading recovery program. Yet, schools have adopted the idea of using level texts, without being trained as a Reading Recovery teacher, in order to provide the level texts as a way to increase students reading vocabulary, fluency, comprehension, and word count gradually. However, Cunningham, Spadoricia, Erickson, Koppenhaver, Sturm, & Yoder (2005) found that not all of the leveled books chosen for their research became

more challenging as the book level increased, along the word dimensions they had chosen for their study. They also suggest to group books according to their characteristics, to help students learn reading strategies for a purpose, rather than assign them by level (p. 424). However, until more extensive research is done in this area the researcher agrees with Cunningham, Spadoricia, Erickson, Koppenhaver, Sturm, & Yoder (2005) to, "follow the consensus of professional opinion that books for early reading instruction should be leveled, and leveled along the curricular dimensions of the instructional emphasis the books are expected to support" (p. 426).

In addition Shabani (2010) examined the instructional implications to Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), in which a teacher will recognize the students' current independent skill level, and what is beyond the students' current capability, and what the student can do with some help from a teacher, or more skilled peer, which is what Vygotsky called the students zone of proximal development in which they can learn (p. 238). According to Shabani (2010) Vygotsky's idea is that people raise their zone of development by collaborating with others, so that the next time they will be able to do the skill on their own. This can be done by a teacher scaffolding concepts to a student's level, and or, students collaborating with people more capable within the targeted concept. The researcher concluded Vygotsky's ZPD concept was a useful guide to

help select the books for the guided reading groups to help them stretch their skills. It was also a guide to help train students to select books to read on their own within their current skill level.

Summary

Lee's (2010) position, "there is a strong relationship between parent-child-teacher interaction in the classroom and literacy skill development" (p. 219) confirmed to the author that she will form a strong relationship with the guardians and students alike, in order to form a team to help each child to grow to their potential. The knowledge gained from Taylor's study encouraged the author to introduce higher level questioning to students in first grade, yet focus on modeling and giving students ample time to practice the basic skills; in order to be able to have a strong foundation for the upper graders.

In addition, the researcher has concluded using well-designed intervention, Reading Recovery (RR), techniques in small guided reading groups will have the same academic benefits to the students, whether taught in a small group of up to 6 students, or individually (Elbaum 2000, p. 616). The teacher, and the para educator, will provide RR groups daily for the lowest students. Furthermore, the author will observe RR sessions, continue to read the manuals, and stay in constant communication with the RR teacher in her school in order to ensure she provides the best RR intervention possible, without having the opportunity to

receive the in-depth training. Finally, through close examination, the author concluded a combined approach of the various strategies studied may produce good readers.

CHAPTER 3

Methodology and Treatment of Data

Introduction

In the fall of 2013 and spring of 2014, a reading intervention program using reading recovery methods was implemented to answer the question of whether a guided reading program using reading recovery techniques would increase students reading to at or above reading level by February 2014.

The reading intervention action research project was done with a small group of four students who participated in an intervention program during regular classroom hours in the reading block Monday through Friday. Students invited to participate in the program were more than six months below grade level as indicated by the DRA assessment. Within the guided reading time the teacher-researcher used reading recovery methods. The session began with reading a familiar book, and then they performed a running record of a familiar book from the previous day. After the running record the teacher-researcher would state one or two things the student did well. Then the teacher-researcher would teach one or two techniques to help the student try something new the next time they read. Next, they would work on letter and word work such as match capital letters with lowercase letter. Afterwards, the student would come up with a sentence and write it phonetically in a notebook. The teacher-researcher would use magnetic letters

to help prompt the student with sounds. The student wrote what they knew and the teacher-researcher provided assistance when needed for each student to succeed. At the end of the intervention session, the teacher-researcher would introduce a new book. The student would read it with the researcher's assistance.

Methodology

After receiving permission from the school's administration, the teacher-researcher measured the effectiveness of the Reading Recovery in this action research methodology that evaluated the main components used within the intervention by means of a DRA baseline test in September, another DRA test administered in October, and then again in February. The teacher-researcher selected four of the lowest performing students to review their assessments more closely; all of the students in the class received reading recovery support. Qualitative sampling allowed the teacher-researcher to select a small number of students for the study administered to help the teacher-researcher understand the relationship between reading recovery small group intervention and the increased DRA scores (Airasian, Gay, & Mills, 2006, p. 600). The teacher-researcher used the reading recovery techniques in small group settings to test how effective it was within a small group setting as compared to when it was administered one-on-one.

Participants

First grade students invited to participate in the reading recovery intervention program were more than six months below grade level as indicated by the DRA assessment administered in September 2013. The reading recovery small group intervention was overseen by a qualified teacher and para educator. The teacher-researcher and educational assistant were trained in small group instruction. The teacher-researcher was trained in reading recovery methods through means of two texts, and ongoing conferencing with a reading recovery teacher, as well as an observation of a reading recovery session with one of the teacher-researcher's students.

Instruments

Students were given a pre, mid, and post DRA test assessment in the area of reading in September 2013, then in October of 2013, and again in February 2014. The assessment scored students in areas of comprehension, fluency, and wpm. After the baseline test was given the teacher-researcher and para educator worked with the students on a daily basis using reading recovery techniques.

It is vital when looking at the instruments used to measure students' progress we examine the validity and reliability of the test. According the Gay, Mills, and Airasian (2012) the validity is, "the degree in which a test measures what it is intended to measure" (p.633). The reliability is the degree to which the test

measured what it was set out to measure on a consistent basis. The teacher-researcher found that as she and they para educator worked on a daily basis with the students and gained a more trusting relationship DRA tests validity and reliable increased.

Design

The teacher-researcher used the September 2013 DRA test and the February 2014 DRA test which demonstrated the pretest and post test results of reading comprehension, fluency, and wpm growth as demonstrated by the students as a result of reading recovery intervention. The study allowed the teacher-researcher to examine data on the effects of comprehension as related to fluency and wpm.

Procedure

Students received small group reading recovery intervention twice daily once by the teacher-researcher, and once by the para educator within two 15 minute blocks. At 12:00-12:15 the teacher-researcher provided Reading Recovery small group techniques with the four focus students, and then from 12:15pm-12:30pm the para educator met with the students. Within both groups the students first read from a familiar text, and then the researcher performed a running record on one of the students from a familiar text. After, the running record the group would work on word work either on the white board, using magnetic letters or a brief game, and then the students would write sentences they came up with and write it

phonetically in the students spiral notebook. To conclude the session the students will read from a new book with the teacher-researcher's assistance.

Treatment of the Data

The data from the running records recorded by the teacher-researcher and para educator as well as the results from the October 2013 and February 2014 DRA tests were analyzed as differences and commonalities were noted. All data was kept in a locked file cabinet. The data was interpreted by the teacher-researcher and shared to the para educator, and reading recovery teacher in relation to the research question: Will the use of Reading Recovery methods as well as one-on-one interventions increase the lowest four first grade students' DRA reading scores from September to February so they are at or above grade level?

Summary

To answer the question of whether reading recovery small group methods as well as one-on-one interventions increase the lowest four first grade students' DRA reading score to grade level expectations or above grade level an experimental study was put into action. From the assessment given in the beginning of the school year, four students were approximately six months or more below grade level in reading. This was identified by a DRA test performed within the first week of school participated in a small group reading recover intervention. Students were tested two or more times per week on leveled books

by running records and the results were recorded by the researcher. The students were given a DRA posttest assessment February 2014. The data was then interpreted and the results were shared to the para educator, and reading recovery teacher in relation to the research question which is: Will the use of Reading Recovery methods as well as one-on-one interventions increase the lowest four first grade students' DRA reading scores from September to February to grade level expectations?

CHAPTER 4

Analysis of the Data

Introduction

First grade students were involved in this small group Reading Recovery study. The DRA was given to determine the baseline first grade reading level during the first week of school. Based on the DRA scores the teacher-researchers four lowest scoring first grade students were given interventions in attempt to improve their DRA scores to "on or above" grade level. The DRA was given a second time in October, and then a third time in February, to determine the growth of the students' reading scores. The teacher-researcher analyzed the data collected to show the students' progress in relation to the research question.

Description of the Environment

The small group Reading Recovery reading intervention methods were provided to all students in the teacher-researcher's first grade elementary class between September 2013 and February 2014. Reference Table 1 for DRA results.

The teacher-researcher gave all the students a DRA test to determine the students reading level. The teacher-researcher tested the students a second time in October, and a third time in February. It is important to note that four students received one-on-one reading recovery intervention, from a qualified reading recovery teacher, five days a week. The other four lowest students received small

group Reading Recovery reading intervention 15 minutes daily from the teacher-researcher; and 15 minutes daily from a para educator, during the regular reading block. On Tuesday's and Thursday's they received an additional 15 minute small group reading recovery intervention, also during the regular reading block.

The teacher-researcher was trained through reading recovery observations, reading teachers manuals, and participating in briefing sessions with the Reading Recovery trained teacher. The researcher observed trained Reading Recovery teachers in other schools within the same district and similar student demographics. The para educator was trained by the teacher-researcher. Furthermore, the teacher-researcher and para educator were trained in how to implement the basic elements of reading recovery.

Hypothesis/Research Question

Will the use of Reading Recovery methods as well as one-on-one interventions increase the lowest four first grade students' DRA reading scores from September to February to grade level expectations?

Null Hypothesis

The use of Reading Recovery methods, as well as one-on-one interventions, will have no affect on the lowest four first grade students' DRA reading scores from September to February so they are at or above grade level.

Results of the Study

Table one displays student achievement in reading as measured by the DRA Assessment provided in: September, October, and February. Kindergarten growth should be from level A, 1, 2, and 3 (for students to be on level) or level 4 (for students to be above level) by the end of the year. The following is a more detailed description of the DRA levels as presented on Learning A to Z (Holl, n.d.) and what skills a students must master at each level.

Table 1

Student	September DRA On level 3	October DRA On level 6-8	February DRA On level 12-14
1	A	1	3
2	A	1	4
3	A	A	A
4	A	1	4
5	1	6	12
6	1	3	8
7	2	4	8
8	2	6	12

Early Emergent Readers = DRA Levels A,1, 2, 3, and 4 in which students are beginning to grasp the basic concepts of print and gain a command of the alphabet

including distinguishing between upper and lower case letters. These students are expected to recognize rhymes, sound out CVC (Consonant Vowel Consonant) words, and read some high frequency words. At this level students are reading large print, with wide spacing, and limited text on a page. Pictures are used to support the carefully controlled text featuring repetitive patterns and repeated vocabulary.

Emergent Readers = DRA Levels 6, 8, 10, 12, and 14 represent levels that students should attain by midyear. At these levels students recognize many sight words automatically, as well as gain phonological awareness, and basic phonic skills. These skills include recognition of consonant clusters and blends. These students are gaining basic comprehension strategies, and learning how to recognize, and differentiate between, fiction and non-fiction text. Students also begin to learn one reads texts for a variety of purposes. At this level there is more print per page, less dependency on pictures. Additionally the sentence structures become more complex at this level, and exhibit less repetitive word and sentence patterns. The books have familiar topics, yet greater depth, compared to books used at lower DRA levels. These students begin to recognize more phrases as complete thoughts, as opposed to word for word reading.

Early Fluent Readers = DRA Levels 16, 18, and 20 in this stage reading is more automatic in which they read more for comprehension, rather than working

on reading each word. The students read a more expanded variety of texts in which they are able to recognize different styles and genres. At this level there are more pages per book, and many books are formatted into chapters, with even less reliance on pictures. The students are reading longer sentences with richer vocabulary and greater variation in the sentence patterns.

As shown in the table below, students one through four were the students with the four lowest test results, who did not qualifying for the Reading Recovery program. These students were given small group reading recovery intervention by the teacher-researcher and para educator. Students five through eight also tested low, but qualified for the Reading Recovery program and received one-on-one intervention by the Reading Recovery Specialist in the building.

Findings

The analysis and interpretation of student performance suggest that using small group Reading Recovery Intervention methods for students' one, two, and four produced positive reading growth. The students mentioned, improved exactly one year's worth of standard growth levels during this time. However, even though they advanced a year's growth between September and February they are still below reading level for first grade expectations. As a result the small group Reading Recovery Methods, and one-on-one interventions, did not bring the

lowest four first grade students' DRA reading scores to "at or above" grade level in February.

Table 1 suggests that by February student one is at DRA Level 3, where one should enter first grade, and students two and four are at DRA Level 4, just above kindergarten reading level. The remaining students that did not receive Reading Recovery and entered first grade with a DRA Level 3 or 4 were at or above level by February ranging from levels 12 to 18 by using small group Reading Recovery methods with these students. At the end of the first grade year a student should be a DRA Levels 16, 18, which is "on level", or at level 20 which is considered "above level".

Within this project the teacher-researcher closed the achievement gap at first grade by causing more than 65% of the class to be at or above grade level, and the other students to raise an entire grade level within half a school year.

Students five, six, seven, and eight received one-on-one half hour sessions daily from the Reading Recovery specialist. Even with this extra assistance students six and seven are slightly below reading level at this time. The Reading Recovery Teacher and teacher-researcher have discussed additional interventions for these two students. Intense small group reading recovery groups twice daily increased students DRA scores by one year's standard growth levels in half a school year; yet it does not support the researcher's hypothesis. The four lowest

students are not at or above grade level at this time. The null hypothesis cannot be rejected because the students are not at benchmark, however, three of the four lowest students have demonstrated substantial growth over the duration of the study suggesting that small group Reading Recovery is effective at some level.

Discussion

With the heightened federal, state, and district accountability, public schools pay much closer attention to student achievement with the enactment of the No Child Left Behind Act. Teachers also anticipated the CCSS Smarter Balanced Assessments during the 2014-2015 school year. The increased accountability brought urgency to teachers to improve student learning in all academic areas including reading.

To accomplish greater levels of student achievement in reading, the teacher-researcher studied the Reading Recovery program, and implemented it inside her classroom. She also observed, and conferenced, with the schools Reading Recovery specialist on a regular basis. The teacher-researcher trained the para educator and they worked effectively together to raise three of the four lowest student's reading levels by one year's growth between September and February. This research has shown the positive growth Small Group Reading Recovery can have on students DRA reading scores. However, the teacher-researcher found this program did not produce a year and a half's growth in half a year's time as was

projected by the teacher-researcher's question. However, if students' growth were to continue at the observed rate one could potentially suggest that student growth could advance by another year from February to June. This could be a topic of a future study.

As discussed earlier, the teacher-researcher found that studies agreed that Reading Recovery is an effective tool to decrease the gap between some of the lowest performing students, and students who are performing at grade level. The teacher-researcher's intent was to produce high gains; however, high gains may be relative so, in this instance high gains were a year's growth in four and a half months, instead of the teacher-researchers projected year and a half growth during the four months of the study (Schwartz, 2009, p. 10). The students that grew from level A to 3 or 4, and the three students who grew from levels 4 to 18, made an entire years growth receiving Reading Recovery Small Group Instruction. This project suggests that the students on Levels 3 for 4, who received the extra Reading Recover Small Group Intervention from the researcher and the para educator, needed intervention in order to receive one year's growth. The three students that only received Reading Recovery Small Group Instruction by the researcher and not the para educator received one year's growth from levels 4 to 18.

Summary

Four of the lowest students were given Reading Recovery small group interventions daily by the teacher-researcher, and the para educator, over a four and a half month period. The research question was to see if these students would make one and a half years of reading growth during the four and a half month span. Using the DRA for the pretest, mid-test, and post-test benchmarks the teacher-researcher determined the growth between the initial and final scores. Based on the chosen reading intervention, three of the four lowest students improved their scores by one year's growth, and one student who made no reading growth and was placed into an inclusive special education classroom most of the day.

The teacher-researcher found, and agreed with Schwartz (2009), that the Reading Recovery program and the DRA assessment were effective tools in separating the two categories of students into: those who did not make gains, and those who showed numerous difficulties in reading. This separation helped all parties involved in the students' educational plan make further decisions in providing a positive schooling experience (p. 10). In this case the fourth student's educational team, which included his parents, decided that his best placement was inside an inclusive special education classroom.

CHAPTER 5

Summary, Conclusions and Recommendations

Introduction

The importance of effective reading intervention programs, within the public schools, has increased considerably these past few years with the heightened federal accountability and high stakes tests. The educational standards and responsibilities have intensified dramatically. As a result federal, state, and local mandates have been passed in order to increase the number of students reading at level.

Summary

With the push for more accountability there has been an increased urgency to create and utilize more productive, and efficient, curriculum within the public school classroom. Reading Recovery has not been widely accepted in all schools because of the amount of money one needs to invest in this program, as well as the amount of time it requires with each student in a one-on-one setting.

Small group Reading Recovery intervention was proposed by the teacher-researcher as a potential method of improving reading proficiency, and could be applied within the teacher-researcher's time constraints, during small group guided reading sessions with the students'. The teacher-researcher wanted to see if the effectiveness of small group RR intervention could be improved, and as a result its effectiveness on raising students DRA scores. A primary question of

research was: Will the use of Reading Recovery methods as well as one-on-one interventions increase the lowest four first grade students' DRA reading scores from September to February to grade level expectations or above?

The teacher-researcher used Reading Recovery techniques in small guided reading group sessions daily, with all students during the classroom reading time. However, the four lowest students received an intensive reading program comprised of 15 minutes of daily work with the researcher, followed by 15 minutes of daily work with the para educator, with an additional 15 minute work session on Tuesdays, and Thursdays. The author and para educator worked with the four lowest students one-on-one, or in small groups, assisting them in their writing and reading using RR techniques. These four students were given extra one-on-one, or small group, opportunities for learning that the other students were not. Results were shared with the student and their parents/guardians. After examining the DRA scores the researcher determined the hypothesis to be false. As mentioned previously, based on the chosen reading intervention, three of the four lowest students improved their scores by one year's growth, and another student made no reading growth, and was placed into an inclusive special education classroom most of the day. As a result the researcher found the RR small group program to be an effective tool to help student reading growth.

Conclusions

This project suggests that small group Reading Recovery techniques may produce increased DRA reading levels, even though the researcher failed to reject the null hypothesis. As previously discussed, Schwartz (2005) mentioned Reading Recovery "intervention was effective in reducing the gap between the first-round at risk children and their average peers by raising at-risk students' literacy levels to a point where they can benefit from classroom instruction and other literacy experiences" (p. 266). In addition, the teacher-researcher found that the intensive small group RR intervention has helped three of the four students' gain, on average, a one year reading growth during half a school year while participating in the study.

Recommendations

Based on the conclusions from the study, the teacher-researcher would suggest expanding the number of students, and para educators, who participated in the study. While four participants was sufficient in providing a glimpse of how an intensive small group Reading Recovery intervention may help improve struggling readers DRA scores; more data would offer an even wider perspective giving further confidence to the overall effectiveness of this program as means of effective reading intervention.

Furthermore, the teacher-researcher would suggest the reader invite the idea that students have the potential of two years growth within one school year, since this study only took place during half a school year. Also, the teacher-researcher

would suggest a system wide implementation of small group Reading Recovery intervention in the K-1 grades. A pilot study may be implemented district wide to all schools interested in improving reading scores of struggling readers. Using this program could help students raise their reading scores using an intervention method already utilized within the district, by applying it to small groups, as well as to using it one-on-one to expand the sphere of influence.

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