

Increasing First Grade Reading Scores
Using Various Reading Interventions

A Special Project

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FACULTY APPROVAL

Increasing First Grade Reading Scores

Using Various Reading Interventions

Approved for the Faculty

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of the project was to help the lowest four students in reading be able to read at or above grade level by January 2008 using various selected reading interventions. The Developmental Reading Assessment was used to assess the students in October and again in January.

The lowest four students were pulled individually for interventions during regular reading instruction. During the project the students were also taking extra work home, and one student received after-school tutoring.

When the four students were assessed in January, all four students were reading at grade level. The use of reading interventions as a means to raise reading scores was proven successful.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
FACULTY APPROVAL.....	i
ABSTRACT.....	ii
PERMISSION TO STORE.....	iii
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	iv
LIST OF TABLES	vii
LIST OF FIGURES.....	viii
CHAPTER 1.....	1
Introduction.....	1
Background for the Project.....	1
Statement of the Problem.....	2
Purpose of the Project.....	2
Delimitations.....	2
Assumptions.....	4
Research Question.....	5
Significance of the Project.....	5
Procedure.....	5
Definition of Terms.....	6
Acronyms.....	7

	Page
CHAPTER 2.....	8
Review of Selected Literature.....	8
Introduction.....	8
Fluency.....	8
Intervention.....	9
Developmental Reading Assessment.....	10
Attention Deficit Disorder and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder.....	11
Response to Intervention.....	12
Parent Involvement.....	13
Summary.....	14
CHAPTER 3.....	16
Methodology and Treatment of Data.....	16
Introduction.....	16
Methodology.....	16
Participants.....	16
Instruments.....	17
Design.....	18
Procedure.....	18
Treatment of the Data.....	20
Summary.....	20
CHAPTER 4.....	21

Analysis of the Data.....	21
Introduction.....	21
Description of the Environment.....	21
Hypothesis/Research Question	22
Results of the Study.....	23
Findings.....	24
Discussion.....	24
Summary.....	24
CHAPTER 5.....	26
Summary, Conclusions and Recommendations.....	26
Summary.....	26
Conclusions.....	26
Recommendations.....	27
REFERENCES	28

LIST OF TABLES

	Page
Table 1, Developmental Reading Assessment Scoring Chart.....	23

LIST OF FIGURES

	Page
Figure 1, First Grade Students' DRA Score.....	23

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Background for the Project

The reading curriculum used in the parochial school where the research project took place was *Open Court*. This program had many components of an effective reading program but focused the sessions on group instruction. While *Open Court* had been proven effective overall, the author wanted to add something else to the instructional program for individual first grade students that struggled in reading.

The project attempted to identify interventions that would most benefit the lowest four students in the classroom. The project's goal was to have the four students reading at or above grade level by the conclusion of the project. In order to accomplish the goal the author identified a variety of interventions including one-to-one teaching, after school tutoring, repetition, and parent involvement at home.

The group being studied was very diverse. Of the four students used, one had parents speaking only Spanish at home and was offered little help outside of the classroom. Two of the students were diagnosed with Attention Deficit Disorder or Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, one was on medication while the other was not. The fourth child was from a single parent family where the mother lived away and the child switched households every other week between two aunts.

Statement of the Problem

The importance of being able to read and comprehend text at an early age was key for the project. The four children had difficulty reading for a variety of reasons. Two had attention problems, one had language barriers, and the fourth had no consistency at school or at home. Early interventions could possibly help the students become successful readers for the future.

Purpose of the Project

The author's purpose was to help the lowest four students in reading be able to read at or above grade level by January 2008 using various selected reading interventions. The Developmental Reading Assessment was used to assess the students in October and again in January.

Delimitations

The first Developmental Reading Assessment was given in October to determine the lowest students. There were four students at a level A which was the lowest level on the assessment, meaning pre-kindergarten reading level. Some of the students did not know all the letters and sounds associated with the alphabet.

The author determined the interventions to use based on research and prior knowledge about best practices. The author chose to administer the interventions during the reading hour. The author divided the class heterogeneously and worked in small groups of four to five students using the guided reading approach. When the author finished with the group, one student of the four low students was pulled aside to do an intervention.

During this time the author had the student re-read text for fluency using direct instruction. “The direct approach involves modeling and practice with repeated reading under time pressure” (*Developing Reading Fluency*, n.d.). Other students needed help with phonemic awareness, and the author worked with the students on specific blends, chunks, and phrases to help the students sound words out. One of the four students received after-school tutoring as an intervention. The same methods were applied as during the normal school day but on a more intense level.

The four students also took extra reading help home with hopes the parents would be involved in the education of the child. Parent involvement was one of the delimitations. The author could not guarantee the parents would help at home. One of the students’ parents only spoke Spanish and could be of limited help.

One student was getting after-school tutoring while the other students were not. The author would have liked tutoring for all the students but only one was able to afford the cost.

Two students had Attention Deficit Disorder or Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder which put the students at a disadvantage from the beginning. The students had a much shorter attention span, therefore making it more difficult to use intensive intervention methods. One student was not on medication making the interventions even more difficult to administer.

The number of students studied in this project was small. Due to time, the study could not have been done with more students. There was little funding for the parochial school. The author had to pull materials from a variety of outside resources, and could not rely solely on one intervention program.

Assumptions

The author was trained to use the Open Court reading program at the first grade level. The author was also trained to administer the Developmental Reading Assessment to the students. The school in which the author taught used the Basic Reading Inventory as the form of reading assessment school-wide but the author determined the Developmental Reading Assessment was more developmentally appropriate for the grade being taught. The principal of the school approved the assessment.

The interventions used during the study were done based on the individual students' needs. The needs were determined through the Developmental Reading Assessment, and the knowledge the author had of the students' backgrounds. The best practices were determined using Grade Level Expectation standards. Based on what Grade Level Expectation was to be met, the author determined what intervention to administer. A Response to Intervention conference was attended. The conference helped the author discover new interventions that could be administered to the students.

Research Question

Will selected reading interventions increase the lowest four first grade students' reading scores from fall to winter so that they are performing at or above grade level as measured by the Developmental Reading Assessment?

Significance of the Project

The author observed that students who were low performing readers in the classroom did not have the chance to improve using only *Open Court Reading*. Specific interventions were necessary to insure all students could read at or above grade level. The author chose a small controlled group to insure success. If successful the author hoped to try the interventions on other groups of students.

Procedure

To conduct the project the author had to first test all twenty two students in the classroom to determine the reading levels. The assessment used for the results was the Developmental Reading Assessment. After receiving the scores, the first grade students with the four lowest scores were used as a focus for the project.

Specific interventions were used for each of the four students as determined by the students' backgrounds and the assessment. Most of the interventions took place during the scheduled reading time during the class day. When students were pulled for regular reading groups, the four low students were pulled individually after the group meeting time for interventions. All four students were given extra opportunities for learning that the rest of the class was not given.

The family of one student only spoke Spanish at home. At conference time the author had a translator help discuss the situation, and the conclusion was reached to send small books at the student's reading level that could be read with ease at home. The intervention of reading a book at home was done on a weekly basis.

Another student was given extra help through tutoring outside of school. The one-on-one intervention time was done every other day bi-weekly for an hour.

The assessments and interventions at school, home, and after school were conducted from October 2007 to January 2008. In mid January the students were given the Developmental Reading Assessment once more to determine the new reading levels, and if the scores had improved.

Definition of Terms

Direct Instruction. Direct Instruction was a highly structured instructional approach, designed to accelerate the learning of at-risk students.

Fluency. Fluency was the ability to read a text accurately and quickly.

Heterogeneous Grouping. Heterogeneous Grouping was a method used to group students of varied academic levels for instruction.

Interventions. Interventions were methods used to help students improve in a subject area.

Open Court Reading. *Open Court Reading* was the curriculum being implemented for reading in the first grade.

Small Group Instruction. Small Group instruction was a direct instruction approach focused on basic reading skills and strategies in a small group setting.

Acronyms

ADD. Attention Deficit Disorder

ADHD. Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder

BRI. Basic Reading Inventory

DRA. Developmental Reading Assessment

GLE. Grade Level Expectation

RTI. Response to Intervention

CHAPTER 2

Review of Selected Literature

Introduction

Research was done on various intervention methods to help the author better understand which methods had the most potential to be successful. Fluency, Intervention, Developmental Reading Assessment, Attention Deficit Disorder and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, Response to Intervention, and Parent Involvement were all topics researched. With the knowledge gained the project could be successful if implemented correctly.

Fluency

Fluency was defined as “the ability to read a text accurately and quickly” (Put Reading First, 2003). Students were considered fluent when they read with ease, and were able to comprehend and decode words with little or no effort. Students that were fluent in one area were not always fluent in other areas. Some text was difficult because of larger vocabulary, and thus made it harder for the students to be as fluent.

Many methods were used to help readers become more fluent. The methods were implemented through direct and indirect instruction. “The direct approach involves modeling and practice with repeated reading under time pressure...The indirect approach involves encouraging children to read voluntarily in their free time” (*Developing Reading Fluency*, n.d.).

Through direct instruction students did repeated readings in a variety of forms. Students practiced student-adult reading, choral reading, tape-assisted reading, and readers' theatre. All methods done repeatedly helped students become more fluent. The methods also offered immediate oral and written feedback from peers, teachers, and other adults.

Indirect instruction offered students the ability to become more fluent through independent silent reading. It was found to be difficult to assess unless the students self-assessed while reading, and chose to read books at the appropriate instructional level.

Intervention

The successes of interventions were dependent on the standards of highly effective schools. Each component needed to show evidence of high standards, effectiveness, replicability, and support structures.

One intervention method was Direct Instruction. "Direct Instruction is a highly structured instructional approach, designed to accelerate the learning of at risk students" (American Federation of Teaching, 1999, p.4). When Direct Instruction was used the students performed tasks led by the teacher to the point of automaticity. The teacher taught a focused lesson either in a whole group or small group setting. When put in small groups the students were grouped by ability level according to a pre-assessment.

Another method was Early Steps. “Early Steps is an early intervention/tutorial program in reading and language arts for first grade students who are at-risk for reading failure” (American Federation of Teaching, 1999, p.7). The program offered a balanced approach to literacy where the students learned specific phonemic skills as well as less explicit reading activities. “ES tutors work with students in reading new books at their instructional level, re-reading familiar texts, writing and learning problem-solving strategies that can be used to tackle difficult words” (American Federation of Teaching, 1999, p. 9). The program could be used during regular instruction hours, for pull-out sessions, or after school tutoring.

Interventions were difficult with students of limited English proficiency. Studies showed that students needed to be proficient in their native language before attempting to read and comprehend another language. Interventions for the students needed first to be taught in the native language. Once mastered the students could begin learning to read in English.

Developmental Reading Assessment

The Developmental Reading Assessment “can be used to (1) assess a student’s independent reading level and (2) diagnose a student’s strengths and weaknesses in relation to accuracy, fluency, and comprehension” (*DRA Technical Manual*, 2003, p.1). This assessment had the ability to assess students on reading skills from Kindergarten through the third grade. The level read determined whether the student was an early reader (below grade level), emergent reader (at grade level), or transitional reader (above grade level).

The assessment offered small readers and assessment sheets to help determine words per minute, miscues, and also comprehension questions. The assessment was in the second edition, was reviewed, and was proven to be both a reliable and valid means of assessment.

Attention Deficit Disorder and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder

ADD and ADHD were both common disorders in the school system. Some research showed the disorder was diagnosed too often in children as the only solution to a child having difficulty focusing in class. Whether a student truly had the disorder or not, teachers were left questioning how to teach students with the disorder. ADD and ADHD can be defined as:

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder is a neurological disorder that impacts individuals in four main categories: Attention - causing people to have problems paying attention, focusing on a task, or finishing tasks, especially if they are not very interesting tasks. Impulsivity - causing a lack of self-control. Impulsive behaviors, or choices, can cause havoc in relationships, work, school, or life. Hyperactivity - Many (though not all) with ADHD are "bouncy" and hyperactive, always "on the go" and restless. Easily Bored - Unless the task is very stimulating, like a video game or TV program or outside playing, those with attention disorders are often easily bored by a task - especially bored by homework, math tests, balancing checkbooks, or doing taxes, and many of these tasks just never get done. (*ADD ADHD Information Library, 2007, p.1*)

In order to insure students with ADD and ADHD were successful in the classroom, the teacher needed to have a basic knowledge base of the disorder. The teacher needed to work with students using problem-solving strategies to give the students steps to follow. When the students felt mentally tired the students took a brief break and then got back to the task using the problem-solving strategies.

Noise levels were problems for students having trouble focusing. The method for helping the students was to place the students in an area of the classroom that was quieter than other areas so the focus would not be lost.

Response to Intervention could also be used to help students with the disorder. Strategies to help students included having “clear and direct messages, time out, posted rules, follow through, seating arrangements, transitions, and mutual respect” (Goodman, 2007). The more consistency present in the classroom the more focused the students could be.

Response to Intervention

Response to Intervention was a program created to aid students who were put in special education programs that did not need to be in special education. The students needed to have more in-depth, universal screenings to determine interventions that could be used in a regular classroom. “Response to Intervention is, simply put, a process to implementing high-quality, scientifically validated instructional practices based on learner needs, monitoring student progress, and

adjusting instruction based on the student's response" (Bender & Shores, 2007).

Response to Intervention used a three tier model. Tier one focused on eighty percent of the classroom population. At tier one, all of the students were receiving the same intervention. Tier two involved fifteen percent of the population and targeted small groups of students with more specified needs. Finally tier three involved only one to five percent of the population where individual students needed specific intense interventions. If a student reached tier three and could not be helped, the student was recommended for special education.

Advantages to Response to Intervention were: "Provides assistance to neediest children in a timely fashion. Ensures that poor academic performance is not due to poor instruction. Assessments and interventions are closely linked. Treatment resisters are not given stigmatizing labels" (Goodman, 2007, p. 87). Response to Intervention gave the regular education classroom teacher a way to group students, and use the groups to help struggling readers perform. Many interventions were used and became more intense depending on the tier the students were in. Interventions included games as simple as finding a rhyming word to story maps and visual imagery to help with comprehension.

Parent Involvement

Parent Involvement was an essential part in the success of a student in school. The more involved the parent was with the students education, the more chance the child had of success.

Reading achievement is more dependent on learning activities in the home than is math or science. Reading aloud to children is the most important activity that parents can do to increase their child's chance of reading success. Talking to children about books and stories read to them also supports reading achievement. (National Education Association, 2002-2008, p. 1)

Research stated that students spend seventy percent of their time outside of school. What better time for a parent to get involved. Involvement at home could be as simple as asking a child what was learned in school that day, helping with homework, and reading to the child. The earlier a parent could get involved with the child's education, the better the child's chance of success.

Decades of research show that when parents are involved students have:

- higher grades, test scores, and graduation rates
- better school attendance
- increased motivation; higher self-esteem
- lower rates of suspension
- decreased use of drugs and alcohol, and
- fewer instances of violent behavior. (National Education Association, 2002-2008)

Summary

Readings on fluency were reviewed to focus attention on the importance of the subject when using interventions. The Developmental Reading Assessment

was the assessment selected to use in the study and the background, reliability, and validity of the assessment were discussed. Of the four students used in the study, two had ADD or ADHD and the author read about the disorder to learn more specific intervention methods and techniques to help the students improve their scores. A variety of reading interventions were reviewed. The author attended a Response to Intervention conference and the information gained from that conference was reviewed as important. Parent involvement was a strategy used to help improve reading scores. Therefore, strategies to support effective ways for parent involvement were researched and included.

CHAPTER 3

Methodology and Treatment of Data

Introduction

The DRA was given to determine first grade reading scores. Based on the scores the four lowest scoring students were chosen to give interventions to improve reading fluency and comprehension. The DRA was given a second time after three months of interventions to determine if the students' reading scores improved.

Methodology

The project was done using a qualitative approach. "Qualitative research is the collection, analysis, and interpretation of comprehensive and visual data in order to gain insights into a particular phenomenon of interest" (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2006, p. 399). The Developmental Reading Assessment was given to each child in the class to determine the students that were below grade level. The project was based around the four lowest scoring students in the first grade class. Various interventions were used with each student to help raise the reading scores.

Participants

The participants for the study were the four lowest scoring students in reading. The DRA test was administered to determine the reading levels of the students.

Student one scored at the lowest level on the DRA test which was an early kindergarten level. The student was diagnosed with ADHD and was on

medication. Time management and focus were difficulties for student one.

Student two was also diagnosed with ADD, but was not on medication. The parents wanted to monitor progress after having the student tested early in the year. Student two needed constant reminders to focus with very short intervals of work time. Mental breaks were essential for the student to complete his work.

Student three struggled with all aspects of reading and even struggled with letter names and sounds. The mother moved away for extra schooling, leaving student three to live with two other family members. The student spent one week with one of the family members, and rotated to the other family member the next week. Student three struggled with consistency, and needed it in the classroom to help with comprehension and retention.

Student four spoke English in the classroom but only Spanish at home. Student four struggled balancing the two different languages, which made it difficult for the student to pronounce words correctly, and become a fluent reader. Measures were taken in November so that the student could bring English readers home on a weekly basis to use for practice.

Instruments

The DRA was used to assess the students in October and again in January. The DRA was a reliable and valid assessment, but the school in which the study took place did not have the funds to purchase the entire assessment. The author created an assessment sheet to cover fluency and comprehension. The study was qualitative because the school did not have all the necessary resources.

Design

The design of the project was to use the DRA to do a pre-test on the twenty-two students in the first grade class. Based on the results of the test the lowest scoring students were chosen for the study. Various interventions were administered from October through January. The interventions were tailored to the students' individual needs. In January the DRA was administered once more in the form of a post-test to determine growth.

Procedure

In order to conduct the study, the students were given the DRA to determine the students' reading levels. The four lowest scoring students were used for the study.

During regular weekly reading groups the students were pulled individually from the group to do one-on-one interventions. The type of intervention was dependent on the students' individual needs. Based on the students' scores and knowledge of the background of the students, the author tried interventions that would match the students' needs.

Student one was diagnosed with ADHD and had a hard time focusing even with medication. It was difficult for student one to use the skills he already knew without immediately asking for help. The author used interventions that would slowly build the confidence of the student and help the student become more independent.

Student two was also diagnosed with ADD but was not medicated. The interventions used for both student one and two were geared towards time management and focus. A digital timer was used with the students to monitor time on task. The students also struggled with independence. The author also simplified directions or broke them down step by step to help the students focus on the details.

Student three had a life in constant change, moving back and forth each week to live with different family members while the mother went to school out of town. The student needed consistency to build skills in retention. The author made sure that every intervention given to the student was done in a consistent manner. The interventions were always given at the same time of day and in the same location in the classroom. Many interventions to develop phonemic awareness were administered. In addition to one-on-one time in the classroom, the author also tutored the student every other week twice a week after school for an hour. During this time the author used intervention games such as popcorn spelling to teach the student games that could easily be repeated in the home.

Student four needed help with stretching words to help sound them out. Once the skills were in place, the author used interventions for comprehension like re-telling, and picture text connections. The student was not reading at home because of the language barrier in reading between the parents and the student. After conferencing with the family the author sent home weekly readers in English that the student could easily read at home.

In January the author gave the students a post-test using the DRA. The DRA helped determine whether the interventions given improved the students' reading scores.

Treatment of the Data

When the DRA test was given in October, each student's score was recorded on the computer from lowest to highest. In January, the new scores were recorded. A graph was created to show individual student improvement.

Summary

Four students were given various reading interventions in a three month period of time to determine if the students could improve the reading scores to be at or above grade level. The assessment used to calculate reading scores was the DRA.

CHAPTER 4

Analysis of the Data

Introduction

The DRA was given to determine first grade reading scores. Based on the scores the four lowest scoring students were chosen to give interventions to improve reading fluency and comprehension. The DRA was given a second time after three months of interventions to determine if the students' reading scores improved. Data was collected to show progress.

Description of the Environment

Four students from the first grade class were chosen for the study. The students were chosen based on scores from the DRA test done in October. The four students were given individual interventions from October through January.

The four students took extra reading help home with hopes the parents would be involved in the education of the child. Parent involvement was one of the delimitations. The author could not guarantee the parents would help at home. One of the students' parents only spoke Spanish and could be of limited help.

One student was getting after-school tutoring while the other students were not. The author would have liked tutoring for all the students but only one was able to afford the cost.

Two students had Attention Deficit Disorder or Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder which put the students at a disadvantage from the beginning. The students had a much shorter attention span, therefore making it more difficult to use intensive intervention methods.

One student was not on medication making the interventions even more difficult to administer.

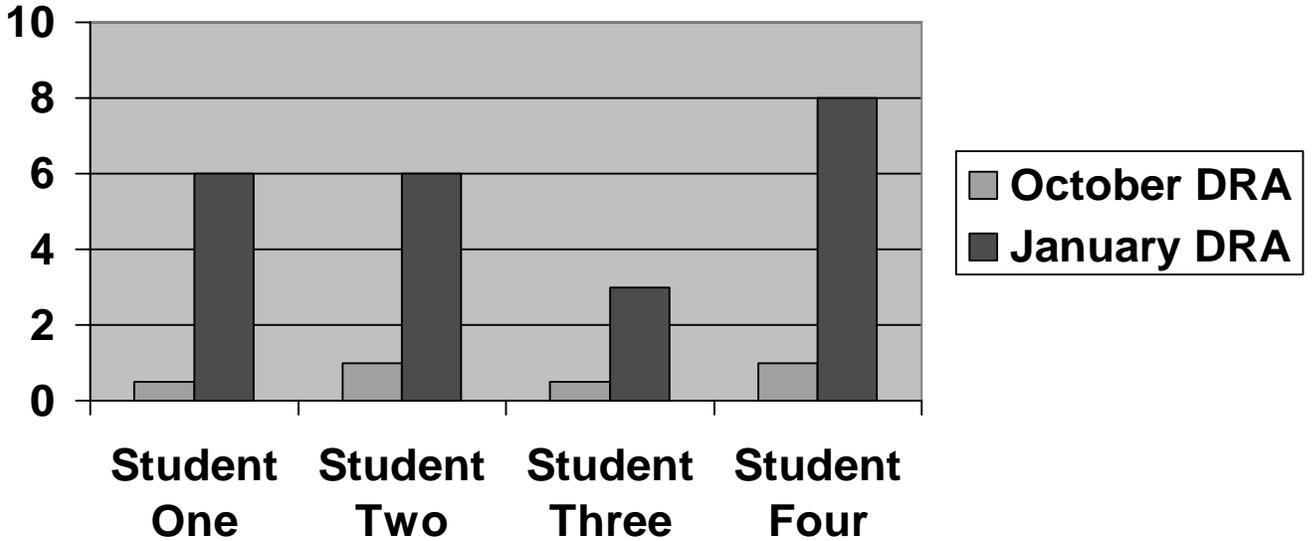
The number of students studied in this project was small. Due to time, the study could not have been done with more students. There was little funding for the parochial school. The author had to pull materials from a variety of outside resources, and could not rely solely on one intervention program.

Research Question

Will selected reading interventions increase the lowest four first grade students' reading scores from fall to winter so that they are performing at or above grade level as measured by the Developmental Reading Assessment?

Results of the Study

First Grade Students' DRA Scores



Developmental Reading Assessment Scoring Chart		
Below Grade level (A-2)	At Grade Level (3-12)	Above Grade Level (14-28)
Student One (A) October	Student One (6) January	
Student Two (1) October	Student Two (6) January	
Student Three (A) October	Student Three (3)	
Student Four (1) October	January	
	Student Four (8) January	

Findings

It was determined, based on the findings, that the DRA scores from October to January had improved for all four students. All four students scored at or above grade level as stated in the research question. Student three had the least improvement. The student struggled to retain new information given his situation. The other three students improved to grade level standards at the month the test was given.

Discussion

The study was done to determine if using reading interventions with low scoring students in reading would improve the scores using the DRA. After applying various interventions with the four students, the author gave the DRA once more to determine whether the interventions had improved the scores. The research question proved to be true. Based on the scores the students had improved the scores to be at grade level in the three months the study was conducted.

Summary

Four students in a first grade class were given interventions over a three month period to see if use of interventions would improve reading scores. Using the DRA for both pre-tests and post-tests, the author determined initial and final scores. The scores were added to a graph to show growth. The author added the DRA breakdown for below level, at level, and above level scoring. After plotting the graph the author determined the research question to be true.

Based on various reading interventions, the four lowest scoring students in the first grade class were able to improve their scores. Each student scored at grade level on the assessment.

CHAPTER 5

Summary, Conclusions and Recommendations

Introduction

The purpose, procedure, and results of the project were discussed. Based on the results, the study was successful. The beginning and final assessments were used to determine the success of the study. Recommendations were given based on the findings.

Summary

The purpose of the project was to help the lowest four students in reading be able to read at or above grade level by January 2008 using various selected reading interventions. The Developmental Reading Assessment was used to assess the students in October and again in January.

The lowest four students were pulled individually for interventions during regular reading instruction. During the project the students were also taking extra work home, and one student received after-school tutoring.

When the four students were assessed in January, all four students were reading at grade level. The use of reading interventions as a means to raise reading scores was proven successful.

Conclusions

The study was done to determine if using reading interventions with low scoring students in reading would improve the scores using the DRA. After applying various interventions with the four students, the author gave the DRA once more to determine whether the interventions had improved the scores.

The research question proved to be true. Based on the scores the students had improved the scores to be at grade level in the three months the study was conducted. The table and graph on page twenty-three show the students' DRA scores and improvement from October to January.

Recommendations

The use of reading interventions was a success, and it improved reading scores. The study was small, and in the future the author would like to do the same study with a larger group of students. The author feels that all students could benefit from one-on-one interventions to help supplement reading programs.

During the course of the study the author used interventions learned from the RtI conference. The author would like to continue the research of this method and implement the program school-wide. The school could benefit from this program because it does not have a complete assessment program for reading. Using this program could assure that students will raise their reading scores through appropriate interventions across all grade levels.

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