A Coach's Approach: Lessening the Achievement Gap with Specified Reading

Strategies and a Supportive Environment

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A Special Project

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FACULTY APPROVAL

A Coach's Approach: Lessening the Achievement Gap with Specified Reading

Strategies and a Supportive Environment

Approved for the Faculty

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to investigate the effect reading strategies and academic vocabulary had on the comprehension scores of low-income students when delivered in a structured environment by effective teachers. With the use of pre-tests and post-tests, three, proven teachers delivered pre-reading strategies and academic vocabulary to 90 low income students during the 2012-13 school years. The initial intervention was successful based on multiple factors: (a) Data collected showed student growth in the assessments of pre-reading strategies; (b) Data collected showed student growth defining and applying academic vocabulary. Further study is, therefore, recommended.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Background for the Project

For many years – since the release of the Coleman Report, research that

provided teachers an intellectual rational supporting a belief that teachers could

only impact 10% of the effects of poverty (Coleman et al., as cited in Marzano,

2001) – there had been an acceptance by the American people that very little

could be done educationally for children labeled poor or members of a minority

group (Haycock, as cited in Barr & Parret, 2007, p. xix). Sadly, instead of

providing them with the resources needed to close the growing achievement gap

between them and their more privileged peers, students-of-poverty were given

less (Barr & Parrett, 2007, p. 1).

It was not until 2002 that the federal No Child Left Behind Act took hold

and helped to ensure each individual student learned. "Schools will now have to

build gains in achievement one student at a time because schools have until 2014

to bring every student up to the level of "proficiency," and every school must

demonstrate "adequate yearly progress" toward that goal" (Morrison Institute for

Public Policy, 2006, p. 25). This shift in thinking had caused Read Now High

School, centrally located in eastern Washington, to focus their energy and

resources toward that student population.

<u>Statement of the Problem</u>

Read Now High School had consistently scored well below the state average on the reading state assessment. This was recognized by the School Improvement Plan (SIP) that stated, "All sophomore students at Read Now High School will increase their basic reading skills so that 85% will meet or exceed standard in reading, as measured by the High School Proficiency Exam (HSPE), within three years". After a spike in 2008, HSPE reading scores steadily decreased, while the achievement gap compared to the state and district continued to widen. This had been even more evident with low-income students. In 2008, reading scores of low income students were 1.9 percentage points better than the state's average, compared to a negative 12.6 point difference in 2011.

Question One: Would reading comprehension scores of low-income students improve if pre-reading strategies were offered as an intervention in a structured environment?

Question Two: What impact would teacher influence have on student achievement?

Question Three: What effect would weekly assessment and immediate feedback have on student growth?

Purpose of the Problem

The purpose of this proposed research was to investigate the impact specialized instruction (pre-reading strategies and academic vocabulary) had on the reading comprehension scores of 90 low-income students when delivered by intentionally selected teachers.

Limitations

Aspects of the study that could have negatively affected the results, or generalizability of the results, are listed below:

1. Participants could have been exposed to the experimental treatment for a longer period of time to assess its effectiveness more accurately.

2. Impact of putting low-level students with veteran teachers might have influenced student growth more so than the intervention itself.

3. Inability to ensure English teachers implemented the intervention as prescribed.

4. Teacher-created assessments may lack the validity needed to measure the effectiveness of the pre-reading strategies academic vocabularies.

5. Extent to which a student's other teacher emphasized these strategies or not may negatively affect the results.

6. The reading deficiencies of low-income students might vary greatly:

    a. Lack of life-experiences

b. Lack of vocabulary

c. Lack of reading that occurred in the home could impact study results.

<u>Assumptions</u>

An assumption for this experimental research project was that participants – who had traditionally received less resources and attention in their educational lives than their affluent peers – would show academic growth because of the influence of veteran teachers, the focus of the intervention, and the organized and supportive environment established by selected teachers.

<u>Hypothesis or Research Question</u>

Students who received specified reading strategies and academic vocabulary by intentionally selected teachers in a structured environment with clearly defined standards and expectations would yield higher reading comprehension scores.

<u>Null Hypothesis</u>

Implementation of reading strategies and academic vocabulary by intentionally selected teachers in a structured environment with clearly defined standards and expectations will not impact reading HSPE scores for students-of-poverty.

Significance of the Project

Research indicated that students who are identified as low-income typically have lower vocabulary, are not as likely read at home, and tend to have fewer life experiences to relate to their readings. The interventions implemented addressed each of these issues with the focus on academic language and pre-reading strategies.

The emphasis on academic language identified common vocabulary terms that were typically found in questions on state assessments and in high school textbooks. Emphasizing academic vocabulary provided students additional support to better understand questions, and, as a result, provided more in-depth answers that demonstrated comprehension.

Pre-reading strategies provided low-level readers the skills necessary to become cognitive readers. They also supported high-level readers by enhancing student background and assisting with active reading. The intervention promoted connections to previous knowledge, author's purpose, student inferences, and helped students recognize lack of background knowledge to spur questions. This promoted equity among all students because they could participate in and benefit from being cognitive readers through pre-reading strategies. Specifically, pre-reading strategies were broad enough to be utilized in every subject at every academic level. This promoted equity throughout the school with pre-reading

strategies being incorporated in classes from Special Education through the International Baccalaureate program. Pre-reading strategies allowed teachers to involve all students at different depths at which they incorporated the strategies. The intervention promoted high expectations focusing the entire building on literacy. As students became more literate, academics could be more rigorous due to increased comprehension.

Procedure

Procedures utilized in the present study are as follows:

1. Academic vocabulary and reading strategies were made an instructional priority to help low-income students.

2. 90 low-income students who scored high level two's on their 8th grade reading MSP and did not have significant attendance issues or behavioral problems were selected.

3. The reading deficiencies of low-income students were identified.

4. Deficiencies of low income students were addressed

   a. Lack of life-experiences

   b. Lack of vocabulary

   c. Lack of reading occurring in the home

5. Teachers to implement the intervention, based on classroom instruction and ability to motivate students, were selected.

6. Common instructional strategies and terminology were established

7. The instruction facilitator spent time in classrooms modeling lessons, provided more consistent instruction with common activities, and facilitating conversations that centered on improving instruction.

8. Teachers delivered instruction with common objectives.

9. Pre-reading strategies between the three intervention teachers were established.

10. Teachers and instructional facilitator created assessments that measured the effectiveness of the identified pre-reading strategies.

11. Teachers evaluated data to show the progress of the intervention.

Definition of Terms

1. Expectations: confidence that students would meet content and performance standards

2. International Baccalaureate program: a two-year educational program primarily aimed at students aged 16-19 that provided an internationally accepted qualification for entry into higher education, and is recognized by many universities worldwide.

3. Differentiated Instruction: a framework or philosophy for effective teaching that involved providing students with different avenues to acquiring content.

<u>Acronyms</u>

<u>HSPE</u>. High School Proficiency Exam

<u>IB</u>. International Baccalaureate

<u>ICLE.</u> International Center for Leadership in Education

<u>MSP</u>. Measurement of Student Progress

<u>OPIP</u>. One Page Improvement Plan

<u>OSPI</u>. Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction

<u>SIP</u>. School Improvement Plan

<u>SRI</u>. Scholastic Reading Inventory

CHAPTER 2

Review of Selected Literature

Effective coaches create a stable where young foals are trained to become horses, thoroughbreds. It is in this structured environment that they first learn to walk, then run, then sprint. (Rotondo)

<u>Introduction</u>

Supportive and Structured Environment. Because schools are now responsible to meet adequate yearly progress, and each child is responsible to meet the standard of "proficient", teaching and learning is becoming transparent, meaning "freelance teaching based on textbooks, teacher interest, and personal prerogative [is] set aside by a system of carefully planned, aligned, and prescribed instruction" (Barr & Parrett, 2007, p. 1). If students are asked to develop advanced thinking skills that require them to try new ways of working with ideas and information, [however], the environment [becomes] especially crucial (Cotton, as cited in Shannon & Bylsma, 2007, p. 110).

The classroom environment must be structured in such a way to promote learning. If it is not, the probability that learning occurred was low. But what did that look like exactly? Shannon and Bylsma (2007) had defined a supportive learning environment as being safe and orderly, cultivating a positive learning climate, and maintaining classroom management (p.107).

As LePage et al. asserted, "An efficient classroom organization and structure is crucial to maintaining an orderly and effective learning environment" (as cited in Shannon & Bylsma, 2007, p. 108). The research on effective schools suggested typical qualities of safe and orderly schools included:

> (a) a visible and supportive principal; (b) broad-based agreement about standards for student behavior; (c) high behavioral expectations that are clearly communicated to students; (d) input from students, especially older ones, into behavior policies; (e) consistent application of rules from day to day and from student to student; (f) a warm school climate whose signature features is a concern for students as individuals; (g) delegation of disciplinary authority to teachers; (h) for seriously disruptive students, in-school suspension accompanied by support. (Cotton, as cited in Shannon & Bylsma, 2007, p. 109)

Once the learning environment was safe and orderly, the climate must be such that students felt accepted and challenged. LePage et al. advocated for removing the punitive aspects of schooling – a shift from "a focus on intervention – recognition and punishment for misbehavior" – and promoting life-long learning (as cited in Shannon & Bylsma, 2007, p. 113). Barth identified qualities of life-long learning as (a) loving learning for its own sake; (b) engaging in learning on a voluntary basis; (c) asking one's own questions and taking responsibility; (d)

marshaling resources; (e) sustaining engagement in learning; (f) continuously reflecting; (g) assessing one's learning; (h) knowing and celebrating successes. (as cited in Shannon & Bylsma, 2007, p. 110)

Ridnouer calls for creating a learning environment by "managing [a] classroom with heart" (as cited in Shannon & Bylsma, 2007, p. 110). By doing so, and supported by the Common Core State Standard Framework that focuses on rigor, relevance, and relationships, a classroom would become a place where curiosity, higher-level thinking, and interpersonal relationships were cultivated.

Last but not least, classroom management, "broadly defined as actions taken to create and maintain a learning environment that supports instructional goals" (Brophy, as cited in Shannon & Bylsma, 2007, p. 113), contributes to positive classroom climate and improves student achievement. LePage identified six procedures and routines that support well functioning classrooms:

(a) the physical setting of the room; (b) transitions in and out of the room; (c) procedures during group work; (d) general procedures such as distributing materials or being on the playground; (e) procedures specific to particular classroom routines, such as attendance or putting homework on the board; (f) procedures or routines associated with student-initiated and teacher-led instruction. (as cited in Shannon & Bylsma, 2007, p. 114)

With these steps in place (ranging from to high-medium-low control), the act of teaching and learning could occur. Without it, discipline and off-task behavior would become the focus of the teacher's day.

By understanding a supportive, learning environment possesses three attributes (safe and orderly, positive learning climate, and clear routines and procedures), the classroom climate created by the teacher promotes high expectations, lets students know they are capable of meeting basic objectives, and emphasizes a belief that no one is expected to fail. Research, then, suggested that the environment becomes an equally powerful tool that aids student learning.

Successful coaches have high expectations for their teams. (Robert Eaker)

High Expectations. The researcher asked the rhetorical question, "How good is good enough?" Since the standards movement of the early 1990s and the No Child Left Behind Act of 2002 clarified the academic purpose for schools, the answer is clear: when students meet both content and performance standards that have been set (Shannon & Bylsma, 2007, p. 33). This shift in expectation is far from what research suggests -- "teachers tend to have lower expectations for students of color and poor students than for white students and more affluent students" (Banks et al., as cited in Shannon & Bylsma, 2007, p. 34) -- but the

expectation that "…all students can do rigorous academic work at high standards, even if they are far behind academically and need significant amount of time to catch up" (Saphier, as cited in Shannon & Bylsma, 2007, p. 33) needs to remain firmly in the minds of teachers and students.

How to raise expectations is through increasing rigor and relevance in classroom lessons. Rigor refers to academic rigor – learning in which students demonstrate a thorough, in-depth mastery of challenging tasks to develop cognitive skills through reflective thought, analysis, problem solving, evaluation, or creativity (Jones, 2012, p. 4). Relevance learning is created through authentic problems or tasks, simulation, service learning, connecting concepts to current issues, and teaching others (p. 8).

Langer gives guidance for increasing rigor and relevance in instruction: (a) Treat learning as a process of questioning, trying out, and grappling with new ideas and skills; (b) Aim to teach students a network of understandings, to connect and use in new ways; (c) Treat 'getting it' as groundwork to teach deeper understandings; (d) Help students relate new learning to larger issues in the discipline and the world; (e) Teach strategies for ways to think about and use the content in assignments and activities. (as cited in Shannon & Bylsma, 2007, p. 38)

The International Center for Leadership in Education (ICLE) suggested their Rigor/Relevance Framework to increase student achievement and "make explicit the relevance of learning to the real world, broadening the historically narrow focus on acquisition of knowledge" (Jones et al., 2012, p. 8). The framework focused on the interrelationship of curriculum, instruction, and assessment. Through the understanding and use of the Rigor/Relevance Framework -- planning instruction, selecting strategies, and assessment – learners were afforded an opportunity to engage in more rigorous and relevant learning.

There were four major steps in planning rigorous and relevant instruction: (a) define the focus of learning; (b) create student performance; (c) design the assessment; (d) develop the learning experience (p. 14). Whether a school district adopted the Rigor/Relevance Framework or another researcher's recommendations to meet the growing achievement gap, "one constant finding of academic research is high expectations are the most reliable driver of high student achievement, even in students who do not have a history of successful achievement" (Lemov, 2010, p. 27).

Coaching staffs take scrimmage so seriously that they videotape each scrimmage to collaboratively analyze their performance of each player – skill-by-skill, play-by-play. (Robert Eaker)

Assess and Analyze. The preponderance of the research suggested the importance of assessing and reviewing the data could not be overlooked. It is through disaggregating data that schools could individually look at each classroom, each teacher, and, most importantly, each student (Morrison Institute for Public Policy, 2006, p. 28). It was through an embedded assessment process the needs of individual students were made visible and steps were taken to ensure individual students or teachers were not left behind. This was the antidote to the wait-till-students-fail approach, and was much more effective and student focused.

"The challenge for schools, [however], was to provide each teacher with the most powerful and authentic information in a timely manner so that it could impact his or her professional practice in ways that enhanced student learning" DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, & Many, 2010, p. 183). Therefore, it was the responsibility of the teacher to give formative assessments "over and over, often every week or every month, to make sure they were catching problems as they arose" (Morrison Institute for Public Policy, 2006, p. 28). This was a critical step

so teachers, and students themselves, knew how proficient students were in the content (Shannon & Bylsma, 2004, p. 66).

A variety of measurement methods and tools were available for monitoring student learning and providing evidence of student learning. According to Stiggins, six criteria were used to ensure the assessments produced accurate results:

> (a) the intended user(s) and use(s) of the assessment were clear; (b) the valued student learning target(s) were clear and appropriate; (c) a proper assessment method had been selected; (d) the assessment samples achievement used enough high-quality exercises and scoring procedures; (e) relevant sources of bias had been minimized; (f) results were communicated effectively. (as cited in Shannon and Bylsma, 2007, p. 88)

ICLE also suggested making a conscious effort to mirror instruction in assessment, as it would enhance the student's ability to perform (Jones et al., 2012, p. 20).

According to ICLE, the eight most frequently used types of assessment were (a) multiple choice; (b) constructed response; (c) extended response; (d) process performance; (e) product performance; (f) portfolio; (g) interview; (h) self-reflection (p. 20).

The goal of assessing and analyzing was to understand where students were in regards to the content. "There was much, much more, [however] to the data analysis than simply looking at the aggregate test scores and exit exams at the end of the year, when it's too late to solve problems" (Morrison Institute for Public Policy, 2006, p. 28). Effective schools used the data to look at the root cause of deficiencies and took steps to correct defects and improve student outcomes.

By embracing regular assessment as a way of identifying problems, teachers and school leaders then had the ability to offer struggling students differentiated instruction based on their findings. Dahlman, Hoffman, and Brauhn (2008) suggested that differentiated instruction was a relatively widely used instructional approach across instructional contexts. The instruction had proven to be successful in the general education context where studies were found that students exposed to differentiated instruction strategies consistently outperformed other students (Tomlinson, as cited in Dahlman, Hoffman, & Brauhn, 2008). "Successfully differentiated instruction offered a classroom teacher the means to reach diverse learners and offered an underachieving student of poverty his or her best chance to access the needed support to acquire content and demonstrate learning" (Barr & Parrett, 2007, p. 195).

Coaches recognize that simply identifying individual player's unlearned skills does nothing to help players improve. They recognize players needed additional time and support that focuses on specific, unlearned skills. (Robert Eaker)

Timely, Immediate Feedback. According to Hattie, "The most powerful single modification that enhanced achievement was feedback" (as cited in Marzano, Pickering, & Pollock, 2001, p. 96). As coaches would stop their athletes during to practice when a skill was misapplied to ensure mistakes were limited in a game, teachers needed to the same prior to summative testing. "In the era of high-stakes testing, one of the most common forms of checking for understanding was having regular assessments that were closely aligned with final high-stakes tests or end-of-course exams" (Jones et al., 2012, p. 60). Techniques included students' oral language, teacher questions, quick writes, projects and performances, and student body language" (Fisher and Frey, as cited in Jones et al, 2012, p. 60). Barr and Parrett (2007) note:

> Advances in digital technology, as well, had enabled districts to create sophisticated student-information systems, data warehouses, and instructional-management programs. These changes – specific, timely, and immediate -- had dramatically enhanced a classroom teacher's ability to accurately assess student achievement on a daily basis. (p. 163)

Highly effective coaches, like teachers, used instructional strategies to ensure

players acquire skills and knowledge) to succeed on summative assessments.

(Robert Eaker)

Supportive/Effective Teachers. "Teachers' attitudes and expectations, as well as their knowledge of how to incorporate the cultures, experiences, and needs of their students into their teaching, significantly influenced what students learned and the quality of their learning opportunities" (Banks et al, as cited in Shannon and Bylsma, 2007, p. 34). But not all teachers were created equal.

The National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance (Glazerman & Max, 2011) examined the question of "Do low-income students have equal access to the highest-performing teachers?"

> There was growing concern that students from low-income and minority
> backgrounds had relatively less access to teacher quality. It was well
> documented that schools with more disadvantaged students tended to have
> teachers with weaker qualifications in terms of experience, teacher test
> scores, post-baccalaureate coursework, and certification. However, with
> the exception of experience in the first few years of teaching, the teacher

qualifications that had shown to be inequitably distrusted were only

weakly, if at all, associated with teacher performance in the classroom.

The researchers concluded that low-income students did not always have

equal access to the best teachers.

Peske and Haycock further supported IES' findings:

In state after state, district after district, we take the children who are most

dependent upon their teachers for academic learning and assign them to

teachers with less of everything. Less experience. Less knowledge of

content. And less actual teaching skill. (as cited in Shannon & Bylsma,

2007, p. 16)

The question then became what did effective and supportive teachers do to

improve student learning?

Rosenshine and Furst synthesized the research that had been done on

teacher effectiveness up until approximately 1970. They identified nine

characteristics of teachers whose students made greater gains in academic

achievement than students of other teachers:

(a) clarity; (b) variety in use of materials and methods; (c) enthusiasm; (d)

task-oriented, businesslike approach to instruction; (e) avoidance of harsh

criticism; (f) indirect teaching style; (g) emphasis on teaching content

covered on the criterion achievement test; (h) use of instructional

statements that provide an overview for what is about to happen or has

happened; (i) use of questions at multiple cognitive levels. (Gall &

Acheson, 2011, p. 71)

More recently, Marzano's (2003) studies suggested that there were three teach-

level factors that impacted student achievement: instructional strategies,

classroom management, and classroom curriculum (and assessment) design (p.

71). Marzano (2007) suggested that the teacher's ability to actively engage his or

her students was effective across socioeconomic or ethnicity variables.

Specifically, there were five areas in the teacher's locus of control to stimulate

higher engagement: high energy, using missing information (puzzles), self-system

(making learning personal), mild pressure, and mild competition and controversy

(p 100-103).

Marzano, Pickering, and Pollock (2001) identified nine instructional

strategies that were most likely to improve student achievement across all content

areas and across all grade levels. The nine effective strategies were ranked in

order of effectiveness. This ranking was derived from the research literature. The

research studies had quantified how much impact these strategies had on student

achievement. The author's ranking was based on effect size, a measure of

differences in the means of the control and experimental groups divided by the

estimate of the population standard deviation (Marzano, 2003, p. 190). The

strategies the authors deem critical were:

> (a) identifying similarities and differences; (b) summarizing and note
>
> taking; (c) reinforcing effort and providing recognition; (d) homework and
>
> practice; (e) nonlinguistic representation; (f) cooperative learning; (g)
>
> setting objectives and providing feedback; (h) generating and testing
>
> hypotheses; (i) cues, questions, and advance organizers. (Marzano,
>
> Pickering, & Pollock, 2001, p. 7)

Each chapter of *Classroom Instruction that Works: Research-Based Strategies for*

Increasing Student Achievement (Marzano, Pickering, & Pollock, 2001) detailed

one of the strategies. Each chapter had a section on the "Research and Theory" of

that particular strategy and a section on "Classroom Practice" for that strategy.

Successful coaching and teaching is more than technique. Successful leadership

must ultimately touch the emotions. They constantly send the message, "You can

do this. Effort will ultimately pay off. You keep getting better. I won't give up on

you!" (Robert Eaker)

As important it was for the teacher to deliver the lesson effectively,

"teacher-to-student and student-to-student relationships could not be ignored"

(National Association of Secondary School Principals, 2004, p. 89).

Supportive/Effective Teachers

1. Build Relationships

2. Recognize and Honors Improvements

3. Motivate and Inspires

4. Guide Students' Self-Reported Grades

5. Are Facilitative, Inquiry or Discovery Based Provider of Engaging

   Activities (Hattie, Biggs, & Purdie, 1996).

What do coaches do after analyzing scrimmages and identifying players who need

additional time and support? They collaboratively plan the next practice so that

players get additional time and support during practice. (Robert Eaker)

Reading Strategies. Doug Lemov (2010) states, "If you teach, no matter

the subject, you have the opportunity and the obligation to ensure that your

students read more (and better)" (p. 249). Daniels (2011) studied the effect of

school-wide reading and student engagement. Using motivational research,

Daniels made three recommendations: "first, prioritize reading as a school-wide goal; second, provide on-going professional development; and third, commit resources." "This opportunity would result in their being both more informed regarding the topic of your instruction and more effective assimilators and analyzers of information – better readers – in the future" (Lemov, 2010, p. 249). Therefore, teaching reading in a highly effective and productive way, no matter what subject or grade you teach, leads to powerful results" (Lemov, 2010).

Pre-Reading Strategies.

1. "Top reading teachers often begin the reading process by pre-teaching students critical facts and *context* they would need to understand in order to make sense of the text they were about to read" (Lemov, 2010, p. 284).

2. Another useful strategy is *activating background knowledge*: "Students are taught to elicit prior knowledge of the reading topic, building a background relating to what they already know" (Jones, 2012, p. 112).

3. *Investigating text structure*: "Students are taught to analyze the text before them: its print features, the layout, and illustrations. They are taught to consider the language and the literary features of the text. They learn to discriminate between narrative and expository text" (p. 112).

1. Interactive Reader

   a. Context

      1. According to Lemov (2010):

         The most basic approach then to helping students comprehend a text is to give them context on it – to take them methodically through key information that will help

them enter into it as informed readers…. As E.D. Hirsh had

pointed out, lack of prior knowledge is one of the key

barriers to comprehension for at-risk students and it affects

all aspects of reading, even fluency and decoding, as

struggling with gaps soaks up the brain's processing

capacity. (p. 286)

b. Focal Points

1. "To help students manage the complexity of a text, champion

teachers steer them in advance toward key ideas, concepts, and

themes to look for" (Lemov, 2010, p. 287).

c. Front-Loading

1. "For a reading teacher, front-loading scenes can also excite

interest and increase comprehension by making the narrative

seem more familiar at key points" (Lemov, 2010, p. 287).

d. Evidence-Based Questioning

1. "Top reading teachers constantly emphasize groundedness in

the text, even on subjective and opinion questions, by asking

evidence-based questions – that is, questions where students

must make reference to a fact or event from the text" (Lemov

2010, p. 293).

e. Summarizing

   1. Summarizing occurs before, after, and during reading.
      "Students are taught to stop and think during their reading to
      answer who or what they are reading about and where the
      action is taking place" (Jones, 2012, pg. 112). Once they have
      done so, they may "give a brief statement about the main parts
      of the text, story, or chapter. They are taught to extract and
      organize the important information gained from their reading."
      (p. 113).

f. Text-to text-world-self

   1. Making comparisons: "Students are taught how to compare and
      contrast information within a text and between texts. They are
      taught to look for similarities and differences" (pg. 113).

Summary

Based on the research, there was support that suggested that the
reading comprehension of low income students could improve in a
structured environment with high expectations if delivered by
supportive teachers who focused their efforts toward specified

reading strategies, continuous assessment and analysis of student work,

and timely feedback.

CHAPTER 3

Methodology and Treatment of Data

<u>Introduction</u>

The purpose of this project was to determine the impact pre-reading strategies and academic vocabulary had on the reading comprehension scores of 90 low-income students when delivered by veteran teachers in a structured environment with high expectations. The researcher sought to investigate whether self-efficacy – based on attendance, behavior, and participation – would rise with comprehension scores.

This chapter is organized around seven topics: (a) Methodology; (b) Participants; (c) Instruments; (d) Design; (e) Procedure; (f) Treatment; (g) Summary.

<u>Methodology</u>:

Action research was chosen to provide the researcher a method to investigate the effectiveness of pre-reading strategies and academic vocabulary had the comprehension scores of 90 low-income students when delivered by veteran teachers in a structured, supportive environment. The data gathered would help teachers, principals, and students improve teaching and learning.

<u>Participants</u>:

The participants for this project consisted of ninety low-income sophomores who scored in the high two hundreds on the Measurement of Student Progress (MSP) during their 8th grade year. These students were rated as high-level II and had the most potential to pass the HSPE as sophomores. Ninety students were chosen, out of roughly one hundred and fifty, due to the limited number of strong, proven, and motivated teachers that could successfully lead the intervention in these classes. Of the one hundred and fifty, the ninety chosen did not have significant attendance issues or behavioral problems.

<u>Instruments</u>:

1. High School Proficiency Exam (HSPE) released items
2. Teacher created formative assessments
3. Scholastic Reading Inventory (SRI)
4. Reading Logs
5. Interact Readers

<u>Design</u>

The research experiment consisted of three non-randomly formed groups (students-of-poverty receiving intervention). Each class was pre-tested and post-tested using teacher generated formative assessments. The experimental groups

received specialized instruction and focused practice on pre-reading strategies and academic vocabulary.

Procedure

For the experimental group, three teachers were selected to implement the intervention at the start of the 2012-13 school year based on their classroom instruction, support of the One Page Improvement Plan (OPIP), and ability to motivate students -- which was determined by previous years' summative test scores. These teachers were receptive to taking on leadership roles and providing feedback to improve the intervention. Time was organized throughout the year for the teachers and Instructional Facilitator (IF) to work on common lessons, assessments, and rubrics. The information gathered was used throughout the year to re-evaluated and adjust the intervention to improve student learning.

To support the intervention teachers, and provide more consistent instruction, the instructional facilitator spent time in the classrooms modeling lessons. Opportunity was also offered for intervention teachers to observe each other implement the pre-reading strategies, hoping the time in each other's classrooms would facilitate discussions between the intervention teachers and the instructional facilitator. Conversations centered on improving instruction, common activities, and meaningful assessments.

Treatment of Data

An analysis was used that was appropriate for comparing the achievement, on a test of reading comprehension, of three groups of sophomore English students.

Summary

Chapter 3 provided a description of the research methodology employed in the study, described the participants, the instruments used, the research design, and the procedure utilized. Details regarding the treatment of data obtained and analyzed were also presented.

CHAPTER 4

Analysis of the Data

<u>Introduction</u>

After a spike in 2008, HSPE reading scores steadily decreased, while the achievement gap compared to the state and district continued to widen. This was even more evident with low income student. In 2008, reading scores of students-of-poverty were 1.9 percentage points better than the state's average, compared to a negative 12.6 point difference in 2011. This quantitative research study sought to determine the extent to which specialized instruction (pre-reading strategies and academic vocabulary) had on reading comprehension of 90 low income students when delivered by intentionally selected teachers versus students who do not receive the same delivery or intentional instruction.

<u>Description of the Environment</u>

Read Now High School was an urban high school located in an agriculturally dependent community, which was approximately in the middle of Washington. According to the Neighborhood Community Assessment, "extreme poverty was a characteristic of this area" with 40% reporting a family income of less than $12,000, with 32% having less than a seventh grade education, and approximately 50% being born outside this country. Because English was not

spoken in the home, many of the students faced language difficulties in addition to other academic challenges.

The percentage of students received free and reduced lunch at Read Now High School was 77.1%. This, however, was lower than the number who would actually qualify if they applied. These same students qualified at a much higher rate in middle school, but, entering high school, there appears to be a stigma attached to qualifying for free lunch. Consequently, many did not fill out the application. It was estimated that 80% were probably a closer percentage of those who qualified.

Hypothesis/Research Question

Students who received specified reading strategies and academic vocabulary by intentionally selected teachers in a structured environment with clearly defined standards and expectations would yield higher reading comprehension scores.

Null Hypothesis:

Implementation of reading strategies and academic vocabulary by intentionally selected teachers in a structured environment with clearly defined standards and expectations would not impact reading comprehension.

The reading intervention had a positive impact on the following: (a) student ability to be active readers; (b) depth and clarity of responses when answering questions with difficult academic vocabulary; (c) application of pre-reading strategies to better comprehend difficult text.

A pre-test was given to students on the academic vocabulary that would be emphasized throughout the intervention. Of the twenty vocabulary words, only 3.9 percent of students successfully defined fourteen or more words with the average score being 9.04. After implementing common lessons and activities, there was a shift in results. The post-test results showed 66.2 percent of students successfully defined at least fourteen of the twenty vocabulary words. This was a growth of 5.54 points over a four-month span.

As successful as the students were in defining the vocabulary words, it was more important the students were able to apply the words when answering questions from a textbook or on state assessment. Common lessons were devised to demonstrate and assess the students' ability to apply the vocabulary words when answering academic questions. Three lessons were provided to the students over a four-month period. These lessons were used to not only engage students in academic vocabulary, but the intention was to assess their progress, as well. The first lesson showed improvement, with students scoring an average of

7.78 out of 10. The third and final lesson averaged 8.78 out of 10, an

improvement of 3.5 points on average, over the three lessons. These scores

increased due to the fact that students were showing improvements in the

application of the vocabulary words, rather than simply being able to define them.

Pre-reading strategies were the primary emphasis throughout the

intervention, and it was important to measure the changes in student thinking as

they approached a piece of text. The pre-test demonstrated the average score was

4.84 out of 9, with 29.1% scoring 7 or better. By the end of the year, the average

score had risen to 7.46 out of 9, with 76.4% of students scoring 7 or better.

Findings

The initial intervention was successful based on two factors: (a) data

collected showed student growth in the assessment of pre-reading strategies; and

(b) data collected showed student growth defining and applying academic

vocabulary.

The pre-reading strategies were successful in focusing students on what

they were about to read – reading with a purpose. The strategies allowed students

to assess their level of background knowledge in order to begin cognitively

thinking about the reading. Students showed growth in the assessments that

measured their ability to use pre-reading strategies. As stated, students showed an

average improvement of 2.62 points over the course of the semester on the 9-point

assessment. Also, there was an increase of students scoring 7 out of 9 or better

from 29.4% at the beginning of the semester to 76.5% at the end of the semester.

Students were successfully demonstrating the ability to mark up the text to

construct meaning and make inferences.

Students showed substantial growth on the pre-and-post test that measured

their ability to define the academic vocabulary words. The pre-test showed only

3.9% of students could successfully define fourteen or more of the twenty

vocabulary words, as compared to 66.2% of students on the post test at the end of

the semester. Common lessons/assessments were used to measure the students'

ability to apply the academic vocabulary words to real world scenarios. Students

were asked to formulate and answer questions that incorporated the vocabulary.

The data showed a constant increase in student performance on three

lessons/assessments throughout the semester. The common rubric had a

maximum score of 10 with students scoring an average of 5.28 on the first

lesson/assessment, 7.78 on the second, and 8.78 on the third.

Summary

Chapter four included discussion of the environment, hypothesis, results

of the study, findings, and discussion. Data analyzed supported the hypothesis

that students who receive specified reading strategies and academic vocabulary by

intentionally selected teachers in a structured environment with clearly defined

standards and expectations will improve reading scores, measured by increased

scores from teacher created assessments.

CHAPTER 5

Summaries, conclusions and recommendations

<u>Summary</u>

The purpose of this proposed research was to investigate the impact specialized instruction (pre-reading strategies and academic vocabulary) had on reading comprehension scores of 90 low-income students when delivered by intentionally selected teachers.

<u>Conclusions</u>

Based on the review of selected literature and major findings produced from the present study, the following conclusions were reached: If low-income students were provided a structured environment with supportive teachers – teachers who delivered specified instruction and academic vocabulary, similar to what their more affluent peers are receiving -- reading comprehension scores of this student population would rise and the achievement gap would lessen, validating the statement, "…all students can do rigorous academic work at high standards, even if they are far behind academically and need significant amount of time to catch up." (Saphier, as cited in Shannon & Bylsma, 2007, p. 33)

Because of the lack of a control group, however, it is uncertain if the increase in comprehension scores was because of the reading strategies and academic vocabulary delivered or the result of veteran teachers delivering

instruction in an organized, caring environment. Hence, a comparison could not be made to show a correlation between the specified strategies and the student gain. The finding of the study did indicate, however, that growth occurred. Therefore, further research is recommended.

Recommendations

As a result of the conclusions cited above, the following recommendations have been suggested:

1. Continue to enhance collaboration time and instructional facilitator support.
2. Compare the results of the intervention with HSPE scores to determine effectiveness of intervention, and to define a relationship between the formative assessments that would enable predicted passage of the HSPE.
3. Provide further funding and opportunities for staff to take on leadership roles implementing teacher-to-teacher observations, student-to-student training, and lead school wide professional development.
4. Develop a formative assessment system leading to just-in-time instructional changes for all students below level in Read Now High School.

5. Compare how the students who received specialized instruction in a sheltered, supportive environment did academically and behaviorally during the 2012-13 school year versus similar students who did not receive the intervention.

6. Small groups of teachers from other disciplines may work together to implement the intervention and build instructional capacity.

7. While the focus of the study was to improve the comprehension scores of 90 students of a subpopulation, future research needs to seek other interventions for students with more challenging issues, such as truancy, office discipline referrals, gang affiliation, substance abuse, and mental health. Teachers, counselors, and administrators may partner with outside agencies to combat issues facing low-income students.

8. The data can be used to further improve teaching and learning in the remaining classrooms of Read Now High School and throughout the other schools in the district.

9. Qualitative data should be collected from students to determine if the growth in comprehension scores were a result of the pre-reading strategies and academic vocabulary or, rather, the impact of effective teaching in a caring environment.

10. Rather than simply using formative assessments generated by teachers, research should be done to find programs and assessments that can help the struggling learner.

11. Commit to time, finances, and building wide focus to improve intervention.

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