Factors Influencing Readers When Matching Texts to Struggling Students

by

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Educational practices within the United States are constantly changing and evolving. Teachers at the elementary level are continuously searching for the best pedagogical techniques. For the last several years the concept of leveling has taken over many elementary classrooms. Teachers determine what instructional level a book is at so that they can correctly match the book to an individual student. After correctly analyzing a student's reading level the teacher is then able to match each student to a text that will allow him/her to learn at their own personal ability level. Books are leveled by using a formula that measures sentence difficulty and word difficulty. This number is translated into an objective numerical score that suggests the level at which most students should be able to read the text independently. (Rasinksi, 2003).

This concept has traveled through American classrooms as early as the 1830's. As late as the 1980s, teachers voided this practice choosing instead to reach for more authentic literature. Today leveling texts has come full circle and is viewed by many as a centerpiece of a good balanced literacy program. Many teachers have abandoned the basal reading programs of the 1980's because they are too difficult for struggling readers (Pitcher & Brandy, 2007). Teachers level books so that students can select texts that they will be able to read without becoming frustrated. Pinnell states that classroom reading materials should be grouped according to "characteristics that are related to the supports and challenges in the text for young readers." (1999, p.3). Many researchers believe that

when students are placed at their own individual reading levels they then have the most potential for academic growth.

In 2001 the Federal Government passed the No Child Left Behind Act based on the belief that too many of the neediest children in America are being left behind in schools. If educators are to ensure that the neediest children succeed, then students must read books at a level that is developmentally appropriate. In the early 1900s Belarusian psychologist Lev Vygotsky came up with the zone of proximal development theory. One aspect of Vygosky's theory is that true learning occurs at the stage when work is slightly challenging for the student to do independently and must rely on the teacher for small amounts of guidance. For decades teachers have embraced this theory believing that children need to be scaffolded, or given assistance when needed, at the student's individual learning level. This concept lends itself very well to leveling books. Rog and Burton believe that "if students are to learn and apply reading strategies, they need texts that provide a balance between support and challenge. That is, story text should be easy enough to develop students' confidence and facilitate comprehension, but difficult enough to provide a challenge and require the reader to do some reading work." (2002, p. 348).

Teachers make an effort to get children to choose "just right books," or books that fall within the student's individual reading level. Rog and Burton describe a just right book as being a text where students can read 90-95% of the words easily without becoming frustrated. It is at this level that students can be taught most effectively. (2002, p. 348). Not only do teachers determine the level at which students should be taught, but they also put a level on which books children should read independently. Although this

process seems to be grounded in best teaching practices, it can be argued that by confining students to specific reading levels, the teacher can, at times, hinder a student's growth and even deter that child from reading.

While leveling students is seen as a valuable assessment tool, teachers must depend on much more than this when matching a student to a text. Although readability and comprehension level need to be taken into account, these factors can be greatly influenced over the course of several different texts, even at the same level. Dzaldov states that "teachers' familiarity with their students' backgrounds, interests, and socio-cultural identities are at least as important in identifying appropriate books for students as are lists based on books, print, language, and literacy uniformity." (2005 p.228). Features such as number of syllables, font size, and oral language are all incorporated when leveling a text (Rasinksi, 2003). This does not take into account, however, genre, perspective, or background knowledge of the student. At times teachers are far too eager to group students according to assessed reading levels. Teachers then move on with their own personal teaching objectives. Although a group of students might have been assessed at the same level, it does not necessarily mean that all of those students perform the same at that level. It is important for teachers to look beyond the level of the text and more accurately individualize instruction for their students.

Purpose

There are many different factors that influence how a student should be matched to a specific text. The purpose of this study was to examine how students interact with various texts. I specifically looked at each student's fluency, expression, comprehension, and re-telling of the story by using Fountas and Pinnell's running records kit. I also

formally and informally assessed each student's accuracy rates, self corrections, and performed a miscue analysis. This means that I looked at how often errors happen, what the student does about those errors, and which types of errors occur. Students read several different texts that varied in length, genre, and content. I then analyzed whether these varying texts influenced each student's fluency, expression, comprehension, and re-telling.

Through the years there have been many different equivalency charts devised to help level books. In this study I chose to use Fountas and Pinnell's 2008 leveling system that uses letters to correlate a specific reading level. In this system students that begin reading should start with books that are labeled with letters "A" and "B." As students begin to progress they move on to higher level books and therefore higher letters. By fifth grade students should be reading "T," "U," and "V" books.

This study examined what text features a teacher should take into account before placing a student at a specific reading level. This study examined what other factors influence how a student should be placed at a specific reading level. One student, for example, might be a level "U" when reading a fiction book but a level "S" when reading a nonfiction book. Also, reading assessments rarely consider the perspective of the author of the text or the background knowledge of the student. Without understanding these factors it is difficult for a teacher to accurately match a text to a student. In this study students that read below grade level were given several adaptive running records over a range of different texts. Themes from this qualitative and quantitative data were then developed to determine the effects on student reading levels.

This study consisted of two different phases. In the first phase I qualitatively examined how students interacted with various texts at specific reading levels. I informally took anecdotal notes on each student as they read. This helped me to develop their profile as a reader. Achievement on each of the different texts was then compared and common threads were examined. The second phase is a quantitative analysis of students' accuracy rates and comprehension levels on each text. During the quantitative phase of this study three subjects were selected from a fifth grade classroom that read below a fifth grade reading level, according to the Fountas and Pinnell running records kit.

Research Questions

1) In what ways does each specific text influence how a teacher sees the reader? 2) Do readers' fluency, expression, comprehension, and re-telling vary among different texts?

Significance

In the classroom teachers often label students with a specific reading level. Each individual student is matched to a text level according to their accuracy rate and comprehension level. Research shows, however, that there are other factors that influence the appropriate level of a text for a student. Students interact with various texts in different ways. Things such as length of text, genre, background knowledge, and subject matter, to name a few, have a profound influence on the reader. It is important to take these factors into account when matching students to a specific text. If teachers fail to do this then students can be placed at a level that is either too easy or too difficult.

When students are assigned to read a text that is too difficult for them then frustration often follows and they become disenfranchised.

The school district I work in is involved in a large literacy initiative. The biggest push in this initiative centers on small group reading instruction which is commonly referred to as guided reading. I have made great efforts to make sure that guided reading is the foundation of my balanced literacy program. Now that the structure of my classroom is set up and I am meeting with groups regularly I want to make sure that I am doing everything that I can to help students to become better readers and better learners. While I have been given much instruction on how to give broad assessments to my students, I have been taught few strategies on how to correctly monitor and assess individual student progress on a daily basis. By being able to understand what factors influence a reader's success I think that I will be able to assess and analyze my students more accurately. As I learn how different text features affect a student when reading, I will also be able to match students to more appropriate texts. This will in turn allow students to read texts at their own personal levels and grow as learners.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

A teacher has a responsibility to meet the diverse learning needs of every student in their classroom. This means that the teacher must differentiate their instruction in order to accommodate the strengths and weaknesses of each individual student. In order to best meet the needs of the student the teacher must first accurately assess the student's level. This way the teacher knows what background knowledge the student has and can then accurately make a plan for instruction. When providing reading instruction, it is important to know exactly what level the student is at so that the teacher can meet the needs of that particular individual.

Leveled text can be defined as reading materials that represent a progression from more simple to more complex and challenging texts (Brabham and Villaume, 2002). While this definition is quite general, the implications are very broad. The idea of leveling texts is not a new one. McGufey readers first introduced the concept of leveled text into American schools as early as the 1830s. The practice caught on, and by the mid-1900s, collections of texts arranged by difficulty level were bound into reading programs throughout the country (Smith, 2002). As educational trends are often cyclic, support for leveling texts has varied throughout the years.

During the 1980s the practice of leveling books declined greatly. Educators reached out for more authentic literature, such as classic novels. It was believed that leveled texts could limit readers by controlling vocabulary and narrowing perspectives. Scripted reading programs were being chosen as a trend rather than as a means of best

teaching practices. Publishers began to stray from leveled books for fear that they were not "high-quality books" (Pitcher & Brandy, 2007). The great push of the 1980s to move away from leveled texts did not last very long. By the early 1990s teachers began to see a need for greater flexibility with the types of texts they were using in the classroom. Teachers were dissatisfied with the "one-size-fits-all" mentality of the basal reading series (Szymusiak, Sibberson, & Koch 2008).

By the early 1990s educators began to find major flaws in the more "authentic" reading anthologies. Leveled texts again began to gain popularity largely due, in part, to two distinct factors. The first major fault of the basal reading anthologies was that they did not differentiate to the needs of all readers. For this reason, struggling readers were often left behind in the classroom. Students that read below grade level could not keep up with the anthology while students that read above grade level were not challenged to reach their potential. To better meet the needs of all individual students, teachers once again turned back to using leveled texts within the classroom. The second reason that teachers began to reestablish faith in leveled reading programs was based on the research of Marie Clay. Clay began the Reading Recovery program, which is an intervention system targeting primary students that are struggling readers. She believed that by giving frequent mini-lessons to a struggling reader using texts that were developmentally appropriate, one could teach that student a system of effective strategies and problem-solving skills. Once those skills were in place, Clay believed that students could steadily improve their level of reading by using a systematic book leveling system (Pitcher & Brandy 2007).

Today, leveling is applied to commercial reading programs, basal anthologies, and children's literature. Teachers are able to make individualized lesson plans that cater to a student's specific reading level. When teachers are able to match the right book to the right reader, they can more specifically target their instruction as well as make decisions about how to group and when to move students. In selecting "just right" books at appropriate levels, teachers are allowing students to read texts they feel comfortable with rather than forcing students to read texts that are too challenging and will, in turn, frustrate them. Likewise, strong readers can be challenged and more actively engaged when reading material is at their specific level. By having the resource of leveled texts, a teacher is able to meet the diverse instructional needs of all students.

As a teacher begins to differentiate between individual student reading levels, that teacher's awareness of student performance begins to grow. By attending to each child's reading level, the teacher is forced to design lessons that more accurately meet the needs of each child (Brabham & Villaume 2002). The process of matching each individual reader to a specific text allows the teacher to take into account the student's background knowledge, experience and interest level, familiarity with language structures, print conventions, vocabulary, and comprehension strategies that are being developed (Szymusiak, Sibberson, & Koch 2008).

WHY LEVELED TEXTS:

Research shows that matching readers to a specific leveled text can help students progress within the classroom. Allington states that "readers make the most progress

when books are not too easy or too difficult" (p.12, 2006). Clay's work also backs this statement. Clay believed that texts should be easy enough for students to work on comprehension strategies and develop confidence as a reader, but hard enough to challenge students and force them to grow (1991).

Lev Vygotsky was a famous psychologist who spent a great deal of time studying this principle. Vygotsky believed that cognitive development is not the result of social interactions, but rather the type of social interactions that one has that shapes and develops the actual way one thinks (Cole & Wertsch 1996). The theoretical model that Vygotsky used to explain his work was called the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). Vygotsky defines this as "The distance between the actual development level as determined by independent problem solving, and the level of potential development, as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers" (1978). Within the ZPD the educator and the leaner work on a task together that the learner would not able to complete independently due to the level of difficulty. Through daily instruction, however, the educator would provide less and less instruction until the learner would grow cognitively and eventually be able to complete the objectives independently. This tiered instruction was referred to by Vygotsky as "scaffolding." Scaffolding, therefore, represents the support a learner is given to reach a goal or participate in a task that would otherwise be too difficult to accomplish independently (Davis & Miyake 2004). As the learner masters each facet of the task, the educator can remove more and more scaffold support until the learner eventually shifts to a new ZPD point.

SUPPORT FOR LEVELED TEXTS:

A major cause of deficiencies in reading comprehension is students are given

materials that are not at an appropriate level and are too difficult. For students to be able

to learn and apply various reading strategies, they need texts that provide a balance

between support and challenge (Rog & Burton 2002). That is to say that if students are

to make strides in reading comprehension, they should be working at their Zone of

Proximal Development within a given text. It is necessary for the text to be easy enough

for students to read with confidence and adequate comprehension, but hard enough to

require the student to do some "reading work" (Clay 1991). This means that students

need to use some of their reading strategies to understand the text. "Reading work" refers

to decoding strategies, using syntax clues, applying comprehension strategies, or any

other various methods that the student has been taught to better understand a particular

text. When students are at their appropriate reading level, reading teachers consider these

texts to be "just right" books. This means that students can read them at an accuracy rate

of 90-95%. Text that is easier than this is said to be at the student's independent reading

level. Texts that are more difficult than this are at that student's frustration level. When

this level is reached, not only is the student's comprehension level greatly affected, but

they can become disenfranchised with the learning process altogether (Rog & Burton

2002).

When students are matched to a text at their level, they are able to better develop

skills of good readers, such as fluency, comprehension, and stamina (Rasinksi 2003). By

allowing students to read appropriate books, one is ensuring that that child develops

grade level reading strategies regardless of the child's ability to decode and decipher text. Likewise, by forcing children to read books that are too challenging, one achieves the complete opposite. Students can frustrate easily when reading books that are not at their level. When reading books that are too challenging, students begin to concentrate simply on decoding the words rather than to concentrate on the meaning of the text. Szymusiak, Sibberson, and Koch state that "students who meet success in reading are more likely to persist, to read more with less off-task behavior, and to achieve more" (2008). O'Connor's research backs this statement. O'Connor found that students' learning accelerated quicker and achievement was higher when students were matched to their correct text/reading level (2002).

This is particularly true in struggling readers. Many of the complex texts that students are exposed to are much too difficult for struggling readers who are below grade level. While students are unable to tackle these texts independently, they can access grade-level material when the teacher facilitates their interaction with the text. Without the teacher scaffolding these students at their "just right" level, they would often avoid these more complex texts. This is why leveling is necessary to both promote growth as well as foster the confidence that young readers need to allow themselves to find success (Glasswell & Ford 2010).

CAUTIONS FOR LEVELED TEXTS:

Despite all of the research that supports leveling texts, there also can be many drawbacks. Some teachers begin to concentrate solely on leveling books and lose sight

of their true teaching objectives. Leveling can not only muffle the best interests of a teacher but also deter children from reading.

Worthy and Sailors state that "focusing solely on text difficulty limits students' choices, which can lead to boredom and resistance (2001). Students can often be interested in a particular topic but cautioned away from a book on that topic because it is not at that child's specified reading level. Along those same lines, students can become turned off from reading due to the limited amount of texts available at their level. For example, a fifth grade student that reads below grade level might get frustrated with the subject matter of a text that is written for a second grade audience but is still the appropriate level for the fifth grade student. Leveling texts rarely takes into account the interests of individual students.

Since leveling is often the only criteria that takes place when matching a text to a student, some students can begin to have a distorted view of the purpose of reading and of themselves as readers (Worthy and Sailors 2001). Kids can be steered away from books of interest because they are not labeled with the appropriate level. This causes them to lose interest in reading. Students that read below grade level can become self-conscious and embarrassed about their reading level. This can ruin the image of how students see themselves as readers. When struggling students begin to notice that their level is far behind their peers, they label themselves as poor readers and begin to develop avoidance tendencies towards reading in general. Worthy and Sailors state that when students develop a poor image of themselves, it causes struggling readers to "spiral further into a cycle of failure if they are reading at a 'lower level' than their friends" (2001).

Another place where leveled texts can fall short is that they do not know take in to account different genres or topics of interests to readers. Most leveled books, for example, are fiction and do not address the interests that many students have in certain nonfiction topics. In using a majority of leveled texts, the teacher is also limiting the types of reading that students are doing. Students should be taught using a diverse array of reading material, such as newspapers, comics, graphic novels, magazines, and so on. None of these types of texts fall within the small confines of leveled book libraries. By limiting the material students are exposed to, one is also limiting the way that students see the world. For this reason, students must be taught beyond mere levels (Szymusiak, Sibberson, & Koch 2008).

Since leveling does not take into account the background of the student, it is possible for one student to make great cognitive growth while reading a book at one particular level but do poorly when reading a different book at the same level (Szymusiak, Sibberson, & Koch 2008). A student that is interested in fishing, for example, might be able to use his interests and background knowledge to show adequate comprehension while reading a book about fishing. If the teacher selected another book at the same level about a topic of less interest, the student might not fare as well. Pitcher and Fang state that "Books within levels often vary widely; sometimes an appropriate book in terms of interest is at a higher level than students might read for guided reading" (2007). At some point in choosing books, purpose and interest need to be taken into account. Leveling books often fails to attend to this.

In American classrooms different reading programs use an array of book leveling criteria. Some programs base the level of the book strictly on a readability formula.

These formulas "usually give a numerical score to rank books or other reading material in an order of difficulty" (Fry, 2002). This score often corresponds to a suggested grade level. Other leveling programs take into account factors such as language predictability, text formatting, and content. While each program suggests a grade level equivalency, some show that grade level numerically while others use letter representations.

HOW LEVELS ARE DETERMINED:

There are several different leveling systems that dominate today's classrooms. One of them is the Developmental Reading Assessment, or D.R.A. The D.R.A. is a set of reading assessments designed for individuals in kindergarten through eighth grade. It is a system that is intended to be administered and interpreted by classroom teachers (Rathvon, 2006). The objective of this assessment is to determine a student's independent reading level. The D.R.A. uses a set of criteria in terms of fluency, accuracy, and comprehension to determine which level will be best for the student. The assessment is comprised of two major parts. First, the student's fluency and accuracy are measured by counting the number of miscues that are made during a specific portion of the text. Next, students are asked a series of comprehension questions that are specific to the text and graded. The D.R.A. uses numeric scores that correspond with specific grade levels. A student entering third grade, for example, should read at a DRA score of 30 and should finish third grade with a DRA score of 38.

In 2005 Spector conducted a study comparing how teachers administered the assessment to how trained reading professionals administered the assessment. Results

showed an accuracy rate of just over 70%. "Because differences between DRA accuracy categories are very small, even a small disagreement can represent a difference in performance levels. Moreover, teacher-expert agreement for the many fluency and comprehension scores that require a greater degree of subjective judgment was not evaluated" (Spector, 2005). Although this test analyzes several different aspects of student reading, many of the questions used are subjective, and the teacher performing the assessment can often sway the results. Another limitation of the DRA is that only one reading passage is available at each level to assess the students.

A second leveling system that has been gaining popularity is Fountas and Pinnell's running records kit. The Fountas and Pinnell running records kit assesses a students' accuracy rate, fluency, and comprehension. Through a series of short, leveled reading passages, the Fountas and Pinnell kit assigns a letter to each student's reading level that correlates with specific grade levels. A student entering fifth grade, for example, should be reading at a level "T." By the middle of fifth grade, students should have progressed to the next level in the kit, being level "U." By the end of fifth grade, students should be reading at a level "V." Teachers can accurately measure student growth throughout the year by using these common assessments. In their research Fawson and Smith state that "Teachers should be very cautious when they determine instructional placement of students into reading groups with a single running record score" (p.4, 2006). In the Fountas and Pinnell running records kit, there is a fiction and a nonfiction passage at each assessment level. For this reason, more accurate data can be compiled. Fawson and Smith note that individual reading assessments are often

not sensitive to between-text variations, such as structure, type, and topic.

According to Fawson and Smith, the second biggest factor in properly assessing

students is scoring reliability when analyzing responses to comprehension

questions. In the Fountas and Pinnell kit, sample answers are given for each

comprehension question that is asked. Only student responses that match the

sample answers are given credit. For this reason, the subjectivity of the person

administering the test is decreased greatly.

Chapter 3

Applications and Evaluations

Introduction

In theory, matching students to texts at their own individual ability level is grounded in best teaching practices. Students are able to make the most growth if they are within the zone of proximal development. The zone of proximal development is the level at which students are able to grow only with the assistance of a teacher. The work at this level is just below a student's frustration level, but still hard enough so that the student could not complete the task independently. This being said, there needs to be more that goes into matching a student to a text than just the text level. Levels are assigned based upon word counts and readability formulas. For a student to truly understand a text, the teacher needs to take in to account far more than just the level. Factors such as text length, genre, and student's background knowledge should also be taken in to account in addition to the reading level.

The objective of this research project was to determine what factors influence readers when matching texts to struggling students. I looked at how factors such as genre and background knowledge can affect the results of a student's comprehension and fluency scores at a particular reading level.

Participants

Three students participated in this study. They were selected from a suburban school district in western New York. The participants were all fifth grade students that

read at least one year below grade level. They are students that struggle with both reading comprehension and decoding skills. All students come from middle class socio-economic backgrounds. These participants were chosen based on their need to develop stronger reading strategies. The participants were ten years old at the time of the study. Throughout the study the three participants will be referred to as Student A, Student B, and Student C.

Student A is 10 years old and comes from an upper middle-class family. He is an only child and his parents are still married. He is very involved in sports and enjoys factual information. He does not like to read but has told me that if he has to, his favorite books are mysteries. Student A has received academic intervention services (AIS) for both math and language arts since first grade. According to Student A's file, he has been brought before the pupil assistance team (PAT) every year since kindergarten. The PAT team is a panel of specialists that are assigned to help the classroom teacher with any struggling students. Since kindergarten that PAT team has made several suggestions that Student A should be tested by a psychologist or a speech and language therapist. These tests could yield results that would qualify Student A for additional services, such as an individual education plan. The parents have consistently denied requests for testing through the years and they are afraid of placing any type of label on their child. They have reluctantly agreed to AIS services. Like his parents, Student A has developed an embittered attitude towards receiving extra help.

Student A reads at a level "O" which is around five levels below what is expected of a fifth grader. He has good literal comprehension but struggles greatly with decoding. Due to his poor decoding skills, his comprehension is being hindered greatly. Student A

is not able to move on to more challenging texts and often does not understand the texts that are presented to him. He has a great deal of anxiety and hates looking different than other kids. Student A gets pulled out of the classroom for AIS support which triggers his anxiety. I believe that this is one of the factors why he has shown little growth with reading this year.

Despite the fact that they deny testing, Student A has very supportive parents. They are actively involved in school functions and constantly check up on his academic progress. Although they show concern, I do not believe that the parents like to admit how great their son's academic struggles are. Student A very rarely reads at home despite continuous pleas from the teacher. Without this necessary reading practice, Student A will make minimum growth. He needs to practice his decoding, fluency, and expand his vocabulary.

Student B is 10 years old and comes from a broken home. He lives with his grandma along with his sister. Student B also has two half-sisters and a step-brother that do not live with him. Student B's parents never married. His mother married another man and lives out of town. Student B has little contact with her. His father has done jail time and has limited visitation rights. Student B's grandma is very involved in his schooling. She frequently attends school events and always makes sure that his homework is done.

Student B is a very bright boy with good comprehension skills. He reads below grade level but was exited from the AIS program due to his score on the fourth grade New York State ELA Exam. Prior to fifth grade he received AIS services for three years.

Student B works hard during class and is eager to please. He struggles with reading because of his decoding skills. Student B does very well with whole group shared reading lessons or read aloud lessons. He has good aural skills and when he doesn't have to decode the text, he has great comprehension. He self-monitors his reading but still needs a great deal of work in this area. Student B reads independently in school but does not read consistently at home. He lacks a stable figure at home that will hold him accountable for the independent reading. Although he has made steady growth with his reading, Student B will continue to progress slowly until he gets more practice with the skills that he's been taught in class.

Student C is 10 years old and she has lived in this country for two and a half years. She is originally from Yemen and moved to this United States in third grade with her father, mother, two brothers, and two sisters. She attended the Rochester City School District for one year and then moved to the Gates-Chili CSD in fourth grade. Student C comes from a strong Muslim background and comes to school wearing a hajib every day. Her life experiences are vastly different from her peers although she tries hard to fit in with her classmates. Because of her religion she is not supposed to interact with men. For the first two weeks of school she would not utter a single word to me. After meeting with her father he explained to his daughter that she could speak to her teacher about school related topics. Since then Student C has been able to communicate her ideas to me. She has a quiet determination that drives her to succeed.

Student C has very good decoding and can read words above a fifth grade level. Her comprehension, however, is a point of concern. Student C is what reading teachers would call a "word caller." She simply reads off the words without truly understanding

their meaning. This is understandable due to her many cultural differences and her immense language barrier. Despite these obstacles, she has made tremendous growth. Student C did not know a single word of English when she came to this country. In just two and a half years she is already reading at a level "O."

Student C needs to work on self-monitoring her reading. If she stopped more frequently at unfamiliar words and learned how to use context clues, her comprehension would greatly increase. She spends a great deal of time independently reading both at home and in school. This extra practice has done wonders to expand her vocabulary.

All three participants come from extremely different backgrounds. They all read at a level "O" which is typical of a student at the end of third grade. Although they all have the same reading level, they have completely different reader's profiles. Each student struggles with reading for their own individual reasons.

Participating teacher/action researcher

As the participating teacher/action researcher, I am a general education teacher with eight years of teaching experience. I have a bachelor's degree in childhood education from the State University of New York at Fredonia, and I currently teach fifth grade.

Procedures of Study

First, the letters of consent to parents (Appendix A) and letters to students (Appendix B) were sent out and signed. These letters outlined the procedures of the study. Next, all participants were given three separate reading assessments. Each

reading assessment was at a level "O" based on Fountas and Pinnel's leveling system. Students at grade level should be at a level "V" half way through the fifth grade year, so the letter "O" represents a struggling reader. The three different assessments given to each student were a fiction text, an informational nonfiction text, and a historical fiction text. While these assessments were given, the teacher performed a running record for each text. The objective of this research was to determine the effects that various text features have on a student's individual reading level. After observing how students interacted with different texts, I am now able to create a more accurate reader's profile for each student and teach them on a more appropriate level. Based on how students interact with each text, I am able to adapt my future lessons to better meet individual needs. By analyzing students' fluency, comprehension, and accuracy rate, I was able to pinpoint exactly where their reading skills began to break down. Identifying the reading levels of students is just the beginning of good reading instruction and only one component of an overall reading diagnosis. By analyzing the results of this study, I was able to get a much more detailed look at what my students' strengths and weaknesses were. I am now able to adapt my instruction, so my students will achieve maximum growth. The results of this study will help guide my reading instruction to better meet the needs of each individual student, therefore allowing all of my students to find greater academic success.

Instruments for Study

The primary instrument of study used was Fountas and Pinnel's running records kit. In this kit each text is paired with a formal reading assessment. This reading

assessment consists of three parts: a running record, a miscue analysis, and a comprehension test.

While the student is reading, the teacher fills out the running record portion of the assessment. This gives an accurate accuracy rate and allows the teacher to evaluate both the child's decoding skills on a particular text as well as the child's fluency. Accuracy rates are calculated by taking the word count and applying a percentage of the words missed. Fluency scores are taken by timing the participant's reading and analyzing how many words are read per minute.

A miscue analysis is then done by analyzing all of the mistakes and self-corrections that the participant makes when reading. Self-correction rate is determined by adding the miscues and the self-corrections and then dividing by the number of self-corrections. For example, eight miscues plus four self-corrections mean that the participant self-corrected at a rate of 4:12 times or one out of every three mistakes. Miscues are then analyzed and broken up in to three different categories: graphaphonic or visual, semantic or meaning, and syntactic which is based on clues from the text. This analysis allows the teacher to see specifically where and why the participant is making errors.

The comprehension test consists of three different categories: about the text, within the text, and beyond the text. The teacher begins by asking the participant to retell the text. This allows the teacher to evaluate whether the student understands the text at a very basic level. Next, the teacher asks more specific questions about the text. This allows the teacher to evaluate whether the participant comprehends the text at a deeper level. Finally, the teacher asks questions beyond the text. This allows the teacher to see

if the participant has developed higher level thinking about the text and is able to infer and predict.

The data from these three running records were then analyzed both qualitatively and quantitatively. Students were interviewed after each assessment to discuss the results. Students were questioned about their background knowledge of each text. Students were also questioned about their comfort ability with each genre. The teacher was able to draw trends between the three assessments by looking at accuracy, miscue, and comprehension scores. The teacher then organized the results to present the data in a quantitative manner.

Chapter 4

Results

The purpose of this study was to determine what factors influence struggling readers within a specific text. Also, to find out if varying genres have an effect on a student's fluency, accuracy, and comprehension levels. Ultimately, the goal was to find out how accurately students can read leveled texts at their own specific reading levels.

Three students were selected for this study based on their reader profiles. Each of these students was reading below grade level and each reads several levels behind what is expected for their age. All students still have difficulty with decoding and it is therefore imperative that they are matched to an appropriate text so that they can make optimal growth. If texts are too difficult, the student will become frustrated and disenfranchised. If texts are too easy, the student will make little or no growth. This precise point of scaffolded learning is known as the zone of proximal development or ZPD. The objective of this study was to determine if simply matching a student to a specific leveled text allows for students to reach the ZPD or if there are more factors involved that cause the teacher to look beyond the level of the text.

Each student was observed for several weeks during small group guided reading instruction. During this time reading profiles were created for each student by formatively assessing them and using anecdotal notes. Each student's reading level was determined based on these observations.

The students were then given three different formal reading assessments over a two week period using the Fountas and Pinnell Running Records Kit. (See Appendix D)

In each assessment the student was asked to read a short text at their individual reading level. The reading level was the same for each assessment but the genre of the texts was different. Each student was given a fiction text, a nonfiction informational text, and a historical nonfiction text. The students' accuracy rates were assessed by measuring the percentage of words that they correctly decoded for each text. Types of miscues were also noted and analyzed. Students' fluency was measured by timing them during the assessment. The number of words in the assessment multiplied by sixty and then divided by the total number of seconds it took the student to read the text gives an accurate words per minute (WPM) score. Finally, students' comprehension was measured by asking them questions within the text, beyond the text, and about the text.

Benchmark Criteria for Levels L-Z

Comprehension Scores

Accuracy	Excellent 9-10	Satisfactory 7-8	Limited 5-6	Poor 0-4
98-100%	Independent	Independent	Instructional	Hard
95-97%	Instructional	Instructional	Hard	Hard
Below 95%	Hard	Hard	Hard	Hard

The above chart was taken from Fountas and Pinnell's Assessment Guide. Its purpose is to help guide a teacher when matching a text to a student. The assessments in Fountas and Pinnell's Running Records Kit correlate with the benchmark criteria. The

student's level is determined based on their accuracy and comprehension scores on the given assessment. If a student falls in the "independent" category, the text is too easy and the student will not make the maximum amount of growth. If the student falls in the "instructional" category then the student is within the zone of proximal development. Students should be instructed at this level so that the teacher can provide them with just the right amount of scaffolded teaching to make maximum growth. If the student falls in the "hard" category then the text is too difficult and the student will soon become frustrated. Once the instructional level has been determined for a student then all teacher guided reading instruction should take place at this specific level.

Student A

Assessment	Accuracy	Fluency (WPM)	Comprehension	Suggested reading level
1: Fiction	97%	61	7/10	Instructional
2: Informational Nonfiction	98%	64	9/10	Independent
3: Historical Nonfiction	93%	57	4/10	Hard

Student A was tested at a level "O," which is five levels below grade level. The first assessment given was a fiction text about a girl moving to a new school and making friends. During the fiction assessment, the student had an accuracy rate of 97%. The student self-corrected one in every five miscues that were made. The rest of the miscues were primarily graphophonic errors. This means that the student was making visual mistakes. For example, the student read the word "the" instead of "this." The student

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saw the "th" at the beginning of the word and made a visual error. The student's words per minute (WPM) were 61. This is very low. The student read in mostly two or three-word phrases with some word-by-word reading. There was very little continuity or expressive interpretation. The student had a comprehension score of seven out of ten. The student did very well with questions about the text but scored slightly lower with questions within or beyond the text. Despite the low fluency score, the accuracy and comprehension scores suggest that a level "O" is at a perfect instructional level for this student.

Student A was then tested using a nonfiction informational text that was also at a level "O." This text was about snakes. It discussed different myths about snakes and the truth behind these myths. During this assessment, the student had an accuracy rate of 98%. The student self-corrected one in every five miscues that were made. Again, most of the miscues were graphophonic errors. The student's WPM was a score of 64. The student had a comprehension score of nine out of ten. With this assessment, the student scored very high with both questions within and about the text. Although this student continued to score very low with fluency, the accuracy and comprehension scores for this text were very high. These scores would indicate that a level "O" should be the student's independent reading level. This means that the text is below the ZPD and that the student should be challenged at a higher level text.

The third assessment that Student A took was a historical nonfiction text at a level "O." The text was about the Stamp Act and how it was a contributing cause of the Revolutionary War. The student's accuracy rate for this text was just 93%. In addition to making many graphophonic miscues, the student also had a higher rate of semantic and

visual errors. The semantic errors occurred because the student did not know the meaning of words such as "grumble" and "initial." The self-correction rate was also much lower at one correction for every ten errors. The student's WPM was a score of 57. Fluency continued to be an area of concern as the student read at a very slow rate and placed inappropriate stresses on a large number of words. The student had a comprehension score of four out of ten. This is very poor. The student scored particularly low with questions beyond and about the text. With such low scores in accuracy, fluency, and comprehension, this text is well above the student's frustration level. This means that it is far too difficult for the student to read independently. This assessment would suggest that a level "O" is far too difficult for the student and they should be placed several levels below this text.

The first assessment showed that Student A was at the right instructional level. The second assessment, however, showed that level "O" was too low and the third assessment showed that level "O" was too high. These inconsistent results point to a flaw in the leveling system. After each assessment Student A was interviewed to get some insight about the results.

Student A said that he liked the first assessment because he could relate to the text. The story is about a girl moving to a new school and having to make friends. Student A said that he felt this way when he first joined a baseball team. These text-to-life connections seem to have had an impact on his comprehension of the story.

The second assessment was an informational nonfiction text about snakes. Student A said that he loves snakes and has learned a great deal about them in the book. He has, in fact, checked books out of the library this year about snakes. Not only did he

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have some strong connections to this text but also a wealth of background knowledge.

His familiarity with the subject had little effect on his accuracy but it had a visible effect

on his comprehension. He had a very high comprehension score which indicated that the

text was too easy for him. It was surprising to see how having some background

knowledge about a subject could so drastically sway the leveling system.

Student A had his lowest scores in accuracy, fluency, and comprehension on the

third assessment. This assessment was historical nonfiction about the Stamp Act. Earlier

this year we learned about the Revolutionary War. After interviewing Student A, I found

that he was unable to make any connections between this text and the content we learned

earlier in the school year. He was confused about the topic and the content-based

vocabulary greatly hindered his accuracy score. This assessment indicated that a level

"O" was far too difficult for Student A.

These results indicate that background knowledge and genre play an enormous

role in finding an appropriate text for a student. Also, the connections the student makes

with the book can dictate how well they understand the text.

Student B

Assessment	Accuracy	Fluency (WPM)	Comprehension	Suggested reading level
1: Fiction	96%	92	7/10	Instructional
2: Informational Nonfiction	97%	88	7/10	Instructional
3: Historical Nonfiction	97%	86	8/10	Instructional

Student B was also tested at a level "O." During the first assessment using the fiction text, the student had a 96% accuracy rate. Most of the miscues made were either graphophonic or dealing with syntax. The student self-corrected one out of every four errors. This shows that the student has very good self-monitoring skills and that decoding at this level was not a major concern. The student read 92 WPM. The student read in four or five word phrase groups with some smooth, expressive interpretation. The student was also able to pause appropriately at punctuation and apply appropriate stresses on most words. This fluency score is slightly below average but again it does not prove any large deficiencies at this particular level. The student scored a seven out of ten for comprehension. The student scored average on questions above, within, and beyond the text. The student's comprehension, and accuracy scores indicate that a level "O" would be a perfect instructional level right at the ZPD.

On the informational nonfiction assessment, Student B had a 97% accuracy rate. Most miscues were due to syntax. The student self-corrected one of every five errors and read at 88 WPM. This fluency score is still slightly below grade level but the lack of phrasing did not seem to hinder the student's progress. The student scored a seven out of ten for comprehension with identical scores to the first assessment. These comprehension and accuracy scores indicate that a level "O" is at the student's instructional level.

During the third assessment, Student B had a 97% accuracy rate. The student showed very similar results as the previous two assessments. Self-corrections were at a rate of one to every five errors and most miscues were graphophonic or syntax. The student read at 86 WPM with mostly appropriate stresses and some slow downs. The

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student scored an eight out of ten for comprehension. These accuracy and comprehension scores show that the student's instructional level is appropriate at level "O."

Student B's assessments were very consistent. His accuracy, fluency, and comprehension scores all indicated that level "O" was his proper instructional level. This is a direct contrast to how Student A scored.

While interviewing Student B I did find one common theme: he was able to connect to all three assessments. Student B said that he was able to connect to the first assessment because he knows what it is like to get picked on. He is seen his peers picking on kids and he's even been picked on himself at times. He felt sorry for the new girl in the story. After reading the second assessment Student B said that he likes snakes. His uncle has a pet snake and he has always been interested in them. He did not have as much background knowledge about snakes as Student A but this connection did seem to impact his understanding of the story. After the third assessment Student B told me that he remembered learning about the Revolutionary War and that he understood how the Stamp Act was a leading cause. He connected the story to the Boston Tea Party and mentioned learning about "No taxation without representation."

Although Student B did not have a great deal of background knowledge about any of the specific texts, he was able to make connections to each story. It seems as if these connections helped him to understand the texts. Student B had very consistent results that would indicate that the leveling system is quite accurate.

Student C

Assessment	Accuracy	Fluency (WPM)	Comprehension	Suggested reading level
1: Fiction	99%	112	6/10	Instructional
2: Informational Nonfiction	98%	115	4/10	Hard
3: Historical Nonfiction	98%	110	3/10	Hard

Student C was also tested at a level "O." The student had a 99% accuracy rate on the first assessment. This student has very strong decoding skills. Although few errors were made, the student also took little time to self-correct. Student C only self-corrected one in every twelve miscues. While few errors were made, this does suggest that the student needs to work on self-monitoring skills. Student C had good fluency with a rate of 112 WPM. The student read in larger, more meaningful phrases. The reading was smooth and expressive. The comprehension score was six out of ten. The student did equally as well with questions within, beyond, and about the text. These accuracy and comprehension scores suggest that level "O" is an appropriate instructional level for the student. At this level, the student is within the ZPD.

On the second assessment Student C show good accuracy with a score of 98%. Although this is a good score, no self corrections were made during this assessment. The errors made were all graphophonic or semantic. The student continued to have good fluency with a score of 115 WPM. This is very close to grade level expectation. The

student read with appropriate stress and very few slow downs. Student C had a comprehension score of four out of ten for the second assessment. This shows poor comprehension and according to Fountas and Pinnell's benchmark criteria the text would be too hard for the student. According to this assessment the student needs to drop down to a lower level to reach their instructional ZPD.

On the final assessment Student C again showed strong accuracy with a score of 98%. The student made few miscues but again showed poor self-correcting. The student self-corrected only one time during the entire assessment. The miscues that were made were graphophonic and semantic. The student read at a rate of 110 WPM with meaningful, larger phrases and few slow downs. Despite the strong accuracy and fluency, the student scored just a three out of ten for comprehension. The student did poorly with all three types of questions on the comprehension portion of the assessment. Even though the student read the text very well it is clear that the student understood barely any of it. With such a low comprehension score this text would be too hard for the student. This data suggests that the student is below a level "O."

On all three assessments Student C had very high accuracy and fluency scores. The student was able to read almost all of the words, but had low comprehension scores. The first assessment indicated that the student's instructional level is "O" but the second two assessments show that this level would be too difficult.

After interviewing Student C she said that she liked the first assessment. Student C understood how difficult it was for the main character to move to a new school because she had to move to a new country. She remembers feeling scared and upset. Student C had a strong connection with this text and this was evident in her comprehension score.

After speaking with Student C about the next two assessments, she admitted that she didn't really understand either of them very well. She read them both very well but had very poor comprehension. Student C was able to retell parts of each text but struggled to come up with the main ideas for either one. Both of these assessments were nonfiction texts and had more content-based vocabulary. Since Student C is an English Language Learner (ELL) the nonfiction texts seem to have given her a great deal of difficulty. These assessments show that the leveling kit can be biased towards genres.

All three students had very different results with the running records assessments. Student A had varied outcomes while Student B was quite consistent. Student C did well with fiction text but struggled greatly with nonfiction texts. The results of these three participants show that teachers must look beyond the level.

Chapter 5

Conclusions and Recommendations

The purpose of this study was to examine what text features, if any, should be taken in to account when matching a text to a student. My goal was to determine how accurate leveling systems can be. I wanted to find out if students can be given a specific level to work at or if the teacher needs to factor in other text features such as genre or the student's background knowledge about the text. I used Fountas and Pinnell's Running Records Kit to give three different assessments to three different students. I wanted to see how consistent the results would be if I gave the students varied assessments at the same reading level. Each assessment was a different type of genre and the students had varying degrees of exposure to the subject matter prior to taking the assessments. My goal was to find out how heavily the teacher can rely on a leveling system when matching a text to a student.

The results that I found were very inconsistent. Student A showed great discrepancies between the three assessments. The fiction text showed that the student was right where they were supposed to be. The data showed that the student was at an instructional text and that this text was a good level for the student. The informational nonfiction text was too easy for the student. This suggests that the student should be at a higher level. Finally, the historical nonfiction text was too difficult for the student, suggesting that this level was at the student's frustration level.

I interviewed Student A after each assessment and his answers allowed me to make valuable insights about the data that was collected. Student A did well with the

fiction text because he was able to make strong personal connections. It seems that by connecting to the text he was able to comprehend the story far better. He was able to come up with specific details when retelling the story because he could relate them to his own life.

Similarly, Student A was able to make strong connections to the second assessment. The second assessment was about snakes and the student had a great deal of background knowledge about this topic. The student was also extremely interested about snakes. He had previously checked out books from the library about snakes and looked up pictures of snakes on the internet. His background knowledge teamed with his strong interest in the topic resulted in a very high comprehension score. Student A also had his highest accuracy rates during the second assessment. I believe this is because he was already familiar with much of the content-based vocabulary. Having been previously exposed to many of the content specific words allowed Student A to read more fluently and understand what he was reading.

Student A did very poorly with the third assessment which was a historical fiction text about the Stamp Act. The student struggled with accuracy and failed to read correctly many of the vocabulary words that were specific to this text. The majority of the miscues that were made were graphophonic and semantic. This was because the student had never been exposed to these words and simply skimmed over them. He often read part of the word correctly but mispronounced the whole word because he was not familiar with its meaning. This assessment showed me that Student A still has a great deal of difficulty with decoding. Although he did well with the previous two assessments, I could see that when presented with unfamiliar words Student A had poor

decoding skills and the text quickly became too difficult. This low accuracy rate had a great effect on his comprehension. I was actually a little shocked at how little Student A took away from the text. Earlier this year we studied the Revolutionary War and the factors that led up to the war. Student A was not able to make any connections from this text to what he had learned earlier this year. He is a bright student and did well in the Revolutionary War unit. This shows just how drastically a student's accuracy can affect their comprehension.

I was interested to see how inconsistent these assessments were for just one student. These results made me question the validity of the leveling system. The system was good for identifying the general range of the student. As the teacher, however, I would be doing the student a great injustice if I were to make him read books just at this leveling. These results showed me that I really need to take the time to consider a student's background knowledge and interests when matching them to a text.

There was a large discrepancy in the results for Student A and Student B. While Student A's results varied greatly between the three assessments, Student B was consistent. Each assessment showed that Student B was at an appropriate instructional reading level. Student B's accuracy, fluency, and comprehension scores were almost identical for all three assessments.

Although Student B had different results than Student A, there were some similarities. After interviewing Student B I realized that he was able to make some type of personal connection to each of the three texts. Student B was able to relate the first assessment to peer-pressure situations that he has witnessed both in and out of school. He said that he felt sorry for the new girl from the story. This shows a strong personal

connection to the main character. Similar to Student A, this connection seems to have helped his comprehension. In the post-assessment interview Student B stated that he has an interest in snakes. His uncle owns a snake and he enjoys learning about them. Student B had good comprehension scores for the second assessment and this seems to be again able to connect to the text. On the final assessment Student B was able to make connections between the text and information that we had previously covered in class. He had his highest comprehension score on the third assessment and it seems to be because of his background knowledge about the topic. Student B was able to make text-to-self, text-to-world, and text-to-text connections. His ability to relate to the characters and ideas presented in the different texts seems to have helped his comprehension.

Student C's assessment scores were also inconsistent. Despite having good fluency scores and fantastic accuracy rates on all three assessments, the second two assessments showed that the level was too difficult for the student to read. Student C did score an instructional level on the first assessment.

Student C was interesting to evaluate because she has such great accuracy scores. She can read almost any word that I put in front of her. Her phrasing needs work but I believe that this is because she comes from a different country and has a heavy accent. It's obvious by how quickly she learned the English language that she is a very bright student. The first few times I listened to Student C read I placed her much higher than she really was. After doing these assessments I realized that Student C has strong decoding skills and that these can often mask her poor comprehension.

Like the other two students tested, Student C did the best when she was able to make personal connections. On the first assessment she did well because she could relate

to the main character. In the story the main character moves to a new school. Student C not only moved to a new school but a new country as well. She could sympathize with the main character. I think that this personal connection helped her to better understand the text. The second two assessments were nonfiction texts and had a great deal of content-based vocabulary. This could be another reason why Student C did poorly with the comprehension piece of these assessments. After speaking with Student C it was clear that she did not understand a lot of the vocabulary in the second assessment. She read the words clearly but did not know what they meant. She also told me that she found the third assessment very confusing. When questioning her about the final assessment she kept giving answers about stamps. She completely missed the concept behind the Stamp Act and the connections to the Revolutionary War.

After interviewing Student C I think that she scored so lowly on the second two assessments because she had a lack of background knowledge. Student C is an ELL student and just moved to this country a little over two years ago. She did well with the fiction text because she has quickly learned conversational English and she could more easily pick up on themes of the text. For the nonfiction texts, Student C had very limited background knowledge due to the language barrier. The content specific vocabulary was too much for her to overcome and this greatly hindered her comprehension. In this case both personal connections and text genre played a great role in how the student interacted with the text.

After analyzing the data and interviewing the students I noticed several trends. The most obvious trend was that when students were able to connect to the text, their comprehension increased. This was true regardless of the genre. These connections were

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enough to move the student from hard to instructional or from instructional to independent. The students' ability to connect to the text seems to matter far greater than the specific level of the text.

Another trend I noticed is that nonfiction text was more difficult to than fiction. This was true for Student A and Student C. Student B did well with the nonfiction texts but I believe this was largely due to the fact that he could connect to them. For struggling readers the nonfiction texts in general seemed to pose more difficulty. I believe this is because of the amount of content-based vocabulary. Student A had poor decoding while Student C had strong decoding. Regardless of their ability to decode the words, both students struggled greatly with the historical fiction assessment. Without any background knowledge or exposure to the vocabulary, these students struggled greatly.

The third trend I noticed is that background knowledge had an enormous effect on what level the student should be reading at. With the two nonfiction assessments Student A went from an independent level to a hard or frustration level. This was entirely because of Student A's background knowledge. He had a great deal of exposure to the topics in the second assessment and therefore was able to comprehend the text well. It seems that to better comprehend a text, students need a certain level of prior exposure to the topic.

Overall, based on the results from my study, I was able to come up with the following conclusions. The first is that students simply need to read more. Student A showed great difficulty with fluency and accuracy. Student C struggled with unfamiliar vocabulary. The best way to improve fluency while enhancing vocabulary is to practice.

The students tested need to have daily independent reading in order to improve the skills needed to become successful readers.

Since the leveling system showed such inconsistent results, it will be more difficult to match students up with appropriate independent level texts. To better match my students to texts I could have them keep ongoing lists of topics that they are interest them. If I can find books around their appropriate level that they are interested in, I would be willing to send them home so that the students could practice independently.

If I had to do this project over again, I would like to get parents more involved. It would be interesting to add a "home" piece to the study. I would like to see what the students' reading habits are at home and what opportunity they are given to read. I wonder if these trends would have an effect on student reading levels. I could survey parents or even keep an ongoing log. I think that these results could be telling. I would like to see what the connection would be between reading at home and classroom success. It would also be interesting to study these comparisons for both struggling students and higher-level students.

After doing this study there are a couple of recommendations that I would make. Since some students seemed to struggle more with nonfiction texts I think it would be a good idea to pre-read any content-based books with kids. A picture walk or small summary might help fill the gaps in background knowledge. By providing a base a base for the student to work from, you might greatly improve their comprehension.

Teachers should keep in mind that ELL students have a limited amount of background knowledge in content areas because of a language barrier. I would stay away from nonfiction texts for beginner ELL students. For more advanced ELL students it

would be important to pre-teach any new vocabulary. These words may be so foreign to the students that they can't use context clues to assist them. I would also pre-teach any complex concepts that might be discussed in a nonfiction text.

In a profession where leveling has become the newest craze, this study helped to open my eyes. It made me realize that there is no set formula that can be applied to a given student to make them read better. Leveling seems like a good concept and it can help to give teachers an approximate idea as to where the student should be performing. The assessments yielded useful data and I would continue to use them as a summative tool. I would not, however, slap a label on a given student and confine him/her to that one category. In the end there is no substitute for good teaching. Knowing your students' backgrounds and interests is a far better assessment tool than knowing their specific level. Teachers need to look beyond leveling and get back to what's really important: the students.

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Appendices

May 23, 2012

Dear Fifth Grade Parents,

This form describes a research study being conducted with students about their reading levels. The purpose of this research is to find out how to best match a student to a given text so that the student can make the most possible growth as a reader. I am currently a student at SUNY College at Brockport and this research is part of my Master's Degree.

Your child's participation in this study is completely voluntary. Being in the study or refusing to be in it, will not affect your child's grades or class standing. S/he is free to change her/his mind or stop being in the study at any time. The possible benefit from being in this study is to improve reading skills.

I understand that:
1. My child's participation is voluntary and s/he has the right to refuse to answer any questions. S/he will have a chance to discuss any questions s/he has about the study with me.
2. My child's confidentiality is guaranteed. Her/his name will not be written on the research and there will be no way to connect my child to the data. If any publication results from this research, s/he would not be identified by name. Results will be given anonymously and in group form only, so that neither the participants nor their schools can be identified. Participation will have no effect on grades status.
3. There will be no anticipated personal risks or benefits because of participation in this project.
4. My child's participation involves completing three different reading assessments with the teacher. It is estimated that it will take 20 minutes to complete each assessment.
5. Data and consent forms will be kept separately in a locked filing cabinet by me and will be destroyed by shredding when the research has been completed.

You are being asked whether or not you will permit your child to participate in this study. If you wish to give permission to participate, and you agree with the statement below, please sign in the space provided.

I understand the information provided in this form and agree to allow my child to participate as a participant in this project. I am 18 years of age or older. I have read and understand the above statements. All my questions about my child's participation in this study have been answered to my satisfaction.

(Next Page...Over)

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If you have any questions you may contact:

<u>Primary Researcher</u>   **<u>Faculty Advisor</u>**
Brian Romeo   Dr. Thomas Allen
260-0079   727-9777
Romeos4@yahoo.com   duffy12@rochester.rr.com

_____
Signature of Parent/Date

Child's Name   _____

May 23, 2012

Dear Fifth Graders,

I am taking a college course at SUNY Brockport and I am studying how to best pick reading material at your reading level. Students like to read all different types of texts and I'm trying to find out how this affects which reading level you should be at.

A possible benefit from this study is to become a better reader. You also might find out how to pick out books at a more appropriate reading level.

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. If you refuse, it will not affect your grades in any way. You are also free to change your mind or stop being in the study at any time.

I understand that:

1. My participation is voluntary and I have the right to refuse. I will also have a chance to discuss any questions I have with my teacher.
2. My confidentiality is guaranteed. My name will not be used in the study and nobody will ever find out who I am. If the study is published, it will not be connected to me.
3. There will be no anticipated risks or benefits because of participation in this project.
4. My participation involves taking three reading assessments and each one will take about 20 minutes to complete
5. Data and consent forms will be kept separately in a locked filing cabinet and will be destroyed by shredding when the research has been completed.

You are being asked whether or not you want to participate in this study. If you wish to participate, and you agree with the statement below, please sign in the space provided. You can refuse to participate even if your parent/guardian gives permission for you to participate.

If you have any questions you may contact:

Primary Researcher **Faculty Advisor**
Brian Romeo   Dr. Thomas Allen
260-0079   727-9777
Romeos4@yahoo.com   duffy12@rochester.rr.com

I understand the information provided in this form and agree to participate in this project.

_____

Signature of Participant/Date

_____

Birth date of participant

Sample prompting questions

Questions within the text:
Can you summarize what happened in this story?
Then what happened?
What else happened?
Can you say more about that?

What happened first in the story? (....next?...last?)
Tell what happened then.

Questions beyond the text:
Predict what will happen next.
Why do you think this?

Why do you think this happened?

What can the character do to help this situation?

How has the character changed?

How does this make you feel?

Do you have a connection?
(text to self/text/world)

How is the setting of this story different than today?

Questions about the text:
What caused _____ to happen?

How did the character feel?
Why do you think _____ acted this way?

What is the problem in the story?
How did the character solve the problem?

Look at the first part of this story. How did the writer begin?
Do you think this was a good way to start? Why (not)?

Are there any specific details you can remember from the text that show _____?
What figurative language did the author use to support this?

What is the theme of this story?

How is this text organized?
What genre is this text?

Running Reading Record / F & P Aligned to Level L-Z

Student & Grade: _____

Date: _____

Text Title & Level: _____

<u>**Comprehension Score:**</u>   /10

Page	Text	E	SC	E			SC		
				M	S	V	M	S	V
	Sub-Totals:								

Scores: Words correct = _____ **% Accuracy**
SC Rate= 1: _____ **total # words**
(E + SC) / SC = 1: _____

Independent = 98-100%	Instructional = 95-97%	Frustration = 94% and below

Fluency Scoring Key *		
0	Reads primarily word-by-word with occasional but infrequent or inappropriate phrasing; no smooth or expressive interpretation, irregular pausing, and no attention to author's meaning or punctuation; no stress or inappropriate stress and slow rate	**Fluency Scoring Key (Circle score:)**
1	Reads primarily in 2 word phrases with some 3 & 4 word groups and some word-by-word reading; almost no smooth, expressive interpretation or pausing guided by author's meaning and punctuation; almost no stress or inappropriate stress and slow rate	0 1 2 3
2	Reads primarily in 3 & 4 word phrase groups; some smooth, expressive interpretation and pausing guided by author's meaning and punctuation; mostly appropriate stress and rate with some slowdowns	
3	Reads primarily in larger, meaningful phrases or word groups; mostly smooth, expressive interpretation and pausing guided by author's meaning and punctuation; appropriate stress and rate with only a few slowdowns	

Use bottom of sheet for notes re: student responses to selected FICTION comprehension conversation questions:

Comprehension Questions for Fiction Texts

WITHIN the Text (Literal)	BEYOND the Text (Inferential)	ABOUT the Text (Critical)
• Talk about what happened…first? …next? …at the end? • Tell some of the things that… • What was the problem? …How was it solved? • What did char.do to solve problem? • What was the mystery? surprise? • Summarize…	• How do you think (char.) felt? • What kind of person do you think (char) was? • What can you infer/predict? • What makes you think that…? • How did (char) change and why? • Tell why you think… • Connections…	• Is this a good story? • How did the writer show …? • How did the writer help you…? • What lesson is the author trying to teach? • How did you like the ending? • What might you change? • Why do you think the writer included…?

Comprehension Scoring Key

0	Reflects **no** understanding of the text. Either does not respond or talks off the topic.
1	Reflects **very limited** understanding of the text. Mentions a few facts or ideas but does not express the important information or ideas.
2	Reflects **partial** understanding of the text. Includes important information and ideas but neglects other key understandings.
3	Reflects **excellent** understanding of the text. Includes almost all important information and main ideas.

Guide to Total Score:

9-10 **Excellent** Comprehension

7-8 **Satisfactory** comprehension

5-6 **Limited** comprehension

0-4 **Unsatisfactory** comprehension

Within text notes:	Score: 0 1 2 3

Beyond text notes:	Score: 0 1 2 3
About text notes:	Score: 0 1 2 3

Subtotal score:___
_ / 9
Add 1 for additional

understandings:____ / 1

Total score: ____ / 10

Use bottom of sheet for notes re: student responses to selected <u>NONFICTION</u> comprehension conversation questions:

Comprehension Questions for Nonfiction Texts

WITHIN the Text (Literal)	BEYOND the Text (Inferential)	ABOUT the Text (Critical)
• Explain what you learned about____ • What facts did you learn? • Tell me in your own words... • Can you find ... in the text? • What did you notice about...? • What were some important facts about...? • Tell how...happens/works. • Explain the meaning of the title.	• What is the most important info/idea? • What did you learn that was new? • So what is probably true about...? • Why are blank...so important to...? • What led to...? • What might happen if...? • Look at (text feature)...what does it tell you? • How are ...like...? different from...?	• Why do you think the writer included (text feature)? • How did the author help you to...? • Why did the author write this book? • What did the writer do to get you interested in this topic? • What does the author want you to think about...?

Comprehension Scoring Key

0	Reflects **no** understanding of the text. Either does not respond or talks off the topic.
1	Reflects **very limited** understanding of the text. Mentions a few facts or ideas but does not express the important information or ideas.
2	Reflects **partial** understanding of the text. Includes important information and ideas but neglects other key understandings.
3	Reflects **excellent** understanding of the text. Includes almost all important information and main ideas.

Guide to Total Score:

9-10 Excellent Comprehension

7-8   Satisfactory comprehension

5-6   Limited comprehension

0-4   Unsatisfactory comprehension

Within text notes:	Score: 0 1 2 3
Beyond text notes:	Score: 0 1 2 3
About text notes:	Score: 0 1 2 3

Subtotal score:____
_ / 9
Add 1 for additional

understandings:____ / 1