Higher Levels of Differentiation in Reading Instruction: a potential framework

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HIGHER LEVELS OF DIFFERENTIATION IN READING

Chapter 1: Introduction

It is a busy, bustling morning in a third grade classroom. The PowerPoint projected on the board shows the rotation for Reader's Workshop. The students don't need to refer to the board because everyone knows who is in which group. It has been that way since kindergarten. The teacher knows that some of her "high" students have gaps in their decoding and encoding skills. She also knows that some of her "approaching" students have strong verbal comprehension and analysis skills. How can she meet all these needs and make sure each child is getting the instruction that they need?

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Problem Statement

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According to *The National Assessment of Educational Progress* (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2007), "the average reading scores for students who were eligible for either free or reduced-price lunch showed no significant change in comparison to 2005" (p. 31). The report also found that there has been no significant change in the score gap between white and minority students from 1992 to 2007 (p. 29). The same organization issued a report in 2013 and found that scores in reading did not change from 2009 to 2013, and that scores had in fact decreased from 1992 (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2013). This is a call to arms for educators to continue to search for ways to meet the needs of all learners in their classrooms. Despite the fact that many schools have implemented Response to Intervention (RtI) models to support at-risk students, and most schools now acknowledge the importance of early intervention with reading difficulties, these statistics show that there is still much work to be done.

This data suggests that educators have to refine their practices even further, even within the RtI framework, and create a model which meets the needs of all readers. This is particularly crucial for those who are struggling to read at grade level. The research shows that students who

qualify for Tier II, or nearly qualify for these interventions, are either falling farther behind or barely maintaining their below-grade level skills.   The next challenge in literacy education is to reach all but the most significantly below-grade readers' needs within the classroom or with minimal additional resources. There are neither the financial resources, nor the will on the part of policy makers, to provide a large influx of additional resources and staffs to schools. This work will have to be done within the classroom and with the existing supplemental resources currently available. This means that teachers will have to target their time and instruction very carefully using data and assessment to guide their instructional decisions for each child. Otaiba, Connor, Folsom, Greulich, and Meadows (2011) found that teachers could learn to carry out this Individualized Student Instruction (ISI). They then documented the gains in students' reading scores that resulted from the new framework for delivering instruction.

Significance of Problem

With the nationwide use of *Common Core Learning Standards* (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010), a strong foundation in decoding and comprehending text by the beginning of third grade is essential to success in both language arts and math. Students who lack these skills will find the emphasis on using complex texts as the basis for nearly all their academic work, extremely frustrating. The need for accelerated remediation has never been stronger. Connor et al. (2013) found that data-driven, individualized instruction was most effective when provided consistently for at least three years. The authors noted that, "students who attended ISI classrooms all 3 years achieved reading skills that were well above grade-level expectations by the end of third grade" (p. 1416). In addition, gaps in effective instruction in any grade kindergarten through third were shown to have a negative impact on students' reading progress.

This research only highlights the need for reading instruction in the early grades to be as effective and efficient as possible in meeting the needs of all students. As elementary grades are critical in future reading success, attention must be given to practices and assessment tools used in these early grades. If professional development in individualized instruction can be successfully provided to teachers, who in turn can provide this instruction to their students, we have an obligation to find a way to make this happen in our general education classrooms.

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to examine a flexible individualized reading block model which assigned small group instruction and tasks for students by studying baseline data. The instruction was delivered to address two of the components of literacy, spelling or phonics, and comprehension. The model sought to use the data to determine whether a child needed code-focused, or meaning-focused instruction, and if the instruction should be teacher- or child-managed. The teacher then assigned instructions and tasks accordingly. Through the use of ongoing assessment and further data collected at the end of the study, the teacher/researcher documented student results. While phonics and comprehension were the focus of the instructional groups, and vocabulary was added to the phonics instruction, the other components were also assessed because the five components of literacy are so closely related. By choosing student participants who have diverse socio-economic, ethnic, and academic backgrounds the study attempted to gain information about the effectiveness of the framework within a diverse range of learners.

In order for this study to be of use in a larger realm, the amount of work and planning time would have to be practical at a district-wide level. In addition, the researcher acknowledges that the assessment tools used may not have been as accurate in targeting instruction as the A2i

software used in multiple studies cited in this proposal (Connor et al., 2013; Connor, Morrison,

Fishman, Schatschneider, & Underwood, 2007; Connor, Morrison, & Underwood, 2007; Otaiba

et al., 2011). Nonetheless, this study sought to determine if such a model is effective, or even

realistic, in the general education setting.

Definition of Terms:

Code-focused: Instruction that is focused on phonics, phonemic awareness, and word

identification skills.

Meaning-focused: Instruction that is focused on comprehension and gaining meaning from text.

Teacher Managed: Instruction that is explicit and is led by the teacher.

Student Managed: Independent, partner, or small-group work where students monitor their own

learning and the learning of their peers.

Summary:

Teaching children to read in the early grades is crucial to their future success.

Differentiation, the workshop model, small-group instruction, and RtI have all allowed educators

to make gains in reaching a greater range of students and abilities within the general education

classroom. Nevertheless, statistics from *The National Assessment of Educational Progress*

(National Center for Educational Statistics, 2007) clearly show that we still have work to do,

particularly for minority students and students of lower socio-economic status. This study will

work to explore an instructional model that uses assessment data to drive the content and process

of instruction in a third grade classroom. It will seek to provide a more individualized

framework for instruction to all students. In the process, the data for a sampling of students will

be studied to determine the efficacy of the model within the classroom.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

Much has been written to support differentiation practices over the years. Nevertheless,

some of the key questions are still being researched and discussed. At what age is it most

important to differentiate instruction? Who should deliver the instruction to the students? What

type of instruction is most effective? In what setting or using what process should instruction be

delivered? Which data should be used to guide differentiated instruction, testing or teacher

judgment? Should the content or the process be the focus of the differentiation?

Differentiation: how it works

In the view of Tomlinson (2001), one of the seminal researchers on differentiation,

"differentiated instruction provides multiple approaches to content, process, and product" (p. 4).

Tomlinson also addresses some of the concerns and misunderstandings that surround

differentiation and its implementation. She argues that it is not chaotic and unstructured, but

rather carefully planned and supported by assessment. In addressing the concerns of many

educators, Tomlinson also notes that differentiation does not require doing something different

with 30 students. She does believe that it should be qualitative as opposed to quantitative in that

it does not just ask more of the same task from one student and less from another. In fact, she

makes the observation that a teacher who is truly differentiating instruction "is fully aware that

every hour of teaching, every day in the classroom can reveal one more way to make the

classroom a better match for its learners" (p. 5). Tomlinson was ahead of her time in addressing

the issue of academic, experiential, and cultural diversity with our classrooms. In *How to Differentiate Instruction in Mixed-Ability Classrooms* (2001) she states that how students learn best should be "the engine that drives effective differentiation" (p. 8). She provides examples of multiple modes of differentiation including interests, readiness, learning-style, presentation by student and teacher, and academic background and skills. Her work has been instrumental in guiding educators by providing research-based advice on using differentiation in a practical way in the classroom. This advice will be helpful in this study in order to navigate the logistics and management of a highly-differentiated classroom.

In their case study of an exemplary teacher, Ankrum and Bean (2008) sought to look at the research on differentiated reading instruction and used this case study to provide practical examples for teachers on how to differentiate instruction within the classroom. They noted that many teachers using whole group instruction focus on the average learner, which is detrimental to students with higher or lower ability levels. These researchers did acknowledge that reading instruction is so complex that individualizing instruction for each child is extremely difficult and time consuming for most teachers. They also stated that teachers found that whole group and even small group instruction eased classroom management issues, but they also stated that the most effective teachers were expert at managing their classrooms, even while executing small group instruction. One of the components that was indicative of exemplary differentiated classroom instruction was systematic on-going instruction which allowed the teachers to carefully pinpoint students' needs and group them flexibly to target students' specific goals. One of Ankrum and Bean's stated reasons for undertaking the case study was, while many acknowledge the need for increased levels of differentiated instruction, there is very little

research based information or literature on specifically how to differentiate instruction by content, pacing, skills, and materials.

While discussing the complexity of planning for this type of instruction Ankrum and Bean (2008) describe six important areas that need to considered; assessment, grouping formats, classroom management, materials, length and frequency of instruction, and lesson focus. Although most districts have mandated assessments throughout the year, they argue that in order to be effective, assessments must be "comprehensive, on-going, classroom-based, and easy to administer and interpret" (p. 138). This study showed that grouping can be used effectively in various formats. Whole-group instruction can be used to introduce or teach a curriculum-based skill or concept. Small-group instruction is most effective when used to target a specific need, based on interpretation of the assessments, and individualized instruction is used to meet the particular or intensive needs of struggling students. In response to prevalent concerns about classroom management, these authors suggest a variety of approaches including literacy centers, independent reading, and written reading responses. Materials, lesson focus, and frequency and duration of instruction, can be difficult for a teacher to manage as they are often mandated or controlled at the state or district level. The authors note that strong teachers take advantage of any flexibility that they have. The most important factor found that it is the teacher, not the pacing or the materials that makes the most difference when it comes to effective differentiated instruction.

Struggling Learners

One of the most compelling arguments to increase levels of differentiation within the general education classroom is to meet the needs of struggling readers. Research from Connor, Morrison, & Underwood (2007) found that "the impact of particular instruction strategies may

depend on children's reading and vocabulary skills" (p. 205). So even high quality, well-planned

instruction may have little impact on a child whose current skill level requires a different form or

process of instruction. Torgesen (2002) argued that in order to prevent reading difficulties in at-

risk students, some critical elements had to be part of regular classroom instruction. According

to Torgesen these elements must include explicit instruction, more intensive and direct learning

opportunities, and instruction must be more supportive and encouraging. He acknowledges that

these requirements would "involve a reallocation of resources to make more teacher time

available for preventative instruction" (p. 18). This may or may not be a realistic goal, so in the

meantime educators will have to create a structure for literacy learning that is more supportive of

struggling readers. Torgesen notes that students who struggle to read in fourth grade have

consistently had trouble with word identification stemming from a lack of alphabetic skills and

phonemic awareness. This supports the contention that code-focused explicit instruction could

have a powerful effect on students in the early grades. Torgesen also believes that schools must

have the will to consistently use early assessment tools, provide teachers with the skills needed to

teach children who do not learn easily, and create a structure to deliver the interventions in a

timely and effective way. Torgesen provides further support for the link that is found between

assessment and effective instruction, particularly for struggling readers.

Using Data to Drive Instruction

True differentiation is based on the needs of the child. In order to determine these needs

with accuracy timely and meaningful assessment is required. Or, as Tomlinson (2001) states,

"Differentiated instruction is rooted in assessment" (p. 4). She also notes that assessment is no

longer just an end of unit check to see who "got it" or to provide a grade for a report card, but is

an ongoing dynamic process that is used by teachers to plan, determine instruction, make

groupings, and even guides future assessments. Madelaine & Wheldall (2005) argued that an

over-reliance on teacher judgment to identify low-progress readers was a mistake. They found

little reliability in teacher judgments in which students were the lowest performing readers when

measured by a curriculum-based measure (CBM). In fact, their study found just over one-half of

teachers selected the poorest readers as identified by the CBM. This has major implications

when teachers are determining grouping and the amount and content of instruction. An objective

and easily administered assessment is a key part of each teacher's toolbox.

In the studies that used A2i (Connor et al., 2013; Connor, Morrison, Fishman,

Schatschneider, & Underwood, 2007; Connor, Morrison, & Underwood, 2007; Otaiba et al.,

2011) researches assessed language and reading scores that were entered in to the software. The

software then generated a multidimensional framework stated how much code- or meaning-

focused instruction each child needed. A2i also determined whether the instruction should be

teacher- or child-managed. This use of assessment was not the only piece of the individualized

instruction framework, but it was the foundation of the decision making and instruction that

followed.

Individualized Instruction

The purpose of this study is to look at a more individualized model of reading instruction.

While the studies by Connor and other researchers cited throughout this review are the basis for

much of the study, there will be limitations in replicating some aspects of their work. Those

studies included a significant ongoing professional development component in using the A2i data

to deliver the specifically targeted instruction. It also included bi-weekly classroom-based

support and resources for center-based activities. These resources would undoubtedly aid in a

more fully differentiated classroom. The research into the ISI approach does provide an

intriguing model, and a possible way forward in meeting children's specific reading needs.

Connor, Morrison and Underwood (2007) examined the relationship between student

progress and language arts instruction which is teacher-managed and code-focused, and

instruction, which is child-managed and meaning-focused. The study found that students with

weaker skills at the beginning of first grade had greater growth at the end of second grade when

they received more teacher-managed code-focused instruction. One of the key findings of this

study was that students who had weaker reading skills at the end of first grade benefitted from

optimal instruction in second grade, allowing them a second chance to achieve grade level

reading skills.

The authors sought to investigate whether code-focused instruction was less important in

second grade than in first. This multi-dimensional view of reading instruction is a key

component of differentiated instruction, in that it seeks to tailor the content and method of

instruction. The study looks at the optimal time for these different dimensions of instruction to

take place to ensure the most growth in a student's reading ability. Code-focused instruction

emphasizes phonological decoding, letter-sound connections, phonemic awareness, and word

identification which result in a higher level of reading fluency, while meaning-focused

instruction is designed to allow students to gain deeper meaning and understanding of text. The

concept of teacher-managed versus child-managed instruction distinguishes whether it is the

teacher or the student who is responsible for focusing attention on the learning task. For

example, teacher-managed instruction includes substantial child adult interaction with the

teacher monitoring the child's reading and drawing the child's attention to a task. Child-

managed instruction might include small group discussion with peers or independent work which

promotes student learning. While all of these dimensions will be used with most students, the emphasis and time spent on one type is determined by the learner characteristics.

Children with lower letter-word reading scores benefitted more from the teacher-managed code-focused instruction. This might include alphabet activities, word segmentation, and phonemic awareness activities. Students who had higher letter-word reading scores going into first grade benefitted from less teacher-managed code-focused instruction in first grade but more in second grade. Most importantly, the researchers found that for students with low initial skills, increased teacher-managed code-focused instruction in second grade could compensate for less than optimal teaching in first grade. This study has strong implications about the importance of targeting both the format and type of instruction that a student receives based on their assessment information. It also lends support to the idea that students flourish when their specific learning needs are met, and that strong well-planned instruction can even mitigate the damage of some period of time with less than optimal instruction.

The study by Otaiba et al. (2011) sought to determine if kindergarten teachers could modify their instruction based on the differentiated plans created by the A2i program. The authors then examined the efficacy of this differentiation on students' reading outcomes. This extensive cluster-randomized study involved 14 schools, professional development for the studied teachers, and a contrast group of teachers who also received baseline professional development on differentiation. The researchers' goal was to create a hybrid of the Tier 1 (classroom instruction) and Tier 2 (targeted and differentiated small-group interventions) components of the RtI program within a general education classroom. This study also used A2i to create a targeted instructional plan for each child. It determined how much teacher-managed (TM) code-focused instruction and child-managed (CM) meaning-focused instruction each child

needed. The teachers in the study were then asked to modify their instruction accordingly. The

sample for this study was carefully chosen to include an ethnically and socio-economically

diverse group of students and included students with disabilities. This lends even more weight to

the results that found that students whose teachers used the individualized instructional approach

achieved stronger reading performance results than those whose teachers did not.

In a subsequent study, Connor et al. (2013) conducted a 3-year, cluster-randomized

controlled, longitudinal efficacy study which looked at the impact of 1, 2, or 3 years of

individualized reading instruction in first through third grade. It is important to note that 45% of

the student participants came from families living in poverty. This study provided some

important findings about the sustained effect of the instruction. The study showed that 94 percent

of the students receiving individualized instruction in all three grades were reading proficiently,

compared to only 78 percent who did not receive the instruction consistently for three years. In

addition, while this form of instruction was necessary in first grade for future success, it was

enough on its own to reach the stronger third grade outcomes.

What maybe one of the key components of this study, is that all the instruction was

provided by general education teachers within the classroom. The implication is that general

education teachers can make a substantial impact on Tier I and Tier II students, if they provide

the right instruction. While this study is on a small and modified scale, it will seek to find out if

the philosophy and practice of differentiating to the greatest extent possible, makes a difference

in students' reading outcomes.

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Summary

The theoretical foundation for differentiation has been demonstrated by seminal researchers such as Tomlinson (2001) and Torgesen (2002). The new research into individualized student instruction undertaken by Connor and other researchers (Connor et al., 2013; Connor, Morrison, Fishman, Schatschneider, & Underwood, 2007; Connor, Morrison, & Underwood, 2007; Otaiba et al., 2011) takes the next step, and moves instruction towards meeting the needs of each learner and not each group of learners.

Chapter 3: Study Design

Methodology and Design

This study was designed to be a collective case study (Clark & Creswell, 2010) of five students in one third grade general education classroom. It was an in-depth exploration of the students' progress in the five components of literature, during the study period. The study will use multiple forms of data, both quantitative and qualitative. The findings will include "descriptions, themes, and lessons learned" (Clark & Creswell, 2010 p. 293). This chapter will describe the procedures used in the study, the participants, and data collection and analysis procedures. In addition, it will look at the possible limitations of the study.

Positionality of the Researcher

The researcher is a third grade teacher in the general education classroom that is the setting for this study. The district in which the study takes place is encouraging their staff to work with newly-purchased assessment resources to target instruction and differentiation. The model used by the teacher and the district up until this year has been a 9 block Reader's Workshop model. This model usually included three groups of students who rotated through

small group work with the teacher, independent work, and peer group work within a 90 minute

language arts block. Students were traditionally grouped as approaching standards, meeting

standards, and exceeding standards.

Questions:

The study will attempt to answer the following questions:

- Can assessment data be used to differentiate the instruction delivered to each student in a general education classroom?

- Is this model of individualized instruction feasible in a general education classroom with one teacher and no additional classroom support?

- What is the impact of this model of instruction on students' progress in the different components of reading?

Participants

The study was conducted in a public K-3 elementary school located in a Western New

York inner-ring suburb. The third grade classroom consists of 18 general education students.

There are 9 boys and 9 girls in the class. 44% of the students within the classroom qualify for

free or reduced price lunch and of the 18, 11 are Caucasian and 8 are minority students. There is

one Limited English Proficient student in the class. Two of the students are residents of a nearby

city and participate in a program in which city students attended suburban schools. One of these

students is a study participant. She attended urban public schools until second grade and came to

her present school in third grade. Five participants were chosen when permission was received

from guardians or parents. Every attempt was made to attain gender and cultural diversity

among the participants. There was also an attempt to include economically disadvantaged

students. This demographic subset of students had a 6% passing rate on the New York State

Language Arts Test in the school's third grade cohort last year. All names used in this article

and its appendices are pseudonyms.

Student Participants

Mary

Mary is a nine year old Caucasian girl from a two-parent middle class family. Both of

Mary's parents have shown substantial support for her academic and social emotional well-

being. She has a background steeped in literacy, books, enrichment activities and travel.

Nonetheless, she has come to the third grade with a long history of anxiety and currently receives

one-on-one counseling. Despite strong fluency scores, her comprehension including verbal and

written responses to literature showed a significant lack of comprehension and overall

understanding of text. For these reasons, during the first part of her third grade year she received

academic intervention services for language arts for 30 minutes each day.   Mary continued to

show symptoms of intense anxiety and her teacher, in consultation with her parents and AIS

providers, determined that her needs would be better served receiving intensive intervention

within the classroom setting. The attention and focus on her perceived deficits was increasing

her anxiety and reinforcing a lack of confidence.

Mary presented at the beginning of the study with above average Aimsweb reading

fluency scores and comprehension maze scores. Her encoding, or spelling scores, were below

grade level, and her baseline reading score which includes short tests on all aspects of literacy,

was one of the lowest within her class. Her incoming second grade scores on a nationally

normed test were very low compared to her third grade peers. For the study, Mary was chosen to participate in spelling and comprehension small group instruction with the teacher.

Lee

Lee is an eight year old African American boy. He is one of four children to parents who are immigrants from Ethiopia. His family is eligible for free and reduced lunch. His parents are very involved in all of their children's academic lives and attend all school functions and parent conferences. A mixture of Ethiopian and English is spoken within the home. The family places a lot of value on academic success and Lee works hard to please both teachers and parents. Lee scored in the average range on the Scott Foresman Baseline Test but within the overall scores, comprehension was notably lower than the class average. Lee also has below grade level spelling scores. His fluency scores were above average but he showed a higher than average error rate also. Lee was chosen for both of the comprehension and spelling small groups.

Mikayla

Mikayla is an eight year old African American/Latino girl. She came to her current school through a program which sends urban students to suburban schools to diversify the student body and provide additional opportunities to urban students. She comes from a single parent family and is eligible for free and reduced lunch. Her mother is very involved in her academic progress and has weekly, sometimes daily, communication with the classroom teacher.

While Mikayla scored above average on the Aimsweb fluency benchmark and her spelling scores were in the average range, her scores are some of the lowest in her class in reading comprehension and response to literature. She shows a lack of confidence and is

reluctant to tackle academic tasks without help from a peer or her teacher. Mikayla was chosen to participate in the comprehension focused small group instruction.

Eddie

Eddie is an eight year old Caucasian boy who is part of a blended family. He lives with his mother, stepfather, brother, and two stepbrothers. The family is eligible for free and reduced lunch. Eddie receives mental health counseling and is being treated for attention deficit hyper activity disorder. He came to third grade with a history of behavior and discipline problems. His beginning of the year fluency testing showed him to be just slightly above the cutoff point for receiving academic intervention services.

Eddie shows that he has strong spelling skills but his fluency and comprehension assessments showed areas of weakness. Eddie was chosen for small group instruction working on comprehension.

Sarah

Sarah is an eight year old Asian American girl who was adopted from South Korea as a baby by a two parent, middle class family. Sarah has a counseling history that shows anxiety issues around school attendance and separation from her mother. She has not attended counseling this year but still exhibits signs of anxiety within the classroom. Her family is very supportive and involved in Sarah's school and academic life.

Sarah's reading fluency scores are well above grade level. Nonetheless, she shows some areas of significant weakness in her comprehension. She struggles when receiving feedback and needs a lot of positive reinforcement to maintain effort and confidence.

Procedures of Study

This study was completed over a period of five weeks, during February and March of 2015. During this time, all students participated in a daily 90 minute Reader's Workshop block. The teacher began the block with a brief mini-lesson which focused on a theme, concept, skill or strategy related to the selection from the reading resource. The scope and sequence of these lessons is predetermined by the district's reading resource, *Scott Foresman Reading Street: Common core* (2013). After the mini-lesson students, including the study participants, were provided with reading tasks based on their individual needs. (See Appendix A)

Tasks for each student were determined by the baseline data results which highlighted areas of need within various components of literacy. The content and method of the instruction attempted to follow the results of Connor et al. (2013) study and provide students who lack word identification skills, or show a deficit in comprehension, with increased teacher-managed, code-focused instruction, while providing students with stronger initial skills, opportunities to take part in student managed meaning-focused instruction based instruction. This did not take place every day of the five week period. There were occasions where whole-group instruction, partner activities, performance reading and other instructional delivery methods were used. The majority of the instruction and student tasks were assigned based on the teacher- or child-managed and code-, or meaning-focused model (Connor et al., 2013; Connor, Morrison, Fishman, Schatschneider, & Underwood, 2007; Connor, Morrison, & Underwood, 2007; Otaiba et al., 2011).

Students who showed lagging skills received direct code or meaning-focused instruction from the teacher in a small group setting. This included phonics work on syllabication and sound identification. These groupings were flexible and inclusion in any group was based on

assessment data. Students received, often within the same day, small group teacher-managed instruction which was meaning focused and small group instruction that was code focused. This instruction included discussions around vocabulary work and increasing comprehension monitoring strategies. Students who had higher initial scores on word-reading had opportunities to work with peers in comprehension related activities in more complex texts. As noted by Connor, Morrison, & Underwood (2007), "for children with higher initial letter-word reading and vocabulary skills, lesser amounts of explicit code-focused instruction and greater amounts of child managed meaning-focused instruction all year long were associated with greater letter-word reading skill growth" (p. 201).

Each child received a daily agenda, which outlined the activities that they were expected to complete within a given ELA block. This included some computer-based activities associated with the reading resource. For some students they included listening to a story from the resource, or listening to a differentiated reader and then reading it with a partner. Activities also included vocabulary activities which allowed the students to make sentences from words taught during small-group instruction, listening to background information and concept talks, and answering comprehension questions. There was time for partner reading for fluency, reading decodable readers based on studied spelling feature, and reading and discussion of texts at a variety of reading levels and complexity.

Data Collection and Analysis

Various forms of data collection were used to complete this study. The students were assessed once at the beginning of the study using the Scott Foresman Reading Street Baseline Test. This test looks at phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, and comprehension. For the purposes of this study comprehension and phonics, or spelling, was the focus. The researcher

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administered the entire baseline test to each student. The small group work for both

comprehension and spelling necessarily included discussion about vocabulary and some

phonemic awareness. Those scores, while noted, will not be the central focus of the research.

The participants also received an Aimsweb Fluency Assessment to determine their fluency and

reading rate. This score helps to determine students' word identification level. In addition,

students received an Aimsweb curriculum based maze test to determine their comprehension in a

novel text. Students completed a Developmental Spelling Assessment to determine encoding or

spelling level. These tests were administered again at the end of the study to measure any

progress made by the subjects. All of these assessment tools are required by the school district

and are used as tools to screen students for inclusion in intervention services and to monitor

progress throughout the school year.

Each week the teacher used the Aimsweb curriculum based measurement passages

(2002), to monitor the progress of students who are below grade level and the students within the

study.

Aimsweb Fluency Scores Words Read Correctly per Minute/Errors									
Student Fluency	Bench Fall	Bench Winter 1/16	2/3	2/13	2/23	2/26	3/6 17	3/13	Change WRC
Mary	124/3	135/2	**130/1**	128/2	141/1	152/0	159/2	157/1	+27
Sarah	109/2	124/1	**120/1**	119/0	125/1	121/1	122/1	127/1	+7
Eddie	76/1	108/0	**120/0**	111/1	114/2	118/0	126/0	128/1	+8
Lee	96/6	101/1	**83/1**	110/1	115/7	113/4	111/1	121/1	+38
Mikayla	83/4	105/1	**112/2**	114/1	119/2	127/2	125/1	127/1	+15

Figure A:

Average improvement in WRC over six week study 16 words read correctly (WRC) per minute

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Figure B:

Recommended goals for Aimsweb Fluency goals by grade level.

Grade Level Passages	Realistic Goal Rate	Ambitious Goal Rate
5	.5 WRC per week	.8 WRC per week
4	.85 WRC per week	1.1 WRC per week
3	1.0 WRC per week	1.5 WRC per week
2	1.5 WRC per week	2.0 WRC per week
1	2.0 WRC per week	3.0 WRC per week

*WRC-words read correctly

Figure C:

Aimsweb Maze Comprehension Scores
Words chosen correctly per 3 Minutes/Errors

Student Maze	Maze Bench Fall Grade levels	Bench Winter 1/16	2/3	2/13	2/23	2/25	3/6	3/13	Change
Mary	12/2	17/3	**18/1**	23/1	20/2	19/5	21/1	25/2	+ 7
Mikayla	8/4	15/0	**12/1**	14/1	15/2	19/1	20/1	18/1	+6
Eddie	n/a	n/a	**17/0**	18/0	21/1	18/0	22/0	24/0	+7
Sarah	n/a	n/a	**18/1**	17/0	18/2	20/2	19/1	18/1	0
Lee	n/a	n/a	**12/3**	11/1	13/2	13/0	14/2	15/4	+3

Average improvement in Comprehension Maze words correct over six week study 4.6 words per 3 minutes

Figure D:

Scott Foresman Baseline 3rd Grade Test

Student Name	Phonics				Vocabulary				Reading Comprehension				Phonemic Awareness				Total Test	Total	Total Test %	Total Test %	% Change
Total possible	10	10	%	%	15	15	%	%	20	20	%	%	15	15	%	%	60	60	100	100	
Lee	8	8	80	80	14	14	93	93	15	16	75	80	15	11	100	73	52	49	87	81	-6
Sarah	6	6	60	60	15	15	100	100	14	17	70	85	14	15	93	100	49	53	82	88	+6
Eddie	8	8	80	80	15	15	100	100	11	17	55	85	15	15	100	100	49	55	82	92	+10
Mikayla	9	8	90	80	14	15	93	100	12	13	60	65	13	14	87	93	48	50	80	83	+3
Mary	7	7	70	70	11	15	73	100	13	17	65	85	11	11	73	73	42	50	70	83	+13

Black = before study assessment
Blue = after study assessment

HIGHER LEVELS OF DIFFERENTIATION IN READING

After study changes in Scott Foresman Baseline Grade 3 Test results of six week study

5.2% points increase average overall test

-2% points decrease in phonics average

6.8% points increase in vocabulary average

32 % points increase in comprehension average

Figure E:

Developmental Spelling Assessment (Within Word Stage)						
Name	Long Vowels (Vce) 5	R-Controlled Vowels 5	Other Common Long Vowels 5	Complex Consonants 5	Abstract Vowels 5	Within Word Stage Score 25	Change
Mary	5	5	3	3	5	19	
Mary	5	4	5	5	4	21	+ 3
Lee	5	5	3	2	4	22	
Lee	5	5	5	4	5	24	+2

Black = Developmental spelling scores before study

Blue = Developmental spelling scores after study

Focus of small group instruction was Other Common Long Vowels spelling feature

Figure F:

Student Assessment Change Data Over Study Period							
Student	Aims Fluency	Aims Maze	Baseline Comp	Baseline Phonics	Baseline Vocab	Baseline Phonemic Awareness	D.S.A. Spelling Feature	Spelling Stage Score
Eddie	+8	+7	+35%	0	0	0	N/A	
Lee	+38	+3	+5%	0	0	-27%	5/5	+2
Mary	+27	+7	+20%	0	+27%	0	5/5	+3
Mikayla	+ 15	+6	+5%	-10%	+7%	+6%	N/A	
Sarah	+7	0	+15%	0	0	+7%	N/A	

Anecdotal records

The researcher kept anecdotal records which recorded students' reading behaviors and any relevant conferencing notes. The students were observed for their confidence, attitudes, and willingness to read and tackle texts.

The researcher wanted to ascertain whether this reading framework model could be rolled out across a district in general education classrooms. The teacher noted how much extra work and planning time was required to implement the modified reader's workshop framework. The researcher's goal was to determine whether the framework could be used without an excessive additional burden on general education classroom teachers. To this end, the study looked at the lesson planning for the various components of literacy. In order to be a viable model for improving student outcomes, the framework must be one that does not require a large amount of additional time or resources in order to be implemented.

Criteria for Trustworthiness

In order to address concerns of bias or validity stemming from the researcher's position as classroom teacher, the data was gathered and analyzed in multiple ways. Triangulation was used to verify results that resulted from anecdotal records, audio recordings of small group discussion, and researcher notes. The quantitative data from nationally normed tests such as the Scott Foresman Third Grade Baseline Test, the Developmental Spelling Assessment, and the Aimsweb Fluency and Maze tests, were used to check the consistency of the findings.   Data was collected at the start of the study in multiple areas of literacy. The same battery of tests was administered at the end of the study. All components of literacy were tested and examined in

order to provide the most valid and accurate picture of student progress. This quantitative data validated and corroborated anecdotal researcher observations.

Findings

The researcher was struck by the amount of growth made by the study participants, despite a relatively minor adjustment to the reading workshop model. Due to the restrictions of established district expectations and the time frame for the study, the scope of the study was limited. Yet, the data showed a significant increase in the fluency scores of four out of the five participants. This was found even though fluency was one of the components of literature that was not directly addressed in the small group teacher-led instruction. The researcher found that the rich small group discussions which could be adjusted to target specific needs and misconceptions made an improvement in students' reading in general. It also improved their confidence and the students' metacognitive view of their own reading abilities. This increase in positive views towards reading was demonstrated by the participants' willingness and eagerness to participate in small group work. While Mary showed the most remarkable change in reading related behaviors, all students in the group showed an increase in confidence in their reading.

After the data was collected the researcher reviewed audio recordings of small group instruction to listen for patterns of questions, responses, and answers from students. She also reviewed student work. This included short comprehension passages used for instruction in which students had to determine importance and summarize by "chunking", or finding a word to annotate each paragraph. The students' work within the spelling group and their progress in recognizing and transferring use of complex vowel sounds was also studied. Students' writing and teacher conferences were observed for examples of skill transfer.

The data from all observations, conferences, student work, and assessments was then examined and analyzed using the constant comparative method of data analysis. Transcripts and observations were systematically analyzed and color coded for recurring themes. These themes provide the basis for the following findings.

Students with areas of reading weakness but who do not qualify for academic intervention services, benefit from this model.

One of the most significant findings of the study was that students who do not qualify for intervention services under the criteria set forth by the school district benefitted significantly from this model of reader's workshop. The students in this study all met the Aimsweb Fluency benchmark for third grade in September which is a major data point for receiving academic intervention services. In addition, none of the students fell below the Scott Foresman Baseline Test overall benchmark for third grade. Yet, Eddie, Mikayla, and Mary all scored below 70% on the comprehension portion of this assessment. Lee and Mary scored below average on the district wide developmental spelling assessment, but this assessment does not carry much weight in the school district's decision to place a child in academic intervention services.

In the course of small group, whole group instruction, and general classroom interactions it was clear that these students had gaps in their grade level reading skills. Mary, Eddie, Sarah, and Mikayla all showed a lack of independence when working with peer groups, and displayed confusion and misunderstandings in their reading. Lee worked well independently and with peers but appeared to be using a strategy of gleaning information from others as opposed to gaining a full understanding of the text independently.

Over the course of the study, Mary showed strong growth in fluency. Her rate of words read correctly increased by 27 words per minute. At the third grade level, an average rate of progress is to increase a student's reading rate by 1 word per week and an ambitious rate of progress is considered to be 1.5 words per week. Mary increased her words per minute at a rate of 5.4 words per week. Mary's baseline comprehension scores improved by 20%. Her spelling assessment that was done at the "Within Word" stage of spelling showed that she had mastered the spelling feature "Other long vowels". This was the spelling feature that was targeted as an area of need based on her Developmental Spelling Assessment. Mary's vocabulary score went from 73% to 100%. The increase in her vocabulary score is interesting because the spelling group focused heavily on vocabulary, word meaning, and multiple meaning words.

Mary was one of only two participants who received spelling/vocabulary and comprehension small group instruction. This meant that she spent a comparatively large proportion of her language arts block in teacher-focused instruction. She showed strong growth in her assessment scores but also showed some substantial gains in confidence and attitude to academic tasks. This was noted by the teacher, Mary's parents, and Mary herself. When asked at the beginning of the study if she could identify any aspects of reading that she found challenging, or that she would like help with, Mary became tearful and stated, "I forget things a lot." At the conclusion of the study when asked how she felt her reading had changed she said, "Well, I just read carefully, I visualize, and I know that the answers are really in my head if I slow down and read carefully." Over the course of the study, Mary started to ask to help peers who were struggling, and her parents reported that the process of doing homework had become less stressful. Mary now completes homework independently and then asks an adult to check it.

Both in the classroom and at home, if an error is brought to her attention she no longer becomes upset or sees an error as indicative of her overall ability to complete the task.

Eddie, whose reading rate almost qualified him for academic services in September, is now exceeding grade level standards for fluency. During the course of the study his fluency improved by 8 words read correctly per minute, which is an increase of 1.6 words per week. His comprehension score on the baseline test increased by 35%. Eddie was not provided with additional spelling/vocabulary instruction as his spelling scores were above grade level at the beginning of the study. As this was an area or relative strength for Eddie during word work he worked using a student-managed instructional model working with a peer or independently.

Mikayla's fluency scores increased by 15 words per minute over the course of the study. This is a rate of 3 words per week increase. Her comprehension still shows some significant gaps and actually declined on the baseline test by 10%. Mikayla had grade level spelling scores so she did not receive the spelling small group instruction but she may well have benefitted from the vocabulary instruction and discussion. Her independence and ability to attempt a task without support has improved but is still below what is needed at the third grade level.

Lee improved his reading rate by 38 words per minute in the 5 weeks of the study. This is an improvement of 7.6 words per week. This is especially impressive because his teacher had asked him to slow his reading down at the beginning of the year. As a particularly eager-to-please student, Lee was using the strategy of reading at what sounded like a reasonable rate but he was mumbling over, or making up nonsense words, for those words he could not quickly decode. This practice was causing him to lose meaning and have a higher than acceptable error rate. Lee knew he had to slow down, but made good progress reading at an appropriate rate

while continuing to make meaning. He received small group instruction for spelling/vocabulary and comprehension along with Mary. His ability to mask his misconceptions and areas of weakness could have easily allowed him to be seen as "doing fine" under a more generalized reader's workshop model. Nonetheless, during small group instruction many areas of need became apparent to the classroom teacher. During dictation activities in small group spelling it was clear that his syllabication and phonemic awareness were weak. In addition, during comprehension groups he struggled to determine importance within very small chunks of text. The teacher observed that he has not mastered the use context and syntax to make meaning and sense of a text. His second language home may be a factor.

Sarah showed a 7 word increase in her fluency rate, or a 1.4 per week rate of increase, which is just slightly above average. She showed a 15% increase in her baseline comprehension score but still demonstrated some significant needs in this area. She was one of the students who showed growth in phonemic awareness which a comparative need for her. She and Lee would likely benefit from small group, code-focused, teacher-managed, phonemic awareness instruction. Overall, Sarah showed the least progress of all the participants. She still displays many anxiety related behaviors. She asked for additional homework assignments so that she could work at home on the chunking skill that was part of the small group comprehension instruction. She showed more concern with answering questions "correctly" than understanding text or entering into discussions.

Figure G:

Student Assessment Change Data Over Study Period								
Student	Aims Fluency	Aims Maze	Baseline Comp	Baseline Phonics	Baseline Vocab	Baseline Phonemic Awareness	D.S.A. Spelling Feature	Spelling Stage Score
Eddie	+8	+7	+35%	0	0	0	N/A	

HIGHER LEVELS OF DIFFERENTIATION IN READING

Lee	+38	+3	+5%	0	0	-27%	5/5	+2
Mary	+27	+7	+20%	0	+27%	0	5/5	+3
Mikayla	+ 15	+6	+5%	-10%	+7%	+6%	N/A	
Sarah	+7	0	+15%	0	0	+7%	N/A	

During reading workshop these students showed great enthusiasm for participating in additional small group instruction. They frequently asked what the topic would be for the day's comprehension instruction and reminded others to come to group if they were still working. Most parents shared positive feedback from their children around their progress and increased confidence. It is unclear if these changes stem purely from instruction, or from the adult support, scaffolding, and positive feedback provided during these meetings. Many of these children had histories of anxiety or behavior problems, and the additional time spent in the small group setting seemed to have a positive impact both academically, socially, and emotionally.

This supports the findings of Connor, Morrison and Underwood (2007) that for students with low initial skills, increased teacher-managed instruction makes a difference in their progress. It is possible that the students' awareness of their weaknesses and a lack of confidence needed to be addressed by an adult, along with their academic needs.

The researcher noted that students seemed relieved to have their areas of need recognized and addressed. An example of this came during the small group spelling/vocabulary instruction. As the group was working on spelling features, the teacher observed a student within the classroom who scored well above average in all areas except for spelling, watching and listening to the group. When asked if he wanted to join the group, he immediately gathered his materials and joined the group. In the daily classroom environment this student is allowed a large degree of independence because of his high level of reading and comprehension skills and strong independent work habits. This was an example of a student who also benefitted from the

individualized reading workshop structure. As a high performing student his particular areas of need were not being addressed in a focused teacher-led setting. He knew he had encoding or spelling weaknesses and he wanted a setting that provided the needed help. This showed the teacher that while the model was helpful to students who were struggling at grade level it could also help high achieving students with their individual areas of need.

Small group work reveals even more specific needs to be targeted.

The most beneficial aspect of the individualized framework, from an instructional planning point of view, was the additional insight and information gathered about each students' strengths and weaknesses. This knowledge was far more specific and targeted than any information that could be constructed looking at beginning of the year testing or even ongoing assessments. Subtle misconceptions and areas of need were identified with a far greater level of specificity than had previously been possible.

For example, all students within the comprehension group were weak in the area of monitoring their comprehension as they read. That is a fairly typical and general weakness at this particular point of the third grade year. What came to light during the comprehension group work was that Mikayla struggled to find a main idea word because she did not have the vocabulary to explain her thinking. Lee had trouble determining importance and focused on the details missing the main idea. Mary was surprisingly strong and benefitted greatly when she gained confidence and realized that her thinking matched the main idea. It also turned out that a lot of Mary's confusion had stemmed from not reading questions carefully rather than her understanding the text. Sarah reads beautifully for fluency, but is so focused on reading correctly that she does not visualize or make meaning as she reads. Eddie showed competence in many areas of comprehension but he lacked inferencing skills, background knowledge, and

vocabulary. Eddie realized with instruction that he could find the answer in the text using specific comprehension strategies.

Another valuable insight from the work was seeing clearly who was not making sufficient progress. While most of the students who participated in the study made strong progress, Sarah and Mikayla made less progress in some areas. During observations, it was noted that these students still lacked confidence when defending their answers. They were tentative during the comprehension discussions and struggled with the "chunking" skill. When students were asked to "chunk" a piece of text to determine the main idea of the paragraph, Sarah, Lee and Mikayla often struggled to find words to describe the main idea. This was particularly true with Lee who could not summarize the text and showed a skill for answering questions by guessing while sometimes having little understanding of the reading.   Initially during the annotating process, he labeled two paragraphs in the same passage as "action". This showed that he had not grasped the purpose of the task and was having trouble determining importance and finding words to describe the main idea. Having such constant, real-time feedback on student progress allowed the teacher to modify and change instruction on an almost daily basis to meet the needs of each student.

During the spelling instruction with Mary and Lee, misconceptions and weaknesses were noted with Lee's understanding of plurals and tenses. The spelling groups quickly transitioned into spelling and vocabulary groups when it was discovered that many of the group's words, which were chosen for their spelling features, were unknown or misunderstood by Lee. It came to light that many of the students struggled with multiple meaning words and different spellings for homophones. This led to rich discussions about vocabulary and how to determine meaning in

context. The small group work was what demonstrated that Lee did not use syntax or context as well as the other students to make meaning and check for understanding.

The structure of spelling group instruction included identifying a spelling feature, finding other words that contained the feature, writing a sentence that included the word, and an assessment in which students wrote each word in a dictated sentence. This structure allowed for instruction and small group discussion that checked constantly for understanding. The spelling group worked on words with "Other Long Vowel Sounds" which includes many multiple meaning words. These word-based discussions were very important for Mary and Lee, and allowed them to explore their thoughts on sentence construction and synonyms extensively. Both Lee and Mary gained mastery of the targeted spelling feature when assessed at the end of the study. In addition, four out of the five students scored 100% on the vocabulary component of the baseline test. Despite this, the teacher believes that vocabulary is still an area of need for Lee, Eddie, and Mikayla.

Another area of student need uncovered during small group work was a lack of reading stamina demonstrated by some students. It was observed that Mikayla and Lee had trouble reading a text on demand and comprehending it deeply at the same time. While they could read the short passages used in the comprehension group work, they had trouble understanding and determining the importance of the main idea with one read. This led to work on stamina and extended reading opportunities. Lee and Mikayla struggled with limited background knowledge and vocabulary, so they often needed more time to construct the meaning of a text. In addition, Lee, Mikayla, and Eddie were challenged by the academic language used in comprehension questions. For example, Mikayla showed a strong understanding of a passage during small group discussion but answered a multiple choice question incorrectly when asked to do so

independently. As the teacher had observed this phenomenon before, she asked Mikayla to stay for a conference. After careful questioning, the student stated that she often did not understand questions and did not understand what "most likely" meant. This allowed the teacher to have a conversation about question vocabulary and look for ways to support Mikayla in this area.

Increased differentiation requires strong assessments, data analysis, and initial planning by classroom teacher.

One of the key foundations of any differentiated instruction is reliable, accurate data. Such data can only come from valid and meaningful assessments. The process used for this study of analyzing each child's data, developing a clear picture of their needs and strengths, and then putting together an instructional plan to meet those needs, has highlighted the weaknesses and gaps in the assessment and instruction process. For example, phonemic awareness is a priority in kindergarten through first grade, but the emphasis on this skill lessens in second and third grade. Sarah and Lee showed that this was an area of need for them but it is a difficult skill to remediate within the general education third grade classroom. The emphasis in third grade assumes a level of competency in these skills and instruction focuses more heavily on comprehension skills. These phonemic awareness and phonics skills are only tested once at the beginning and end of third grade. Therefore, the gap often shows up as a general weakness in reading and comprehension skills and it manifests in students as a lack of understanding or confidence or both.

In addition, the Scott Foresman Baseline Test, which is supposed to test each component of literacy at the beginning of third grade, does not provide data that is strong enough to guide and target instruction to specific needs. According to the data from the baseline test, 50% of the students in the classroom were at grade level and 50% were above. None scored in the below

average percentile. These statistics include a student who is an English language learner and

arrived in the school in mid-second grade speaking no English. This test has 10 – 20 questions

for each component of literacy, which is insufficient data to use for placing students in groups or

planning instruction. The process of creating an accurate picture of each student required

multiple assessments, teacher conferences, and daily observations in order to determine student

needs. While this is part of the teaching process and a valid way to assess students, it would be

more beneficial to have richer, and more accurate, assessment data, as this would allow targeted

instruction to start earlier in the year. A more meaningful assessment would also allow the

teacher to move students in and out of groups with more confidence and would help determine

which targeted skills had been mastered.

The Developmental Spelling Assessment is helpful in its specificity. It measures each

spelling feature within 4 spelling stages, which allows instruction to be targeted and specific.

This also allows a teacher to group students by need without preconceived notions of who should

be grouped with whom or who is "high" and who is "low".

The Aimsweb Fluency Assessment is a good measure of reading rate, and rate is one

good indicator of reading ability. It should not be relied exclusively as an indicator of which

students are strong, well-rounded readers who will continue to make progress. This form of

fluency assessment, unlike a running reading record, does not analyze the reader's patterns of

mistakes and self-corrections. So it becomes purely a rate-based assessment. Only Eddie, out of

the 5 participants, had fluency scores that raised concerns, yet all of the participants showed

some significant comprehension deficits, which if left unaddressed could lead to further gaps in

achievement to third grade peers.

This in turn sheds light on the need for an effective ongoing assessment tool for comprehension within the school. The baseline test did highlight that these students were below the class average, but showed very little other useful data. It would be helpful and more efficient to have an ongoing tool that could be used regularly to determine growth, or lack thereof, in comprehension skills. This would allow for further differentiation and flexibility with instruction and groupings.

Another area of need that came to light is the lack of a vocabulary assessment. This is an ongoing frustration when teaching economically disadvantaged students and English language learners. It is clear to most teachers that some students have particular challenges in an academic setting from a lack of vocabulary for both comprehension and expression. There is very little available to teachers to assess, teach, and reassess this area of need. As it is considered a key component of literacy it seems logical that there should be a tool to measure both instruction and student progress.

The strength of all these assessments, even with their limitations, is that they allow for a detailed picture of each student. This, along with teacher observation and informal assessment, allows students to be seen for who they are. This means that a student like Eddie, who despite having a history of behavior problems and who lacks strong verbal or vocabulary skills, is placed carefully in the highest spelling group because the data shows that he has strengths in this area.

Sarah, who presents as a strong reader, and who always has a thick new chapter book in her hands, has shown some serious gaps in understanding during small group instruction. The texts used for her small group instruction were only a couple of paragraphs long and were not complex or at a high reading level. Nonetheless, she frequently showed confusion or only the most basic and literal level of comprehension of these texts. As Sarah has many of the attributes

of a successful student including compliant behavior, neat and thorough task completion, strong

background knowledge, and a strong vocabulary, the depth of her needs was not recognized until

the data brought them to light. This is a strength of data-driven individualized instruction. It can

help a teacher to avoid grouping students together based on overly-generalized data or just

"reading level".

Conclusions

This research study sought to study a flexible individualized reading block model which

assigns instruction and tasks for students using baseline data from the components of literacy.

The study sought to determine whether students benefitted from the targeted individualized

instruction. The research used an instructional model that relied on assessment data to drive the

content and process of instruction in a third grade general education classroom. In addition, the

researcher wanted to determine if the instruction should be teacher- or child-managed.   The

teacher/researcher provided targeted instruction to students in three components of literacy,

phonics, vocabulary, and comprehension. In the process, the data for a sampling of students was

studied to determine the efficacy of the model within the classroom.

Limitations

This study had significant limitations. It was completed with a very small sample of

children whose participation was dependent on parents' willingness to allow their children to be

a part of the study. In addition, the study took place over five weeks, which is a short period of

time to study a model for literacy instruction. None of the students in the study received

academic intervention services in reading, as this would have limited the researcher's ability to

study and assess them within the limited time frame. In addition, all members of the study group

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had shown weakness in some area of literature. The parents of students who showed no deficits

did not sign up for the study. The consequence of both these limitations is that the study group

participants are not representative of the class as a whole.

As the students in the study group all required teacher-managed instruction, it meant that

observation and assessment information was not gathered on student-managed settings.

Therefore a valid comparison could not be made between teacher-managed and student-managed

settings. This component of the research would require a more varied participant group and

possibly more researchers for observation and assessment.

Observation data can be limited when the research is undertaken by a general education

classroom teacher. A teacher has the ethical responsibility to provide the best possible

instruction to all students, so therefore she cannot observe a control group who do not get

instruction for the purposes of comparison.

Tests helped to ameliorate the possibility of teacher bias or a teacher having preconceived

ideas about the students. As Madelaine & Wheldall (2005) found, teacher judgment is not

always an accurate barometer of student skills. The addition of nationally-normed assessments

within the classroom added objectivity and validity to the results.

Implications

Students with areas of reading weakness, but who do not qualify for academic

intervention services, benefit from this model.

Under the traditional framework for reading workshop, the children in the participant

group would be the "middle" group, in a high, medium, low framework. This is because in the

same classroom there is a group of students who received lower scores than the study

participants on the Aimsweb Fluency Assessment and the Scott Foresman Baseline Test. This lower achieving group, also known as "strategic intervention" or SI students, qualify under the district's guidelines for academic intervention services and increased intervention time in the classroom. The SI students score below grade level in nearly all of the elements of reading and receive a significant amount of small group instruction when pulled out of the classroom for instruction and within the classroom setting.

Many of the study participant group fell into the on-level or "bubble" students, in that they show areas of need but met the benchmarks for third grade. This means that in a traditional reader's workshop the study group would usually meet with the classroom teacher for one small group meeting per day to work on the current reading skill being taught within the scope and sequence of the reading program. These students would not receive targeted small group instruction specifically around discrete literacy skills. Historically, students are grouped by reading level and skills are taught in the context of that common reading level.

This individualized instruction model meant that students who had skill gaps, but whose gaps were not significant enough to gain them access to academic intervention, had their needs addressed. This could be very important in classrooms, like the one in the study, that have a large percentage of students at risk of failing the grade level standardized test. In many schools with at risk populations intervention services are provided to the neediest students, and the needs of students who fall only slightly below those criteria are not met. This study shows that all 5 of the students benefitted from the increased targeted instruction. And while the comparison between teacher-led, and student-managed instructional time could not be accurately studied, it is interesting to notice the dramatic increase that Mary and Lee made on their Aimsweb Fluency assessments for reading rate. These were the only two students who received double the amount

of teacher time than the other students in the study. Lee's progress was 5 times the progress rate

identified as "ambitious", and Mary's was 3.5 times the ambitious rate of progress. This

happened even though fluency was not the skill being taught in either of their small groups.

In many classrooms the focus is correctly on the neediest of students. The results of this

study and the gains made by this group could call into question whether "middle" students are

being provided with adequate instruction. Is it possible that if we could structure a reading

workshop model to target instruction to specific skills that have not been mastered by any

student in the room? Maybe if these students these students received timely and targeted

instruction they would be less likely to chronically underperform in years ahead. This would

require school districts to leave time within their curriculum and scope and sequence to allow

teachers to provide this targeted instruction to those students who need it. As Torgesen (2002)

stated it will "involve a reallocation of resources to make more teacher time available for

preventative instruction" (p. 18). Currently, in an environment that is heavily skewed towards

reading comprehension and written responses to literature, there is little emphasis on remediating

or consolidating the discrete reading skills of any but the neediest students. The results of this

short study suggest that with a focus on data analysis, targeted instruction, and an open and

flexible approach to the workshop model, more students could be moved towards competency or

even mastery.

Small group work reveals even more specific needs to be targeted.

One of the greatest challenges for a general education teacher at the elementary level is

time. Time is even more of an issue in schools with large numbers of at-risk students. This

means that it is imperative that teachers use their instructional time effectively and efficiently.

Data can be extremely helpful in directing the teacher to the specific needs of students. This

study found that the intense and specific focus of small group instruction led to even further

differentiation. While the initial time investment in administering assessments and analyzing

data is significant, the specific and highly differentiated nature of the subsequent instruction is

more efficient and effective. With the continuous loop of teaching, feedback, and adjustment,

the instruction can becomes differentiated and focused on each student's needs. This level of

differentiation leads to the most efficient use of teacher time because each child is getting what

they need and they do not have to sit through generalized instruction that is not at their

instructional level or covering a skill that they have already mastered. This targeted instruction

allows the teacher to group, question, and assign work with a high level of specificity for each

child's needs.

Increased differentiation requires strong assessments, data analysis, and initial planning by classroom teacher.

The more accurate and specific the assessment, the stronger and more targeted the

instruction. Indeed, as was noted in the findings from this study, there is no tool to measure,

teach, and reassess a child's grade level vocabulary. The small sampling of questions on a

beginning of the year baseline test does not begin to address the issues caused by a lack of

vocabulary in today's third grade classroom.

These assessments should also measure all elements of literacy and provide a balanced

picture of a child's reading ability. An overreliance on one measure or mastery of one skill can

result in children being overlooked because they have mastered one skill but not another. It is

clear that if an assessment is given too much weight in placing students in academic intervention,

or conversely not placing them in academic intervention, then gaps in students' reading skills can

be missed. This could lead to a long term deficit in one or more of the components of literacy.

While the Aimsweb fluency assessment is a strong indicator of fluency and word identification, it does not detect those students who can accurately "word call" while having little understanding about what they have read. A strong well-rounded assessment, or set of assessments, could provide a clear picture of each child's literacy skills and needs. This would allow a teacher to start remediation immediately at the beginning of the year and possibly move the child to mastery of lagging skills earlier.

Recommendations for educators

There is no doubt that this framework would require teachers and school leaders to make an investment of time and effort initially. The acknowledgement of missing skills, less focus on test-driven skills, and more focus on mastering all elements of reading would be a prerequisite. School districts would have to provide a strong suite of assessments for each grade level. As Ankrum and Bean (2008) noted, in order to be effective assessments must be "comprehensive, on-going, classroom-based, and easy to administer and interpret" (p. 138). In addition, school administration would have to build in time and the expectation that teachers would analyze data to drive individualized instruction. Adopting individualized instruction would mean providing time and space in the curriculum for targeted skill instruction. Teachers would have to be willing to spend the time administering assessments and using the data to build a literacy portrait for each child. Teachers could create initial groupings based on a true representation of student needs. While this model requires a large investment of time at the beginning of the year, it allows students to progress more quickly during the year, and hopefully leads to higher levels of reading skills in all students.

This is essentially the model that is used in the Response to Intervention model to determine who receives academic intervention, moved to the whole classroom population. If

assessing, setting goals, providing targeted instruction, and continuing to reassess, works for the

neediest students why would it not be effective for all students?

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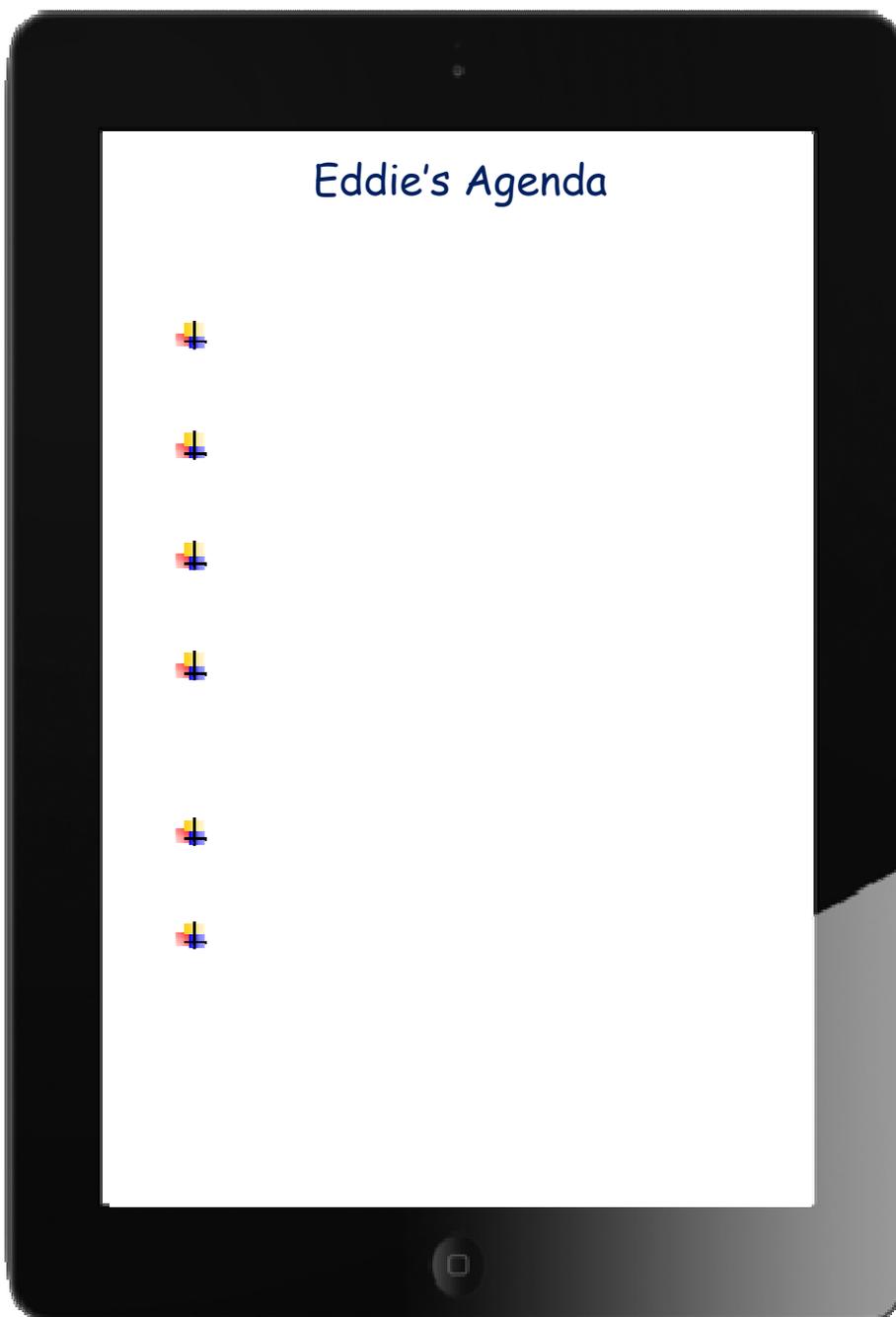
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Appendix A:

Appendix B: Aimsweb Fluency passage

Andy was one of the many ants who worked daily in the anthill.	13
Every day Andy and the other ants would wake up and go off to work.	28
Andy's job was to carry pieces of sand up the side of the anthill to build	44
it higher. Andy thought his job was really boring. Who would find	56
carrying pieces of sand interesting? All Andy did day after day was	68
stack tiny pieces of sand on top of other tiny pieces of sand. Where was	83
the challenge in that?	87
All Andy really wanted was to create a daring new kind of anthill.	100
He wanted to build a modern castle. He could see the castle in his	114
mind, and that goal made him continue his daily grind.	124
One day Andy spoke to his friend, Sally. He took a chance and told	138
her about his dream. "I don't want to build anthills, Sally. I want to build	153
a modern castle."	156
"I don't know, Andy," said Sally. "Ants have lived in anthills for a	169
very long time."	172
"I need to tell someone who will understand," Andy thought.	182
The next day Andy went to see Queen Ant. He shook with fear as	196
he knocked on her door.	201
"Come in," said a low, pretty voice.	208
Andy stepped inside the queen's chambers. There were beautiful	217
pictures on the walls and a bright carpet underfoot. The queen wore a	230
golden crown. She was much bigger than Andy.	238
"Who are you, and what do you want?" she said to Andy.	250
Andy showed her his plans for building a castle. "You are a lovely	263
queen," Andy told her. "Lovely queens should live in castles. I'm the	275
ant who knows how to build them."	282
"You are right," the queen said. "You may start building my castle	294
tomorrow."	295

Appendix C: Aimsweb Maze Curriculum Based Measurement

Albert was a goldfish in a bowl. He ate a breakfast of green **(and, but, from)** brown flakes each morning. Then he **(finished, fishbowl, watched)** the children go off to school.

(Which, Albert, Himself) hated being stuck in his bowl **(because, children, finally)** he could only swim around in **(circles, children, flakes)**. He'd rather go to school. Poor **(loved, Albert, Alone)** couldn't even read a book. The **(night, pages, flakes)** would get soaked!

Albert was quite **(a, an, if)** smart fish. He could do flips **(under, mean, rock)** water. He could spell his name **(in, one, ate)** the pebbles on the bottom of **(he, they, his)** bowl. No matter how brilliant Albert **(are, was, when)** though, he still had a problem. **(Mean, Only, And)** the cat spoke to him. And **(a, the, on)** cat was not particularly nice to **(him, his, day)**.

"I'll eat you up one day," **(home, an, the)** cat would tell Albert when they **(was, were, and)** all alone in the house. "I'll **(Albert, would, gobble)** you right up. You will be **(surprised, fishbowl, brilliant)** to discover that no one will **(sent, miss, off)** you."

It seemed to Albert that **(everyone, problem, breakfast)** loved the cat. No one seemed **(in, to, for)** notice the cat was mean. No **(they, by, one)** seemed to care that the cat **(brown, seemed, hated)** books and wasn't smart. The cat **(couldn't, hiding, school)** even spell his own name, but **(us, the, to)** children played with him every day.

(One, At, You) day the cat dipped his paw **(up, to, in)** Albert's fishbowl. To save himself, Albert **(under, found, swam)** to the very bottom of his **(breakfast, fishbowl, soaking)**. He hid behind some rocks. When **(the, go, can)** children came home from school that **(bowl, day, paw)**, they saw the cat was wet. **(Have, They, House)** didn't see Albert hiding behind the **(flakes, happy, rocks)** in the bottom of his fishbowl, **(and, if, his)** that scared them.

"You are a **(such, each, very)** naughty cat!" they shouted.

Finally one **(a, of, it)** the children found Albert hiding in **(the, was, it)** bottom of the bowl. "I found **(cat, his, him)**! I found our wonderful fish!" Albert **(ate, felt, day)** happy that his family loved him **(after, could, under)** all.

Appendix D: Scott Foresman Baseline Group Test

NAME _____ **DATE** _____

Scott Foresman
Baseline Group Test

PEARSON

Glenview, Illinois
Boston, Massachusetts
Chandler, Arizona
Upper Saddle River, New Jersey

Reading STREET
Grade 3

ISBN-13: 978-0-328-48524-6
ISBN-10:   0-328-48524-1
10 VON4 18 17 16 15 14 13
CC1

ISBN-13: 978-0-328-48524-6
ISBN-10:   0-328-48524-1

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HIGHER LEVELS OF DIFFERENTIATION IN READING

Appendix E: Developmental Spelling Assessment

Answer Sheet: FORM B   Name _____

Stage _____   Date _____

1. _____   16. _____

2. _____   17. _____

3. _____   18. _____

4. _____   19. _____

5. _____   20. _____

6. _____   21. _____

7. _____   22. _____

8. _____   23. _____

9. _____   24. _____

10. _____   25. _____

11. _____

12. _____

13. _____

14. _____

15. _____

Appendix F: Lee's annotating for comprehension

Name: _____

READ THE PASSAGE   Visualize a dog doing each action described in the passage.

Ways Dogs Talk

Dogs use their voices and bodies to talk to people. Watch a dog's actions. You can learn to tell what it is trying to say.   *intorduion*

A dog shows when it is happy to see you. It looks at you and wags its tail, or it runs around quickly in circles. Some happy dogs will jump up on you. A scared dog acts differently than a happy dog. A frightened dog puts its tail down between its legs. Some scared dogs growl. Others try to hide.   *ation*

Dogs like being with people, so they try to get your attention. They tap you with a paw or place their head in your lap. They also might look at you and bark or howl.   *ation*

Dogs show when they want to be left alone, too. A dog that is upset will bare its teeth, or it will growl. Both are signs to stay away!

STRATEGY PRACTICE   Think back to the dog's actions you pictured while you read. With a partner, describe a dog doing two of those actions.

SKILL PRACTICE   Read each question. Fill in the bubble next to the correct answer.

1. What is the passage mainly about?

   Ⓐ the ways dogs use their voices to talk

   ● the ways dogs tell people what they want

   Ⓒ how dogs show they are scared

   Ⓓ why dogs run in circles

2. Based on the passage, which sentence is true?

   Ⓐ Happy dogs may jump up on you.

   Ⓑ Sad dogs cry tears.

   Ⓒ Scared dogs run in circles.

   Ⓓ Upset dogs want a lot to eat.

3. What might cause a dog to put its head in your lap?

   Ⓐ It is scared of some noise.

   Ⓑ It is happy that you are home.

   ● It wants you to pay attention to it.

   Ⓓ Its stomach is upset.

4. A happy dog wags its tail, but a scared dog _____.

   Ⓐ taps you with a paw

   ● puts its tail down

   Ⓒ lifts its tail

   Ⓓ looks at you and howls

Appendix G: Developmental Spelling Assessment class progress monitoring tool February 2015

Initial & Final Consonants	Initial Consonant Blends & Diagraphs	Short Vowels	Affricate	Final Consonant Blends & Diagraphs	Stage Score	Long Vowels (Vce)	R-Controlled Vowels	Other Common Long Vowels	Complex Consonants	Abstract Vowels	Stage Score	Doubling & e-Drop with ed & ing	Other syllable Juncture Doubling	Long Vowel Patterns (stressed Syllable)	R-controlled Vowels (stressed syllables)	Unstressed Syllable Vowel Patterns	Stage Score	Silent & Sounded Consonants	Consonant Changes	Vowel Changes	Latin-Derived Suffixes	Assimilates Prefixes	Stage Score	Total Inventory Score
Letter Name						**Within Word**						**Syllable Juncture**						**Derivational Constancy**						
A	B	C	D	E		F	G	H	I	J		K	L	M	N	O		P	Q	R	S	T		
					25						25	5	4	5	5	4	23	2	3	4	3	1	7	80
					25						25	5	5	5	4	5	23	1	1	0	3	0	2	75
					25	5	5	5	4	5	24	3	4	5	5	4	21	0	1	1	3	0	3	73
					25	5	4	5	5	5	24	3	3	3	3	4	14							63
					25	5	5	5	4	4	23	5	2	3	3	3	14	0	0	1	3	1	2	64
					25	5	5	5	5	5	25	1	2	3	4	3	8	0	1	3	2	0	2	60
					25	5	5	4	5	5	23	4	2	2	2	3	11							59
					25	5	4	5	5	5	24	3	2	4	4	2	11							60
					25	5	5	5	2	4	21	2	1	0	0	2	6							52
					25	4	4	5	4	5	22	3	4	3	2	1	10							57
					25	5	5	4	4	4	22	5	3	3	4	3	12							59
Lee →					25	5	5	3	2	4	18	1	1	2	4	2	7							50
					25	5	4	3	5	5	22	1	1	2	2	1	7							54
Mary →					25	5	5	3	3	5	19	3	1	1	2	3	9							53
					25	3	4	3	3	3	15	0	0	1	1	1	3							43
					25	5	2	4	4	4	19	2	2	3	2	0	3							47
					25	5	3	2	0	2	10	2	2	2	2	2	6							41
5	3	5	2	1	11																			11