How effective is guided reading at accelerating reading abilities of sixth grade struggling readers?

by

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Chapter One: Introduction

To be successful in life, individuals must be able to read. Learning to read can occur in many formats and situations, both in and out of elementary school. One method of instruction is guided reading. Students are grouped according to their level and taught focused skills based upon specific needs. When students have below grade level reading abilities, guided reading groups are often one intervention used to accelerate learning.

Problem Statement

According to Manset-Williamson and Nelson (2005), "A significant number of students enter the upper-elementary and middle school grades with significant deficits in their ability to read" (p.59). Teachers and administrators have utilized numerous methods of instruction to accelerate student learning to not only make progress, but close the gap quickly. It is imperative to accelerate student learning. Iaquinta (2006) asserted that children who got off to a poor start in reading rarely caught up. Some programs to accelerate learning require immense amounts of staff, money, and time. Others are fairly simple to implement. The type of program selected by a district is based upon many factors.

The district in which I work selected guided reading to accelerate student learning about three years ago. The district started with a large in-service training opportunity for all English Language Arts (ELA), special education, and reading teachers. The training went through how to level students using entrance assessment data and running records, instruct students in small homogeneous groups, and

reassess students to determine growth. Now that the program has been in effect for a number of years, it is important to determine how effective guided reading groups are at accelerating student growth.

Significance of Problem

As students go through the education system, teachers and administrators need to be concerned with students that have below grade level reading abilities. It is imperative that students are educated in programs that accelerate their learning to close the gap and bring their abilities closer to their on-grade level peers.

Many schools are spending a great deal of time, money, and resources on guided reading. Stake-holders in the school need to be assured that the resources are well spent. If students are not accelerating quickly, other programs should be examined. However, if students are making great progress, the amount of resources spent would be worthwhile.

Purpose

The purpose of this research is to determine how effective guided reading groups are at accelerating reading abilities of sixth grade struggling readers. Entrance assessments will be used to get a baseline of students' abilities. Bi-monthly, students will complete running records to measure progress. At the end of the study, a closing assessment will be used to determine the amount of growth made. This information will help determine if guided reading groups accelerate student learning or help students acquire new information slowly.

Rationale

As a special education teacher, I spend a lot of my time working with students that are below grade level in reading. This skill impacts the entire day for my students. They have a hard time in all core subjects because they often cannot read the material; therefore they have a difficult time progressing satisfactorily. I need to be guaranteed that the time I spend working with students to accelerate their reading abilities is actually doing that. I need to know that guided reading is working to help students learn to read efficiently and effectively. Otherwise, the district is wasting a lot of time and energy with little results.

Definition of Terms

According to Fredericks (2003) guided reading is an instructional strategy that a teacher uses to improve the reading levels of his/her students. The teacher selects a certain text that matches the instructional level of the students in a small group and provides explicit instruction of specific skills and strategies.

The Developmental Reading Assessment, Second Edition (DRA) helps teachers identify students' reading abilities and levels. Once the assessment is scored, it provides teachers with specific skills and strategies that students need to be instructed on. The assessment can also be used to document reading progress made by students.

Fountas and Pinnell (2001) stated that running records analyze student's oral reading for processing strategies, typically on 100 words. Students then finish reading the entire passage or text and answer comprehension questions. The teacher combines

the results of the read aloud and comprehension check to determine the level of the text for the student, either frustration, instructional, or independent.

Summary

It is imperative that students that are reading below grade level receive instruction to accelerate their learning. Learning at the same rate as their peers will not allow them to close the gap and achieve grade level. "Children who struggle with reading in the early grades often remain behind their peers throughout school, and academic progress in all subject areas suffers" (McIntyre et al., 2005, p.99)This study examines how effective guided reading groups are at accelerating the reading abilities of sixth grade struggling readers. To do this, students will complete a pre- and post-reading assessment and bi-monthly running records. I will journal thoughts and observations about each guided reading session. In my district, guided reading has been selected to instruction struggling readers because research drives their decisions. Much research has been written on the effectiveness of guided reading.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Prior to collecting data to determine how effective guided reading groups are at accelerating reading abilities of sixth grade struggling readers, previous research and studies were examined. After looking at a wealth of research, three main topics emerged: literacy programs, reading interventions, and specific strategy instruction. All were focused around improving reading and literacy levels of students.

Literacy Programs

Mackey, Pitcher, and Decman (2006) completed research to determine how a principal's influences on the school's reading program was linked to standardized reading test scores. Prior to collecting data, previous studies were examined. The researchers found significant evidence supporting the idea that the principal has a substantial influence within an elementary school. In schools where at-risk students were achieving, principals supported teachers' instructional methods, allocated necessary materials and resources, made frequent visits to classrooms, solicited and provided feedback on instructional methods, and used data to drive instruction.

To begin their study, Mackey et al. (2006) selected four reading programs: Direct Instruction, Guided Reading, Open Court, and Balanced Literacy with Open Court Embedded. Four schools that utilized the programs were included in the study. Three second grade classrooms from each school were selected to participate. The teachers and principals were interviewed, and the classrooms were observed throughout the study. Data was analyzed against the National Association of

Elementary School Principals standards for what principals should know and be able to do.

In the school using Guided Reading, Mackey et al. (2006) found that the principal blended many different philosophies in providing leadership for her school. Rather than leading the implementation, the principal delegated this task to the literacy specialist. She supported the initiative by buying the necessary materials. During an interview, the principal said she hired teachers according to their view of teaching the whole child, not necessarily their background in literacy. The literacy specialist was expected to develop and implement professional development for teachers. The principal was very data driven. Teachers needed to keep data on every child's reading levels and submit the information quarterly. During the first year Guided Reading was initiated in the school, the second grade standard score on a national reading test was 51. The following two years, the second grade score was 46.

When the data that was collected was analyzed, the researchers found that principals in the Guided Reading and Open Court models delegated literacy leadership to someone else in the building. There were many practices going on in classrooms that did not align with the programs the principals asserted were implemented. Mackey et al. (2006) stated that the principal's lack of literacy knowledge in the Guided Reading building may have led to the many inconsistencies observed. The researchers found three concepts that enabled an elementary principal to influence the school's reading program and test scores: the principal's vision of the reading program, the educational background of the principal, and how the principal

defines himself/ herself and applies his/her role as an instructional leader in the building.

The purpose of the research completed by Altwerger et al. (2004) was to determine the impact of reading programs on teachers, classrooms, and students. Specifically, the researchers wanted to determine if systematic, explicit phonetic instruction significantly improved a child's ability to read. Prior to beginning their research, the authors of this study examined previous research. The most influential piece of literature was the meta-analysis of experimental research conducted by the National Reading Panel (NRP). The NRP found that explicit and systematic phonetic instruction for kindergarteners and first graders that were at risk had an advantage over sporadic or no phonetic instruction. The researchers also found that many teachers have recently been required to implement one-size-fits-all programs to ensure that no students are left behind in the era of No Child Left Behind. However, the researchers questioned the programs' ability to be successful.

Altwerger et al. decided to study to effectiveness of three programs on second grade classrooms and the students' reading abilities: Guided Reading (GR), Direct Instruction (DI), and Open Court (OC). Each program was implemented in a different urban school. Approximately thirty children identified as low, middle, or high readers by their teachers participated in the study. Students across sites were matched to have the same number receiving free and reduced lunches. The students in this study had been working with the reading program since first grade, were proficient English speakers, and did not receive any special education services. Data was collected in a

variety of ways. Ethnographic observations of the language arts instruction were completed. Principals and teachers were interviewed about the history to the program and their perceptions of it. Children in the study were interviewed regarding their beliefs, perceptions, and their use of different reading strategies. Students' oral reading samples and retellings were analyzed using miscue analysis. To determine student's ability to demonstrate phonetic rules in isolation, the Woodcock Johnson Psycho-Educational Battery-R (WJPE-R), Word Attack subtest was administered.

The school that utilized Guided Reading (GR) implemented a variety of teaching strategies: shared reading, read-alouds, guided reading, guided writing, independent reading, independent writing, literature discussions, and strategy discussions. Skills and phonics were taught in meaningful situations in a guided reading approach. When miscues were analyzed, the students had significantly fewer miscues that were not semantically or syntactically acceptable. They had a higher rate of self-corrections and were typically unwilling to go on until they made sense of the text. They demonstrated understanding of the entire text during the retell. The students performed in the average range for second graders on the WJPE-R subtest.

The results were staggering to the researchers. They did not find any significant differences among the three sites in the use of graphophonics cues while students read authentic texts. According to the NRP, students in the DI and OC sites should have been far superior to students in the GR site. No significance was found for students reading phonetics out of context on the WJPE-R test either. Overall, this suggested that although DI and OC sites provided explicit and systematic phonetic

instruction, they did not produce readers who differed significantly from students that did not receive explicit and systematic phonetic instruction. Students in the GR site did surpass their DI and OC counterparts in many areas. The DI children produced considerably more miscues that made sentences totally incorrect grammatically and meaningless. The researchers found that even low students in the GR site were more likely to produce semantically and syntactically acceptable miscues that resulted in some sort of comprehension. Low and middle readers in the GR site had a higher number of attempted, although incorrect, corrections than all of the readers at the DI and OC sites.

The researchers concluded that systematic and explicit phonetic instruction did not significantly improve a student's reading in terms of his/her use of graphophonic knowledge, meaning construction, and comprehension. They found that this type of instruction not only failed to improve comprehension, it often hindered comprehension because it took a student's focus away from comprehension. The researchers concluded that there was no advantage in using systematic and explicit phonetic instruction.

In the action research paper by B. C. Ahrens (2005), the researcher wanted to determine what would happen when research-based teaching methods were introduced to the reading department, and where failures and successes would occur. Prior to taking action, the researcher reviewed previous research and studies completed on the topic. Ahrens found research which stated that a lot of instruction time is lost to assessments. However, when assessments were used to drive

instruction, the time was worthwhile. Studies showed that it was imperative to have an accurate understanding of students' reading abilities. Then teachers were able to personalize and differentiate instruction. Ahrens also found studies that examined research-based instructional models. Programs ranged from ones that focused on one specific aspect of literacy, to ones that encompassed a wide range of reading, writing, and spelling.

To complete the study, Ahrens collected data through five means: assessment results from the McLeod and STAR, interviews, observations, and personal reflections. Approximately 250 sixth grade students in Old Almaden Middle School in Silicon Valley, California were placed by reading level in one of nine classes. Teachers were purposefully scheduled to teach the classes: teachers with differentiated curriculum already planned were scheduled for the highest level reading classes, the most experienced teachers were scheduled to teach readers that required the most assistance, and new teachers were scheduled into classes with students reading at or just below grade level. When students came in for summer orientation, they took the Accelerated Reader program's diagnostic test, The Star Reading Assessment. During the first week of school, all the students took the McLeod reading assessment in just over an hour and a half. Teachers gained an extra two weeks of instruction, as they previously assessed during the first two weeks of school. In addition, teachers had two assessments from which to draw information. Next, instruction included research-based methods of independent reading, phonics

instruction, and strategic comprehension skills instruction. Some teachers fully implemented the new research-based instructional practices, while others did not.

The results were very interesting. Two teachers, both teaching classes with students two years below grade level had very different results. Kelly, who fully implemented the program, had 82% of her students improved. On the other hand, Emma, who did not implement the program, had only 62% of her students improved. In the Old Almaden School District, sixth graders could take an elective during the second semester of the year if they were reading at grade level. After one semester of using research-based instructional practices in the literacy classes, 80% of the students moved into an elective class, which was a 40% increase from the previous year.

Throughout the study, some surprising results were observed. The attitude and behavior of the students in the reading classes improved dramatically. Neither Ahrens nor her colleagues predicted this. Students were involved and invested in class, and improved their reading ability. They attributed this to the students' ability to work and progress at their independent and instructional levels, whereas they would previously be working at the frustrational level. Another surprising result was the fact that teachers were reluctant to trust their knowledge. They often asked the researcher prior to making instructional changes based on students' reading level rather than looking at the data. The researcher blamed this on a previous overreliance on a basal system. Overall, students showed much growth and progress in classes where the research-based instructional practices were utilized.

Reading Interventions

The research conducted by Blachman et al. (2004) sought to evaluate the effectiveness of an intensive reading intervention for second and third graders with reading disabilities. Prior to beginning their research, the authors looked at previous studies. They found that early reading programs that emphasized the connection between phonics and the alphabet helped close the gap for children that had difficulty learning to read. Blachman et al. also found prevention had better success than remediation for those already behind. Research also showed that children who were unsuccessful in learning to decode, often struggled with fluency because they read less. In turn, they struggled with comprehension because they read less fluently.

Students from eleven schools in upstate New York participated in this study. Eighty-nine students were randomly assigned to either a treatment or control group. Both groups of children were given a pre-test before tutoring began, a post-test after tutoring, and another post-test after the year of tutoring. During the first year of the study, students in the treatment group received fifty minutes of one-on-one tutoring five days a week from September to June. The tutoring program was not scripted, but each session consisted of five steps: review and introduction of a new sound-symbol association, practice with phoneme analysis and blending sounds, fluency building activity, oral reading practice, and finally a spelling activity. Children in the control group received the normal remedial reading instruction provided by their school.

After the data was analyzed, Blachman et al. found that children in the treatment group showed significantly greater gains in reading real words, nonword

reading, reading rate, passage reading, and spelling. Most of these children maintained the gains made at their one year post-assessment. Although children in the treatment group showed greater gains in comprehension after tutoring, these gains were not maintained at the one year post-assessment. The researchers believed this was due to the lack of intensive reading instruction during the year after tutoring. Based on the data and analysis, Blachman et al. concluded that second and third graders greatly benefited from remediation that was explicit, systematic, focused on word-level skills, and allowed frequent opportunities for text-based reading.

McIntyre et al. (2005) sought to determine if supplemental reading instruction helped struggling readers. Specifically, they wanted to determine if first- or second-grade children who received daily supplemental instruction in addition to their regular literacy instruction statistically outperformed children who received only regular instruction after one year. Prior to collecting data, McIntyre et al. examined previous research. Research showed that students received supplemental instruction when they participated not only in regular literacy instruction with their peers, but also received intensive literacy instruction at another point during the day. The researchers found that all interventions did not result in the same student gains, some were far better than others. It was also found that quality teaching, not just an increase in time on literacy was key to improved achievement.

To determine how first- and second-grader students achieved on phonics and comprehension assessments after one year of remediation, the researchers included 196 students throughout seventeen schools. Students that participated in the study

took assessments that focused on phonics, oral reading of fiction and nonfiction texts, retelling, and comprehension. Students completed the pre-test assessments during October and November of the first year of the study. The post-tests were administered in May of the first year. During the second year of the study, students were tested again in September and May. The testing took place in two to three sessions of 30 minutes each. After pre-testing was complete, the researchers collected data by observing the teachers, taking field notes, and interviewing teachers about their instruction and practices. Each teacher was observed twice during the first year for approximately 90 minutes each visit.

Prior to analyzing data, the McIntyre et al. determined which students received at least 30 minutes of additional literacy instruction each day; students that received supplemental literacy instruction. There were 39 first graders and 20 second graders that met this requirement. It was determined that the students receiving supplemental instructions preformed better on post-tests than those that did not. All students that received supplemental instruction spent more time reading during the day. The increase of time with texts helped students become better readers. There were non-significant increases with the phonics assessments; the researchers did not include any phonics-specific instruction. In conclusion, McIntyre et al. found that children who received supplemental reading instruction outperformed students that received only the normal literacy instruction throughout the day.

Specific Strategy Instruction

Skidmore, Perez-Parent, and Arnfield (2003) sought to determine the way that teacher-pupil dialogue occurred in guided reading sessions, and how it affected student learning. Previous research on this topic showed that teachers often dominated the talk with "pedagogical dialogue, in which someone who knows and possess the truth (the teacher) instructs someone who is ignorant of it and in error (the pupils)" (Skidmore et al. 2003, p.47). Although there were relatively few studies for the authors to examine, the National Oracy Project found that talk was a valuable resource for learning in many areas of curriculum.

To determine the role that talk played in a guided reading session, the researchers visited five schools on three different occasions over a six month period. The schools were primary schools located in the south of England. Skidmore, Perez-Parent, and Arnfield recorded a group of fifth graders from each school for approximately twenty to thirty minutes each visit. Each student in the group as well as the teacher wore an individual microphone recording all things said. This made transcriptions much easier because the voices were clear and could be heard on more than one recording. The researchers asked the teachers to keep the guided reading sessions as authentic as possible during the observations.

The researchers analyzed the recordings of the guided reading sessions and put the data in three different categories: teacher questioning, turn-taking, and pupil modification of the topic. Three types of questions were asked by the teacher in varying degrees: questions with one right answer, questions with a finite set of

acceptable answers, and questions with an indeterminate, though bounded, set of possible answers. During the observations, teachers most often asked questions with one right answer. This limited the number of students able to participate in the discussion and the amount of talk required to give an answer. Less often, teachers asked questions that had a finite set of answers. This allowed more students to take part in the discussion and provide longer responses. Rarely, teachers asked students authentic questions that had an indeterminate set of answers. When this occurred, students were able to respond with varying length answers and all were able to participate. The researchers found that during a guided reading session, students had to wait to be called on by the teacher, which is an inauthentic part of conversations, especially when the teacher dictated who talked and when. Skidmore, Perez-Parent, and Arnfield also found that although the teachers may have allowed students some flexibility to modify the question, the teacher always had the final say.

The researchers' data closely mimicked previous research that stated discussions between teachers and students resembled pedagogical dialogue. The teachers rarely asked authentic questions, typically controlled the order in which students spoke and responded, and did most of the talking. Researchers concluded that students were able to learn more with "internally persuasive discourse, in which pupils retell a story in their own words rather than reciting it by heart" (p.52).

Laing and Kamhi (2002) completed research to compare the number and types of inferences made by average and below-average readers. Before collecting data, Laing and Kamhi examined research previously completed. They found that being

able to make inferences played an important role in understanding texts. Research also showed that making inferences was a more difficult skill for below-average readers.

Forty third grade students participated in the study. After taking the Woodcock Reading Mastery Test, students were divided into two groups based upon their score: average readers and below average readers, each group with twenty students. To gather data, all students underwent testing in three separate sessions. During the first session, components of the WRMT-R, the TONI-2, and story comprehension measures were completed. During the second session, the CELF-3 was completed. During the final session, students completed the GORT-3 and a verbal working memory task.

After the data was evaluated, the researchers found that average readers produced significantly more inferences and fewer errors than below-average readers. Average readers also answered more comprehension questions correctly and recalled more information from the text. Because average readers were able to produce significantly more explanatory inferences, Laing and Kamhi predict that could be one reason they scored better on comprehension measures. Researchers found that explanatory inferences served to unite the story for readers; the more explanatory inferences, the more coherent picture the reader formed. When the researchers had readers make inferences while they read the story, they were able to see where comprehension broke down. If teachers were to utilize this strategy, they would know

when to intervene and assist with comprehension, rather than waiting until the end of the passage.

Massengill (2004) completed research to determine how effective guided reading would be at teaching adults with low levels of literacy. Prior to collecting data, Massengill examined previous studies that had been completed. Clay (1985) created a successful reading intervention program called Reading Recovery. From this, Fountas and Pinnell (1996) designed guided reading, which was an instructional framework for all children. During the guided reading session, students were instructed on a specific comprehension skill as well as basic reading skills which include decoding and word recognition.

There were four participants in Massengill's (2004) study, two women and two men that ranged in age from twenty-five to fifty-two years. The reading levels of the participants ranged from first- to sixth-grade. Each participant completed three pre-tests to record baseline data. Participants took part in thirty-two guided reading sessions, each of which lasted one hour. Each session followed the same format: familiar reread, word work, and new read. The instructional materials were fiction and non-fiction passages that each adult had an authentic purpose for reading. Targeted skills for word work were decoding letter-sound correspondences, using structural analysis, and learning sight words.

After the data was analyzed, all four participants showed an increase in their post-test scores. The adults increased their ability to apply what they learned about decoding and increased basic recall of sight words. Each participant also showed an

increase in his/her decoding ability and ability to complete structural analysis after the intervention. All four adults began to use different word attack strategies to determine an unknown word after the guided reading intervention sessions. Massengill found that low-literate adults benefited from learning decoding skills, structural analysis skills, and basic sight words they learned in the guided reading sessions. Then they applied this information to aid and improve their reading ability.

The research completed by Manset-Williamson and Nelson (2005) focused on balanced and strategic reading instruction for upper elementary and middle school students with reading disabilities. The researchers wanted to determine what the effect would be when the degree of explicitness of the comprehension strategy being taught was varied. Previous research found that students at risk for reading disabilities required explicit and direct instruction in phonemic awareness and decoding. However, interventions tended to vary in explicitness. Research also showed that students must have a certain level of fluency to comprehend a text. Two ways to increase fluency were guided oral reading and passage rereading.

To complete the study, Manset-Williamson and Nelson asked principals from local schools to recommend students that met four characteristics: entering grades four to eight, had a reading level at least two years below their expected achievement, had standard scores on at least one of three composites at least one standard deviation below the mean, and had a standard score of a brief measure of intellectual functioning above 75. Students identified as having an emotional/behavioral disorder, autism, or sever hearing or visual impairment were excluded. Also excluded were

students for whom English was a second language. Twenty students participated in the study. Students were randomly assigned to one of two groups.

The study was conducted over the summer for six weeks. Participants received five weeks of one-on-one tutoring for four days per week, for one hour per day. Approximately one week was spent on pre- and post-testing. The two groups incorporated the exact same training I phonological awareness/analysis, strategic decoding, and reading fluency. The component manipulated was reading comprehension. The conditions varied with regard to the degree of explicitness with which the comprehension strategies were taught.

When Manset-Williamson and Nelson analyzed the data, they found that students made meaningful progress over the six-week study. Subtest scores showed that all students increased their reading abilities by approximately one-half a school year. Students were reading more quickly and accurately. The finding suggested that a balanced and strategic intervention accelerated the learning of older students with reading disabilities over a short amount of time. Students that received the most explicit instruction made significantly greater gains in passage retell. The researchers found that although the instruction that was more structured and explicit was more labor intensive for teachers and students, the results suggested that older students with reading disabilities made significant gains in reading comprehension.

The purpose of the research completed by Hall, Sabey, and McClellan (2005) was to investigate the effectiveness of an instructional program that was designed to teach second graders an expository text comprehension strategy during a small-group

guided reading instruction. For the purpose of this study, narrative texts were defined by the authors as stories that depicted events, actions, emotions, or situations that people in a particular culture experience. Expository texts were defined as informational texts that conveyed and communicated factual information. The researchers examined previous studies prior to collecting data. They found that most early childhood educators neglected expository texts in classrooms and conversely overemphasized narrative texts. It was this focus that could have been what led to the fourth-grade slump, which was defined as a decline in reading scores as students entered fourth grade. Previous studies noted that there was a limited availability of well-written expository texts to match student reading levels. The authors also found research that supported the idea that expository text comprehension strategies were more effective when taught in a small-group guided reading session.

To complete the present study, six second-grade classrooms were randomly assigned to one of three conditions: text structure, content, and no instruction. There were seventy-two second graders from one elementary school that participated in this study. The six teachers volunteered their classrooms for the study. Each had between four and six guided reading groups. One of the classrooms was later dropped from the study because there were problems with fidelity of treatment. Each student that participated in the study took part in a pre- and post-assessment. Teachers were observed for forty-five to sixty minutes approximately once a week for six weeks. Observers focused on how closely teachers followed lesson plans, time spent on the

lesson, and student engagement. No observations were completed in the no instruction classrooms.

Each condition group had slightly different instructional techniques. The text structure program consisted of three main components: introducing the text to the students, reading the text, and discussing and revisiting the text. During the introduction phase, the content, vocabulary words, and clue words were discussed. All students read the text aloud using mumble reading. Mumble reading was defined by Fountas and Pinnell (1996) as a strategy used during guided reading to allow the teacher to listen in on individual students reading. During the final component, the teacher discussed and reviewed key vocabulary words and the students completed a compare/contrast graphic organizer and created a well-written summary of the text. The content program also consisted of three main components: introducing the text, reading the text, and discussing and revising the text. During the introduction phase, the teacher discussed vocabulary words and concepts in an effort to activate background knowledge. All students then read the text using mumble reading. In the final component, the teacher discussed and reviewed key vocabulary words and major concepts found in the text. The students completed a web graphic organizer to highlight main topics and subtopics and then wrote a summary of the text.

When the pre- and post-assessments were analyzed, researchers found that students in the text structure group were better able to write summaries of expository texts. They also scored much higher on the portion of the assessment that tested their ability to recall a list of clue words from a text. Students in the text structure group

were also better able to use a graphic organizer to organize important information from a text more effectively. In addition, these students scored significantly higher when asked about their conceptual understanding of compare and contrast.

The results of this study suggest that text structure instruction is an effective way to help second graders read, understand, and interpret expository texts. To be successful, specific instruction on clue words and graphic organizers should be systematically implemented with teacher selected, appropriate expository texts in a guided reading session.

Much research has been completed on the subject of literacy instruction and improving a student's ability to read. Guided reading is one intervention used to help struggling readers. When strategies were taught explicitly in the guided reading session, students did even better. Overall, research supported the idea that instruction needs to be systematic, research based, and supported by all in the school setting.

Chapter Three: Applications and Evaluations

Introduction

The goal of the research was to determine how effective guided reading groups were at accelerating reading abilities of sixth grade struggling readers. To do this, three sixth grade females took a pre- and post-assessment. Bi-monthly, the students completed a running record assessment to measure their progress. Daily, the researcher noted important information in a journal. After data was collected, it was analyzed to determine if the guided reading sessions accelerated students learning.

Participants

There were three female students participating in the study. All students were sixth graders. Students were all eleven years of age at the time of the study. They were classified with other health impairments or learning disabilities. The other health impairments were due to attention difficulties or processing difficulties resulting in below grade level math and reading abilities.

Research was completed in a rural elementary school. The district had two buildings in two separate locations. One housed second through fourth grade, and the other housed pre-kindergarten through first grade, and fifth through twelfth grade. The district was made up of sixty-six square miles and had an approximate enrollment of 811. Thirty-nine percent of all students were eligible for the free and reduced lunch program. The district was made up predominately of Caucasian students.

I was the researcher for this study. I have taught special education in my current district for four years; two years at seventh and eighth grade, and two years at fifth and sixth grade. Prior to my current placement, I was a long-term sub as a tenth grade special education teacher and an elementary special education teacher in two different districts. My undergraduate degree came from SUNY Geneseo in the areas of childhood education and special education. Having graduated under the old program, both certifications are provisional. Currently, I am pursuing a master's degree in childhood education. Once completed, my certifications become permanent.

Procedures of Study

To determine how effective guided reading is at accelerating reading abilities of sixth grade struggling readers, I utilized a case-model format. Data was collected through three means: Diagnostic Reading Assessment (DRA) scores, running records, and teacher journaling. Students completed a DRA at the beginning and end of the study and running records bi-monthly. Teacher journaling was done daily. Before the data collection period began, I reviewed each student's literacy folder, which contained a wealth of information from previous teachers.

Instruments for Study

One source of data was from DRA scores. The DRA was administered twice to each student, once at the beginning of the study, and once at the completion of the study. I administered the DRA to each student, so my role was participant. The DRA is a reading assessment used in our district. To begin, the student made predictions from the title and table of contents. Next, the student read aloud a portion of a text to

a teacher who kept track of correctly and incorrectly read words. The teacher calculated accuracy, self-correction rate, and error-rate. After the student read the portion aloud, he/she independently read the rest of the text. Upon completion, the student answered questions in a packet regarding the main idea, important information, a reflection, created a summary, and identified strategies he/she used while reading. The information was then scored using a rubric and the student was given a DRA reading level.

A second source of data for my research was running records. Running records were completed bi-monthly. I completed the running records, so my role was participant. In my district, running records occurred in a one-to-one or small group setting. The student read aloud approximately one hundred words and the teacher kept track of words read correctly and words read incorrectly. In addition, incorrect words were recorded and analyzed later to determine the types of errors made. The teacher calculated accuracy, self-correction rate, and error-rate. After the read aloud section, the student continued to read a section of the text silently and then verbally answered ten comprehension questions. Based on the calculated information and comprehension score, a guided reading level is assigned to the student.

A third source of data was from teacher journaling. I added an entry each day to the composition notebook. I was the one doing the journaling, so my role was participant. During that time, I noted any pertinent information from the guided reading session and focused on specific journal prompts. Journal prompts included: How was the instruction focused around the needs of the group? What behaviors did

the student(s) display during the running records? Did the students share any concerns or comments? For the complete list of journal prompts, see Appendix A.

Chapter Four: Results

It is important to know if guided reading is effective at accelerating reading abilities of struggling readers. To do so, data was collected over a six month period of time. During this time, students completed an initial Developmental Reading Assessment in September. Students also completed thee running records, one each in September, December, and February. To complete data collection, students took a final DRA in February. Over the six month period, students were involved in a guided reading class that met every other day for 45 minutes.

Initial Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA) Results

After students were in school approximately one week, each of the three participants individually completed the DRA. The three girls, whose names have been changed, all demonstrated similarities and differences on the assessment.

Molly took the assessment and was instructional at a level 40, which equated to early-fourth grade. During the oral reading section, she used the strategy of re-reading to self-correct her errors and confirm comprehension. She read 70 words per minute and had 98% accuracy, after only misreading three words. She had some expression and exhibited mostly appropriate pauses and phrases. Molly went back to her seat and wrote three questions she had about the text and three things she thought she would learn from the rest of the text. Although they were not very insightful, her answers were complete. Molly finished reading the text, *The Amazing Octopus*, and wrote a summary, answered literal comprehension questions, and wrote about her use of comprehension strategies while she read. When her answers were scored on a four-

point rubric, she received mostly threes. Molly earned a total of 27 out of a possible 40 points, putting her in the instructional range.

After Molly was complete, Emma completed the DRA. She too took the assessment and was instructional at level 40. During the oral reading section, she did not consistently use any one strategy to self-correct her miscues. Emma read 143 words per minute and had 99% accuracy, after only misreading one word. Emma read with appropriate expression and phrasing. Emma went back to her seat and wrote three questions she had about the text and three things she thought she would learn from the rest of the text. The questions and predictions were complete. Emma finished reading the text, *The Amazing Octopus*, and wrote a summary, answered literal comprehension questions, and wrote about her use of comprehension strategies while she read. When her answers were scored on a four-point rubric, she received one one, three twos, and two threes. Emma earned a total of 29 out of a possible 40 points, putting her in the instructional range.

Nichole took the DRA and was also instructional at level 40. During the oral reading section, she used the strategy of re-reading to self-correct her miscues. Emma read 99 words per minute and had 98% accuracy, only misreading four words. Nichole read with some expression and phrasing. She went back to her seat and wrote three questions she had about the text and three things she thought she would learn from the rest of the text. The questions and predictions were adequate and complete. Nichole finished reading the text, *The Amazing Octopus*, and wrote a summary, answered literal comprehension questions, and wrote about her use of comprehension

strategies while she read. When her answers were scored on a four-point rubric, she received two twos and four threes. Nichole earned a total of 25 out of a possible 40 points, putting her in the instructional range.

Running Record Results and Guided Reading Instruction

Soon after the DRA was administered and scored, Molly, Emma, and Nichole individually completed a running record. Running record levels were selected based upon the previous year's outgoing data complete by the fifth grade teachers. Molly read a book called *Hoofed Animals*, a Fountas and Pinnell level R, which equated to mid-fourth grade. On the running record, Molly had nine errors and only two self-corrections. When she read aloud, she had appropriate expression and phrasing. On the comprehension section, Molly orally answered eight and a half questions correctly out of ten. She struggled with questions that asked her to make an inference and a critical response about the text. After the running record was scored, Molly was found to be instructional at level R.

Emma read a book called *Bears*, a level Q, which equated to mid-fourth grade. On the running record, Emma had two errors and four self-corrections. She used re-reading as her dominant self-correction strategy. When she read aloud, she had adequate expression and phrasing. On the comprehension section, Emma orally answered eight questions out of ten correctly. She struggled with questions that asked her to make an inference and a critical response about the text. When the running record was scored, Molly was found to be instructional at level Q.

Nichole read a book called *The Titanic*, a level P, which equated to early-fourth grade. On the running record, Nichole had four errors and three self-corrections. She used word chunking as the dominant strategy to determine unknown words and make self-corrections. When she read aloud, expression and phrasing were missing because she was so focused on reading the correct words. On the comprehension section, Nichole orally answered eight questions out of ten correctly. She struggled with one question that asked her to make an inference about the text and one that asked her to pull details directly from the text. When the running record was scored, Nichole was found to be instructional at level P.

The girls met as a guided reading group every-other-day for 45 minutes, along with three other students that were not part of the study. Instruction during guided reading class for October and November focused primarily on making connections with the text and making, confirming, and revising predictions. At the beginning of each guided reading session, students had a brief activity to activate their background knowledge of a text feature, such as table of contents, title page, index, glossary, etc. Students then received direct instruction on the chosen strategy for the text they were reading. Next, students read the text as a group and practiced applying the strategy. To conclude each session, each student talked about how the strategy helped deepen his/her comprehension of the text.

At the beginning of December, I met individually with each participant to administer the second running record. Each student increased her reading ability by one level. After two months instruction, Molly improved to a level S, which was late-

fourth grade. She had six errors and one self-correction. The errors she made did not interfere significantly with comprehension. After the read aloud portion, Molly finished the text independently and orally answered questions. She correctly answered eight out of ten questions. She had a difficult time when she needed to answer a question that required her to make an inference and have a critical response to the text. When the running record was scored, Molly was found to be instructional at level S.

Emma completed a running record and improved to a level R, which was mid-fourth grade. During the read aloud portion, Emma had one error and one self-correction. Emma finished reading the text independently and orally answered questions. She correctly answered eight questions out of ten. She had a difficult time when she was asked to answer a question that required her to make an inference and have a critical response to the text. When the running record was scored and analyzed, Emma was found to be instructional at level R.

Nichole completed a running record and improved to a level Q, which was mid-fourth grade. During the read aloud portion, she had five errors and no self-corrections. She relied on using chunking to determine unknown words. She struggled with the words that she read incorrectly and tried repeatedly to sound them out. Nichole completed the text independently and orally answered questions. She correctly answered eight questions out of ten. She had a difficult time when she was asked to answer a question that required her to make an inference and a question that

asked her to recall a text-based detail. When the running record was scored and analyzed, she was found to be instructional at level Q.

Throughout December and January, instruction in the guided reading group focused on two informational text comprehension strategies: determining important information and summarizing. Sessions began with a quick activity to activate background knowledge of the material being studied. Students were working with factual information, and seemed to be much more interested in reading the texts than previously. Students were anxious to share something they remembered about the topic, or a new fact they learned. Then, students reviewed the two strategies and how they needed to be applied. As students read, they highlighted or underlined information that was important based upon previously determined characteristics. After reading a section, students used the information highlighted or underlined to create an oral summary. At first, students worked together to create summaries. After some practice, they were able to adequately summarize short sections by themselves. To wrap up the guided reading session, students talked about how determining important information and summarizing helped them better comprehend the text.

At the beginning of February, I met with each student individually to administer the third and final running record. Molly read a book called, *Amazing Animal Adaptations*, a level S, which equated to late-fourth grade. She had five errors and three self-corrections. Although Molly was able to read the text, she had a difficult time answering the comprehension questions. When asked if she understood the book, she replied that she did, but that she was confused what adaptations meant.

Although this information was told to her before she began the book and again in the book, it still caused confusion. When the running record was analyzed, Molly was found to be instructional at a level S.

Emma completed a running record also with *Amazing Animal Adaptations*, a level S that equated to late-fourth grade. She had three errors and self-corrections. The errors made did not interfere with comprehension. Emma used a self-correction strategy of asking herself if what she just read made sense. When it did not, she re-read and self-corrected her errors. Emma was able to answer the comprehension questions adequately. When the running record was scored and analyzed, she was found to be instructional at level S.

Nichole read a fictional text called *The Election*, a level R that equated to mid-fourth grade. While reading, she read three words incorrectly and was able to self-correct four errors. When asked comprehension questions, she answered all correctly. Because of her accuracy and ability to answer all questions correctly, she scored in the independent range for level R. When getting a running record level for students, I continue to administer assessments until the student scores in the instructional range. Next, she read *Could be Worse,* which was a level S. Nichole had five errors and three self-corrections. When asked to recall pertinent information from the text, she was able to do so adequately. She struggled to make inferences about why characters in the text did certain things. When the running record was scored and analyzed, Nichole was instructional at a level S.

Final Developmental Reading Assessment Results

At the end of February, I met individually with each participant to complete the final DRA. Molly read, *Mike Fink: King of the Keelboatmen.* It was a fictional text at a level 60, which equated to early-sixth grade. During the oral reading selection, Molly had five errors. At times she was reading too fast and not processing the print. Rather than reading what was printed, she read a word visually similar. Molly had six self-corrections. She used re-reading and self-monitoring to make the corrections. She read 70 words per minute with 98% accuracy. Molly read with some expression that conveyed meaning but generally shorter than appropriate phrases. Next, Molly went back to her seat and individually wrote questions she had about the text and made predictions about what would happen next. She came up with good questions and predictions. Molly finished reading the text independently and provided written responses to questions after she was completed. She had some difficulty determining the most important information from each section in the text. She had an accurate interpretation of the story. Molly wrote that she used the comprehension strategy of making connections to better understand the text and was able to give two concrete examples of how she used the strategy. Molly's answers were scored on a four point rubric. She earned three twos and three threes. Out of a possible 40 points, Molly earned 23 points, which put her in the instructional range of a level 60.

For her DRA, Emma read, *One Brave Heart: Triathlete RudyGarcia-Tolson.* This was a biography written at a level 60, which equated to early-sixth grade. Emma had five errors and three self-corrections. While reading, her primary strategy used

was asking herself if what she read made sense. If it did not, she went back and re-read. She read at a rate of 92 words per minute and had 99% accuracy. Emma had good expression and phrasing. When she was finished with the read aloud section, she went to her seat and wrote three adequate predictions and three adequate questions she had about the text so far. Emma completed reading the text independently. She struggled with finding the most important details of each section. However, she was able to write an acceptable summary. She demonstrated a partial understanding of the text in her responses. She was able to provide two examples of the comprehension strategies she used, which were questioning and visualizing. Each response was scored out of four points. Emma earned mostly twos. Out of a possible 40 points, she earned a total of 23 putting her in the instructional range of level 60.

To complete her DRA, Nichole read *Lights! Camera! Action!*. This was a fictional text at a level 50, which equated to early-fifth grade. Nichole had three errors and three self-corrections. She used chunking words into syllables to try and determine unknown words. Nichole read at a rate of 76 words per minute and had 99% accuracy. She read with some expression that demonstrated meaning but broke the text into phrases generally shorter than necessary. Nichole was able to come up with adequate questions she had about the text and predictions of what would happen. She went to her seat and completed reading the text independently. She was able to write a partial summary of the important events in the story. She used details from the text to support her answer to a literal question and she had an accurate understanding of important text implications. When the questions were scored out of four points, she

earned two twos and four threes. Out of a possible 40 points, Nichole earned 25, putting her in the instructional range of level 50.

All students showed growth over the course of the study. Molly began the year with a reading level of R and completed the study with a level S. Emma began the year reading at a level Q and completed the study at a level S. Nichole began the year with a reading level of P and at the time the study ended was reading at a level R. Molly began with a DRA level of 40 and ended with a level 60. Emma began with a level 40 and also finished with a level 60. Nichole began with a level 40 and ended with a level 50.

Chapter Five: Conclusions and Recommendations

Discussion

Throughout the study, participants received guided reading instruction every other day for 45 minutes. Bi-monthly, each student completed a running record to determine how her reading skills had progressed. Additionally, students completed a Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA) at the beginning of the school year and at the completion of the study to measure progress.

At the beginning of the school year, each participant was instructional on the DRA at a level 40, which equated to early-fourth grade. On the running record assessment in September, Molly was found to be instructional at level R, mid-fourth grade. Emma was found to be instructional at level Q, mid-fourth grade. Nichole was found to be instructional at R, early-fourth grade.

Guided reading instruction in October and November focused on helping students make connections with the text and make, confirm, and revise predictions. Students were taught three different types of connections: text-to-self, text-to-text, and text-to-world. When a text-to-self connection was made, a student would make a deep connection between something in the text and something in his/her life. The connection would help the student have a better understanding of a situation or character in the text. A text-to-text connection occurred when a student connected something she was reading in the current text to a text that was previously read. This connection also helped her to have a deeper comprehension of the text. When a text-to-world connection was made, the student connected something in the text to

something seen in the media (on TV, a movie, etc) or an event either happening now or that happened in history. As with the previous connections, this would allow the student to have a deeper understanding of an event in the text.

Students were encouraged to make as many connections as they could while reading. However, the connections needed to be deep and meaningful. At the beginning of instruction, connections were superficial, such as, the character in the book has a brother, and so do I. Although this is an example of a text-to-self connection, not much insight can be gained. After instruction, students were able to make more meaningful connections, such as; the character has a younger brother in the text. I also have a younger brother who I try and protect. I bet the main character has strong feelings about what is happening to his younger brother. Students wrote t-s, t-t, or t-w in the text where they had a connection and shared the information at the end of the paragraph or section.

Prior to beginning a new text, students were taught to make predictions about what will happen. After they were comfortable with this, students were encouraged to make predictions while they read. After a prediction was made, it was either confirmed or revised. When the prediction was correct, it was confirmed. When something different happened, the prediction needed to be revised. Students were comfortable making, confirming, and revising predictions because it was a natural skill. They had always been saying what would happen next, now there was a name for it.

After the running records were administered and scored in December, each participant increased their reading ability one level, Molly to a level S, Emma to a level R, and Nichole to a level Q. All three students struggled with answering a question that required them to make an inference (take what they know plus what is the in the text to make an inference). Molly and Emma struggled to answer a critical response question and Nichole struggled to answer a text-based question. Although they were not asked questions that directly asked them to make a connection or prediction, each participant told me of a connection they made to the text.

Guided reading instruction in December and January focused on reading and comprehending nonfiction texts. Specifically, students worked on determining important information and then using that information to create a summary of what they read. Instruction began with brainstorming text cues that allow the reader to know something important has been or will be read. Students came up with cues such as: bulleted or numbered list, bold or italicized words, and text in different colors. While reading, students used this list to determine what was important and either highlighted or underlined the text. All books used during guided reading sessions were consumables printed from www.readinga-z.com to allow students to work directly with the print. Often students had discussions about what information was important. At times, students would play the leader role. One student would read a paragraph and ask the rest of the group what should be highlighted. As instruction went on, students were able to highlight as they read rather than waiting until the end of the paragraph.

After only a few weeks, Molly and Nichole became proficient at determining what information was important. They needed little guidance to pick out the important things to highlight. Emma struggled with this skill. While reading, she wanted to highlight every word in every paragraph. Her thinking was that if the author wrote it, it was important. She received the same instruction as the group, as well as individual instruction while the group worked independently. Even after two months of instruction, she had a difficult time separating the important information from the non-important information.

After a few sessions of strictly working with determining important information, students were taught to use what was important to create a summary. During the session that summarizing was introduced, students stopped after reading each paragraph and one student reread the highlighted text. As a group, that information was used to create a summary. After a few sessions, students began to summarize longer sections of text as a group. Eventually, students were working to summarize whole chapters. This was a difficult skill for Molly, Emma, and Nichole. All three participants worked diligently to come up with appropriate summaries, but had trouble working with longer pieces of text.

When the running records were administered in February, Molly stayed at a level S, late-fourth grade. Emma increased one level to level S, late-fourth grade. Nichole increased two levels to level S, late-fourth grade. Students were not asked questions that specifically required them to determine important information or

summarize. However, to recall information, students were determining what was important as they read.

On the DRA assessment, participants were asked to take notes of the most important information from each section. The three girls struggled with this skill. I believe that they had a hard time because they could not highlight or underline as they read because the books were not consumables. Instead they had to try and remember the information and then write it down. The three participants had trouble writing a strong summary because they had a difficult time remembering the important information. When asked to describe one comprehension skill used while reading, Molly stated connections. She was able to give two text-to-self connections she made throughout the text. Emma wrote she used questioning and visualizing and was able to give general examples of each. Nichole noted that she used questioning and was able to provide one question she asked herself. Although Emma and Nichole did not specifically write they made connections, when asked if they made connections while they read, they all responded yes and were able to tell of the connection made. When the three participants were asked if it would have been helpful to highlight in the text, they responded that it would have made taking notes and summarizing much easier.

Action Plan

Now that data has been collected and analyzed, it will need to be shared with professionals in the district. First, I will need to meet with the elementary principal to go over the results. Because she is also the Director of Special Education, she has been very interested in the study. We will go over data, results of the assessments,

and analysis. I will recommend to her that to maximize the impact of guided reading on struggling readers, students should have guided reading sessions daily, rather than every other day.

Next, data will be shared with the team of teacher I work with at our team meeting. All teachers on the team teach guided reading to students on an every other day schedule as was utilized in the study. I will share the results of the assessments and the analysis with the team.

Finally, the study will be shared at a faculty meeting that will consist of fifth and sixth grade teachers, reading specialist, special education teacher, reading coach, and elementary principal. A brief overview of data collection will be presented, followed by a summary of assessments and results, and will conclude with analysis and future recommendations for accelerating the reading abilities of struggling readers.

Recommendations for Future Research

One limitation to the current study was that it only included three students. With a population, the results may have turned out differently. Another limitation was that the study involved only females. A final limitation was that the study was done in a small, rural school. There were no participants from urban or suburban settings.

For individuals also interested in accelerating reading abilities for struggling readers, one future study could be to look at data results when students received guided reading every day rather than every other day. With increased intensity in instruction, reading abilities should be accelerated.

Conclusions

To determine if guided reading instruction would accelerate reading growth for struggling readers, data was collected and analyzed from three, female, sixth grade, struggling readers. At the start of the school year, they completed a DRA and running record. Two moths later, they completed another running record. Two month following, they completed a final running record and another DRA. Throughout the sixth month period, the three participants received guided reading instruction every other day for 45 minutes in a group of six students.

It was found that guided reading had a positive impact on the reading levels of the participants. Each participant increased her reading level by approximately half a year based upon running record data. Data from the DRA showed one participant increased her reading level by approximately one year and two participants increased their reading levels by approximately two years. The discrepancy between results from running records and the DRA come from how specific each assessment is. The running record breaks down each grade level into four levels, where there is only one level for each grade level on the DRA. Overall, guided reading is an appropriate instructional strategy to use to increase the reading level of struggling readers.

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Appendix 1: Journal Prompts

1. How was the instruction focused around the needs of the group?
2. How did the students respond to the task(s) during the guided reading session?
3. What behaviors did the student(s) display during the running records?
4. What behaviors did the student(s) display during the DRA assessment?
5. Did the students share any concerns or comments?