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FOREWORD

Nancy Fichtman Dana, Director, Center for School Improvement
University of Florida

In 2004, the Center for School Improvement at the University of Florida joined in partnership with the North East Florida Educational Consortium (NEFEC), PK Yonge Developmental Research School, and the Lastinger Center for Learning at UF to develop a program of support for teachers and principals in North Central Florida as they engaged in the process of practitioner inquiry for the first time. Practitioner inquiry (also known as teacher research or action research) is defined as practitioners systematically studying their own classroom or administrative practice. This is accomplished through the process of defining a wondering, collecting data to glean insights into that wondering, analyzing data, synthesizing and sharing with other practitioners what was learned, and taking action for change (Dana & Yendol-Hoppey, 2009).

The power of inquiry as a form of meaningful professional learning for teachers was so great, that in five years time, the process spread like a wild fire throughout Florida, with one of the most exciting and successful “outbreaks” being in Immokalee! Under the leadership of Cathy Gould, Immokalee held their first Inquiry Expo in 2006. The Expo provides a forum for education professionals to celebrate and share the insights they have gained from systematically exploring pressing issues they face in schools and classrooms every day. In 2006, 40 teachers presented at the Immokalee Inquiry Expo. In 2007, that number grew to 62, and then to 74 in 2008. In 2009, the Immokalee Inquiry Expo was the forum for over 100 teachers to share their inquiries! I was fortunate to attend the 2009 Expo, and was overwhelmed by the dedication and passion that all of the teacher inquirers from Immokalee have for the complex processes of teaching and learning, and determination to work tirelessly to make a difference in the lives of both the children they teach and their teaching colleagues through engagement in the process of practitioner research!

These Expos proved to be so valuable that it made sense to capture and summarize some of the wonderful work being done by teachers in a publication. Hence, Improving Immokalee Schools Through Teacher Inquiry was born. The educators who have shared their work in this 2009 collection have taken charge of their professional growth and learning, and have joined fellow educators across the nation in a powerful mission – to better understand, inform, shape, reshape, and reform school practice. Please join them in this mission by contacting any of the authors if these brief summaries of their work spark your interest, generate questions or comments, or inspire you to learn more! In this way, this monograph serves to connect teacher inquirers to one another, extending the collaborative network that exists on one Thursday afternoon in May each year at the Inquiry Expos through time and space. Through collaborating during the continuous cycles of inquiry we pass through as educators, the work of teaching becomes better informed, teachers gain a louder voice in the politics of education, and teaching becomes a more respected profession! Let the inquiries summarized in this monograph inspire the development of a community of teachers excited about learning and stimulated by their continuous inquiries into their own practice!

REFERENCE

I teach in a Head Start Pre-kindergarten classroom, and I have several students that have difficulty staying focused at circle time. Typically these particular students just want to "play,” but I was wondering if they might "bloom" academically if I was able to incorporate more structured play-based activities that address their specific needs versus just addressing these needs in a typical teacher led small or whole group setting. Structured play would allow for the children to explore the same skills learned in circle time in a less formal setting. I believe that they might have a greater chance of attaining mastery while working in their zone of proximal development.

The zone of proximal development (ZPD) is a concept which has received much attention. It is defined as the distance between a child's actual developmental level as determined by independent problem-solving and the higher level of potential development as determined through problem-solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 86). This means that, during interactions, less capable participants can perform beyond their competence than when acting alone. Intersubjectivity is most simply defined as mutual or shared understanding; a sharing of purpose or focus among individuals. This process involves cognitive, social, and emotional interchange. Both the ZPD and intersubjectivity have implications for an active role for a teacher in children's learning. The sociocultural view of cognitive development therefore explicitly acknowledges the roles of adults and peers in children's learning (Hedges, 2000).

**Question**

- How will incorporating more structured play-based activities that address specific student needs affect students’ mastery of pre-kindergarten literacy skills?

**Sub Questions**

- Will the struggling students still feel frustrated and not participate?
- Will these activities push students that are not struggling to further excel?
- How will the students work together? Will those that already have mastery fall into the role of peer tutor or just wait for me to assist the struggling students?

**Method**

I developed several structured play-based activities that reinforced literacy skills that I was teaching during whole group learning time. The two that we spent the most significant amount of time on were setting up and exploring a post office and a grocery store through a variety of literacy activities. I chose several students that struggle to focus at circle time to participate first,
and then invited the rest of the class to do so as well. I paired the struggling students with on-level peers to introduce the activity and let them choose play partners in subsequent return visits to the center.

The first activity that I introduced was the grocery store. The students chose labeled picture cards to add to their shopping list. The main objective with our first activity was letter recognition. I asked the students to identify each item on their list and what letter and/or sound that it began with. When their list was full (four items), they went shopping, located each item, and placed it in their cart. After locating the last item, I checked their list and we reviewed each item along with its beginning letter/sound. For students that needed more challenge, I gave them a beginning letter or sound and they chose their own items that fit that description from the basket of picture cards.

The second activity was the post office. After modeling how to write a friendly letter, address an envelope, etc. during circle time, I invited them to write their own letters in our Post Office center. I gave them a variety of materials such as name cards, along with different types of paper, envelopes, and writing utensils. My focus was the beginning letter/sound of their name, along with that of the person to be receiving the letter, as well as practice writing new words. I asked them to identify these as each was completed. They also got in a great deal of practice following directions that involved several steps. For example: Write your letter, draw a picture, place it in the envelope, address it, and take it the mailbox. I provided a “stamp” upon completion and then placed it in our plastic classroom mailbox. I chose a mail carrier to deliver each letter after we cleaned up our center activities.

**Data Collection**

I surveyed the students prior to and at the conclusion of this project on how they felt about learning new things and where they had more fun doing so (circle time or center time). I also printed their progress report at the beginning for baseline data and again at the end to assess growth or mastery of my targeted literacy skills, along with information from our Alphabet Letter Recognition Inventory (ALRI) that is completed each quarter with the students. In addition, I kept a checklist of who visited the center and how long they stayed, along with anecdotal notes of progress and students’ comments.

**Data Results and Analysis**

Each of my focus students made gains. Student A receives speech/language services and is in the process of being evaluated for OT as well. He was unable to identify any letters at all in the first quarter and progressed to twenty five by the end of the third quarter and beginning of the fourth. Student B does not receive any ESE services, but has displayed defiant and disruptive behavior that keeps her from being able to focus during instruction. She was able to identify one letter in the first quarter and progressed to nine letters by the fourth quarter. Student C also exhibits severe behavior issues that prevent him from participating completely in instruction. He made the greatest gains; beginning with zero letters and progressing to recognizing 20 letters at the end of the fourth quarter!

These structured activities took place during free choice center time. Both activities were successful in that students made a choice to visit these centers frequently and did play
purposefully for a time. However, I found that as I relinquished my scaffolding of each activity, my focus students were less able to play with purpose and returned to rolling the grocery cart in circles around the classroom. When these students participated independently with peers that were at higher academic levels, I found that their peers often encouraged them to complete their tasks and use the props for their intended use. I noticed that certain students worked well as peer tutors, and this led me to change my groupings for my small group instruction to better accommodate the needs of my focus students and encourage them to continue to “bloom” with assistance from their peers.

Reflection
Aside from having difficulty focusing during instruction, my three focus students also lacked the basic social skills needed to enter and maintain play experiences. This usually translated to them kicking down someone’s blocks in frustration. I began to notice this and stepped in to scaffold these skills. When I saw one of these students get ready to act aggressively, I would step in and say, “You look like you want to help Christopher build his tower” etc. They would shake their head sadly and I would respond, “Ask him: Can I play here, too?” Before these students can play with purpose, they have to master these basic social skills to allow for successful play interaction. I was hoping to add additional activities into my inquiry, but I ended up spending a great deal of time working on social skills in the beginning. Once we cleared that hurdle, I could really begin the task at hand.

I did see improvement in playing with purpose for my three focus students, but when I was not there to scaffold, they could only maintain this with a peer for a limited amount of time. My other students did continue to use the props in an appropriate manner. However, that being said, my focus students did use materials for general exploratory play in a much more purposeful manner, which indicates that they better understand the concept of using their imagination and props to act out play scenarios with peers.

This experience did not lead to improved focus and behavior during circle time. I am continuing to search for new ways to diversify my content delivery to meet the needs of my present focus students and those that I may have next year.

References


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**Movin’ and Groovin’ to Learning**

Pam Purevich, Pre-Kindergarten Teacher

Village Oaks Elementary

**Purpose**

I teach Migrant Pre-Kindergarten four and five year old children. All of my students are from low income families who do not have the resources to expose their children to many different learning opportunities. The children need literacy, language, and social/emotional skills along with the ability to follow directions in order to be successful in school. I want to see if I can enhance my students learning ability including language development and communication skills by using music, movement and transitions. My new strategies and techniques will help to reduce challenging student’s behavior in the classroom.

**Question**

- Will music/movement and transitions be the key that opens the doors to learning?
- Will incorporating varied movement experiences in the classroom schedule increase children’s focus, improve balance and coordination, and coordinate the mind and body while stimulating learning?

**Sub-Questions**

- Can I challenge children’s natural enthusiasm for music and movement into a rich, positive learning experience?
- Can children sing, dance, and chant their way to learn better basic skills and behavior?

**Method**

I introduced key concepts such as letters, rhymes, vocabulary, sound recognition, math, and calendar using music/movement and transitions. The daily schedule included specific times for movement activities, when children tend to be fidgety or low on energy. Some children found it difficult to cope with transitions, and this often led to challenging behavior. I evaluated the schedule in terms of number and length of transitions and what children were expected to do during transitions. This information led me to modify my transitions to better support the children and to reduce challenging behavior. I incorporated music into all parts of my curriculum. We sang during transitions, to line-up, clean-up, when learning about the calendar, and to learn new language and skills. I began seeing children singing and moving as they were totally engrossed in learning and having fun.
Data Collection

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<thead>
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<th>Assessments</th>
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<td>January-March</td>
<td>Collect data daily and weekly</td>
<td>Analysis of student activities</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Observations/Notes</td>
<td>Galileo Progress Report</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Behavior Pre-K Checklist</td>
<td>On-going data</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Conferences: Teacher/Parent</td>
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Data Results and Analysis

My room was becoming chaotic at times, especially during transitions. At times I felt as if I was losing control of my classroom. I knew I had to make changes in the room’s climate. I observed changes in my children as I tried to create new transitions (music/movement, rituals, poems, finger plays and the use of props) into our everyday routine. The children’s behavior, attention span, and listening skills did improve as I changed my teaching techniques and incorporated strategies to include more music and transitioning tools.

The parents of my students were very supportive of our changes. I explained my plan to them at conferences. I asked them for suggestions. Some parents came in to participate and to observe our classroom changes. The children loved when we had visitors. I invited colleagues into our room to observe, analyze, and give suggestions for improvement. I wanted the opinions of others to help me find a hidden treasure that I missed. I needed others to help me find something I might have overlooked.

My Galileo (on-going data) showed more growth than I expected. My student’ language development and communication skills had sky rocketed. I had nine non-English speaking and five limited English speaking students in December. I was concerned about their growth and where they would be at the end of the year. Now, they are all speaking English. Some students talk in phrases, two students just in one or two words, but most can talk in sentences. Their student involvement and engagement levels can be observed when they are in centers, in large groups and small groups. They sing, re-tell stories, have a plan of what they want to do, ask questions, and talk to each other. They are enthusiastically engaged.

I learned transitions can be used in a variety of ways. I found that some of the music and transitions used in the beginning did not work as the year progressed. I changed them around and that helped me to meet the students’ needs over time. As with most teaching strategies, the better you know your students, and their capabilities and needs, the better equipped you are to decide which transition activities will best meet their needs.
Reflection
As a Pre-Kindergarten teacher, I am continually thinking and looking for ways to motivate my students to learn while keeping them focused on an activity at hand. I needed a better way to safely move students from one area to another and from one activity to another. Music and transitional activities function as playful strategies.

Some brain researchers believe there is a direct correlation between improved learning, music and the brain. My data results agree with this information. Research scientists have shown that young children experience neural stimulation via ordered patterns of rhythm, tone, and music. By directing children’s behavior in a positive way while offering learning opportunities at the same time, young ones learn through music, transitions and play. The music not only teaches concepts and skills to children, but also helps to help them to comply with requests, whether individually or groups. I saw how using music and transitions offered solutions for quickly gaining children’s attention, diverting bad moods, and encouraging appropriate behavior without raising voices or punishing. I learned using music as a teaching tool does more than enhance language development, body awareness, muscular coordination, rhythmic proficiency and listening skills. I saw a relationship between singing and literacy development. When children sing they are beginning to learn sequencing, phonics, rhyming, and language which are all critical skills used in reading. It offers opportunities to build character, teach self-control, encourages individual interests. These experiences did help the children focus and offered opportunities to connect mind and body. My learning community has changed. The atmosphere encourages children to interact, think, look, listen, and learn. And, it’s fun!

References


Learning Math Through Block Play
Lisa Pietrzyk, Prekindergarten Teacher
Pinecrest Elementary

Purpose
As a prekindergarten teacher, I am faced with the challenge of finding time in the daily schedule to teach all of the subjects which are essential in preparing my students for kindergarten. With the push for literacy and the “No Child Left Behind” act our core curriculum is ELLM- Early Literacy and Learning Model. With this program taking up circle time on a daily basis I struggle to find the time to teach math. I have successfully integrated math into our daily routines, including during our morning circle and calendar activities, but I feel that my students would benefit from additional direct math instruction. Our daily schedule includes one hour of free choice center time. Open-ended block play is very valuable; students learn motor skills, fantasy play, social skills, eye hand coordination, organizational skills and spatial awareness. Center time could also provide the opportunity to work with students in a small group setting focusing on essential math skills.

In this inquiry I spent 15-20 minutes of the hour of block play during center time explicitly teaching mathematics using block-building activities. When students work with blocks, they sort and classify them based on their geometric properties relating to their shape. They also use the skills of estimation, measurement, patterning, part-whole relationships, visualization, symmetry and balance. For example, Legos can be sorted using three skill levels. They can be sorted by one attribute (by color) sorted by one attribute, then another (by color, then by size within each color) and by two attributes (by size and color). Legos are also great for making patterns because they snap together and come in many colors and sizes which make them ideal for many levels of patterning. Legos can also be used for one-to-one correspondence activities and provide opportunities for endless counting. Teacher directed block play can promote increased mathematical vocabulary and spatial awareness.

Question
- How will the use of explicit instruction in mathematics and independent practice of these skills while the students are working in the block center in small groups aid in the increase of the number of learned goals which correlate with the explicit instruction and independent practice as found in the Math scale of the Galileo Assessment System?

Sub Question
- Will activities of this nature increase students’ motivation towards mathematics and higher order thinking skills?

Method
The students engage in one hour of free choice center time in my pre-kindergarten classroom on a daily basis. During this time period, I worked with small groups of students (for 15-20 minutes) in the block center guiding their block building, helping them build complex structures with blocks. Children learn a lot about spatial concepts and other aspects of cognitive development while manipulating and arranging blocks. As stated in *The Power of Block*
Building (Early Childhood Corner), research has shown that preschool children who are able to build complex structures with blocks have a better chance of mathematical success in middle and high school, even taking into account student’s IQ levels, social class and gender. I also explicitly taught other essential math skills using blocks and block accessories. These skills included 1 to 1 correspondence, counting groups to 20, more/less, longer/shorter/taller, same/different, sorting, and patterning, exchanging two halves for a whole, and other basic fraction skills. These activities took place four times per week, working with four to five students at a time. Each week I focused on a different skill.

Data Collection
A report of the Math scale of the Galileo Assessment System with goals that correlate with the explicit math instruction and independent practice in the block center was printed prior to the beginning of the inquiry. A second report was printed after the completion of the inquiry. Additionally, photographs were taken throughout the inquiry to show student engagement. The students participated in a survey as additional data to assess students’ motivation towards learning math while working in the block center.

Data Results and Analysis
Data was collected for 20 of the 53 math skills that are assessed in pre-k. The data that was collected prior to the inquiry reflected all of the students needing to learn 6 of the skills. The post data showed 3 skills with the same deficit. This was due to the short duration of the inquiry and the fact that all skills were not taught or practiced during the time period. Prior to the inquiry, of the 20 skills, only 6 were learned by ½ or more of the students. At the end of the inquiry, 8 skills were learned by the entire class and another 3 were learned by all but 1 student. Only 6 of the 20 skills were learned by less than 15 students by the end of the inquiry.

Reflection
In my opinion, the results of the inquiry showed that it was successful, but I didn’t feel that it was a success in the manner it was intended. Lack of time was a major factor, I was unable to get to all of the skills that I intended, and I wasn’t able to just build blocks with the students taking their block building to the next level as often as I hoped. It felt to me like I was just practicing math skills with small groups of students or accessing them, the only difference was that I chose to work with them in the block center with block accessories as opposed to at the table with other manipulatives. However, the students definitely benefited academically as a result of my working with them in the block center during center time. The students who always enjoy working with me during their choice time still did, but others would rather be doing something else or wanted to use the block materials as they wished.

Another drawback to this method of instruction was that it meant that the block center was not available to students who wanted to build freely or engage in other block activities while I was working with my small group.

References
Word Wall Wonder
Jennifer Casiano, Kindergarten Teacher
Village Oaks Elementary School

Purpose
For my inquiry I focused on six retained students who were having difficulty with memorizing and using sight words. I wanted to build their writing skills by helping them master words and make the most of the word wall posted in the classroom. Improving Student Reading Skill Through Sight Word Instruction (2000) is a M.A. research project by Johanna Monroe and Jeannie Stauton. The author of the project notes Pat Cunningham’s ways of teaching printed words in isolation. If teaching students sight words in isolation by using a word wall and the Dolch word list is helping students maintain word recognition while building on reading skills, then the word wall and Dolch list are working.

Question
• Will the use of explicit sight word instruction affect student’s word recognition?

Sub Question
• How does sight word recognition practice affect students reading skills?

Method
I researched effective word wall drills and activities prior to implementing new activities. The students were given a pretest on 35 five focus words for this inquiry. The pretest used was the Dolch Assessment list provided by Collier County.

I conducted direct instruction for 10 to 15 minutes each day for the six retained students. The instruction took place in a small group setting. Each student had a dry erase board and pen. They numbered one through five on the left side of the board. Each word was introduced, spelled, used in a sentence, and then written on the board. I collected writing samples based on the words that were incorporated on the word wall for a seven week period. On the first day of each week I introduced 5 new words. The students spelled the words on their boards while snapping their fingers as they said the whole word. The students then wrote the words on their boards. On the second day of the week, I called on one child to use the word in a sentence. Each student wrote their own sentence using the words. I repeated this routine for all five words. I added the words to the word wall. After the word was added to the wall, the students were responsible for writing it correctly in their own writing. During journal time, I observed the students’ writing. If a word was misspelled, the student was sent to the wall to check the spelling. As I worked with students during this time, I wrote “ww” above a misspelled word to remind the student to check the word wall. On the third day of the week, I used the words in a rhyming
lesson. I used clues such as, “The first word ends like May.” It fits in this sentence: “I like to _____ outside.” The students also used the word wall during independent center activities. On the fourth day, I asked the students to practice with a partner 3 words that they found challenging. On the fifth day the students were tested on the 5 words learned during the week. At the end of the six week period I gave the students a post test using the same Dolch List provided by Collier County.

Data Collection
Before I began my study, I researched effective activities and drills that pertained to the six retained students in my class. The students were given a pretest using the quarterly Collier County Kindergarten Dolch word assessment list. I focused my activities and drills on 35 sight words from the list. The students received direct instruction with drills and activities for six weeks. After the six week period, I gave the students a post test using the same Dolch word list and 35 words.

Data Analysis
I analyzed the data which I collected from both assessments. Based on the data I compared the student previous scores with the current results. I also compared individual instruction with whole class instruction. I made observations as to which method of instruction was most effective.

Reflection
By working through my inquiry I have gained insight on effective strategies. When the six students were given direct instruction on the sight words they did well because they were familiar with the words. They enjoyed snapping out the spelling and writing on the board. The students also like finding the rhyme for the word. As the children wrote sentences in their writing journals they were conscious of their spelling. On or about the third week, the words were unfamiliar and harder for them to use correctly.

About four of the six students continued to utilize the word wall. The spelling of the sight words written in their journals was consistent throughout the inquiry. As the words became familiar to these four students they continued to recognize the words and gain fluency and reading comprehension.

Two out of the six students lost interest as the words became unfamiliar. They did not utilize the word wall as often and failed to make gains in reading fluency. Although they did make some gains with fluency it was not as much as the other four students. They enjoyed the drills and activities. The two students did not flourish during whole group instruction. They did better during small group instruction because they were more focused on the task.

The inquiry was informative. The strategies that were incorporated into the lessons were educational and engaging for the students. It was challenging to figure out the best strategy for the retained students. Some of the first strategies used were drills that the students were familiar with and were not motivating. In the future I will find better activities to motivate the students.

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**Leading the Way to Improved Verbal Expression**
Dora Espinoza, Kindergarten Teacher
Lake Trafford Elementary

**Purpose**
Our school is placing a strong emphasis on vocabulary development this year. We have been encouraged to display weekly vocabulary words walls for our each subject area was well as having ours students focus more on learning and applying those words. While I appreciate the concept of having words highly visible and readily available for the children to read and use, I question whether arbitrarily having words on display is the most effective way for my ELL students to recognize and retain those words. I have attached pictures to most of the words that I display to help the students get a better sense of the word, but many of our reading vocabulary words are too complex for pictures. Therefore, I feel this was an area I needed to explore further.

I believe that extensive vocabulary development is a valuable asset for second language learners to acquire. It will help them as they are beginning to read. This knowledge will help students during individual reading groups and read-alouds, for academics as well as in social situations. An extensive vocabulary will benefit them throughout their schools years and in their careers.

**Question**
- How will using the MacMillan vocabulary words in a vocabulary notebook affect my ELL students’ vocabulary knowledge?

**Sub Question**
- How can I incorporate time during my reading block for the vocabulary notebook?
- How will I modify the current vocabulary notebook template for my Kindergarten students?
- How do I develop a more efficient way of introducing new vocabulary words each week?
- Will I assess my ELL students weekly or bi-weekly to check for their understanding of the vocabulary words and how?
- How will I refine my teaching techniques to obtain better results for student vocabulary retention?

**Method**
My students and I created a vocabulary notebook together. We originally began working with our notebooks every day, but the students did not respond well to it and time restraints did not allow me to work on it consistently every day. I established the routine of having us work in our notebooks three days a week. The students were each given a piece of drawing paper that they had to fold twice, to create 4 squares and copy down the vocabulary word of the day. We went over this each time, until they knew the routine. They were then instructed to write down the vocabulary word of the day in the first square and to think about how the words was constructed and what it could possibly mean. Then I presented our word for the day and the students were given time to think about what the word meant and if they had every encountered the word before. We then discussed the word and its possible meaning and developed a common definition of it. We then discussed how to properly use the word in a sentence and formed sentences that could be made using the vocabulary word of the day. Then I instructed the students to write down the sentence they came up with and draw a picture to illustrate their vocabulary word and sentence. Once a week, the students were allowed to share one of their vocabulary entries with the class. On Fridays, we played our vocabulary game, Name that Vocabulary Word and we reviewed all of the previous vocabulary words and definitions. The game was my students’ favorite activity and it also helped me to get a quick and fun assessment of their knowledge of the words.

**Data Collection**

Through the course of my inquiry, I collected various forms of data that I used to reflect on my students’ progress, enjoyment and usage of the vocabulary notebook. I used anecdotal notes about the students’ receptiveness and application of the MacMillan vocabulary words. I jotted down notes every day about examples they used and how and if they used the vocabulary words in other areas. I also used their vocabulary notebooks as part artifacts, which I placed on my inquiry board, because that really demonstrated their understanding of the words. I also used informal teacher observations for the pre and post test of the vocabulary words I introduced and a student survey to assess student enjoyment.

**Data Results and Analysis**

Overall, I am very pleased with the changes that occurred with my ELL students’ progress with vocabulary words and the implantation of the vocabulary notebook. My students, as I discovered after an informal survey, were not as satisfied with the notebook. Although, their receptiveness and interest in the process was positive, they said they did not enjoy using it because it became too mundane for them.

I used the anecdotal notes I kept whenever we worked on our notebook to keep track of my students’ interest as well as to note any words they found particularly difficult. Using this data collection tool helped me to know which areas I needed to work on more and which words my students were still not comfortable with or unable to make sense of. The anecdotal notes also were a good reminder for me of how they students were applying the words and to write down any good quotes they produced with their newfound vocabulary words.

My informal observations were based on my anecdotal notes and my students’ knowledge of the vocabulary words when we played our word games at the end of the week. The students thought of it just as a game, but I gained valuable insight into their understanding of the words. I also
used our daily discussions about the vocabulary words to do an informal assessment of their exposure to and knowledge of words I was introducing.

The most valuable piece of data that I collected was the vocabulary notebooks, those are the ones that show the growth of my students’ knowledge and how they learned to apply it in their writing. The sentences they developed were phenomenal and the pictures they illustrated to go along with their sentences were just as wonderful. I am going to return the notebooks to them so that they can use them as resources to refer back to and as review during the summer.

**Reflection**

I enjoyed conducting this inquiry in my class because of the growth in oral vocabulary that I noted in my students and because I took something it seemed very complex and overwhelming to me and made it easy to use and implement for both my students and myself. I plan on implementing the vocabulary notebook next year, with my students, but I plan on beginning earlier in the year with it so that my students will be more comfortable with the process and will be able to work more independently with it sooner.

My colleagues also enjoyed the progress that they saw in with their own students after I had shared my ideas with them. They felt overwhelmed with the idea of it, but soon came to realize the benefits garnered from it, and also plan on using the notebook with their students next year.

My only concern is finding a new way to make it more exciting and interesting for my students, so that they too become more positive about the notebook. I think next year, instead of having them work with individual pieces of paper, I will have a notebook already prepared for them so that it will take less transition time and the students will be able to take greater ownership of their notebooks.

I am considering incorporating vocabulary words from other subject areas as well. I believe this well help my ELL students to become more comfortable with terminology in all areas and help them to realize that the vocabulary words are not only something associated with reading, but all aspects of learning.

**Resources**


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**I’m All Ears!**

Alicia Rosales, First Grade Teacher
Village Oaks Elementary

**Purpose**

My class was having difficulty listening during whole group instruction. They were hearing, but not listening. I mentioned this concern at one of our team meetings, and I learned that my team
members that their students showed similar behavior. I decided to research this problem and start using strategies to teach my class of first grade students to become better listeners. It was my hope that the students in my class would learn to not only hear, but listen.

**Question**

- How will explicit listening instruction affect the listening skills of my first graders?

**Method**

The students were given a whole group pre-test consisting of listening and following instructions. I read articles on listening. We conducted listening activities. We used visuals during whole group instruction to indicate we were listening. Guest readers were invited and we practiced our listening skills during their presentations. We practiced listening to each other read. At the end, the students were given the same test as a post-test. The results of these tests were compared to determine how much growth had been made in the area of listening. To improve the classroom environment, we placed tennis balls on the legs of the student chairs, and I used the microphone daily during whole group instruction.

**Data Collection**

My data collection consisted of field notes, observations, photographs, and pre and post tests. The artifacts I collected were the results of various listening activities I conducted during my study. I photographed students as they listened to guest readers and to each other read. I used the pre and post test results to determine growth in the area of listening.

**Data Results and Analysis**

The results of the pre-test were somewhat alarming to me. The data showed we had a lot of work to do to improve students’ listening skills. As I studied the artifacts, I saw that the listening skills improved gradually over time. The pictures of the students listening to a guest speaker show the growth that was taking place. The post test results indicate a tremendous amount of growth in listening skills in all students. Eleven of the students got a perfect score. I am especially proud of how the students learned to listen to each other read. It is my conclusion that explicit listening instruction will positively affect the listening skills of first grade students. These results indicate to me that listening, like reading and writing, should be explicitly taught. This explicit instruction will teach students that “listening is not the simple ability to decode information; it is a two-way exchange in which both parties involved must always be receptive to the thoughts, ideas, and emotions of the other” (Murphy, 1987). The use of the microphone was an eye-opener. The need and usefulness of the microphone became evident as soon as I would start teaching a whole group lesson or when I needed the attention of the class.
Reflection

When I discussed my concern over the lack of listening skills with my team, I was discouraged. I also realized that this was not a problem that was isolated in one classroom. I wondered if there was anything that could be done to help our students become better listeners. My inquiring mind wanted to know if, like reading and math, explicit teaching of listening would enhance the listening skills of my students.

The first step of my inquiry was to do some research. I located and read articles on listening. I was a bit discouraged because most of the articles dealt with teaching students to listen in order to aid their reading comprehension skills, but not much on how to explicitly teach listening skills. Then, our reading coach gave me an article that caught my eye. The article by Hyslop and Tone (1988) states that listening “provides a foundation for all aspects of language and cognitive development.” The article goes on to say that teachers do not emphasize listening objectives because they do not get much training on teaching listening skills. We are not certain how best to teach it. This article got me moving. The next step was to administer the pre-test. The test is a teacher directed activity that asks the students to follow eight directions on paper. The results of the pre-test were not satisfactory to me. Of course, this was to be expected.

I made a visual of a huge ear to use when I expected all eyes and ears to be focused on me. The students loved this because it was huge. When I held it up, their attention was instantaneous. Then I remembered a training I had attended during one of the pre-planning days. The speaker demonstrated the use of hand signals to teach students when to listen and when to respond to the teacher. I started using my version of the hand signals, and found it to be quite beneficial. Another useful tool that was brought to my attention during a meeting with our restructuring team was the use of the microphone. One of the members of the team stated the importance of the use of the microphone, especially with special needs students. I started using the microphone and found that it helped get the attention of the class. This is especially telling, since my class is
an inclusion class. At one point, I added tennis balls to my student chairs, to reduce noise level. Until the tennis balls were placed on the chairs, I did not realize the intensity of the noise level. I noticed the difference one day during our literacy block. The noise level was so much lower, and made a big difference in gaining the attention of the students.

The next step was to administer the post-test. The results indicate a tremendous amount of growth. All of the students demonstrated some growth ranging from +3 to +1. Although the results of the pre and post tests indicate student growth, I found the role of the teacher to be especially telling. The development of listening skills depends a lot on teacher behavior. There were times during my study that I would return to my old way and refrain from using hand signals, microphone, or visuals. I would remember, rather quickly, what a mistake that was. I believe that consistency on the part of the teacher is an important aspect of teaching students to become better listeners. This is the most important thing I’ve learned from this inquiry.

**References**


For The Love of Reading
Tanya Beyer, First Grade Teacher
Village Oaks Elementary

Purpose
I wanted to do an inquiry on interactive read aloud and its affect on Accelerated Reading scores. I noticed that some of my students were struggling with Accelerated Reader. My wondering was whether interactive read aloud would help struggling students comprehend their Accelerated Reader books.

Question
- How will interactive read aloud affect the Accelerated Reader goals of struggling students?

Sub Question
- Will whole group interactive read aloud facilitate independent text-to-life and text-to-text connections?

Method
Through interactive read aloud, I hope to excite students about reading and have students start using their schema to make better book selections. My target group will receive guidance on how to use their schema to make better test book choices, and they will form goals. This will, hopefully, change their scores and motivate them to become more involved in Accelerated Reader.

Data Analysis
When I administered the student pre-survey, I noticed that the one area that students didn’t understand was question nine: I know what schema is. 74% of my students circled the “maybe” face and 26% circled the “definitely don’t know” face. 84% of my students indicated that they enjoy read aloud time (question one). I administered the same survey as a follow up after the inquiry was complete. I found an improvement in questions one and nine. On question one, 100% of my students circled the “yes” face. I think this is because I allowed them to talk about what they were thinking with their turn and talk buddies. For every book we had a conversation piece. I focused on five different topics: schema, author’s purpose, characters, prediction, and text-to-text connections. I believe this is why 90% of my students circled the “yes” face on the ninth question. I used schema before every read aloud and I made it a target for their turn-and-talk conversations twice. I was surprised at the 4% decrease in the question: I am good at predicting, because that was one of our target conversations. Perhaps some of my students have become more reflective in their ideas on prediction and they think they could be better at this aspect of reading.

I also used artifacts to help me piece my data together. I printed a Student Record Report which I then analyzed and strategically highlighted. In green I highlighted any tests that were taken after my inquiry began. In blue I highlighted any “failing” Accelerated Reader scores. I didn’t find anything significant that would indicate that interactive read aloud has a positive impact on Accelerated Reader test scores. The percentage of students that were failing before conducting
my inquiry was 30%. After my inquiry started, there were 30% still failing their Accelerated Reader tests. I did notice, however, that 45% of the students who were failing before my inquiry started passing more tests after I began my inquiry. Also, three students who hadn’t taken any Accelerated Reader tests, had taken at least five tests since I started the inquiry. In the six weeks since I began my inquiry I have not seen a significant change in the number of tests taken and passed. It appears that during week four I had gains in the number of tests passed by students, but the percentage of passed tests does not stay constant. There was an increase in the number of tests taken in weeks two and four, but the percentage of tests passed was only up during week four. The percentage of tests passed did increase after week two, but peaked and then began to taper off again. This does not prove that interactive read aloud is improving Accelerated Reader test scores. When I looked at the number of tests passed versus the number of tests failed before and after my inquiry, I saw a 1.53% increase in the number of Accelerated Reader tests that my students passed. After analyzing these findings, I found that there is not a significant enough gain in tests passed to be able to conclude that interactive read aloud has a positive effect on Accelerated Reader scores.

![Accelerated Reading Tests Scores Before](image1)

- **Tests passed**: 43.02%
- **Tests failed**: 56.98%

![Accelerated Reader Tests Scores After One Month](image2)

- **Tests passed**: 41.49%
- **Tests failed**: 58.51%
Using a journal helped me organize my thinking and other questions that arose as I observed my class during Sustained Silent Reading (SSR). SSR is when my class reads for 30 minutes and chooses whether or not they are ready to take an Accelerated Reader test.

**Reflection**

While journaling, I noticed that more than five students were struggling with Accelerated Reader. That is why I changed my focus group to include the whole class. I started with a small group and we made goals together. Then I made goals with every student in my class. The students who made their goals received a special certificate for their achievement. The goal of this inquiry was to promote a love of reading. I noticed that interactive read aloud does not necessarily increase Accelerated Reader tests scores, but as individual programs both interactive read aloud and Accelerated Reader seem to help students enjoy reading. Interactive read aloud is primarily used for instruction and Accelerated Reader is used as a tool for students to get more independent reading practice. Accelerated Reader and interactive read aloud are both great motivators. The biggest differences in the two are the types of questions asked. Interactive read aloud asks higher order questions and Accelerated Reader questions are literal and only pertain to the book the student reads. Accelerated Reader is supposed to motivate students to read more because they read, take a test, get immediate feedback, and then they get a new book. My fear is that students not receiving 100% were going to become discouraged and not take Accelerated Reader tests. That is why I started setting goals with my students. The goals help the students and me because we figured out their goals together. They were based on the data stored in Accelerated Reader. Since the goals were based on concrete data it made finding each child’s reading level much easier.

This inquiry has made me a better educator because I learned how to direct students to the correct Accelerated Reader level. Part of the reason I wanted to do an inquiry on Accelerated Reader is because I was not very familiar with the Accelerated Reader program. Including Accelerated Reader as an aspect of my inquiry allowed me to learn more about the different tools that are available in Accelerated Reader Management. I learned how to find student scores and how to help students find their “just right” level through goal setting. Students that feel successful will read more, and the more students read, the more they will grow to love reading.

**References**


Making Sense of Nonsense
Nicole Gallegos, First Grade Teacher
Highlands Elementary

Purpose
Two of my students showed a loss in their nonsense word fluency score. Eight of my students are at a moderate risk level in their nonsense word fluency. This semester I did not explicitly teach nonsense words. Instead, I followed the Macmillan Florida Treasures series for whole group and small group instruction. I believe by explicitly teaching what a nonsense word is, my students’ DIBELS scores for nonsense words will increase. I believe they will not try to make sense of the words and instead, simply read the nonsense words.

I felt the Macmillan-McGraw Treasures series was an effective tool that visited a variety of Phonemic Awareness and Phonics activities daily within a whole group and small group setting. I felt these activities were sufficient in helping build students knowledge of relationships between letters and sounds and increasing their ability to blend sounds together. I continue to agree with the effectiveness of the Macmillan series, however, I feel adding an awareness of the definition of nonsense words will increase students’ nonsense word fluency scores.

Question
• How will explicitly teaching what a nonsense word is, affect students’ DIBELS scores?

Sub Questions
• Will teaching them the definition of a nonsense word help students to better understand the task?
• Will students’ scores increase if I give them practice identifying real words and nonsense words?
• Will students’ scores improve if I allow them to practice reading nonsense words?

Method
During guided reading, I began to teach students what the word nonsense means. We practiced identifying nonsense words and real words. Once a week, I timed students to see how many nonsense words they could correctly identify in one minute.

Data Collection
I used students’ DIBELS NWF scores from February as a baseline. Then each week during the inquiry process, I timed the students on how many NWF they were able to read in a minute. I recorded these scores. I also observed the students’ reactions to the assessment and reflected on
these reactions throughout the next week. Lastly, I compared their baseline scores to their final DIBELS assessment in April.

**Data Results and Analysis**

After comparing beginning DIBELS scores with final scores, I found an increase. This tells me that teaching students what the word nonsense means will help them to understand what is expected of them during the NWF assessment. I also was able to reflect on different student behaviors. For example, some students were so worried at going as fast as possible that they were making careless errors. Also, many students would use long vowel sounds. By discussing this information with students, they were made aware of how to increase their NWF scores. I plan on continuing to observe students in all areas of the curriculum. Observing behaviors and then conferencing on ways to improve will help to increase gains in all areas.

**Reflection**

My anticipation was quickly replaced by a feeling of discouragement when my February 2009 DIBELS scores flashed onto the computer screen. It seemed that all I could see was yellow glaring back at me. I had not expected to see seven students at the strategic level. After analyzing the results, I found that the nonsense word fluency scores were the cause of all the yellow. In past years, I had never had a class score this low in NWF. What caused this class to struggle in the area of NWF? I had started a new Core series and I actually expected my DIBELS to be higher based on this new instruction. I felt the Core series did a wonderful job of providing activities to increase phonemic awareness. I followed the Core for whole-group and small-group instruction. The students seemed to grasp blending and segmenting sounds better than ever! So why were they struggling? What was missing from my instruction?

I administered a sample NWF assessment to collect data on what was happening as my students took the test. I found that many of the students were trying to read the words or make sense of the words. They would add long vowel sounds or change the word in order to make it a real word. For example, one student may see “rak” but read it as “rake”. At this point I felt I needed to help the students understand what a nonsense word was and why they were being asked to read these words that did not make sense.

I began providing very short mini-lessons on what the word nonsense means. I had students identify real and nonsense words. My lessons also included practice of reading nonsense words. I explained that the DIBELS NWF assessment was designed to find out how well they blended sounds together and knew the relationship between the letters and sounds. During their practice, I would remind them not to read the words and expect to make sense of the words, like a story, but instead simply sound out the nonsense words. After only a few short mini-lessons, I began to see increases. However, I found if I did not remind them of the expectation of the NWF assessment before they took it, the scores tended to decrease or remain the same.

Many questions and discoveries arose during this inquiry. I was curious how the other areas in DIBELS compare to my past scores after beginning this new Core series. Also, as students become more fluent readers, wouldn’t it be natural that they would attempt to read real words instead of nonsense words during the assessment? I also found that students would make errors on their NWF assessments each week that went along with the phonics activities for the week.
For example, if we were working on long /o/, students would read many nonsense words, using the long /o/ sound. Also, as we practiced more of the silent e, students would use long vowel sounds anticipating the silent e.

In conclusion, I continue to support the Core series as an effective instructional tool for increasing phonemic awareness. Based on my inquiry, I will be adding a small component of nonsense word understanding. I will also provide my students with an explanation of why they are being tested on nonsense words. Last, I will give my students practice taking the NWF assessment so that they know what to expect and are more comfortable during testing time.

Fun Fast First Grade Facts
Patty Ligas, First Grade Intervention Teacher
Village Oaks Elementary

Purpose
The purpose of my inquiry was to determine if intensive math work would help targeted ESE/ELL students learn and memorize addition and subtraction facts. Students need to know facts with automaticity. I chose to work with three retained first graders who needed extra support with math facts. An essential component of automaticity with math facts is that the answer must come by means of direct retrieval, rather than following a procedure (http://www.autoskill.com). I understand that the mastery of math facts will free up cognitive resources for more complex work.

Question
- Will two thirty minute intensive math tutoring sessions a week be sufficient to affect targeted students’ mastery of facts?

Sub Questions
- Will the students enjoy math more?
- Will the students feel more confident about their math ability?

Method
I met with the targeted students twice a week after school. Each session included a flash card drill, written drill, Fact Families work, and math games. The math fact study was broken into smaller units for mastery. They were: 0-5; followed by 6-8; 9s; 10s; 11s; 12-15; and finally 16-18. I sent flash cards home periodically as they progressed through the sets. I also sent a corresponding teacher-created board game home as appropriate. I always made sure the students were competent with the games before sending them home. At times, the students drilled with flash cards individually and other times they worked in pairs. I kept the written drills and conferred with each child to discuss their individual progress over time. At times, we created flip books of facts which the students took home for study. According to Dinah Zike, foldable activities like our flip books provide students “with a strong foundation that they can build upon with new observations, experiences, and knowledge” (Macmillan/McGraw-Hill Glencoe, p.v).
Data Collection
I gave each student a timed (6 minutes) 100 fact addition sheet before tutoring began. I also post-tested the students with the same test and criteria at the end of tutoring sessions. I gave each student a timed (6 minutes) 100 fact subtraction sheet before tutoring and repeated it after tutoring as the post-test. I also pre and post tested the students on family of facts. I gave them Fact Family quizzes regularly to progress monitor. At the end of tutoring sessions, I gave each student a teacher created survey to determine their confidence as a math student and to see how they felt about the tutoring activities.

Data Results and Analysis
The data clearly demonstrates that the tutoring sessions were highly successful. The data shows that the students did better in addition than subtraction. Child A’s percentage gain in addition was 19%; Child B’s gain was 67%; and Child C’s gain was 33%. The greatest addition gains were by the boy. Child A’s gain in subtraction was 40%; Child B’s gain was 66%; and Child C’s gain was 82%. While the students’ final percentage scores were higher in addition, I was pleased to see the significant gains they also made in subtraction. It is interesting to note that Child C had the greatest gains in subtraction and reported that she played the games and did the flash cards with her mother at home. All three students mastered Family of Facts work. When I first began working with them, the students had just completed this unit of study in their homeroom classes. They still did not understand the concept and needed the tutoring. I am very pleased that all three reached 100% mastery. Five weeks after finishing our Family of Facts work, I quizzed them again and was pleased to see they all still had 100% mastery. All three students are English Language Learners and Child B is also ESE.

The student surveys also gave important data with regards to student perceptions. All 3 children responded that they liked math better. They all stated that the games were their favorite part of tutoring. Each child preferred a different game. They all reported that they would sign up for tutoring again next year.

![Addition Facts](image)
I was very pleased with the progress all three students made. At first, I was a little concerned with the final subtraction scores. When I analyzed the data further, it was clear that the students made significant percentage gains. Student C made the greatest subtraction gains. She reported that her mother loved the games, kept them in a secure location, and played them with her consistently. Student C told me her mother plans on using the games with the younger siblings later. Her mother doesn’t speak English, but she can still easily help with math. The consistent home support capitalized upon the gains the child was making. It is this important home-school connection and support that is vital for accelerated learning. If I do this next year I think I will work with the parents more. I will show them how to play the games to make learning fun. I will emphasize to the parents the importance of their role in advancing their children’s skills. I have learned that the games need to be short and fast with more opportunities to “win”.

References

http://www.autoskill.com/intervention

Dinah Zike’s Teaching with foldables; Mathematics & science, Macmillan McGraw-Hill Glencoe. Columbus, OH.
Different Strokes For Different Folks
Karen Watkins, First Grade Teacher
Village Oaks Elementary

Purpose
Literacy centers are an important part of a student's work day at school. It is believed to be a valuable learning time in which a student is able to practice the skills and enhance his or her learning from lessons taught. These lessons encompass all areas of literacy including phonemic awareness, phonics, comprehension, fluency, and vocabulary. The centers complement the Core Reading Series, (Macmillan, 2006), which is the initial instruction reading material provided by the Collier County School District.

As a classroom teacher, I use a large amount of my planning and preparation time to create appropriate centers that will extend students' learning and understanding of classroom lessons. It became disheartening when I noticed there was little evidence of students completing their work correctly or at all. I realized that the valuable learning opportunities I had presented to students were not being utilized to their fullest potential. Students in the highest reading group (Top 5) were not challenged enough to stay on task and students in the bottom group (Bottom 5), which consists of ELL and Speech Articulation students, did not understand the directions enough to complete the center tasks. This resulted in disruptions of my guided reading groups, as I had to stop my group, have the off-task student(s) change a color card on the behavior monitor chart, redirect them to their center, and sometimes briefly explain what they were supposed to do. As time went on during the school year, students from these two groups began to lose interest in the center work I chose for them and began to socialize more, leading to increased disruptions and more off-task behavior.

I realized that by becoming involved with creating good centers, as well as worrying about content for the whole group, I overlooked the fact that different students have various needs that must be considered. Since my two off-task reading groups made up half of the classroom, I had to discover a way to transform centers so they would be beneficial for all of the students. I needed to consider all types of learners when planning tasks, and multiple intelligence activities would need to be incorporated in all types of learning, including independent practice time. Furthermore, it would need to be taken into account that the ability to read and follow directions varies with each reading level group.

Question
• How will implementing differentiated literacy centers affect the on-task behavior of my students?

Sub Questions
• Will differentiated centers help the lower reading group students become more independent?
• Will differentiated centers help the higher reading group students stay on-task?
• Will the new literacy centers better support the needs of all students in the class?

Method
When reading information about differentiated centers, I discovered that providing opportunities that meet the needs of all students was not being addressed properly during center time. According to the Florida Center of Reading Research (FCRR) in "Differentiated Reading Instruction: Small Group Alternative Lesson Structure for All Students" (Kosanovich, M., (n.d.)) there should be lessons that are skill-focused built into the reading center for each reading group. Moreover, the lessons that target these skills need to be practiced in literacy centers for that specific group of students and taught at their particular reading and writing skill level.

In "Differentiated Literacy Centers," (Southhall, M., 2007) over 85 center tasks are presented. They include multi-levels for each task. This book includes many ideas on planning centers, monitoring student progress by conducting continuous on-going assessments, and monitoring student success in completing tasks and providing motivation.

To complete the study, I first conducted a student survey to find out what types of tasks the children like to do. The questions targeted different types of activities that covered the variety of ways children learn. After that, I changed the way the center rotation occurred. Instead of one group going to centers at a time, two groups would go to centers at the same time so students would have more opportunity to ask for help or to work with a partner to complete the tasks. I created new centers with two main ideas in mind: the students would have a choice of activities which would allow them to complete a task based on their learning style preference, and would provide multiple levels for each skill to ensure all students would be able to complete them. Choice and multiple levels are the two main components for providing appropriate center experiences. These components allow all students to be more independent and can also motivate them to challenge themselves by working within their own Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) level.

**Data Collection**

I collected two types of data during the ten week research period. The first was to keep track of behavior as indicated by color changes during the center rotation period for the targeted reading groups. This reflected the amount of off-task time and inappropriate behavior taking place. The second type of data collected was the accountability sheets students in the target groups were required to finish and turn in for each center activity task. This reflected the number of times a center task was attempted and completed correctly. This allowed me to see if the students are more engaged, if the centers are appropriate for their level, and if the center tasks motivated students to challenge themselves to do harder tasks.
Data Results and Analysis

After analyzing the collected data, I noticed a pattern emerge. More students from both groups were actively engaged in their center work and therefore had fewer color changes for inappropriate behavior. More students began to turn in accountability sheets. This indicates that the tasks were more appropriate for them and the students were more motivated to complete the work. It appears the highest reading group stayed on-task more often than they had been previously and were also challenged to do more work. Furthermore, the lowest reading group students were able to understand the directions and follow through on their tasks.

Reflection

It took a little more time in the beginning to plan and prepare the new centers to ensure there was a proper variety for each group of students. After creating a bank of center tasks, planning became easier. Then, I incorporated puppet theater tasks, retelling cubes and fluency words, sentences and paragraphs that could be adapted to new stories and spelling lists from the Core reading series (Macmillan, 2006). Using the information on differentiated centers made it a lot easier to set up multi-level centers tasks. Also, by teaching each group how to do their task during their guided reading group, the students were able to understand what they were required to practice on their own. I am glad I had the opportunity to learn about differentiating my centers.
and feel it is a very effective way to meet the needs of all my students during the literacy center rotation time.

References


Teaching Vocabulary Through Student Made Books
Kasandra Gallegos, First Grade Teacher
Pinecrest Elementary

Purpose
In the summer, I was trained in the SIOP model (Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol). The SIOP model is research based and validated. We learned to plan and deliver lessons in ways that allow non-English speaking learners to acquire academic knowledge as they develop English language proficiency. I was interested in finding a new way to assist students who were have difficulty retaining vocabulary. I wondered if student made foldable books in two languages would help my first grade students understand content vocabulary words. My objective was to see if the students would retain more vocabulary and score better on their BVAT if they made colorful, interesting, personal books. BVAT (Bilingual Verbal Ability Test) is a test which provides a measure of overall verbal ability with bilingual students.

Question
• How will student made books affect vocabulary understanding?

Sub Question
• Will students be able to perform better on the BVAT if they create their own personal books with vocabulary information?

Method
Before the project started, students were given a pre-test on the BVAT. Then I brought in shoe boxes and cut them in half. Students used paper and markers to decorate their library boxes. These were used to collect the vocabulary foldables. During each subject, in the beginning of the week, students were given construction paper, crayons, rulers, markers, and other materials to assist their book designs. We created pictures, models, and representations of the information. For example, during the plant unit, students made a Parts of a Flower foldable. Each day, we did one section of the book. First, students cut a piece of construction paper into four parts to make a book. Then they drew a picture of the bud, petals, and seeds in English and Spanish. In
the first quadrant students wrote information on the inside flap about the purpose of petals, bud, and seeds. They also did this for the stem, leaves, and roots. At the end of the week, each student received flowers and they dissected them. Then they glued the pieces to their books (3D). A Post-test was given to determine the retention of knowledge and comprehension students gained from the study through the BVAT.

**Data Collection**

The pre and post BVAT scores were used to measure student progress. I also collected field notes, observations, and artifacts. Foldables were collected from each activity and were graded on their completeness, quality of the work, and student effort. Then they were returned, put into the students’ library boxes and used as resources.

**Data Results and Analysis**

Eleven students scored between 0 and 50 and 4 students scored between 50 and 71 on the pre-test, letting me know that while the students came with some background knowledge, much was new to them. After teaching and creating the foldables, all student scores increased. Only 3 students scored between 50 and below. While 9 students scored between 60 and 90.

**Reflection**

At the completion of the project, I found that my students had really enjoyed using foldables for learning vocabulary. Their personal libraries helped them learn and progress all year by having resources at their fingertips. Some students shared and read them with their families. By creating foldables, instead of using a common graphic organizer, students were able to utilize many different learning styles. They also developed a sense of pride and took special care of the final product. I will continue this project because it fits in with ELL strategies and enhances
As teachers at a school with a high population of English Language Learners (ELL), we have seen the need to develop our students’ vocabulary knowledge. Research shows that vocabulary development greatly enhances beginning readers’ skills. Since learning how to read is one of the most important areas to master in first grade, we decided to focus the inquiry on two non-English speaking (NES) students’ literacy gains who were reading below a Fountas Pinnell level A, beginning of kindergarten reading level.

Not only is reading in first grade important, but also the district requires first graders to demonstrate satisfactory performance for his or her grade level which is ideally at an early initial writing stage. In order to prioritize this important aspect of learning and reading in a new language, we have decided to implement a vocabulary resource, *The New Book of Knowledge*. We will be providing the initial vocabulary instruction and extending the vocabulary with enriching activities also associated with the book.

We recognize that the instruction must be meaningful and repeated for the NES students to retain and use this new vocabulary. Because of this, we are going to work to correlate the *New Book of Knowledge* vocabulary diagram and activities with the core Treasures reading series. The weekly writing assignments will also center on a topic that relates to the core Treasures reading program. This correlation of the curriculum and repetition should greatly assist our young NES vocabulary development.

**Question**

- What vocabulary gains will Non-English Speaking English Language Learners (ELL) make in reading and writing after whole group and small group implementation of *The New Book of Knowledge*?

**Sub Questions**

- Will these NES students be able to write sentences that will convey their newly acquired knowledge?
• Will they incorporate the vocabulary from *The New Book of Knowledge* in retelling and extension activities?
• Will they participate more in whole group instruction?

**Method**

To implement this vocabulary program, *The New Book of Knowledge*, Jessica, the first grade teacher, began day one by introducing a read aloud to her first grade class that correlated to *The New Book of Knowledge* diagram and that related to the core reading series. On day two, the students were introduced the vocabulary using a completed diagram. Then, they drew, labeled, and colored the various parts of the diagram, and after that, the class went over the parts as a whole group. The class kept this picture and referred to it throughout the week to help them in their writing extensions. On day three, Nilda Herrera, the ELL contact, spent 30 minutes teaching the vocabulary to the small group of two Non English Speaking (NES) students by performing a modeled writing extension activity. They focused on incorporating the vocabulary words into the story. After experiencing the modeled writing with Nilda, day four’s activity required the two students to create their own independent writing story by using their diagrams as a reference. The students were encouraged to use the vocabulary words in their stories. At the end of the week on day five, the students were assessed on their knowledge of the diagram and the related vocabulary. They were given a blank diagram to complete using words from a word bank.

**Data Collection**

- **February**
  - Administer pre-assessment
  - Begin instruction and extensions from *The New Book of Knowledge*
  - Administer weekly vocabulary assessments
  - Collect student work samples
- **March**
  - Continue instruction and extensions from *The New Book of Knowledge*
  - Administer weekly vocabulary assessments
  - Collect student work samples
  - Administer post assessment
- **April**
  - Highlands Writes Assessment
  - Conclude data collection
  - Compile data for data analysis

**Data Results and Analysis**

We hoped that focused, direct vocabulary instruction that utilized multisensory extensions would help the NES students in Jessica’s classroom find success and experience more comfort in reading comprehension and writing. The initial writing assessment showed that the students were unable to create a story independently since they only copied down the vocabulary words from the word box. However, the last work sample showed improvement in their stories as the students began to write symbols (letters) for the sounds they heard in each word.

Both of the NES students performed well on the vocabulary assessment on day five. The students scored a 100% on all of the assessments except one. On the one exception, Student B switched
two terms and therefore, did not receive as high as Student A. As a whole, the students were able to remember the terms from the pictures that they created.

The challenge throughout the inquiry was the difficulty of correlating the Treasures reading core program with The New Book of Knowledge as well as creating a writing extension that would lend to using the new vocabulary that the students had learned.

Our research shows that activities from The New Book of Knowledge helped our NES students learn the vocabulary that was presented to them based on day five’s assessments. However, applying the vocabulary in writing was only minimally successful. We believe that if this program began in the beginning of the school year, and was consistently performed in this five day approach, the NES students would benefit and show great gains in vocabulary and written expression of the learned vocabulary. When students who are learning a second language have the opportunity to interact with vocabulary in entertaining and meaningful ways, they will remember the new vocabulary and be excited and motivated to use it when speaking or writing.

Reflection – Jessica Radcliff
This inquiry project has shown me how important it is to directly teach and incorporate vocabulary into every lesson. The faster students learn social and academic vocabulary the better they will perform in school and the more information they will understand and retain. To do this successfully, the students need to be engaged in activities such as those used in this inquiry. They need to be able to visualize, interact, and use the vocabulary in many different formats.

Next year, I will be teaching the students that are classified as NES in a sheltered English Language Learner classroom (ELL). I plan to use this resource to help my students learn social and academic language. There are many other resources and strategies to use to help the students who are learning a second or even a third language. Because of the success of this inquiry, I will be looking to incorporate more of these strategies into my classroom earlier in the beginning of the year. This inquiry showed us that it is important to have extended vocabulary instruction throughout the whole year. By doing so, the students will experience the most success with language acquisition as possible.

Reflection – Nilda Herrera
As the immersion teacher for English Language Learners (ELL), I work with students who arrive from different countries and are faced with the challenge of learning a new language. They are constantly struggling to keep up with their native English speaking peers. ELLs are expected to achieve the same goals as all of the other students in the regular classroom. These students first acquire English social skills but need to advance quickly into learning academic English so that eventually they can participate successfully in a classroom setting.

The two students I worked with in this inquiry were a pleasure. They were both learning and having fun while doing it. The hardest activity for them was the independent writing activity. I helped them with their writing but it was a struggle. I realized the importance of not teaching vocabulary in isolation. The students needed to be taught other skills in order to make these activities meaningful. They needed to work on skills such as decoding and phonemic awareness.
They needed more practice with predicting, rereading text when confused, and constructing mental images. Together with their classroom teacher, these needs were being met, which is why I think we saw a lot of improvement.

As Jessica mentioned in her reflection, she plans to incorporate many of the strategies she used for this inquiry into her sheltered classroom next year. If the results we found from using The New Book of Knowledge are any indicator of what we may see next year, then it will be a huge success if it is used from the start.

References

How Will the “Umbrella” Improve Writing
Lori Snell, First Grade Teacher
Pinecrest Elementary School

Purpose
I am currently teaching first grade for the first time. I would like to compare the composition of stories of my first grade students, who are being taken through the writing process, weekly, as well as, utilizing the Power Writing graphic organizer, the umbrella, to that of other first grade students, who are not being taken through the writing process, and who are not utilizing the same graphic organizer or any graphic organizer, to determine how the writing process and the use of the umbrella graphic organizer improves story structure and detail of students’ writing.

Questions
- How will using the umbrella, one of the Power Writing graphic organizers, increase organization, the use of mechanics and detail of the writings of first grade students?
- How can I compare the improvements of students who are being taken through the writing process and those who are not?
- How can I assist those students who are not mastering the use of the Power Writing graphic organizer, the umbrella?

Method
First, I plan to track the writing progress of the students through monitoring their monthly writing assessments and the use of a progress monitoring chart. I also plan to collect some of their independently made graphic organizers to track their planning and thought process, in regards to writing. I will meet with individual students to discuss their stories. I will publish all completed work in a prominent place to instill student pride. I plan to use modeling to demonstrate how the graphic organizers should be created, so that the stories will be coherent and detailed.

Data Collection
- I will collect monthly grade level writing assessments, weekly writing prompt writings
- I will use my progress monitoring chart as well as, those of other first grade teachers
- I will use observation
Data Results and Analysis

Using the progress monitoring chart and collecting the students’ graphic organizers and published work has allowed me to see how my students made significant gains in their writing skills, specifically in comparison to the gains of other first grade students at Pinecrest. The collected data showed that my students were able to incorporate detail to their stories, through the use of what Power Writing calls, Power 2s and 3s. Through the use of individual counseling, I saw, what the strengths and weaknesses of each student were. I discovered that displaying the completed work of each student increased their confidence level as young authors. Finally, the confirmation that modeling the writing process, using a graphic organizer, really boosts writing gains in young writers, was made evident in this Inquiry. I also discovered that modeling for young writers should continue throughout the school year, to add support for students who are still struggling with writing, and for the students who are not struggling, but would benefit from seeing writing done correctly and repeatedly. The most powerful data that I collected was seeing approximately 90% of my students move from the early to mid ranges of the Emergent Developing stages from the beginning of the school year, to the beginning range of the Early Initial stage of writing and the remaining 10% solidly writing at the middle to high range of the Early Initial stage.

Reflection

This particular Inquiry has certainly added confidence to my ability to teach writing to younger writers. After having taught second grade for over eight years, I wasn’t sure how my first year of teaching first graders to write would go. I wasn’t sure if the Power Writing graphic organizer, the umbrella, and the writing process, was going to be too advanced for my young learners. I realized that I was going to have to do tons of modeling, and then modeling some more with a plethora of student encouragement and motivation. In the end, I now know that it would have been disastrous for me as a writing teacher not to use the umbrella and the writing process.

Resources

- Power Writing Graphic Organizers
- Collaborate with other professionals
- Progress Monitoring Chart

Book Worms
Lynnette K. Nugent, First Grade
Village Oaks Elementary

Purpose

I have a diverse group of learners that bring a variety of strengths and weaknesses into our learning environment. This school year I noticed that some of my English Language Learners (ELL) lack interest and motivation during their independent reading block. As I continued to monitor independent reading, I observed them tying their shoe laces, placing their heads on their desks, and looking around the classroom instead of reading. At this point, my wonderings went from daily observations to the classroom learning environment and ambiance. I knew that after “my felt difficulties” I needed to get out of my comfort zone. I felt like I had to take a leap of
faith. I wanted to provide the best opportunity to challenge ELL students during independent reading time in a safe, but effective instructional learning environment.

**Question**

How will peer tutoring affect my ELL students’ reading comprehension and promote an enjoyable reading environment?

**Method**

Two types of reading tests were administered to assess the English Language learners’ independent reading levels: the STAR (Standard Testing Assessment in Reading) and DRA (Diagnostic Reading Assessment). The pretests indicated each student’s independent level, grade equivalent level, instructional reading level and the reading level range. The assessments assisted me in matching ELL students with reading buddies, choosing appropriate leveled books and assessing students’ actual reading levels. I needed to get information about how my ELL students felt about reading at home. Parents were the eyes and ears into my ELL students’ psyche. Therefore, I designed a parent questionnaire in my students’ native languages. I utilized school resource personnel and a colleague to help with translations in Spanish and Haitian Creole. I realized when I embarked on this particular inquiry, that there would be some challenges because of the language barrier. I recognized that there was a wealth of resources available “in house” at my workplace. The students and their reading tutors each completed a student interest form. This enabled me to know their interests, genres of books they enjoyed reading, and other pertinent information that I used to pair ELL students with a buddy reader. It was also important that I observe how the reading buddies were reading with the ELL students. Lots of planning helped me initiate this instructional technique but at the same time allowed me to relinquish some control. I exchanged my role in the classroom from the “lecture teacher style” to treading new territory as a “facilitator” in an environment of learners. I wanted to provide my students with a non-threatening, supportive and effective learning environment. By the second month, the reading routine was set, reading response folders and book worm bags were organized and placed in a designated area in the room. Every morning students followed rules and carried out reading expectations that were explained and shared during the initial discussion.

I was amazed at how my ELL students felt about their reading block time. It became sacred to them. Every morning, students followed rules and carried out reading expectations that were explained and shared during the initial conference discussion.

**Data Collection**

I assessed my ELL students’ instructional and independent reading levels. I used two types of reading assessments as, the pre and post tests; the DRA (Diagnostic Reading Assessment) which is a prescriptive tool that assesses comprehension and the (STAR) a computer based assessment that ranks students nationally amongst other students on their grade level. In addition to the assessments, a student’s interest survey and parental questionnaires were completed by the ELL students and their parents.

**Data Results and Analysis**

The data supports this research based instructional practice as an effective way to practice reading, increase comprehension and raise reading levels. Some of my data was observational. I
observed student buddies who modeled good reading strategies with each ELL student and provided scaffolding when it was necessary. The greatest accomplishment was when I observed every ELL student engaged in reading with his or her buddy reader. Their body language, conversations, smiles and interactions with one another were rewarding to observe. Other data was numerical – the DRA and STAR results.

As shown with the DRA data, students increased their reading level (comprehension) range from pre-primer through 2.0 to 1.5 through 3.0. The pretest data indicated that 83% of the students were below grade level and the post test indicated that 100% of the students were above grade level.

At the onset of the inquiry the STAR pretest indicated that 17% of the students were below grade level while 83% were at or above grade level. The STAR post test indicated that 100% of the students were above 1st grade level.

Reflection
As an educator, I am a very structured. I model my classroom with that same structure. This experience has been extremely rewarding and has motivated me both personally and professionally. I have learned a great deal about myself through the inquiry process as well. I
have come to realize that there are times when it may be necessary for me to relinquish control to better facilitate students’ learning. I think that delegating more of the responsibility to the students will empower and encourage them to take ownership of their own learning while fostering a cohesive classroom environment.

At the onset, I thought that the “inquiry” process was extremely time consuming. I did not know what to expect or how to perform a formal educational inquiry. Data was a technical term for “the experts.” My perception of myself as a researcher was cloudy. I was skeptical and apprehensive about my role as a researcher. I lacked confidence and the knowledge base about how to start research that would impact my students’ learning and develop better teaching practices. I underestimated my value as a classroom teacher. I am definitely one of the most important tools in my students’ lives. As a teacher, I am also a researcher. I work in a profession where I am strategically positioned to make changes. Classroom teachers are the key ingredient to success in today’s classrooms.

References


Critical Thinking for ELL Students
Andria Pierre, First Grade Teacher
Pinecrest Elementary School

Purpose
Using the data from my students’ GRADE test results, seventy-five percent of my students scored in quartile one. I developed a plan to increase my students’ comprehension skills. Fifty-three percent of my students were ESOL and forty-seven percent were NES (non English speaking). My students were from a low socio-economic background. I was interested in researched based strategies and was eager to test them in my classroom for the betterment of my students.

Question

• What will be the effect of the use of organizers centered on pre and post reading strategies help my students strengthen their comprehension skills?

Method

A. Before Reading
1. Select key terms from the guided reading book and display them randomly on a poster.
2. Allow the students to create completed statements about each term. These statements would link the term to the topic to be studied.
3. Model the target such as main idea.
4. Practice the target with the students.
5. Remind the students about the reading strategies good readers use if they see a tricky word. For example, “Get your mouth ready for the first sound.”

B. During Reading
1. Activate prior knowledge by asking questions.
C. After Reading
1. Work together to complete a story map or another organizer referring to the story as needed.
2. Reading Extension: This is an activity which allowed the students to practice the demonstrated target.

Data Collection
On a weekly basis, my students were given the FCAT test to check their comprehension. A running record was done on each student weekly to determine their progress and knowledge of the Guided Reading target. At the end of each quarter, a formal running record was done to determine if the student could move to another level. I focused on one student in each group and compiled their data below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student #</th>
<th>Fountas/Pinnell Level</th>
<th>Quarter#1</th>
<th>Quarter#2</th>
<th>Quarter#3</th>
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Field Notes
Three weeks after administering the Macmillan FCAT Weekly Test, I noticed the students who were reading below grade level, according to the district standard, failed the tests repeatedly. I switched to an intervention test which had a shorter story and cloze sentences. This assessment was more appropriate because the students were able to read them successfully. Additionally, I noticed that the ELL students had difficulty with the vocabulary and meaning of words in the stories. The sentence structure was complex and idioms were present in the story. The intervention test was too easy for them, so I gave them the Selection Test which gave specific questions on the core story instead of a new story with new vocabulary. This Selection test was adequate for the ELL students because the questions were related to a story that we discussed, as well as reviewing the vocabulary, spelling patterns, and the high frequency words. At guided reading, I introduced a new book. I noticed that the content vocabulary was challenging to my ELL students. They were not able to use the picture clues because they had limited background knowledge on that topic. For example, in a story about baseball, the student was given the content words: “base, strike, umpire” but had they had no experience with this game. This story was difficult to understand until I had the students act it out. I also brought in a real baseball glove and ball to help the students make a connection with the story. The use of the graphic organizers helped the students to organize the ideas, but if the student did not understand those ideas the strategy was not utilized. The students were able to tell the ideas in the story web, but when asked the main idea, the students would tell me the title or a specific detail. To determine
the main idea required the student to categorize the information. If the student does not know what a cat, dog, and a mouse is; then, the determination of them being animals is lost. Research supports the transfer of knowledge between the first language and second language, but, if there were no prior experiences, the child would not have a connection to the content vocabulary. Aware of this information, I chose to include role playing, acting, and readers’ theatre in my Reading block.

Data Results and Analysis
The students did not take the GRADE test again in first grad. Instead they took the SAT 10 Test. After reviewing the data, 83% of my class scored in the second quartile and above. The SAT10 and the running records data indicated that my students’ comprehension skills improved significantly.

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<td>Student#4</td>
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At the end of quarter three, fifteen out of my seventeen students were reading on grade level with and/or without accommodations.

Reflection
Working through this inquiry has changed the way I work with my students in Guided Reading. I have learned that the students’ background is very important in connecting with the stories. To activate the background knowledge, it is important for the teacher to know the students’ experiences and their interest. It’s also important to note that comprehension starts at the word level so it is essential for teachers to take the time to explain the meaning of sight words or high frequency words, as well as targeted vocabulary. I would like to research what is needed to help students to deduce the main idea of a passage. In order to use an organizer effectively, the student must understand the thinking process.

References


Sapp, P., Reading Coach
Research tells us if students are exposed to a variety of learning styles, the more successful the students become. If educators can assist students to connect new knowledge to background knowledge then the success of our students will also increase. Therefore, I thought by adding pictures and the letters A-Z together simultaneously with Spalding Phonics, my students would be able to apply all the skills together to allow them to successfully sound out phonemes in words when the student(s) are reading a sentence or a passage. As an ESE inclusion/resource teacher, I worked with high risk students who attend kindergarten and first grade. I have selected the area of phonemic awareness and phonemes based on the assessment needs of my students. The students I worked with are on different levels, and their needs vary from the rest of the students in their homeroom class. This lesson made learning for my students more visual as well as enhanced the students’ reading ability and increased their reading fluency by using prior knowledge through visual activities which improved their recognition of phonemes. Spalding Phonics seemed to be a challenge for some students who have learning exceptionalities and my intention was to apply scaffolding techniques so my students could succeed with Spalding Phonics.

**Question**

- How will applying prior knowledge of familiar pictures affect at-risk students to succeed in learning phonemes?

**Sub Question**

- Will an increase in students’ reading level as a result of visual phoneme instruction have an effect on other subject areas across the curriculum?

**Method**

A pre-assessment was given to my students to assess their baseline knowledge of letter identification and phoneme skills. I followed through with a daily assessment of the student’s prior knowledge with pictures that correlate with a particular letter and sound. The students focused on phonemic awareness and phonemes. I presented each student with a familiar picture while simultaneously asking students to match the sound with a picture. For example, I gave a student a picture of an apple and the student had to find the beginning letter of the word “A” for apple. After the student found the appropriate letter he/she said the beginning sound that correlated with the picture. I had a checklist with the letters across the top of the page and their names were down the side of the page then I placed a checkmark next to their name if they said the correct sound or a dash if the student said an incorrect sound. Data was collected on the above mentioned skills on a daily basis.

**Data Collection**

- Daily activities
- Daily checklists
- Observations
- Pre assessment test
Data Results and Analysis
Succeeding the data analysis, I believe applying prior knowledge of familiar pictures to letters does affect the success of my at-risk and ESE students in a positive manner. My students’ knowledge of letter recognition, phonemic awareness, phonemes, and nonsense words has improved as well as their self-esteem and intrinsic motivation. In the beginning of February, each student was given a pre-test in sound and letter recognition and the students practiced their sounds and letters on a daily basis. The following form labeled “Picture Perfect” was used as a daily assessment tool. A post test in letter recognition and sound recognition was given at the end of April.

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A-Z Sound Recognition Pre and Post Test

Letter Recognition Pre and Post Test
Reflection
This inquiry has changed the way I think about teaching. The regular curriculum in elementary schools should be followed as directed. However, the regular curriculum is geared towards the average student not towards exceptional students or other at-risk students. The curriculum can always be enhanced or complimented by adding more interactive and visual activities. As an exceptional student educator, I always try to look outside the box. This inquiry has made me reflect on more innovative ways to enhance my students’ success in regards to their academic performance. No matter what students I teach or what subjects I teach I know that there will always be something more I can do to make my students learning more optimal. I will continue to use this activity to assist my students to learn their phonemes. They have enjoyed this activity because it was and is fun and they can make connections from the pictures to the sounds of letters. In turn, my students did not concentrate on whether they gave a correct or incorrect response they were excited because they were participating in a different type of learning. I will continue to look for new ways to reach my students.

References


Rise and Shine
Nicole Imbriano, Second Grade Teacher
Village Oaks Elementary

Purpose
After I shared my wonderings with the literacy coach at my school, who is also my inquiry advisor, she recommended that I incorporate a Morning Meeting to establish positive classroom environment and positively affect student behavior. I learned that it is common to start the school day with a calendar routine and a message from the teacher to the students, especially in the primary grades, but recently the practice has grown into higher grade levels including middle
and schools (Charney, 2002, p. 25). This year, I tried to use this routine when the school year started as a way to build our classroom community.

According to the responsive classroom literature, to be “successful academically and socially, children need a set of social skills: cooperation, assertion, responsibility, empathy, and self-control (Dousis, 2008, p. 132).” I was hopeful that Morning Meeting was where I would start to make a difference, especially with two targeted Non-English Speaking (NES) students.

**Question**
- What will be the affect of Morning Meeting, and will it improve my two NES students’ behavior and will the meeting make them feel more a part of the class?

**Sub Questions**
- How can I create an atmosphere of personal responsibility, self-confidence, and student engagement in my classroom?
- How can I learn to react to student behavior with understanding instead of getting into a control struggle with a student?
- Aside from professional development, how can I become a better teacher?

**Method**
Morning Meeting involves not just a daily message, calendar activities, and an overview of the day’s/week’s activities, it is a key component of a responsive classroom. In *The Morning Meeting Book*, Roxann Kriete defines Morning Meeting as “a particular and deliberate way to begin the day, a way which builds a community of caring and motivated learners (Kriete, 2002, p. 14).” The meeting is structured and includes the following four parts: greeting, sharing, group activity, and a morning message. The elements that really excited me about Morning Meeting were the greeting, sharing, and group activity. Students greeted one another using a handshake or some other activity. During the sharing time, students shared experiences and ideas and others responded using positive language that articulated their thoughts and feelings. Finally, the whole class followed up with a short activity.

**Data Collection**
The data collection strategies I used for my inquiry included field notes, pre- and post-inquiry interviews, and literature. These methods were conducive to my teaching style and my schedule. My reading coach took field notes about my two NES students which briefly described their specific behavior during Morning Meeting. In addition, I collected and studied behavior patterns as they emerged in the field notes. This inquiry was conducted for one 9 week grading period starting in November, 2008.

**Data Results and Analysis**
The student interviews (pre and post) were conducted to obtain feedback from the students about how they felt about Morning Meeting. I also used literature to provide a working framework for implementing Morning Meeting. The literature allowed me to implement a variety of activities geared toward specific behavior problems that I observe d. As I studied the data, I identified emergent behavior patterns and I analyzed the field notes to describe and determine the outcome of my inquiry. I asked myself, “Do I see evidence that the students learned self-control, traded
their aggressive behavior for responsible behavior, or learned how to deal with frustration?”
These discoveries were compared to my initial wonderings about classroom management.

In general, the results of student interviews from November and March were very positive and indicated personal growth and increasing self confidence for both students. Student J exhibited more signs of restraint and self-control by March. His behavior had improved and he began to participate in Morning Meeting. Student N continued to be referred to the office for aggressive behavior and still had to be reminded to come to the carpet for Morning Meeting most mornings. Based on the data, I determined that Morning Meeting did start the day with a positive setting from which to build, especially for Student J, but it did not completely transform my student N’s behavior. In fact, his behavior was up and down all year. I feel he is struggling with deeper issues pertaining to attention and aggression. Both students perceived themselves as better students and more able to follow directions. They both stated that they liked morning activities more by the end of my inquiry.

Reflection
Before I started Morning Meeting, my standard reaction was to punish and reprimand these students, which did nothing to alleviate the tension in the classroom. I ended up feeling like I had no control over my class when I was distracted by their behavior. I tried to teach these students to be responsible for themselves and their work and to foster the feeling of safety so all students could explore and grow in the classroom. I think the Greeting portion of the Morning Meeting set the class off on a respectful, inclusive path for the day. The students seemed to enjoy the group activity the most and I began each day with a sense of control and order.

I assumed that if I could prevent specific, aggressive behaviors that would set the tone for success especially for these two boys. By developing strong classroom management skills through Morning Meeting and other responsive classroom strategies, I grew professionally and created a more inclusive, nurturing environment for all of my students, which was my ultimate goal.

References


ELL Students with High Frequency Words  
Belinda B. Sanchez, Kindergarten-Second ELL Teacher  
Eden Park Elementary

**Purpose**

I work with struggling ELL readers in grades Kindergarten, First, and Second. Their needs range from phonological awareness to word study. I concentrated my study on two groups of first graders. Students in first grade are required to know between 50-80 high frequency words at the beginning of the year. Students that are on grade level at the end of the year should know between 150-200 sight words. The ELL students I worked with had the sight word knowledge of 0 to 83 words. Therefore, the purpose of my inquiry was to accelerate their learning of high frequency words. I was interested in seeing the affects of sight word books, supplemental activities, and additional practice.

**Question**

- How will using sight word reading books with struggling ELL readers contribute to their success of reading?

**Sub Question**

- How will additional supplemental activities affect their reading levels?

**Method**

I worked with two groups of first graders. Each day, I introduced five new high frequency words. The words were explicitly taught and translated. The students received additional words as they mastered them. I used the Macmillan Reading Curriculum Map to help dictate the introduction of the order of words. I made five colored lists. The green and pink lists had words that are primarily introduced in kindergarten. The blue and yellow lists were for first grade and the orange list had second grade sight words. I used activities, sight word readers, and high frequency word cards. Each student kept their words in a clear VHS box. Then, they took their word cards home for additional daily practice. During the daily session, I assessed their sight word knowledge. During our lesson, two featured sight words were written on chart paper. We talked about the words and pointed out any special features, such as which letter the word began with and how many letters it contained. The children spelled the word aloud and wrote it in the air. Then, a reproducible practice sheet was introduced. The children traced and wrote the words. Then the sight word reading books were distributed and we read the story as a group. We reread the story round-robin style. We talked about the story and the children were asked if they recognized any words in the story. Then, to reinforce spelling, the children wrote sentences using the sight words.

**Data Collection**

I began my data collection with a pre-assessment of high frequency words. Then, I documented their reading levels and used charts to document their high frequency word scores on a daily basis. The students were able to keep track of their knowledge of high frequency words by the color of their cards. The results of the pre and post tests were compared from both groups. The data I used included:

- Pre-test (high frequency words and reading levels)
- Post-test (high frequency words and reading levels)
• observations
• sight word activities
• student work
• high frequency word cards and checklists

Data Results and Analysis
I tracked the students’ progress by using a daily checklist of all 220 high frequency words. The results of the pre and post tests were compared from both groups in high frequency words and reading levels. Daily gains were witnessed as all students in both groups increased in word knowledge. The students who made the highest gains were the LES (Limited English Speakers) while the NES (Non English Speakers) had the lowest gains. One student even achieved the goal of 220 words. In addition, another student was able to recite 214 words and of the fourteen students, eight reached the grade level expectation of 150 words. The other students ended up with a final word count of 4, 111, 116, 118, 120, and 128. The student with 4 words was in the first group and was only present in school for a short period of time. The students were extremely motivated. I was able to tell if they had practiced their sight words the previous night. All of the students’ reading levels increased, with the exception of one student.

Reflection
I found that additional practice and activities did help jumpstart my students’ retention of high frequency words. I was impressed by the gains comparing the progress of the First grade ELL students. The progress was so significant that I plan to continue using the sight word readers and word cards. Next year, I plan to incorporate other sight word readers. I want to give the students the opportunity to experience high frequency words in various texts. Translating the words and making sure they understood the meanings of the words had a tremendous affect. One teacher commented, “the high frequency words were showing up in their writing.” Many of our parents do not speak English, which makes it difficult for them to practice with their children. Over the summer, I plan on creating a DVD reciting the 220 high frequency words. This will definitely help our students who need additional practice at home. Also, I plan on applying and writing a grant for next year to cover some of the cost of the materials. I have truly enjoyed working with these students, and I will continue to work with them next year.

References

Will They Survive?
Sheila DeShields, Second Grade Teacher
Village Oaks Elementary

Purpose
I have a diverse group of learners with a wide span of reading abilities. While my highest group is reading to learn, my lowest group is still learning to read. Since most of our students are second language learners, they come to school with reading and vocabulary deficits. A. Biemiller (2001) states, “to catch up, vocabulary-disadvantaged children have to acquire vocabulary at above average rates.” This is a daunting task in itself.

Being teacher in a Title I school, I am required to use the Collier County School District’s adopted series, MacMillan McGraw-Hill reading series. This is the first year of the adoption. This series does a good job of addressing the many needs of second grade readers in both whole group and guided group. All my students are being taught targeted strategies in whole group and these strategies are reinforced in 15-20 minute guided groups. The lowest students in my class need more than 15 minutes a day for guided reading because they are struggling with comprehension and decoding as well as vocabulary. My highest group is capable of doing more independent reading work. I had hoped to increase the time that I see my lowest students for guided reading groups while not neglecting my highest group.

Question
- Will giving my highest readers more independent reading response activities and meeting with them less, affect their progress?
- Will this extra time benefit my lowest readers that are still learning to read?

Method
I administered a formal running record at the beginning and end of the marking period to determine starting and ending levels in reading. I used the benchmark books from the MacMillan McGraw-Hill reading series. I also compared the progress of these groups from the previous marking periods. During this inquiry period, all my students were given whole group instruction for about 30 minutes a day.

The lowest group met with me 5 days a week: 3 days for 15 minutes and 2 days for 30 minutes. The extra time allowed me to do an Accelerated Literacy Learning (A.L.L.) group that requires 30 minutes. These groups included 10 minutes of reading comprehension, 10 minutes of word work, and 10 minutes of writing. Both days the lowest group had an A.L.L. lesson, I was not only able to reinforce comprehension strategies taught in whole group, I was able to monitor their progress in word work, comprehension, and writing. I also continued to do a running record on each child once a week. The informal running records showed me the needs of each group, and guided my instruction for the week.

The highest group saw me for guided group 3 days a week and did independent activities on the other 2 days. These independent reading activities were activities using small units that address the targets for the week. I also incorporated activities using leveled readers from the Reading, Science and Social Studies leveled book collection.
**Data Collection**

A pre-test was administered, graded, and recorded. The benchmark books from the MacMillan McGraw-Hill reading series were used for this formal running record. Each week the students in both groups were given an informal running record using the materials from their guided groups. The informal running records showed me the needs of each group and guided my instruction for the week. These running records were used to compare and monitor student progress throughout this inquiry period. Both groups also took the weekly comprehension and skills test every Friday with the rest of my class. A post-test was administered, graded, and recorded; again I used the benchmark books from the MacMillan McGraw-Hill reading series. These were compared with the pre-test. I also compared these students’ scores on the SAT10 assessment from 1st and 2nd grade.

I surveyed my high students to find how they liked working independently with the units. Were they having trouble reading the units? Did they feel they needed more help? Were they able to finish the work assigned? Did they like working on their own? Most of the students liked the independent work. They liked being able to finish their assignments and go on to another activity at their own pace.

**Data Collection**

Record of both groups’ pre and post tests and SAT10 results from 1st and 2nd grade

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Highest Group</th>
<th>F&amp;P</th>
<th>SAT10</th>
<th>SAT10</th>
<th>Lowest Group</th>
<th>F&amp;P</th>
<th>SAT10</th>
<th>SAT10</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pre</td>
<td>Post</td>
<td>+ / -</td>
<td>1st</td>
<td>2nd</td>
<td>Pre</td>
<td>Post</td>
<td>+ / -</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>+2</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>+2</td>
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<td>N</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>+1</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>I</td>
<td>+3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>+1</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>E</td>
<td>F</td>
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<td>N</td>
<td>+1</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>J</td>
<td>+2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>+1</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>88</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Data Results and Analysis**

I was interested in finding if the students that received the extra instructional time in guided reading groups in addition to the instruction from the core would make a difference in their progress in reading levels. I also did not want to hold back the highest group by giving them independent work and not as much time in guided groups.

As a result of my inquiry, I found that the lowest group made better gains than they had in the previous marking period. On average their running records indicated that they went up in comprehension and decoding. Their retelling skills improved and their retellings were sequential and not just random retellings. Most of the students in this group scored higher on the SAT10 than they did in first grade.
On the other hand, I found that my highest group did not make the gains that I had hoped. The running records were indicating they were strong readers, but when the results of the SAT10 assessment came in, the high group scored lower than they did in first grade, although they did make gains in the formal running records.

Reflection
After starting this inquiry, I realized there was no way of knowing what either group would have accomplished as far as gains. Would the gains be due to the extra time in guided reading for the lowest group, or would they be from regular progress? Would the gains have been better for the highest group had I seen them 5 days a week, as I did before the inquiry? One thing I did find out is that the high group learned some skills in independent learning. They learned to be more responsible for their own learning. They also learned how to pace themselves and check their own work. This is something they were not doing consistently. Instead, they rushed through projects and tried to get away with doing the minimum, just enough to get by. They learned about peer checking and conferencing. Now they knew I expected more of them. Their independent work had improved and they seemed to be taking more responsibility for their own learning, but the SAT10 scores were down. This tells me that even though they are strong readers, they still need to meet as a group with me every day.

Another thing I found was that my low group was becoming better at decoding, comprehension, and writing, so this shows me they need more than 15-20 minute guided reading groups. It tells me that given 30 minutes a day in guided groups, these students can make better gains.

Something happened to the way I teach reading. I learned to expect more from my students. I was always worried some things would be too hard for them because they are only in second grade. I have also learned to let go more. The students in the high group, when given the space, were able to accomplish far more than I expected. The low group really needed more time than 15-20 minutes for guided reading, and the test results show this really helped them.

It helped me, too. I was more relaxed with them, because I now feel like I am giving them what they need and I am using the tools I have been taught to use. I now use more of what they show me in reading to guide where I will go next with them. Pinnell & Scharer (2003) stated, “One of the greatest challenges for us as teachers is shifting our instruction in response to children’s learning.” (p.76)

In completing this inquiry, I have found that by stepping back and examining my teaching practices it has forced me to record the results of what I am doing in the classroom. The records I kept during this inquiry period allowed me to share what I have found, with my second grade team.

I will continue to see my low group for 30 minutes, and I will have to find time to also see my high group every day.
Purpose
My second grade students still had not mastered their basic math facts by winter break. Many of them were slow at best and still counted on their fingers for basic addition computation. I believed then, and still do, that my students have to master these basic skills before they would be able to truly comprehend higher level math operations.

I learned about a program called Kumon Math where students learn one set of facts before moving onto the next. I hoped this would help my students master their basic math facts.

Question
• How will Kumon Math affect my students’ basic math fact fluency?

Sub Question
• Will Kumon Math timed tests help my students recall their addition facts more quickly?

Method
I increased the percentage of addition facts my students could accurately recall. This was done by using the Kumon method for practicing and testing. Kumon math enables each child to progress successfully by practicing material until the concept is mastered. The students were advanced in small, manageable increments.

Data Collection
I used time tests, field notes, pretests, and post tests as data collection strategies for this inquiry. The students were first pretested on the number of basic addition facts (1-5) they could correctly answer in 40 seconds. Then, the students were given material to study such as math fact sheets and addition fact cards. They were tested on a weekly basis and the results were graphed. At the end of the study, the students were post tested on the same facts.

Data Results and Analysis
The results of the study were exciting. The students were able to recall their basic math facts with increasing speed each week. They were very excited about the study and some students mentioned that they felt smarter because they could remember their facts. The weekly timed tests showed that the students were able to gradually master their addition facts. Kumon Math will be part of my classroom from now on. Addition facts are the foundation of all other math
operations. I believe the ability to quickly recall math facts will help my students learn future math concepts.
Reflection
This inquiry was an enlightening experience. My days go by so quickly, and I often feel the pressure to move on to the next lesson. However, I have always felt that some concepts must be taught to mastery. Addition is an important basis for math instruction. Unlike some other concepts we teach in math, addition is everywhere. This has made me question other content areas that I teach. Are there other concepts out there that I must spend additional time on regardless of the time constraints? This study has given me a lot to think about. I never felt comfortable moving students on when they still relied on finger counting. After this inquiry, I won’t have too.

References

Reading Quilts: “Sew” Many Kinds of Literature  
Cindy Gerber, 2nd grade teacher  
Village Oaks Elementary

Purpose
Our students are taught using Macmillan series as our core, on-grade level instruction. The stories are a variety of both fiction and nonfiction. However, in the past I have not seen an extension of nonfiction choice reading. I know that a large portion of the 2nd grade SAT 10 test and the 3rd grade FCAT test consists of nonfiction passages. I worked with the Reading Coach to expose my students to a variety of genres. Students need to be assisted as they explore new genres. When readers make predictions about what they’ll learn, they activate their schema about the topic and what they know about the type of text they are about to read (Miller, 2002). It was my desire to help students expand their schema by working with a wider variety of genres, especially nonfiction text.

Question
• How will genre studies affect my students’ comprehension and reading attitudes?

Sub Question
• Will the study of nonfiction genre affect my students’ interest in further non-fiction, independent reading?

Method
I worked with the reading coach on our extended unit of study. The kick off activity was using The Patchwork Quilt by Valerie Fournoy. Each student received their own copy of the book through the First Books grant. The students were then given a notebook to hold their written responses to each type of book. As they worked through a kind of literature, they colored in the corresponding quilt piece, ultimately making a paper quilt that showed genres covered. Each type of literature had its own kind of written response. For instance, when they studied poetry they did a written response using the senses. When we did an author study on Laura Numeroff, they completed a chart comparing her books. They continued this type of work through many books, sometimes working in small groups, other times whole group. At the end of the work, I ran AR reports to examine if the genre work influenced the students’ selection of nonfiction books for their independent reading.

Data Collection
My part of this shared inquiry was focused on the effects on nonfiction reading. I ran the Accelerated Reader reports of my students. I ran one report that ran from the first day of school till October 1st, 2008. Then I ran the same report that covered the inquiry time: Oct. 1, 2008 - April 15, 2009. I also noted which students were English Language Learners (ELL), so I could examine the effect on those students.

Data Results and Analysis
This inquiry project clearly impacted my students’ independent reading choices. With the exception of one student, my class showed an increase in selecting nonfiction books for their independent reading and testing. The overall gain in points for the girls was a 6.27 point
increase. The overall gain in points for the boys was a 15.84 point increase. The largest gain was a boy who increased his non-fiction reading by 42.7 points. This boy happened to be a Limited English Speaker (LES) student. This increase in nonfiction reading included animal books, biographies, sports figures and books about the world. I know that this information will expand my students’ schema, which will make them better prepared to respond to instruction and independent reading. Good readers activate their prior knowledge as they read. This heightened interest in nonfiction books will expand their prior knowledge.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student/Gender</th>
<th>AR Independent Reading of Non-Fiction Prior to Genre Study</th>
<th>AR Independent Reading of Non-Fiction After Genre Study</th>
<th>+/- difference of non-fiction reading</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student A/Girl</td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>7.0</td>
<td>+1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student B/Girl</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>13.3</td>
<td>+8.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student C/Girl</td>
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<td>6.9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student F/Girl</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>12.5</td>
<td>+12.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student H/girl</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>+.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student I/Girl</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>18.4</td>
<td>+15.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student L/Girl</td>
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<td>1.0</td>
<td>+1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student R/Girl</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>+4.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>6.27 gain</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student D/Boy</td>
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<td>45.4</td>
<td>+42.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>10.2</td>
<td>34.3</td>
<td>+24.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student G/Boy</td>
<td>11.1</td>
<td>18.4</td>
<td>+7.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student J/Boy</td>
<td>No data</td>
<td>12.6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student K/Boy</td>
<td>No data</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student M/Boy</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>17.2</td>
<td>+12.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student N/boy</td>
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<td>10.1</td>
<td>+10.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student O/Boy</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>11.2</td>
<td>+9.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student P/Boy</td>
<td>6.8</td>
<td>36.9</td>
<td>+30.1</td>
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<tr>
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<td>7.9</td>
<td>-1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student S/Boy</td>
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<td>+7.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student T/Boy</td>
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<td>6.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>15.84 gain</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Reflection**

This inquiry project generated a new birth of enthusiasm for reading. My students would now go to the library in search of the new genre that had been presented to them during the week. Upon returning from the library, students would readily and enthusiastically share with me the book genre they had chosen from the library. After reading the book, the boys especially would love to tell me about the person they had read about. Retelling a story took on a whole new meaning. Instead of racking their brain for details, they could easily recall facts about the person and tell me a story about the important parts of the life of the person.
Biographies were by far the favorite choice of the students, especially the boys. I could sense that my students felt proud to be reading a biography. It was quite an accomplishment for them to take a test and receive a perfect score.

Not only did this genre study produce a new enthusiasm for reading, but students felt proud about reading a nonfiction book. The students were beginning to feel more confident about their reading ability. It showed in their test scores.

The genre study was presented either by whole group or small group instruction. It was my sense, that the students preferred the small group setting over whole group. There was still much enthusiasm, participation, and learning taking place during whole group instruction, but I could tell my students enjoyed the small group more. It was as if this was their special time to be taken on an exciting journey of new discovery.

Through discussions with my reading coach, we both agreed that this study would be even more beneficial if the genre was related to the Core and Content Area topics. Students would be able to make a greater connection to their independent reading and instructional reading.

References


Writing and Reading with Purpose – “WRAP”: The Talking Boxes

Teri Denis, Second Grade Shelter Teacher
Pinecrest Elementary

Purpose
Many of my students are not proficient in their own language, therefore they lack the background knowledge and the skills to transfer instructional information from their native language to their new second, and in some instances, third language.

The project consisted in creating theme boxes that included labeled realia and a vocabulary list that will help students create a connection with the objects and English vocabulary. I named the project the Talking Boxes.

Question

- Could Talking Boxes help ELL students increase their English vocabulary and their writing abilities as well?

Method
I asked my students what they would like to write about if they had the opportunity of choosing their own prompts, and what it would be.
The list of themes included topics regarding birthday parties, first day of school, dogs, farm animals, foods, ocean animals, transportation, holidays and so forth. I gathered the objects and realia related to different listed topics and activities, and label each object. I included a list of the vocabulary words for each item. I bought 12 four by four inch boxes with lids, and painted them in white. I covered the boxes with stickers related to that particular topic. Then, I proceeded to assemble the set of boxes with the labeled realia.

Students learned to practice writing with a beginning, middle, and end. They were exposed to the rubric expectations required for their grade level. The labeled items in their boxes helped them connect the object with their prior knowledge, and with the use of the word wall, they could use descriptive words to describe their chosen objects in their journals. For their pre-assessments, I used the school writing test, DOLCH word list knowledge, their oral reading fluency assessment (DIBELS) scores, Scholastic Reading Inventory (SRI), and their Fountas and Pinell (F&P) reading level-running records (RR).

### Data Collection
- November: pre-assessment-school writing inventory test, Dolch words, SRI, and F&P levels
- December: school writing test, continue with data
- January: school writing test, continue with data
- February: Collier writes, continue with data
- March: Post-assessment-school writing test, Dolch words, SRI, F&P levels
- April: Completed and analyzed data

### Data Results and Analysis
By the end of this study, my ELL students increased their writing scores by one rubric point. They also raised their running records F&P reading by two levels. Some of my students raised their SRI scores from 0 to 40 points. The Dolch word knowledge increased by 50 words, and their DIBELS Oral Reading Fluency by 20 points. The following is the comparison of data collected by student.
DIBELS score from August 2008 to April 2009

Number of Students

Number of Words Read

DOLCH word knowledge from August 2008 to April 2009

Words Read

Number of Students
Reflection
What I learned from my choice of Talking Boxes for my inquiry project was that, no matter the level of language development of my second language learners, they can be challenged to explore new ways of practicing their new vocabulary and apply it to new situations. The idea of utilizing writing boxes as a way of instruction emphasized the vocabulary development and
introduced my students the concept of adding and combining descriptive words. The simple format gave my students the assurance of exploring without fear of failing in a step-by-step process of applying and expressing parts of speech while focusing on listening-speaking-reading and writing. The scaffolding during the instruction introduces both collaborative and individual writing to my limited English speakers.

The results of both pre-and-post assessments guided me towards what I needed to teach in order to achieve my students writing goals. My shelter class was considered a low performing class before they came to my classroom. As a result of this inquiry, all of my E.L.L. students have had gains from illegible to proficient scores in four months. This inquiry project helped meet both of my E.L.L. students needs in developing their narrative writing skills and language development in English. Combining their personal interests, their desire to share stories, and the use of classroom technology was crucial to develop means of visual cues towards concepts in writing, reading comprehension, vocabulary recognition, and fluency.

Promoting cooperative learning during reading and writing, and the use of their native language in combination with the English language supported and increased students’ connection with their background knowledge. These helped stimulate their new personal enjoyment of narrative writing. The language skills targeted developed strong listening, oral language skills, and increased their use of mental images from descriptive words. After my pre assessment, I knew I had a challenge. Learning about my students’ abilities, backgrounds and culture helped me be sensitive to their learning needs. I truly believed the teaching content of this inquiry was successful when their language and writing skills were matched up to the district shelter classroom expectations for writing.

I have enjoyed the results of this Inquiry process, especially what has done for my students. It has lifted-up their confidence, increased their vocabulary knowledge and made them better writers.

References


Spelling Inquiry Final Findings
Maria Nevarez, Second Grade Teacher, Classroom One
Debra Belknap, Second Grade Teacher, Classroom Two
Highlands Elementary

Purpose
We are second grade teachers. Classroom one is largely devoted to English Language Learners (ELL). Classroom two is a general education classroom. Both classes have about twenty-two students. In the past, we have taught spelling traditionally, words given Monday, studied at home, and tests given weekly on Friday. We have noticed that students are mechanically going through their spelling list; simply copying letters without attending to the actual learning process. Although sometimes students are successful on the Friday test, they are not retaining these words throughout the school year. Due to these spelling difficulties, we decided to research further methods to enhance knowledge and retention of said subject matter.

Question
How will the three selected spelling methods impact the students’ acquisition and retention?

Sub Questions
• Will the method selected enhance the students’ acquisition of the spelling lists provided?
• Will the method selected enhance the students’ retention of the spelling lists provided?

Method
We explained to students that over the next 6 weeks we would be utilizing 3 different spelling methods to see what method would be most beneficial to them. We utilized a total of three methods. Each method was explained and modeled on Monday in the classroom. The three methods are as follows:

*Writing spelling words four times each

*Spelling Pyramids (for example for the word “star” students would write an s, then the next line st, then sta, and finally star in the shape of a pyramid)

*Using Word Study Steps—LOOK, SAY, STUDY, WRITE, CHECK (The students will look at the spelling word, say it out loud, study each letter of the word or phonograms, cover it and write it without looking, uncover it and check their writing, if the word was missed they go back to step one if the word was correct they move on to the next word.)

Each method was applied for four days a week, and for two consecutive weeks, assigned for homework. We then monitored the success rates of each to determine the most effective method for our students.
Data Collection
Spelling homework was checked daily for completion and accuracy. Spelling tests and the corresponding chart indicating the average number of spelling words spelled correctly for each method used was effective in reviewing the results of this inquiry.

Data Results and Analysis
Of the three methods attempted, the Word Study Steps technique was the most successful in classroom one. This method increased student scores on average by two words over the pyramid method and four more over writing the words four times each.

In classroom two, all three techniques were close in success rate. However, the improvement rates were minimal when compared to the before-inquiry classroom averages.

Nevarez’s Reflection
Before embarking upon this inquiry research, I pondered whether or not any of the conventional methods for spelling enhancement would have an effect on English-as-a-Second-Language students as well as monolingual students. Via this research, I have discovered that the methods selected did not greatly impact the spelling acquisition or retention of my targeted students.

However, through personal research and experience I have come to realize that multiples techniques have various success rates depending on the individual learning styles of the student at hand. Another realization is that the lack of reinforcement within the home environment was an unaccounted for variable. In the future, research would be better extracted via a more structured environment within the school setting. Although the present techniques have had limited effectiveness via this particular inquiry project, I feel more research in this area is not only warranted but a necessity.

Belknap’s Reflection
I have always wondered about the effectiveness of spelling homework. In the past, I felt students would study or write the assigned words four times each nightly, take the test on Friday, and then fail to recall them when needed in authentic situations. I have never endorsed homework unless it had a genuine purpose. Most parents like and expect having the traditional Spelling homework of writing each word four times each. It was very hard for parents to understand and change the traditional ways they were taught. They expect this traditional way of thinking from their children. I received several notes from parents about directions of the other methods. These were things they had never done in school. I wanted to try new methods of studying Spelling for homework. I was in favor of the Study Steps because you could use this method to study other areas in the curriculum. In my Second Grade classroom, I saw very little differences in the three methods. I realize that I had no control over their homework environment. I am not sure if my directions for study involving each method were followed with reliability. Although the three methods had limited effectiveness for this inquiry project, I still feel the Study Steps serves the better purpose; as mentioned before, a better way to study most content areas.

I also surveyed my class to find which method they felt helped them the most. The results is as follows: four times each method (7 students), pyramids (3 students), and study steps (12 students). I would like to do more research on this inquiry having a parent meeting to explain
the inquiry or use a controlled setting, such as the classroom. I truly enjoyed this project. It will help me rethink my spelling homework to make sure of its benefit to my students.

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**Turn the Beat Around**
Kathy Rampino, Second Grade Resource Teacher
Village Oaks Elementary

**Purpose**
The purpose of this study was to examine the effects of soothing classical music on behavior. I wanted to see if the music would help the students become more compliant to school protocol so that learning could occur.

**Question**
How will classical music affect behavior?

**Sub Question**
- Will listening to classical music improve concentration?
- Will listening to classical music improve compliance to school protocol?

**Method**
The behavior of four male, below-grade level, second-grade English Language Learners, aged eight or 9 were selected. They were labeled A,B,C,D, identified from most noncompliant to least noncompliant at the onset of the study. They were given verbal instructions and modeled examples on the proper protocol about how to behave during the lesson. There was very little compliance to instruction. Aggressive behaviors were observed. Results were recorded. After gathering and analyzing research, I selected Mozart from *The Mozart Effect: Music for Children Volume I*. The group was pretested with no music. The music was gradually introduced and randomly played at different volumes without telling the group. This was continued for five days. The group was so disruptive and aggressive that the music could not be heard. Next, the students were asked to sit silently with their eyes closed to listen for any sounds they might hear. To measure the success of the study, students were given the task of answering nine questions about onset and rhyme-matching sounds at the beginning and at the end of the study. They were also asked to name fifteen pseudo words. The tasks were done prior to listening to any music and at the conclusion of the inquiry. Compliance goals were measured by teacher observation with anecdotal notes. Compliance was logged weekly as music was increased in duration and volume.

**Data Collection**
Students were identified A, B, C, D. All were disruptive and noncompliant from A – most disruptive to D – least disruptive. Tasks measured were minutes to be seated, listening for directions, and completing the assignment. Compliance to tasks was measured 1 – completely noncompliant, 2 – disruptive to group and self, 3 – disruptive to self and 4 – mostly compliant.

Data was captured mid week using teacher observation. The pretest was administered with no music during the first week using the Sound Matching Task, Sound Matching Rhymes, Sound
Matching Onsets, and pseudo word naming. They were administered again during the final week as the music was quietly played.

**Data Results and Analysis**

The reactions were significant. The soothing classical music improved all students’ behavior in some respect. The time to get on task improved in all students. Being able to hear the music calmed B immediately. That student became increasingly compliant and wanted others to be quiet so he could hear the music. Students began to enter the group more quietly, straining their ears to see if the music was playing. Teacher observations on changes in behavior showed that the music did indeed have a positive result. After looking at the results, the change in student compliance improved in every student. It made a significant difference in student B.

The results of the study show students who wanted to hear the music did better getting on task, focusing, and completing the lesson. The hypothesis was that the students who listened to soothing classical music would be better able to control their behavior and follow simple directions. This hypothesis was supported. The results of this study agree with those of Hall (1952) “The major source of improvement was an increase in attention with the greatest benefit occurring in the students of below average intelligence and achievement.” Don Campbell (2006) states on the CD cover that he, “found that the music of Mozart has a powerful effect on the intellectual and creative development of children.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student</th>
<th>Dates</th>
<th>Minutes taken to get on task</th>
<th>Listening for directions</th>
<th>Completion of task</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>1/7</td>
<td>6 6 6 5</td>
<td>1 1 1 1</td>
<td>1 1 1 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2 3 3</td>
<td>1 1 1 1</td>
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<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>1 1</td>
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<td>D</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1 2 1</td>
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<td>3 2 3 3</td>
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<td>1 1 .5</td>
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<td>C</td>
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<td>1 1 3</td>
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<tr>
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<td>.5 .5 .5 .5 .5</td>
<td>4 4 4 4</td>
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**Reflection**

Working through this inquiry improved my stance on the importance of teacher observation. I had expectations as to what the outcome would be. I had to take a step back and allow the students to experience the changes in the environment. I developed more patience to allow time for learning to take place. I now have more respect for “wait” time.
Observations took place in a migrant, rural-agricultural community in south Florida late in the morning, everyday. All students were present on notation days. The only absences were due to In-School Suspension. The study may be different in different parts of the country and in larger suburban areas. There might be different results from older students or by conducting the study in a more controlled environment.

In the future, this study could be done with students exhibiting other types of noncompliant behavior. Varying ages and types of behavior may show different results. The time of day could also be changed to see if the results would be different.

References


I Did It My Way
Melanie Boswell, ESE K-5
Pinecrest Elementary

Purpose
I teach ESE K-6 in a self contained classroom. I differentiate all materials, assignments and activities daily. I also use varied practice methods in order to expose the students to materials well above their knowledge level, and to give them access to all types of learning methods and strategies. I wanted to see if allowing students to choose which fluency practice method they want to use daily would improve their rate of increasing fluency more than when I assign the methods of daily practice.

I was also curious if letting them choose below level or above level practice materials would slow down or speed up their rate of increase.

Question
• How will allowing students to choose their own independent reading practice methods affect the rate of acquiring reading fluency?

Sub Question
• Will student progress in reading fluency increase more quickly, decrease or remain constant if students choose practice materials well above or well below their current level?

Method
I begin the year by introducing several practice methods for fluency. We used timed partner reading, book on tape, Earobics, River Deep, 100 book challenge, and flashcard games. Each day, the students were assigned one practice method, with materials or assignments chosen by me according to their current reading levels. They rotated methods throughout the week. On Fridays, I gave a fluency check, and the students charted their growth. We talked about which methods they preferred that week for practice and why.

After Christmas break, I allowed the students to choose any of the methods we had practiced, and any materials or assignment to do the practice. Some of the students chose books or passages well below their levels, and some above. Most of them chose only one to two practice methods per week. We continued the weekly checks and discussions.

Monthly, the students met with me to review and discuss their increases. We decided if the independent method seemed to help them more, or if the teacher directed method did. They were also able to suggest areas of practice (phonemic awareness, phonics, etc) if they believed that would also assist the progress.

Data Collection
August-December- weekly fluency assessments (running records), which practice fluency methods daily (paired timed readings, Earobics, 100 book challenge).
January-April- weekly assessment of fluency, daily charting of student selected practice method (from an area we have already practiced), monthly review of progress with students.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data Results and Analysis</th>
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I looked at the total growth (words per minute or sight word increase) of each student. I compared the DIBELS (formal test), and SRI (independent computerized reading test) with our classroom fluency assessments. I was surprised to see that the classroom assessment so closely matched the DIBELS, as usually the students are much more comfortable when testing with me. The SRI growth was phenomenal. We are now in the process of assessing a 3rd time, and I expect that the growth will have continued further. The increases from the beginning of the year were consistent, but slight. Once the students began choosing their own methods and practice level, the progress jumped and continued to grow throughout the year.

As a teacher, the data meant that I can allow the students more choice when practicing fluency. Whether they practiced with on grade level, below or above, their fluency still increased.

For the students, the data meant that they could influence their growth directly. They began to see how more practice helped them learn. The data showed that if the students enjoyed what they were practicing with and had a choice in what type of practice they did, regardless of level, they would show more growth.

**Reflection**

Throughout the inquiry, I struggled with letting go of control over the assignments the students chose each day for practice. I knew that all of the methods were research based, and were valuable to the students. It was difficult for me to allow them to NOT do any one of them. I also was concerned that the growth would be hindered if the students consistently read below their ability.

By watching the progress leap forward when the students got to exercise control, it gave me some freedom as a teacher to let go. I was able to allow the students a lot more control over their centers, which meant I could put that planning time into other areas.

Now that I have seen the progress when students choose whichever method they want to daily, I will start “training” them sooner with all the possibilities, and allowing that choice to occur sooner.

I plan to have the students introduced to all the activities within the first 3 weeks of school, instead of one activity per week, which takes up to 6 weeks. I also want to work with the
Improving Money Counting Skills
Mª Luisa Franco-Torres, Third – Fifth Sheltered Program Teacher
Pinecrest Elementary

Purpose
I started this project because I was really concerned about my students’ ability to deal with real
world situations regarding money. In my class, I have students whose ages go from eight years
old to almost twelve. They come from a similar background: non-English speakers with little or
no knowledge of the U.S. currency. They couldn’t recognize the different coins or their value, let
alone count the money. Anybody could have tricked them into paying more money for a
particular item!

Once I identified the situation, I couldn’t ignore it. I decided I had to do something to help these
kids who already had the language disadvantage against them. I can speak their language, I can
count money, so let’s go for it!

Question
• How will creating a store in the classroom affect the ability of ELL students to
understand and use money?

Sub Question
• Will the prospective of earning money to buy items motivate students to complete their
homework?

Method
I told my students I would give them fake money (I used Math realia) for every piece of
completed homework that they returned to me. At the end of the week, we would open Ms.
Franco’s Classroom Store where they would be able to “buy” items on display from the treasure
box.

I started by teaching how to count money, how to group coins, and how to give change back. The
first weeks, I was the cashier. I modeled both the questions to ask as customers interested in
purchasing items, as well as the answers to give as cashiers dealing with the public. I stressed the
fact that they needed to practice using the English language in this store. The kids were very
enthusiastic and excited from the very beginning; they wanted to learn and they couldn’t wait for
their turn to buy. I would tell them how much they owed and they would have to give me the
money by using the least amount of coins, starting with the ones of greater value and counting
them aloud. However, I had students who would come to buy something and they wouldn’t
know how much money they had in their wallet, so sometimes they had to turn around because
they didn’t have enough.
After some weeks, I felt some students were ready to be the cashiers. By then, they had already witnessed how to give money back multiple times. They did an awesome job! I would still stand next to them just in case they needed some help.

From that moment on, a different student was in charge of the cash register every week.

**Data Collection**
The students took a test at the beginning of the project and at the end of the project. I also did a lot of student observation every week. It was very apparent how the kids were progressing in their money counting skills, and how little they were needing my assistance.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Students</th>
<th>Pre-test</th>
<th>Post-test</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student A</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student B</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student C</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student D</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Since most of my kids come from migrant families, I have had very few students who have stayed the whole school year with me. The results for those who developed the project from the very beginning are terrific.

**Reflection**
If I had to summarize this experience, I would use one word: FUN. I had fun setting up the store every week, going to the Flea Market to renew my store stock, and having the kids asking me for specific items they would like to buy. The kids did enjoy this process; they didn’t see it as academics, they didn’t realize they were learning.

It was neat to see the changes the students went through during those months: they went from keeping an all-dime-coin wallet bag, to asking me for change so they could have coins of greater value. They came to understand the value of savings and went from buying anything every week to saving money for the following week so they could buy something pricier. As new students joined our class/program during the year, the “veteran kids” would explain the rules and give advice to them. Suddenly, everybody wanted to be the cashier; it made them feel important. They had to manage larger and different amounts of money as well as to add the different articles a single customer was purchasing. They saw that as a challenge and they quickly embraced it.

I also saw more motivation on the students to do their homework every day. The deal was 10 cents per piece of homework completed. If they didn’t do it or didn’t complete it, they would have to give me the 10 cents. Everybody was ready to remind me to check their homework, and their baggies were already opened, waiting for the coins to drop in.

**References**

http://mathplayground.com/making_change.html
Spicing Up Math with KUMON
Altamease Hodge, Second Grade Teacher
Village Oaks Elementary

Purpose
The purpose of my inquiry into Kumon Math was to improve my students’ mastery of addition facts. Our students could not recall basic math facts in a timely fashion, as such I hoped Kumon Math would help our students master their basic math facts. One of the goals was to have students recall their math facts without counting on their fingers.

Question
• What will the affect of Kumon Math be on basic math fact fluency in my class?

Sub Question
• Will Kumon Math timed tests help my students recall their addition facts more quickly?
• What will be the percentage of mastery for my NES students be who have never been in school before?

Method
I had my students increase the percentage of addition facts they could accurately recall. This was done by using the Kumon method for practicing and testing. Kumon math enables each child to progress successfully by practicing material until concepts are mastered. The students were advanced in small, manageable increments.

Data Collection
The data collection strategies used for the inquiry were timed tests, field notes, pretests, and post tests. The students were first pretested on the number of basic addition facts (1-5) they could correctly answer in 40 seconds. Then, the students were given material to study such as math fact sheets and addition fact cards. They were tested on a weekly basis, and the results were graphed to display their individual growth. At the end of the study, the students were post tested on the same facts.

Data Results and Analysis
The results of the study were encouraging. The students were able to recall their basic math facts with increasing speed each week. They were very excited about the study and some students mentioned that they felt smarter because they could remember their facts. I believe this ability to quickly recall math facts will help our students learn future math concepts.
Reflection
Working through this inquiry has given me a better understanding of how students with a first language other than English can have such a hard time adjusting to change. I know that the students I was working with throughout this inquiry had to adjust to another type of learning. The advancing to the next level when the students had reached mastery was something that I think was beneficial for them. The students learned the importance of mastering one skill before advancing to the next addition fact. This information could be transferable into other academic areas. Advancing after mastery to the next academic level in the areas of reading and writing is highly beneficial. I enjoyed the time spent with the students throughout the inquiry. It brought a smile to my face as well as the students to see the accomplishments made.

Classroom Management Games
Suzanne Leitner, Second Grade Teacher
Pinecrest Elementary

Purpose
My students are second grade students. They love school but sometimes they feel “out of sorts” and do not act their best. These feelings have been explained to them over and over as not being to their advantage in our classroom or related arts classrooms. My inquiry project gave them a fun and educationally beneficial way to contain their feelings. It helped them understand how they can improve educationally and socially and still have an enjoyable day wherever they are.

Question
• Will this “game” give my students more focus and attention to be successful with the task at hand?
• Will my students get along better with each other?
• How will this carry our class through the entire day whether in our classroom, lunchroom, or related arts classes?
• Would this game have an influence on students’ behavior, achievement and motivation?

Method
I explained to the entire class the importance of everyone working as a team to keep the fun and academics progressing in all classroom areas. Our method of tracking behavior was kept on a Behavior Bingo Chart. The students were told they had to be very quiet, listen, and pay attention because this was a team effort. It involved peer support, pressure, and encouragement so the listening and learning would make a difference. I set up the guidelines by giving each child the rubric for the Bingo Chart. I explained to the entire class the importance of following the rules. They must ALL participate to get the rewards. After ten days we had filled out one row of the Behavior Bingo Chart. We reviewed our rules as often as necessary and by the tenth day, they were becoming respectful when lining up and walking down the corridors of our school.

Having treats (donuts were the first) as rewards – counted and made a difference. Students were reminded of the goals after each reward. Again, I reviewed the goals every morning and whenever necessary. By now they realized the rewards were for the four squares filled in or diagonal rows on the chart and they would receive donuts, cookies, juice or bags of treats. If they could fill in the full board, we would have pizza, puzzle time, game time, Read A Lot or No Homework Week. Once the students knew the rules, they understood why we had to track our progress.

Data Collection
Put a star on one number:
  All homework brought in on time
  All behavior cards on green for the day
  Moving quietly in the halls and at restroom
Put a star on two numbers:
  A compliment from a teacher or staff member any time during the day
Put a star on three numbers:
  A compliment from the Assistant Principal or Principal
Put a star on four numbers:
  A good note from a sub
  Great behavior on a field trip or assembly

Data Results and Analysis
This inquiry project was slow getting started, but after the students got used to the rubrics and understood the chart keeping methods this “game” made a difference in our classroom both socially and academically. Our chart was something they could see at a glance and their rewards were enjoyable because they knew they had worked together to earn the treats or game time. My students learned record keeping. They found that if they were at related arts classes and received a star, they would get a point so they reminded their group to work for that point. Where this
method really showed its value was when our class had a substitute for two days, and instead of being out of sorts and control, they pulled together and were rewarded with four points each day. Eight stars when I got back…. WOW! It made me happy because they were learning to adjust to a new situation; they worked together for the benefit of our class and for the substitute. The substitute complimented them for staying on task and remembering the rules.

**Reflection**

This inquiry has been all about class games and appropriate rewards. Many students need immediate feedback and they need to learn self-control. We worked on this as a class and the team effort paid off. My students took pride in reminding their friends to “be nice and work hard.” Even though I had to set the rules in place at first by going over the rubrics, chart, and gently reminding certain students, the effort paid off because the class members had fewer referrals and they showed one year’s growth academically on the SAT 10.

Basically, these students do not want to be criticized and stressed, by making it more of a game and providing treats or other games as rewards, they decided to do better. They learned the importance of growing academically and socially. The little competitive spirit helped them all along the way, and it was enjoyable. I will use this method of classroom management next year because I have seen such an improvement. When we got a new student, it was amazing to hear the students tell the newcomer of “our Bingo game.” They could explain every detail, and that clearly shows their acceptance of this system of working together.

**Drumming Up Success in Reading**

William Reese, Third Grade Teacher
Pinecrest Elementary

**Purpose**

My purpose is to determine whether the practice of Rhythm Reading, using a rhythm drum, influences fluency. I attended an informative and creative workshop led by John Arsenault, author of books like *The Baobob Tree* in September of 2008. I wondered if applying the concept of tapping out the rhythm of words and syllables while reading would aid some of my students in their reading fluency.

This led me to use this strategy in my differentiated instructional practices. I began to design an experiment to see if I could measure its effectiveness. My students usually show great fluency gains as measured by our DIBELS testing standards. Could their gains be even better by adding this element to the equation, especially for the more challenged students?

I decided to primarily select students from the lowest twenty-five percent of my class to use the drum because it has always been the greatest challenge to bring them up to the targeted reading levels.
I went on the internet and found several interesting articles and studies that correlate with the findings that I experienced. Steven Angel’s article on The Power of Rhythm speaks of the three “R’s” as: Rhythm, Repetition, and Results. His studies showed increases that went from 40% to an astounding 138%. Phil Tulgal also provides information at www.philtulga.com/reading.html.

Question

- Is there a correlation between using Rhythm Reading techniques during reading instruction to augment an awareness of the rhythm in language and ultimately result in fluency gains?

Sub Questions

- Would the Rhythm Reading technique trigger an increase in my third grade students’ fluency scores by a measurably higher percent than they achieved before using it?
- Would students using the “Rhythm Reading” technique make higher gains than similar students who did not practice with the rhythm drum?
- Will this practice motivate the students to practice more?
- Will using the rhythm drum result in greater fluency gains because of intrinsic motivation to practice?

Method

I chose two of my slower readers to practice tapping out words and syllables on the drum while reading. I matched them with two students of comparable speed who would not use the drum. For controls I selected three different students. The first control student had more than doubled her score the first interval. I questioned whether she could match or improve on those gains and decided to let her use the drum to build her confidence.

The second was a student reading on target but that had not shown much growth on the second evaluation. I wanted to see if there would be much of a difference in her progress if she used the drum. She is an ELL student who still receives instructional accommodations.

The third control was a student who was reading below target, but had made great gains during the second evaluation. I tested him individually to see where his gains fell in comparison to the others.

Finally I recorded my entire class’ averages to compare the selected group against. I had the selected students use a rhythm drum while reading selected passages. We monitored their progress compared to reading gains during the first and second quarter of school, against the control students, and against the whole class average. Data was compared and contrasted for overall fluency gains.

All of the students in my class received regular fluency training and practice from the teacher and tutors.

Data Collection

- DIBELS scores
- Lexile Scores
- Teacher and Tutor Observations
Data Results and Analysis

My analysis of the data that I gathered led me to several conclusions: First, my study group was too small to make arbitrary judgments. The general results I observed were positive and encouraging. Also the students who did the drumming were not the only ones who made significant gains in my class. I had one student who began on level with an 85 reach a phenomenal 161 at the end of the year.
Second, I had regrets about the low students that I did not work with on the drum because their third test gains were considerably lower than the two main drummers.
Third, with the exception of one of my control students, the drummers were the only ones who manifested greater gains between the second and third test.
Most students showed greatest progress between test one and two. The class average was 33.3% vs. 15.04%. The student that did the drumming but did not match second test gains was influenced by receiving glasses between her first and second test. It was discovered that she was almost legally blind without them. I was more than pleased that she maintained her gains and read on target.

Finally, other factors have to be considered. My student whose overall fluency gain was 260% also had a phenomenal 364 Lexile gain on SRI. Language acquisition, maturation, and word processing skills which developed because of other influences are all a part of the equation. Nevertheless, I definitely plan to use this strategy extensively in the future with my students.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student List</th>
<th>Test 1</th>
<th>Test 2</th>
<th>Test 3</th>
<th>% Gain 1st/2nd Test No Drumming</th>
<th>% Gain 2nd/3rd Test w/ Drumming</th>
<th>% Gain Overall</th>
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<tr>
<td>Student A</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>24.56</td>
<td>49.29</td>
<td>85.96</td>
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<tr>
<td>Student A2</td>
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<td>81</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>39.66</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>44.83</td>
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<tr>
<td>W/O Drumming</td>
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<tr>
<td>Student B</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>45</td>
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<td>80</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>260</td>
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<td>With Drumming</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student B2</td>
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<td>77</td>
<td>67.56</td>
<td>24.19</td>
<td>108.11</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>C1 Control:</td>
<td>51</td>
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<td>112</td>
<td>101.96</td>
<td>8.77</td>
<td>119.6</td>
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<tr>
<td>With Drumming</td>
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<tr>
<td>C2 With Drumming</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>107</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>2.88</td>
<td>16.82</td>
<td>20.19</td>
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<tr>
<td>C3 W/O Drumming</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>58.33</td>
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<td>81.25</td>
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<td>109</td>
<td>125.38</td>
<td>33.2</td>
<td>15.04</td>
<td>53.22</td>
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<td>No Drumming</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Reflection
At the end of the study I began to feel guilty that I had excluded some of the students who needed to make gains from the practice. I am getting them involved immediately at the conclusion of the inquiry. Growth made by those who used the drum was significant enough to cause me to plan whole class activities along with intensive intervention for selected students. It was noticeable to me that from the beginning of a reading session, and progressing forward, the students reading rate would automatically increase. Also students who might not normally initiate a reading session independently did so in order to be able to use the drum.

Resources
I attended an informative and creative workshop led by John Arsenault, author of books like *The Baobob Tree*, in September of 2008. This led me to use some of the learning in my differentiated instruction practices and wish to measure their effectiveness. www.philtulga.com/reading.html; www.itmagazine.net/stories/spotlight-stories/category_grass-rootsheroes/steven-angel:ThePowerofRhythm; registerm1@mail.leon.k12.fl.us

DIBELS Oral Reading Fluency Scores

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**Vow to Vowels**
Consuelo Ayala, Third Grade Teacher
Village Oaks Elementary

**Purpose**
I have three first year NES students from Mexico who are motivated to read. Two of them show much excitement about reading. One of them is having more trouble with sounds in the English language. With the phonovisual activities, I hope to make my NES students more aware of the phonics rules in the English language so their reading levels improve quickly. In addition, I would like to find out how the phonovisual and phonics activities will affect their writing and spelling. I wonder how focusing on phonovisual instruction every day will improve the one student who is having more trouble with the English sounds. I also wonder how my English speaking students will improve their fluency and spelling skills with daily phonovisual and phonics instruction. I will compare both groups to see who makes more gains, my NES or my struggling English speaking students.

**Question**
- How will phonovisual activities affect reading fluency and spelling?

**Sub Question**
- Which group will make a significant growth in reading and writing, my NES students or my English speaking students?

**Method**
I will incorporate daily phonovisual and phonics instruction during my guided reading lessons, use word family activities, and in writing, I will check for third grade Dolch words spelled correctly.

**Data Collection**
I collected data for 3 months. The data that I collected was weekly spelling tests and pop spelling quizzes, timed fluency practice, and timed speed phrase reading.

**Data Results and Analysis**
My inquiry lasted four weeks. I chose two guided reading groups. The first group was my NES students. These first year students came from Mexico speaking only Spanish. My other group is composed of students who scored red or yellow in DIBELS. To start my inquiry my students took a survey. There were ten questions on the survey about frequency of reading at home and about their feelings about reading. I kept a record of spelling scores and fluency timed readings. I also recorded the minutes read at home daily for two weeks. Two of my NES students made significant growth based on their DIBELS score and moved up several levels in reading. In third grade, we only use the DIBELS as a fluency indicator. In addition, as a result of the phonics instruction, their writing improved. My NES students’ spelling scores averaged 90% to 100%. My English speaking students spelling assessments averaged 60% to 80%. In writing, my NES students are writing complete sentences in English and improving constantly. My English speaking students have not made significant growth in reading levels or in their prompt writing scores.

**Reflection**
This inquiry project has helped me realize that daily reading time and phonics instruction in the classroom are the keys for certain students making gains. Another important factor for students to make gains is the reading motivation. The answers in the student surveys and the home reading time recorded did not match, which indicated that, although some students liked reading they were not self-motivated readers. The phonics instruction in the classroom gave the students the tools they needed to read at their own level at home. Once the students were not struggling with decoding, they enjoyed reading independently. The post survey showed that students liked to read at home whether they made gains or not in reading levels. However, my NES recorded more time for daily reading at home than my English speaking students.

Throughout this inquiry, I noticed that my NES students were more motivated to read than my struggling English speaking students. Based upon my work and reflections with this inquiry, I will continue to do daily phonovisual and phonics instruction with my guided reading groups based on their need. As teachers we would like all our students to be self-motivated readers, but students don’t always have the tools and strategies they need to be successful readers. Primary teachers need to give students the reading strategies they need to succeed in upper elementary grades.

This inquiry has changed the way I instruct my small reading groups. During small group instruction, I instruct my students based on their need. Some students will need more phonovisual or phonics instruction than others. Guided reading time is a great setting to provide small group phonics instruction. I teach writing after guided reading and this is another area where my students get to practice their phonics skills.
My NES students realized that the more they read the better readers they became. In third grade they received the phonics instruction that will make the rest of their school years something to look toward.

From now on, I plan to continue with small group phonics instruction. My next questions are: What would happen if our NES students read to our English speaking low performing students? Will these low performing students correct the NES reading mistakes? Will the English Speaking students be more motivated to read so they can read to others, too? This inquiry has already sparked my new wonderings.

References


Take a Bow
Olwen Suzette Stewart-Bell, Third Grade Teacher
Village Oaks Elementary

Purpose
More than half of the high risk students in my class are below grade level in fluency. They got moderate risk or high risk on the Dynamic Indicator of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) test and they struggle in class when they have to read aloud. “DIBELS ORF can quite accurately predict whether or not a student will attain a score of level 3 or above on the FCAT reading test” (Buck & Torgesen, 2004). This research shows that students who meet expectations on the DIBELS test are considered low risk and have a much better chance of getting a Level 3 or higher on the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT).

I want to give my “at risk” students the opportunity of becoming fluent readers so that they too have a better chance of passing the FCAT.

Question
• How will intensive use of Reader’s Theatre affect the DIBELS, FCAT scores, and general fluency of my high and medium risk students?

Method
Twice a week, I worked with two groups of five students, working exclusively on Readers’ Theatre plays. I chose two groups because I needed to keep each group small. Initially, the plays were taken from the Macmillan McGraw Third Grade Core Reading materials. After the first week, I realized that the plays from this reading series were too long and the vocabulary was too
difficult. Therefore I located more developmentally appropriate Readers’ Theatre plays. Each play was performed for the rest of the class after we had finished working on it. We managed to perform four plays during the six week period.

**Data Collection**

I wrote a journal after every session with each group. I made comments about how the reading went and noted any progress students were making. I also recorded what the students told me about their feelings towards the reading and if they were enjoying it.

Once a week I gave them an oral reading fluency test with 100 words. The tests were also taken from the Macmillan McGraw Third Grade Core Reading series. I used a different grade level test every week and recorded the scores for each student. I gave them a score out of 100.

At the end of the six week period, the students provided feedback on the entire process by filling out a short exit survey.

In April, the final DIBELS test was administered to each student.

**Data Results and Analysis**

The data showed that my students improved in both reading fluency and reading confidence.

The journal helped me to see what the mood of the group was on each day. It documented how each child was reading, how much of the passage they actually knew, and then how much they had retained from day to day. It also showed what my feelings and opinions were of the read-throughs.

The most telling piece of data was results of the oral reading fluency tests. As the six weeks progressed, the scores improved steadily, and at the end of the six-week period, all of the students had shown a significant improvement on these tests – some had perfect scores.

In the DIBELS Test, most of the students showed gains, but these gains were not significant enough for some of the students to move from yellow (medium risk) to green (high risk). This is because the target was raised. So while the students actually showed substantial improvements, the DIBELS Test did not acknowledge the significance.

DIBELS Results: Class Median
Reflection

I am satisfied that this inquiry was a successful one. It was significant because it gave the students the extra practice they needed. By using Readers’ Theater, the students had a purpose for their reading. They were motivated to come to the reading group to practice, and they were excited to perform their plays for the rest of the class.

The students showed gains at higher rates than the rest of the students who did not take part in the study. However, these students also had a lot more gains to make. The rest of the class worked on the regular core fluency once a week and made steady gains in fluency throughout the year.

In reflection, I see that the study would have been more significant if I had a control group. This raises an ethical question because I would not want to withhold valuable instruction from a struggling group of students – even if it was only for six weeks.

I feel some regret that I wasted a week trying to use the grade level core reading fluency tests. I realize now that these children had not been reading on grade level, and I should have given them easier plays to begin with and maybe increased the difficulty as their fluency improved.
As a result of this project, I will use Readers’ Theater even more. Next year I will use it not just with the struggling readers, but with all my students. The whole class can have the experience and enjoyment of performing a play for their friends. The students thoroughly enjoyed the experience - and so did I. I expect to see even bigger gains in year to come.

References

Foldable Facts for Science
Peg Haupt, Third Grade Teacher
Pinecrest Elementary

Purpose
There are many things third grade students need to learn about to meet the Sunshine State Standards in Science. As responsible teachers, we cannot leave Science instruction until 5th grade and expect our students to be successful on the FCAT Science assessment. A foundation for Science needs to begin in the earlier grades. With this in mind, I wanted to try a new way to assist students who may have difficulty retaining information by simply having direct instruction. I wondered if having 3-D graphic organizer foldables would help students enjoy the note taking process. I wanted to see if the students would retain more information and score better on quizzes and tests if they made colorful and interesting creations.

Question
- How will 3-D Graphic Organizer Foldables affect the student’s retention of Science information?

Sub Question
- Will students be able to perform better on tests if they have created foldables with the assessed information?

Method
Before the unit of study, students were given a Pre-test to see what kind of information they might already know or had been exposed to previously. During each unit in Science, students were given small sections of information and asked to create pictures, models, or representations of the information on the graphic organizer foldable preselected by the teacher.

By the time our trip to Corkscrew Regional Ecosystem Watershed, my students studied about the water cycle. They then created a pyramid foldable representing pictures and key elements of the water cycle, such as: condensation, precipitation, and evaporation. Another activity prior to CREW involved discussing the various uses for water. The students made their lists and categories into a foldable. After all the information about CREW was taught, the students went on a field trip. We made additional foldables on our return to represent the various things we
found on the trip. A Post-test was given to determine the retention of knowledge and comprehension students gained from the study.

**Data Collection**
Foldables were collected from each activity and were graded on their completeness, quality of the work, and student effort and input. Students were made aware of the rubric expectations. Data was collected on CREW to determine the usefulness of the foldables through the Pre and Post tests.

**Data Results and Analysis**

12 students scored between 0 and 49% and 6 students scored between 50 and 79% on the pre-test, letting me know that while the students came with some background knowledge, much was new to the students. After teaching and creating the foldables, all student scores increased. 11 students scored between 80 and 100%, 6 students scored between 50 and 79% and only one student scored below 50%.

**Reflection**
At the completion of the CREW unit, I found that my students had really enjoyed using foldables for note taking. I was teaching them a skill that they will use frequently in the future. By creating foldables, instead of using a common graphic organizer, students were able to utilize their many different learning styles. Additionally, it fostered team work and problem solving skills in my students when they assisted each other or shared their work. They also developed a sense of pride, and many took special care of the final product, much more so than a sheet of notes.

**References**


Thomas, B. (2009). Corkscrew Regional Ecosystem Watershed Environmental Education Specialist, bthomas_crew@earthlink.net
50 Social Studies Foldables
Michelle Mink, Third Grade Teacher
Pinecrest Elementary

Purpose
Students in the third grade must learn about many ancient civilizations. Among the major civilizations of the world Mesopotamia, Egypt, China, Greece, and Rome are heavily stressed in this grade level, and the information disseminated about each area is extensive. Students have difficulty retaining information about each civilization by simply having direct instruction, so I wondered if having 3-D graphic organizer foldables would help students retain more information and help them to score better on quizzes and tests.

Question
- How will 3-D Graphic Organizer Foldables affect the student’s retention of Social Studies information?

Sub Question
- Will students be able to perform better on tests if they have created foldables with the assessed information?

Method
Before the unit of study, students were given a Pre-test to see what kind of information they might already know or had been exposed to previously. During each study of an ancient civilization, students were given small sections of information and asked to create pictures, models, or representations of the information on the graphic organizer foldable. For instance, when students learned about Greek soldiers (Hoplites) they created a labeled picture of the Hoplite explaining what each piece of clothing and weaponry was for, and made a 3-D bronze shield from aluminum foil and brown crayons. Another graphic foldable that was created was of the Agora marketplace. Students used stirring sticks, torn paper towels, material, and crayons to create a representation of the market with labels for the various goods sold there. After all the information about a civilization was taught, a Post-test was given to determine the retention of knowledge and comprehension students gained from the study.

Data Collection
Foldables were collected from each civilization and were graded on their completeness, quality of the work, and student effort and input. Data was collected on ancient Greece to determine the usefulness of the foldables through the Pre and Post tests.
All students scored between 0 and 50% on the pre-test, signifying that much of the information that was to be taught was new to the students. After teaching and creating the foldables, student scores dramatically increased. 10 students scored between 90 and 100%, 5 students scored an 80% and three students scored below 50%. 83% of students achieved scores that met the Grade Level Expectation for these Social Studies concepts.

**Reflection**

After completing this study, I have gained some valuable insights into the inquiry process, and the ways in which the students process information. According to the works of Bloom and many others, students learn in various ways that are unique to the individual. By receiving instruction that integrated many various learning styles, the students made connections and gained knowledge that they may have missed had it only been presented through direct instruction. Next year I believe I will integrate more styles of foldables and allow students to help choose information to be included in the unit of study.

**References**


It’s All About… Start to Finish
Rosemarie Zerega, Third Grade Teacher
Eden Park Elementary

Purpose
I am a third grade teacher in Immokalee. My students reading levels range from 1.2 to 4.0. I was interested in increasing my students’ fluency and reading comprehension scores by utilizing a technology based chapter book study called “Start to Finish” which students used 2-3 times a week.

Question
• How will using the technology based “Start to Finish” program increase fluency and comprehension?

Sub Question
• Does the “Start to Finish” program motivate students to read?
• Is the program time effective?
• How can the data be beneficial to teachers?

Method
I administered the chapter book program to a small group of students of various reading levels. The lessons consisted of each student reading along with the CD chapter book that comes with the program. After each chapter, the students took a cloze test, focused on vocabulary, and a fluency test. The chapter books started at their reading levels and increased as students completed each book. I tracked their progress using the graphs that come with the program. Each student’s graph was saved on their computer. I reviewed the students’ progress as they moved along. If a student got under 75%, they were required to re-read the chapter and re-take the cloze test.

Data Collection
My data collection started with the cloze tests that come with the program. They were measured by the graphs supplied through the program. I hoped to see an increased level of understanding with vocabulary. The second form of data was the fluency test they did at the end of each chapter. I also used student surveys to find out if students enjoyed the program. I conducted another survey for teachers that used the program to determine if they thought the program was effective. I compared the students DIBELS scores, Lexile levels and DRA scores to see if great gains had been made.

Data Results and Analysis
I am presented two of the student’s findings, from the four students I worked with. Student A’s beginning reading level was a 1.8, with a DIBELS score of 42 wpm, a DRA of 18 and a Lexile score of 0. When student A started the program, he/she had to read each chapter an average of 3 times before gaining a score to move ahead. As student A continued to read the books and accelerated to a higher level book, repeated readings of each chapter decreased to reading it once and moving on. By the end of this inquiry period, student A scores were as follows. DIBELS score improved to 89 wpm, DRA increased to a 30, and the Lexile score to 274.
Student B’s beginning reading level was a 1.4, with a DIBELS score of 50 wpm, and a Lexile score of 0. Student B also needed to re-read each chapter a number of times in order to be able to move on. By the end of this project, student B’s scores were increased with a DIBELS score of 84 wpm, a DRA score of 24 and a Lexile score of 187. Student B also showed a great gain in writing skills, achieving a 4.5 on the Collier Writes.

Reflection
Using the inquiry project has helped me take a closer look at data I may not have otherwise considered. I loved seeing the joy and love of reading this program instilled in the students. My student A could never finish a chapter book and would jump from book to book. With this program the greatest thing of all was seeing him/her devour the books and actually request the next book. I assigned the books by reading levels instead of allowing the students to choose on their own. This also helped the students by limiting their frustration level. Student A loves to read and, in fact, is constantly sitting with his/her nose in a book. That alone is worth the program’s success. I will definitely use the program again, as will the other teachers I surveyed. I did find I had a student who did not do well on the cloze tests. Instead of re-reading the chapter, he/she just continually went back and kept re-taking the quiz. I would have to monitor that more closely. I also found teachers from other schools interested in acquiring the program. I must mention that the chapter books are classics and it was a great way to introduce the many different genres to the students.

The Times of Your Life
Mary C. Murphy, 3rd Grade Inclusion
Highlands Elementary

Purpose
The purpose of my inquiry was to get my 3rd grade students interested in multiplication. The inquiry started in December out of the need to get the students motivated to learn. In general, the students seemed easily engaged, but I noticed an issue where a lot of information was presented to the kids, but they lack a connection, or awareness of why it is important to learn multiplication. While it makes sense that developmentally they were not at a point where they would make these connections, I felt because my class was an ESE clustered classroom, any awareness about the learning process would be beneficial to the students.

One requirement of a new teacher in Collier County is to attend trainings that are part of an Educator’s Accomplished Practice known as Continuous Improvement. Regardless of subject matter, the common thread among these trainings is the idea that it is best to deliver instruction using multiple modalities to engage students by addressing different learning styles.

Visual learning assists students through the use of pictures, videos, and graphics. Auditory learning helps students who learn best through hearing in the form of songs, chants, poems, mnemonics, voice and music. Kinesthetic helps students connect through doing an activity, such as drawing pictures, role playing, working with their hands, moving around or creating something that allows them to be part of what they are learning.
While brainstorming for a subject, I thought of what would help our school, and what was memorable for me as an elementary student. I knew that multiplication was going to be a goal for third grade students at Highlands this year, and I remembered a project my favorite teacher had us do for parents’ night in the 1970s.

My 6th grade class would host an open house where parents would walk the campus and classrooms looking at planned activities created by the students. Our class was going to do the 5 senses. It was the first time I was involved in anything at school in the evening. I was in charge of bringing a bowl of cranberry sauce to hide in a box, complete with an opening covered in fringed crinkle paper for dramatic effect. I would entice the parents to squish around in the warm mush, while I tried to make them think it was liver. They jerked their red stained hands out of the box and I would giggle telling them it was only cranberry sauce.

Using the five senses had an impact on me 35 years later, and it would be great if I could find a way to help our students learn their multiplication facts by incorporating the 5 senses into their lessons.

As a class, the group is easily engaged, but being young kids, they lacked endurance and the connection that homework is a review of the day’s activities, reading makes you a better reader, and studying a little each night improves grades. It was settled. I would find a way to use the 5 senses to motivate my students to learn multiplication.

**Question**

How will using the five senses affect my student’s ability to learn multiplication facts?

**Method**

The inquiry began on December 8th and ran until April 30th. During this time, I used different items that utilized the five senses and math activities to engage my students in learning multiplication facts. The activities involved exercises to practice multiplication such as: multiplication grids that are filled in up to the 12 tables, math minutes that are random multiplication problems based on practicing one number, and Around the world, a game where students compete with each other to answer multiplication questions. In this game one student stands by another student’s desk, the student who answers correctly moves to the next student’s desk and the student who does not, sits down. Flashcards are used to practice multiplication facts independently and in centers, and practice sheets students could practice at home and school. We also used the school’s website that has links to math web sites.

The five senses were used in a variety of way and combined with multiplication practice. For eyes, I used the cool timer. This is a clock that is displayed on the document camera, the students can watch it count down minutes by seconds and have to finish a number in the grid during the minute. It is very interesting to see the students react to the timer. They loved working with it, and it was one of the activities they requested the most. Other activities that involved the eyes were flashcards, math sheets, and the technology web sites. For nose, we used the scents of lavender and mint. Lavender helps people relax, while mint is known to help the brain react quickly. For ears, this was anything involving voice. It included Around the world, verbal
multiplication games, the multiplication pen that made noises when you answered flashcards correctly or incorrectly, and multiplication bingo. For taste we included the mints, fruit rollups for high scores, and a class wide pizza party when the group achieved an 80% on a math goal.

**Data collection**

Baseline data: 12/08/08 a multiplication grid was given to the entire class. From there, I looked at which students seemed the least familiar with the grid and selected them as the students to track. There were 5 students who struggled with the grid. The grids were practiced on a regular basis but data was timed and collected on them 3 times. The three timed collections were first in December, then in February, and the last time in April. The other type of data that was collected had to do with which activity the student requested to practice multiplication as a preferred learning style.

**Data Results and Analysis**

Everyone had gains. I would not connect the gains to the use of the 5 senses. While I used a lot of props for them to connect the five senses, in the end I was tracking their requests for certain activities and connecting them to their learning preferences. Also, I ran into a few issues that affected data collection.

Issue 1- After Christmas break, my math instructional time was shortened from January-April 15th.

Issue 2- The stimulus props created undesirable issues in the classroom. For instance, the high tech magic pen became something to fight over and its sound was distracting to anyone not using it. The mints became an issue where kids were requesting mints on a regular basis or focusing on the mints instead of the math, and it didn’t seem productive. This was a difficult situation, because it was a motivator on one hand, and a distraction on the other.

Issue 3- What I was considering a lack of connection, was just a lack of number sense. These students were introduced to multiplication facts, technology, arrays and the multiplication grid towards the end of 2nd grade and 3rd grade in the fall. The students could not tell the difference between a 100 chart and a multiplication grid. A student might know that 9x9=81, but they could not find with ease 82 on a 100 chart. Visualization became a cause of confusion. Example: What is 8x8? 80, well what is 10x8? 80, so what do you think 8x8 would be? They would not think in terms of jumping down the 100 chart a few 10s to estimate that 8x8 was 60-something.

Issue 4- Our school began a new program called Passport to Peace. It was a character trait-building program. The idea was to teach the trait and when we saw a student exhibiting the trait we would reward that student with a badge that displayed the trait. When another teacher saw the student with the badge, she would stop the student and ask the student how they earned the badge. The attention the student received became a motivator for the student. Goodbye magic pen. Hello positive recognition.

We introduced our new badge, Confidence in our Passport to Peace program. All of a sudden a few days goes by, and student 1 approaches me, “Miss I am ready for my sixes.” This student wanted a math minute, I gave her one on the spot and she got a 100. She went to the front of the class, and demonstrated how she used her answer cards. She stayed front and center in the room, while I talked about how wonderful she was and everyone clapped their hands. I put the badge over her head and the next day, another student came in with a completed math grid, and, so on and, so on and, so on.
The inquiry had taken another direction. The students enjoyed the fun of mints, pizza, high tech pens, prizes and nice smells, but they were no match for attention through positive reinforcement and recognition.

Of the 19 students in class, I tracked 5 students who seemed to be struggling from the beginning and these are their results in timed math grids:

Student 1:
Baseline: 2 rows filled out in grid
Test 2- 4 rows filled out in grid
Final – 12 rows filled out in grid
Preferred activity- Passport to Peace and taste were equal motivators to this student. Daily she would ask for one or the other. She loved wearing badges and getting food for math.

Student 2
Baseline: 0 rows filled in correctly
Test 2-6 rows filled in correctly
Final-12 rows filled in correctly
Preferred activity- Passport to Peace.

Student 3
Baseline: 5 rows filled in correctly
Test 2- 8 rows filled in correctly
Final-12 rows filled in correctly
Preferred activity- Taste

Student 4
Baseline- 2 rows filled in correctly
Test 2- 5 rows filled in correctly
Final-12 rows filled in correctly
Preferred activity- Passport to Peace

Student 5
Baseline-0 rows filled in correctly
Test 2- 7 rows filled in correctly
Final- 12 rows filled in correctly
Preferred activity- Passport to Peace

Reflection
Being part of an inquiry is interesting. I collect data regularly when working with students who have IEP’s, but this was different in lots of ways. A great source of support throughout the process came from the people who ran the program. Everything they said would happen did, and being able to talk with them helped me make sense of things that were not making sense during data collection. Lastly, while I did not have total success at getting the students to learn their
multiplication facts, I feel they are better equipped to understand numbers and they have built their confidence in their ability to set goals and achieve them.

As I was collecting and looking at the data, I was too bogged down in the idea that their grades weren’t perfect and the whole grid was not coming together easily. When I look at the data from the standpoint that their number sense was low, I am happy with the data. This inquiry served a purpose and it was effective though it did not achieve what I wanted it to in the beginning. Today all the students in the class know their way around a multiplication grid, a number chart, how to build a grid and games to help them practice their tables. They know about different types of technology and while many fill out the grid by counting up instead of pure memorization, I am confident in time they will know their tables. Today, I feel if they were given a test to select the correct multiplication answer out of 4 choices, that they would be familiar enough with the answers that it would not take long to find the correct answer.

Many of the people I talked to throughout the process told me not to be surprised if I found that the focus was changing. Which, in my case, once the stimulus became too distracting for everyone, it became an issue of how to motivate the students. That was difficult because they were easily engaged but, being young kids, when class was over they were on to other activities. Those activities included playing, not independent study.

As far as other wonderings about the inquiry, I gained a lot of insight from my students. We had results from assessments early on, but I was amazed at how little students knew and thought about numbers. As part of the process, I would talk to adults about what they remembered from learning their tables. The ones who liked math all said the same thing; they drew grids in their spare time. They remembered filling in grids in their spare time. This information was interesting to me for the inquiry, because it was information I gathered in casual conversations with people. The adults who used the grids tended to be people who work with numbers and enjoy working with numbers. The people I talked to who did not have god memories about multiplication did not like math and could not tell me how they learned their tables, or described it as unpleasant.

Overall, the inquiry has changed how I function in the classroom. I feel after working with the kids I worked with this year that this particular group could have benefited from a morning warm-up. They liked the math minutes and I think they needed to have some type of accomplishment to set them in motion for the day and it would have given them focus. Next year, I will find a way to blend Passport to Peace and learning targets early on. By doing this, I feel my students will make the connections to learning that will lead to success in their grade and beyond.

Fourth Grade through Sixth Grade

Good Things Come in Small Groups
Jean Torjussen, Fourth Grade Teacher
Village Oaks Elementary
Purpose
Following whole group instruction, a significant number of my students were having difficulty understanding and retaining math concepts. Lower-level students were not having their “gaps filled”, and higher-level students were not receiving enough challenge.

Question
• How will differentiating math instruction affect the learning outcomes of my students?

Method
Before the inquiry, I primarily taught math whole group. I pulled small groups from time to time as needed. During the inquiry I taught small groups at least three days a week. These groups changed almost daily based on data collected from pretests.

I began by administering a simplified test of Gardner’s Multiple Intelligences. Lessons were planned using the data from this test. Activities and assignments were plotted on a chart that listed the intelligences on the vertical axis and Bloom’s Taxonomy on the horizontal axis. The goal was to plan activities that covered higher-level thinking skills and all of the intelligences, with an emphasis on the areas where my class showed strengths.

When introducing a concept I administered a brief pretest. I analyzed the results of the pretest and placed students in three groups: those who were at or near mastery, those who were at the average level, and those who showed no knowledge of the concept, or who seemed to be missing prerequisite skills.

Students rotated through three stations, spending about twenty minutes in each. One group met with the teacher for direct instruction. A second group worked at their seats. Seatwork consisted of paper and pencil practice, additional manipulative work, or an extension activity. Sometimes students worked alone at their seats and sometimes they worked with partners or in groups. Any students who finished their seatwork early were invited to complete work in an “Above and Beyond” folder. These folders held challenging independent math activities. The third group worked at the computer practicing the skill we were learning or reviewing a previous skill.

At the end of the day’s instruction students were asked to complete another short quiz. Two or three problems served as a comprehension check and applied to what had been learned that day. Three to five problems served as a pretest and applied to the next concept to be taught.

One or two days a week a whole group lesson was taught. These lessons were often used to introduce, review, or extend a concept.

Data Collection
Before beginning my inquiry I administered a survey to determine the attitudes and perceptions my students had toward math. This same survey was administered at the end of the inquiry process. I compared second and third quarter math grades for the class. Second quarter grades were based on standard whole group instruction, third quarter grades were based on differentiated instruction. I also compared students’ scores on the second and third quarter district math test.

Data Results and Analysis
The pre and post surveys were very telling. In the survey students had to mark a continuum labeled “Always” “Sometimes” and “Never” in response to eleven statements about math. Below are some of the most significant results.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Percentage of increase answering “Always” on the post survey</th>
<th>Percentage of decrease answering “Never” on the post survey</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I am good at math.</td>
<td>+52%</td>
<td>-20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I learn math best in a small group.</td>
<td>+35%</td>
<td>-15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I understand my math homework.</td>
<td>+15%</td>
<td>Zero students chose “never” on the pre and post survey.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I love math!</td>
<td>+10%</td>
<td>-15%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When I analyzed the second and third quarter math grades, I noticed a slight shift upward.

Eighty-one percent of students also improved by an average of 13.76% on the cumulative district math tests given at the end of quarter three as compared to the test at the end of quarter two. The gains on report cards and cumulative tests were not limited to any one ability group, but were shown by students across ability levels.

Most significant to me were the affective gains. Students showed an increased interest in math, positive attitudes toward instruction, and higher-levels of engagement both during direct instruction and during independent work. After completing the post survey I invited students to write comments about what we called our “small group” math. The comments that follow reflect the remarks that were seen on all of the surveys.

“I work better in small groups.” N.G. “Keep giving me more challenging work!” D.E.
“I like small groups. It helps me learn better that way.” J.F.
“I like the small group better than the big group because I know better when we do small groups.” S.P

Reflection

Before beginning my inquiry I was concerned that differentiation in math would cut down on time for direct instruction, and that so much independent work time would result in my students learning less. While it’s true that I had less direct instruction time with each student, I felt like the quality of my instruction was much better and our time working together more focused. Using data from the pretests I was able to tailor instruction to meet the needs of individuals in a much more effective way. Attention and
engagement increased dramatically. When working with the teacher in small groups, students had little choice but to participate and listen. I could instantly see any errors and take action to correct any wrong thinking. While working independently, students stayed on task completing assignments designed to require higher-level thinking and the use of a variety of Gardner’s multiple intelligences.

Planning for differentiation was time consuming. While general plans could be made easily, specific plans for each group could not be made until after each day’s pretest was created and the students’ responses were analyzed. So rather than planning once a week, I found myself having to plan daily. In addition, trying to incorporate activities that would be beneficial to various multiple intelligences and would reach the higher levels of Bloom’s Taxonomy took extensive thought and the use of multiple resources.

Planning for whole group lessons also became more demanding. Once students tasted the waters of differentiation, they were loath to give their best attention in a whole group setting unless the lesson was highly engaging. The impact on my whole group instruction was unexpected. At first, I grumbled at the extra work now required for these lessons, but over time I came to realize that my students were simply demanding the same level of challenge from me in the whole group that they had come to expect in the small groups.

I was also concerned that teaching the same math concept three times in a row to the different groups would be repetitious and boring for me. It didn’t turn out that way at all. The needs of each set of students were so diverse, that even though I was teaching the same concept, the approach for each group was much different. I felt more engaged as a teacher.

I intend to continue the instructional methods used in my inquiry. In the future I hope to incorporate a wider variety of differentiation techniques. During this inquiry I primarily grouped based on skill level. I would like to do some differentiation based on interest, and have more options based on the multiple intelligences.

References


Data Driven Instruction Using Technology
Dawn Czapnik and Lucinda Nuñez, Fourth Grade Teachers
Highlands Elementary

Purpose
In fourth grade, many students are not proficient in basic skills. In the past, the ability to analyze or pinpoint assessments for remediation from classroom assessments was cumbersome and time consuming due to lack of testing software and training. As a result, we began using Examview Testing Suite and the CPS (Classroom Performance System) to help analyze proficiency levels and print out a focus for remediation on an as needed basis.
Question

- How much will the proficiency percentages increase as a result of providing immediate classroom or individual remediation?

Sub Questions

- Is there enough time to analyze and remediate based upon our classroom makeup?
- How will the weekly data enhance instruction?

Method

We will be focusing on our whole classroom, but will also provide individual and small group instruction depending on the area of remediation. We hope to see that our fourth grade students improve in their proficiency levels as we provide continuous feedback on formal and informal assessments. These educational software tools will also provide us the time needed for efficient teaching in subject areas that are crucial for student achievement.

Data Collection

Types of Reports Used in Examview

Class assignment summary: This summary allowed our data to be broken into four terms. We were able to study and make educated decisions about students based on the term average. We were also able to determine whether the student was improving based upon the averages per term or quarter.

Focus summary: This was very beneficial to our teaching and planning. We were able to look at the reports to see what strand or objective my students did and did not master. It listed each strand or objective based on proficiency levels. We were able to inform other support personnel of topics that were mastered and those that needed review.

Remediation summary: This report allowed us to see specific students who were not proficient in the strands and objectives. This report showed incorrectly answered questions and their percentages that were higher than the set threshold.

Assignment results: This feature allowed the teacher to print out a hard copy of the answers chosen and which answers were not correct. We did allow some students to take a hard copy to their desks and rework the problems and redo the test.

Assignment review: This allows the teacher to review and provide feedback to other educators and parents about the topics to be reviewed for mastery.

Student progress report: This report allowed us to send a snapshot of all assessments completed during the school year. If the parents requested an updated report, we were able to provide them with a report of the scores for all assessments taken.

Item analysis: This feature allowed us to look at the class as a whole to determine how many students answered the question in a particular way. It allowed us to relook at the question and the percentages of students who chose a specific answer. This helped us better understand the format of the questions, and which questions needed to be explained in further detail.

Czapnik’s Data Results Analysis

Looking back at the reports the class averages ranged from 30-90 percent. As the year progressed, percentages went up about 15% cumulative in Examview. The application of Examview provided immediate feedback allowing the students to see immediately their percentage. This was a great motivating factor. The students were concerned with their averages
and some persevered toward excellence. Using Examview throughout the year allowed me to track their proficiency levels and remediate as needed. Looking at the diagnostic and the end of year cumulative test provided by the district, my students improved 29% from a class average of 40% to a class average of 69%. Classroom data related to what is being taught on a daily basis guided my instruction to constant monitoring, small group individualized instruction, and remediation in reading and math.

**Nunez’ Data Results and Analysis**
This year, I had a total of 25 students, 15 boys and 10 girls with 48% being ELL students. As I looked over the classroom average as a whole, I saw that the trend remained constant, while individual scores fluctuated, depending on the concepts taught. In math, those strong in number sense did well on most of the exams, while those that struggled showed various improvements in different areas. The remediation therefore focused on number sense, mostly multiplication, in order to obtain the goal of mastering division this year. The math test averages in the classroom ranged from 40-70%, student averages ranged anywhere from high 30-90%, with most of the class being an average of 60%. In the weekly reading tests the student averages ranged from 30-80% and the classroom averaged from 60-70%. This classroom trend was consistent and did not fluctuate. This was a concern at the time, as I was looking to see improvements as the weeks progressed. The final reports I reviewed to show students improvement in math was comparing the beginning of year diagnostic test and the end of year cumulative test that the district assigns fourth grade. In the beginning of the year test, my class average was 38% and at the end of year it went up to 63%. As a whole the classroom made gains of 25%. As for reading, I went solely on an FCAT simulation test that the students took at the beginning of the year to see where they placed in comprehension. The class averaged 50%, giving me a breakdown of 8 level ones, 4 level twos, and 10 level threes. There was not an end of year simulation that was given, but the average in the weekly reading assessments range looked like the class had improved up to 20%. FCAT scores were not yet released to determine if these students made any gains from the previous year.

**Czapnik’s Reflection**
This year, I have taken the responsibility of multiple ESE students, low achieving intensive students, and ESOL students. It was very difficult to provide remediation to a small group of students because most of my class needed intensive instruction. I feel that I could have remediated non-proficient students in multiple strands if I had more students showing mastery in each of the objectives. I felt that the grouping of students provided little motivation, little independent skills, constant intervention all year in multiple subjects from multiple support personnel. I do believe that mixed classes with multiple levels of achievement allow true remediation. A very positive aspect of this application is that it decreased the time spent grading in math and reading. All math and reading tests were graded by Examview. I will definitely use this application in the future and in other grade levels. I did not have any negative issues except the grouping of my students did not allow small group remediation due to a classroom full of intensive children. Most of my time was spent teaching whole or small groups with multiple teaching personnel. To have a true focus group would be meeting with a small group of students that needed remediation in a particular strand. The Examview Suite guided me in planning instruction for both on level and below grade level students in the areas of reading and math. I had multiple personnel on a daily basis meeting with multiple groups.
Using the Examview Suite for math and reading assessments was very exciting and interesting to me. The clickers from the CPS system also provided tremendous amount of feedback and reports that would help in remediation lessons in all subject areas. The positive results were that the data that was readily available for view and allowed me to see whether the learning objectives were being mastered.

This year was a learning experience trying these two technological tools to make teaching smarter, not harder. It took time to view all the types of reports Examview offered and ironing out the glitches. Though it made some grading obsolete, it also created other issues that needed to be reviewed and fixed. The students sometimes rushed through the tests, just to input them on the computer. At first, I did not allow students to input their tests immediately after taking a test. I collected them and then sent a few at a time to computers to input data. This worked well until students would fail to finish a test, misplace a test or not turn it in. Then I changed strategies and allowed them to immediately input it in the Examview player, but not retake the tests. In the beginning the students had to be continuously monitored to insure that they were inputting correctly until they became comfortable with the system. After conferencing with students, I then made sure they took sufficient time to review the paper/pencil test before allowing them time to re-enter data into the computer. Printed reports allowed those students who rushed a chance to look at their average and refocus on the wrong answers and correct them. I provided additional support by helping them understand the questions to rework the problems and/or reread the selection to find the answers. The time saved in tedious grading allowed me to focus on this type of immediate intervention.

The students enjoyed the immediate feedback allowing them to make personal goals for improvement. The students were very excited and engaged in the task at hand and after every type of assessment they were always eager to ask if they needed to input their tests on the computer. The clickers were mostly used in reviewing for a test and for lesson quizzes. It kept everyone engaged and focused as they reviewed for upcoming exams. I learned that the clickers and Examview Suite are both essential parts of technology that teachers will find enjoyable and beneficial with regards to learning where their students need attention.

Last of all, the reports were excellent to guide instruction throughout the week and for planning further instruction. Not much time was given for team collaboration to further enhance mastery of the objectives. With the majority of my class being intensive, at times I needed more than one person to consistently help in remediating. There were some concepts that many of my students struggled with and having five non-English speaking students added to that dilemma. A more mixed-ability grouping is needed to provide adequate time for remediation with the more intensive students. Teachers often wonder, “How can I teach effectively a concept or strand to a group of students who are not mastering a certain objective?” The answer is by allowing technology to do the work for you and letting you focus on the immediate needs of your students. I am looking forward to next year in which I can go further using these wonderful technological tools to help me focus on my students’ needs. I look forward to using these tools as they provide me with the time to fully explore the data given. I can then collaborate more with teachers in providing the strategies that can help further mastery.
Valuable Vocabulary
Reynaldo Adame, Fourth Grade Teacher
Village Oaks Elementary

Purpose
Due to the vast majority of English Language Learners (ELL) and low functioning students in my classroom this year, I was interested in finding strategic ELL approaches to use to enhance their language vocabulary development. Therefore, I focused on implementing meaningful ELL lessons and activities that motivated the students in vocabulary instruction.

Question
• What will be the effect of using the Beck and McKeown and Macmillan/McGraw Hill Treasures vocabulary activities on targeted ELL students?

Sub Question
• Will contextual vocabulary instruction make a difference in gaining and retaining word meaning for ELL students?

Method
I used the Beck, McKeown, and Macmillan/McGraw Hill Treasures vocabulary models with my students to build concepts and word knowledge for reading. This approach was academically important for enriching the ELL students’ oral, listening, and speaking competencies. I administered a pre and post test to measure their knowledge of the presented words. I used Beck's five day cycle in my work.

*Day 1: I introduced the vocabulary reading words to the students using a set of pictures, and each student wrote his/her definition in their logs.
*Day 2: The students created sentences and discussed the words together.
*Days 3 & 4: I implemented activity games and lessons with the targeted words.
*Day 5: I administered a multiple choice quiz with the words. This assessment measured knowledge gained. I used progress monitoring in this manner each week.

This inquiry was conducted on a six week trial basis. In December, prior to introducing the program to the students, I collected reading and vocabulary data from Data Warehouse (GRADE, Benchmark Tests, Scholastic Reading Inventory). This information gave me a more in depth understanding of each student's strengths and areas of need. I also collected and gathered weekly student activities, work samples, observations, conducted student discussions throughout the inquiry and administered the weekly
benchmark assessment tests. In January and February I implemented the vocabulary inquiry work. In March, I administered a post test and analyzed the data.

Data Collection
As I approached my students with my inquiry model on reading vocabulary, the students seemed eager and ready to face the challenge that awaited them. I prepared reading vocabulary logs for all the students. Each student used the log to take notes, write lessons, and do reflective recordings. For my data collection, I reviewed the student vocabulary logs and the pre and post reading assessments.

Data Results and Analysis
The following data table shows the impressive results of this inquiry work. Clearly my ELL students benefitted from this type of focused vocabulary activities.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student</th>
<th>Pre</th>
<th>Post</th>
<th>Growth</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>LEP Status</th>
<th>Guided Reading Group: H, M, L</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>G</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>+22</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>LY-Lev. 4</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>+63</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>LY-Lev. 5</td>
<td>R</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>+61</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>LY-</td>
<td>Q</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>+54</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>LY-Lev. 5</td>
<td>R</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>+84</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>LY-Lev. 4</td>
<td>Q</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
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<td>+52</td>
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<td>LY-Lev. 5</td>
<td>R</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>+53</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>LF-</td>
<td>R</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Reflection
One of the main reasons for creating and developing this approach is for the ELL students to acquire a broader range of linguistic development by being exposed to the five day cycle that is used by Beck & McKeown's Model. This model has been known to enhance academic achievement in the reading vocabulary area. Having a wide range of culturally and diverse students in my classroom was the impetus for using these activities and analyzing growth. I feel that our core reading basal (Macmillan/McGraw Hill) is very vocabulary focused. This series is a wonderful tool for teaching and guiding students through the targeted curriculum that I use on a daily basis. However, I feel one of its major strengths is that it provides a wide variety of vocabulary instructional methods and activities.

As the weeks progressed, I continued to focus and emphasize the importance of the vocabulary program to the children. I noticed and realized that my entire classroom was well adapted to using Beck’s and McKeown vocabulary reading model on a weekly basis. Throughout the six week period, I applied different types of activities so that it would keep the students interested, focused, and engaged in the lessons. For many of my ELL students, the vocabulary reading five day cycle gave them the needed variety of activities and kept them motivated to learn and apply new words.

I did notice that my ELL students seemed to respond in a slower pace as compared to the rest of the class, so I provided more wait time for them during assessments. By collecting and actively using words, students are constantly building a repertoire of words and word meanings that will increase their understanding of oral language as well as stories, and improve and strengthen their spoken vocabulary and eventually their writing skills (Herrell and Jordan, p. 178). I believe the benefit of explicit vocabulary instruction is long reaching – it affects students’ speaking, reading, comprehending, listening and writing
skills. It also builds their confidence as new English language users. I will continue to use these activities in my classroom.

References


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**Word Pow-Wow! Final Report**
Juliana Brignol, Brenda Day, Todd Holappa and Cecilia Vega
Fifth Grade Team Highlands Elementary

**Purpose**
As a team, we have noticed that our 5th grade students are having difficulties in learning/acquiring, retaining, and using new vocabulary words proficiently. Research states that, as a nation, Americans are losing about ten thousand words per generation.

**Question**
How will explicit teaching of vocabulary through a variety of strategies using a 5-day instructional plan affect the students’ long term retention of vocabulary words?

**Sub Question**
- Will the students be able to take ownership of the learned vocabulary words?
- Will the students be able to write sentences/paragraphs that will convey their newly acquired knowledge of vocabulary words?
- Will the students be able to incorporate the new vocabulary in retelling and in their writing assignments?

**Method**
The fifth grade team delivered weekly vocabulary instruction based on the MacMillan Treasures reading series utilizing a variety of strategies throughout a twelve week time period. Each Monday, vocabulary previews were given to each student. This preview allowed students to indicate which words they understood, thought they understood, or did not understand. At the conclusion of the preview, a pre-assessment of the vocabulary words was administered. The results of the pre-assessment helped to guide instruction for the remainder of the vocabulary lessons for the week.

Each Tuesday, teachers taught and reinforced the vocabulary by using the “Teach Words in Context” lesson in the Vocabulary/Comprehension section of the MacMillan series for each unit. This lesson outline is highly scripted and integrates a reading passage with the main reading selection for the unit by giving some background knowledge to the students while introducing them to new vocabulary. Following the script ensured that our team used the same model for
delivery, with appropriate classroom adaptations. By utilizing this model, each student in the fifth grade was exposed to the same practice book pages, and re-reading for comprehension strategies as well as the teacher directed activity of students using sentence frames to experience the use of the vocabulary.

Each Wednesday, lessons were used to review the vocabulary by presenting a PowerPoint which contained a definition, visual examples of each word, and a sentence in which the word was used. The PowerPoint presentation was a great way to target the visual learners in the classroom, and the students who grasped the definitions further cemented the meaning with the visuals. By seeing the terms outside of their reading text, students were able to see that there were different tenses to certain words and that the word, as presented, may not “fit” where they may have used it previously. As an extension to the vocabulary lesson, the teacher asked students to develop a “kid friendly” definition of each word, allowing the students to explore other means to define the term. The terms were also integrated into a prompt/response writing exercise where students concentrated on including the appropriate vocabulary, in the proper tense.

Thursdays brought review of the words through engaging activities such as Bingo, Flyswatters, and Vocabulary Wars. Exposure to the words outside of the reading unit helped to drive the meaning home, and reinforce the proper usage of the term in a variety of fun and interactive settings. This also helped the students take ownership in use of the newly acquired vocabulary.

Post Tests were administered each Friday afternoon. The post test was formatted to match the pre-test in terms of word order and layout.

**Data Collection**

Our data collection started with the administration of a pretest of all unit 3 vocabulary terms. The students were given the pre-test, unannounced, on December 1, 2009. The vocabulary terms were then divided into 4 groups of six words and one group of seven words. The terms were taught to the students on a weekly basis in the manner outlined above. Each week for six weeks, the students had a pre and post assessment on the words for that week. The number of correct answers scored on each weekly vocabulary quiz was tracked by each teacher in order to observe the trends and adjust instructional delivery as agreed upon by the team. Ultimately, at the end of the unit, the students were formally assessed, and on January 29, 2009, the post assessment was administered. The assessments were graded and the data was entered into a spreadsheet.

**Data Results and Analysis**

At the outset of this project, we hoped to see an overall improvement in the post assessment grades from the pre-assessment grades, in all groups of students, from the ELL group right through to the gifted group, but also the transference of the vocabulary into the everyday writings and conversation of our students. The data collected revealed that with most students, the explicit teaching of vocabulary in context did improve post assessment scores.

Overall the grade level showed improvements from pre-assessment scores to post assessment scores. The ELL students showed an average gain of 21.4 correct words from the pre-assessment to the post assessment. The ESE classroom showed a gain of 17.4 words between the two
assessments and the general education cluster and gifted clusters showed 19.8 and 26.2 respectively.

The ELL cluster was the room in which Flyswatter, Bingo and other game type experiences were tied to the teaching methods outlined in the MacMillan series. The ESE and general education cluster aligned teaching with the script in the text book, while the gifted cluster added some graphic organizers and thinking and concept maps. It is difficult to say whether these added activities helped to increase the retention of the vocabulary, but they did seem to add an element of entertainment for that group of students that the other groups did not experience. The data does, however, show an improvement for this group that is similar in gains to two other classrooms. The gain of 21.4 words is the difference that most of the students needed to rise above a failing score of 59%.
Classroom #2 Pre and Post Assessment results

Classroom #3 Pre and Post Assessment results

Classroom #4 Pre and Post Assessment results
Grade level Pre and Post Assessment scores shown with Gains

**Todd’s Reflection**

The results of this project appear to show that an explicit teaching of vocabulary in context does have a substantial effect on students learning, retention, and use of new vocabulary. For example, the smallest gain in my classroom was actually only one word, but that was from a student who scored a 29 on the pre-test and a 30 on the post-test, and does so consistently. Overall my students showed improvements from pre-assessment scores to post assessment scores. The seven ELL (active and exited) students in my room showed an average gain of 17.14 correct words from the pre-assessment to the post assessment. The remaining students in the classroom showed an average gain of 17.33 words between the two assessments.

The materials provided through the MacMillan text book and reading selections along with the PowerPoint presentations and classroom adaptations have become an integral part of teaching vocabulary to my students. By following the MacMillan scripted lesson, each of my students was exposed to the teacher materials that were appropriate for their level and ability. The addition of some more student engaging approaches to content delivery will come as needed, as this project demonstrated that overall, the more engaging the activity, the higher the retention rate.

I plan to implement similar methods in the science and math lab for next year. The Harcourt Science Series has some interactive tools for vocabulary development that are engaging for students, as well as some vocabulary related exercises. I feel that these would be as effective as the MacMillan tools, maybe even more so as they have a built-in graphical representation of each definition.

While this project did show growth for the students, it did give rise to some other questions;
Did the addition of outside resources such as vocabulary games help increase students retention of vocabulary terms? Would the students perform to higher results if the word wall would display definitions and graphics as well as the word itself?

**Brenda’s Reflection**

When beginning this inquiry project I was more than just a little concerned about my student’s vocabulary knowledge. My classroom make up is quite diverse with an array of background knowledge and experiences. The majority of the students in my gifted clustered classroom had a good grasp of fifth grade vocabulary. There were some students however, that truly struggled with their vocabulary acquisition.

*Bulding Academic Vocabulary* by Robert J. Marzano and Debra J. Pickering was used as a resource. This text was the starting point for my grade level team and me to begin our research into teaching vocabulary more effectively. Our desire being that students as a whole would retain academic knowledge for long term use.

The idea that appealed to me most when we began planning for instruction was the systematic approach that we decided to follow. My personal teaching style adapts really well when my lessons are planned in a systematic and organized way. For the inquiry project we chose to focus our vocabulary instruction based on our core text. This proved to be effective for us because much of the vocabulary instruction was built into our core reading text already. I found the lessons presented to be very effective for my students. The idea of presenting the vocabulary in small, daily, mini-lessons proved to be much more effective than teaching vocabulary in one long whole group activity.

The only struggle for me was differentiating some of the instruction to fit the needs of my gifted students. By their very nature, many of the students in my current classroom are creative, higher order thinkers. Often times, I have to add additional activities or extend activities that dig deeper to satisfy my students’ needs. I was able to diversify the instruction by allowing students to not only make up their own “kid friendly” definitions of the vocabulary words, but also by giving my students the ability to illustrate each vocabulary word in a way that would make the word more meaningful for them.

I know that I will definitely be using the vocabulary instruction in the same way next school year. I was pleased with the progress my students made and I am confident that the changes were truly authentic and meaningful. I plan to continue inquiry projects throughout my career. They are a wonderful way to improve my skills as a teacher for the benefit of all of my students.

**Juliana’s Reflection**

Through this inquiry project, I learned that the explicit teaching of vocabulary through a variety of strategies increased students’ long-term retention of taught words. As the sheltered ELL teacher, I teach students to whom English is a second language or acquiring English as a second language. Many of my students are faced with the challenge of learning a new language and at the same time need to achieve academic standards. This inquiry project is another piece to reading comprehension. The different strategies throughout the week increased vocabulary usage in my classroom in both verbal and written activities.
The students learned to take ownership of the words instead of memorizing the meaning of each word. They also evaluate themselves in the process. The first activity in the 5 day plan is a survey of the new words where they self evaluate their knowledge of each word. I enjoyed watching them take pride in their posttest results. The vocabulary games before the posttest were a very good attribute to their retention of the words; they got to have fun with words they learned. This activity energized the students’ brain and helped them retrieve old vocabulary words from previous week. I had second thoughts about using old vocabulary words for the games but I rationalized that a weekly cumulative review of taught vocabulary words would prevent them from forgetting previously taught words. Using the Thursday vocabulary games is a good way of refreshing their memory.

To most of my students, vocabulary learning is very important and they are eager to learn new words. For one thing, they know they need to learn new words to get a better grasp of the English language and second, vocabulary learning is crucial to their reading comprehension. I liked this model of teaching vocabulary and will continue to teach vocabulary using these wonderful strategies. This inquiry project was truly a learning experience for me and my students.

**Cecilia’s Reflection**

Vocabulary is a struggle for the students at Highlands; it is one of our weakest areas. This especially holds true for students who are labeled ESE. This was the reasoning behind my wanting to have an inquiry centered on vocabulary and their acquisition. I have used a variety of vocabulary strategies with all of my students in the past seven years and have found some work well with some students and others work with other students, but I have never found a single strategy that worked for all students. When our reading coach started creating vocabulary Power Points for our grade level, I thought of using only this strategy but I knew others were just as useful. It was decided that we would use a specific strategy each day of the week to see if there was a true learning of the vocabulary word.

I know that I learn best through repetition, yet I become very easily bored with the same task. This prompted me to come up with a variety of strategies to teach vocabulary. While each Monday was a preview day I chose different ways to introduce the vocabulary. I found myself trying to change up the previous week’s model and after a while it was not so difficult anymore and became almost second nature. On Tuesday when I showed the power point, the students seemed to enjoy the visual and example sentences. In one instance I can remember a student asking, “Are we not doing the power point today?” This was a big indicator that not only was this inquiry working but the students were actually looking forward to learning and were authentically engaged. The rest of the days were just as fun for them.

The students enjoyed the lessons and strategies as well as the other classes, plus they learned and acquired some new vocabulary words. Would they have learned these words otherwise, I simply do not know. I do know that there was more interaction with vocabulary because of all the activities we did. I actually heard and saw discussion about the meaning of, synonyms, and antonyms of some the words. I heard references to other words when we read or studied other subject areas.

If I had a chance to do it over again would I? Certainly. I plan to continue this method of teaching next year. I would also like to pick up another subject area. Although my ESE students
did not make the great leaps the other students did, I think they enjoyed the lessons the most. Because of all of the repetition, by the end of the week they were some of the best scoring students. They could not and did not retain the entire list of thirty-seven words, but their gains, I believe, were comparable to their peers. Next year I would like to take this to the written form. I am now curious:

- would adding a written piece help acquisition?
- would thinking maps hurt or help?

These are some changes and/or additions I would like to implement next year.

References


Intrinsic Motivation/Attitudes; Equal Better Behavior
Domenic Panterra, Fifth/Sixth Grade Social Studies Teacher
Pinecrest Elementary

Purpose

The reason I chose to do my inquiry project on the topic of intrinsic motivation and the teaching of positive attitude traits was because the school has been using extrinsic rewards for years, and the students have come to expect something if they do the right thing. I witnessed students asking questions such as, “What will I get if I do it?” This is not the reason we should be giving rewards to students. The rewards should be for actions that go above and beyond, and not just daily tasks such as writing their name on the paper. Our school offered a new program called “Passport to Peace” in which the students learned about positive attitude traits. I incorporated this program into my intrinsic motivational strategy in order to reinforce both at the same time.

Question

- How can I increase intrinsic motivation and get away from rewarding students for proper behavior?

Sub Questions

- Can I use “Passport to Peace” in my quest for self-motivated students?
- Will intrinsic motivational strategies actually decrease behavioral distractions throughout the day?
- Will the amount of referrals decrease as a result of this inquiry?

Method
At the beginning of the inquiry, I began to incorporate the use of positive praise and self-motivational strategies in order to have students become more self-motivated to do well academically. While doing this research, I also added the use of the program “Passport to Peace” to help with some of the negative behaviors that were taking away from the educational time in the classroom. The students were given badges to wear for the day if they showed that an example of a showcased trait such as: Honesty. The students were excited to get these badges and often reminded me to make sure I didn’t forget to pass them out before transitioning to their first class. This process began right after we returned from winter break, and ran until the present day. The combination of these two programs caused some shocking results.

**Data Collection**

I used personal observations, student report cards, and referral numbers for the month. I looked at the fifth grade students because I have a fifth grade homeroom even though I teach both fifth and sixth grade students. The data is displayed by the month. *(January 2009-March 2009)*

**Data Results and Analysis**

I collected the amount of referrals written each month in order to determine if there was a change in student motivation and/or behavior. The month of *January, 2009 had a referral count of 18*. This number decreased in *February of 2009, with a total referral count of 7*. In the last month of data collection, *March, 2009, showed even more positive signs with a total referral count of 5*. This shows that the strategies encouraging intrinsic motivation and positive attitude traits worked. I also used my own observations of the class and noticed that the students had a more academic focus while they were in class and working. Their grades increased slightly, but that may have come about due to other factors. I cannot attribute these increases directly to the inquiry. Overall, I was pleased with the results of the inquiry and it seemed to work well.

**Reflection**

I did see an increase in self-motivation and a positive reaction to the “Passport to Peace” program. I believe these reactions were honest and effective. I also saw a reduced number of students requesting concrete rewards for doing minimal work. This was one of the main reasons why I chose to do this project. Using an actual passport promoting attitude traits was an added benefit. The students wanted to complete the passports and they enjoyed the first page of writing in their personal information. Some of my students have real passports, so the concept was somewhat familiar to them. I plan on using this type of passport with my sixth grade students next year in the Geography class I teach. It will add another dimension to learning about different countries around the world. Keep in mind that my sixth graders will be the fifth graders who participated with the “Passport to Peace” program this year.

**References**

The Guide to Reading
Lindsay Ricotta, Fifth Grade Teacher
Eden Park Elementary

Purpose
My class make up consists of struggling readers. Of the fifteen students I have for reading, all of them scored either a 1 or 2 on FCAT in the fourth grade. All but two of my students are below grade level in reading. Some of my students are only a year behind in reading. Some are even further behind than a year. All the data collected, (DRA, SRI, Benchmark Testing), supports that I need to intervene before my students fall even further behind.

I want to incorporate an assignment which will require students to use specific reading strategies while reading. I believe these will aide students in comprehending reading material. The assignment I plan to use is called the reading guide, which will teach the following strategies while reading: predicting, summarizing, visualizing, clarifying, and questioning. The reading guide will coincide with guided reading, and I will choose different strategies to use each week with 100 Book Challenge.

Question
- How will the reading guide affect comprehension?

Sub Questions
- How will the reading guide affect students’ attitudes?
- How will the reading guide affect students’ motivation?

Method
Each day, I met with fifteen students arranged in various groups during guided reading time. Some of the students were reading the book, Bridge to Terabithia, while others were reading, James and the Giant Peach. During this time, students and I reviewed what we read the previous day. Then the students were required to write at least one prediction about what they believed would happen in the story that particular day. Some days the students and I read together. Other days I required them to read individually or with a partner. While they were reading, they were responsible for completing two assignments. First, they were required to fill
in their reading guide, which included many different sections. If there was a word they did not
know they had a vocabulary section to record these words. If a student had a question about what
he or she read, they were required to include this in their reading guide. Also, every student was
expected to draw pictures of scenes they could visualize. Finally, each student was asked to try
to make as many connections with the book as possible.

The second assignment was a question packet, which was organized by chapters. For each
chapter, students had specific questions to answer. These answers were constantly referenced
and were an effective tool for review.

During this process, I repeatedly modeled my expectations. I completed a guide just as my
students did, so we could talk about process of using strategies. My example was always
available to them in case they needed a visual representation. Also, I was always available to
students who were having difficulty so I could scaffold the assignment to meet their needs.

Also, not only were my students asked to use strategies during guided reading, they were also
responsible for showing me how they used strategies during 100 Book Challenge. Each week, I
picked a different strategy to focus on while using 100 Book Challenge materials. My students
would write examples in their reading journals and then turn these in for a grade at the end of the
week.

Data Collection
There were three main types of data I collected. First, I collected student journals. Each week
my students were responsible for using a particular strategy while independently reading with
100 Book Challenge. On Friday, students turned in their completed journal for assessment.
Another type of data I gathered was test data. The test data I analyzed was the DRA. Finally, I
also examined students’ scores on a FCAT practice assignments they are required to complete
each week on Friday.

Data Results and Analysis
The first type of data I collected was using the weekly FCAT practice. Before I started using the
reading guide I analyzed my students’ scores on the FCAT practice by determining the
percentage of comprehension questions they answered correctly. I considered this my baseline.
Each week I collected data using the same method. This data allowed me to determine if the
reading guide was helping my students increase their comprehension. It also focused my
attention on the genre of literatures the students comprehended and the genres with which they
still struggled.

This table shows the percentage of comprehension questions answered correctly by each student
using the FCAT Weekly Practice Test.

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<th></th>
<th>Base-Line</th>
<th>Week 1</th>
<th>Week 2</th>
<th>Week 3</th>
<th>Week 4</th>
<th>Week 5</th>
<th>Week 6</th>
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Another assessment I analyzed was DRA. Included in the DRA are numerous sections requiring students to use reading strategies. For instance, the first section of the DRA asked the student to make predictions about a book before it was read. Another part of the test was the summary section, in which the student had to summarize the book he or she was assigned. Finally, at the end of the test there was a meta-cognitive question relating to reading strategies. The student was to pick the strategy of his or her choice and then explain how he or she used this strategy while reading. Doing the reading guide on a regular basis really prepared my students for this assessment. Also, I believe the reading guide helped them score higher on the DRA than they would have without it. For instance, one of my students went from an independent reader to an advanced reader according to the DRA. This same student began the year at about a third grade reading level but by the second test was on a fourth grade reading level. One of her comments to me about the reading guide was that, “The reading guide really helped me, especially my thoughts.” (L. R., personal communication, May 4, 2009). Another student I tested in January and then again in May. The first time I tested him, he was considered an intervention reader on a high third grade level. Later I determined he was an instructional student on a fifth grade reading level!

Other assessments I analyzed were the reading journals and the reading guides. Both of these alerted me to the difficulties students were having with the strategies. This allowed me to constantly review the strategies that students were struggling to use. It also allowed me to observe the progress my students were making. I discovered the more we used the reading strategies, the easier it was for the students to incorporate them into all of the various reading we did throughout the day. Additionally, this practice taught students the responsibility of using the strategies on their own. Every week my students’ responses in the reading journal were more accurate and detailed.

**Reflection**
There were some things that I did not like about the reading guide, which I plan to change for next year. First, the format was not very structured. Almost every section just included blank space following it, which was very difficult for some of my students. Next year I will include lines to make it more structured. Also, the guide only required students to write down words with which they were not familiar. It did not require them to look up the word or use context clues to determine the definition. I like the fact it makes the teacher aware of the types of words students are struggling with, but I believe this should be extended. Another minor adjustment I would make to the reading guide is I would organize the prediction section. I would plan how many predictions I wanted the students make and I would structure the section accordingly. If not, it is difficult to determine how much space is needed, and my students became frustrated when there was not enough space.

The wonderful thing about the reading guide is that it can be used with any content area and any grade level. There might be some minor differences depending on the subject, but a majority of it could remain the same. This could benefit every student. I know I definitely plan to integrate the reading guide into as many subjects as I possibly can next year. I am really excited about using it for the whole year, and I think this will be a valuable tool for me, because it will help focus my teaching.

Additionally, the reading guide can be a great way for students to monitor their own progress. It allows students to make discoveries about themselves. They realize what types of words they do not understand; what parts of the story they could not comprehend; and how effective they were using specific strategies. It could be a great tool to use when conferencing with a student.

Another discovery I made during this process is the types of genres my students are weak in relating to comprehension. I noticed that my students really struggled with themes which dealt with science fiction or fantasy stories. If there was a decline in their scores for a week, it was because the story dealt with one of these genres.

Finally, I do believe the reading guide gave my students confidence and motivation. Most of my students religiously completed exactly what I asked them every day. Also, since we used them every day, my students really became comfortable with the process, which made them feel good about themselves. Additionally, this time spent with small groups really gave me a great opportunity to praise the strengths and support the weaknesses of all of my students.

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**Language! …In Progress and Progressing!**
*Judy Maugeri, ESE Inclusion 6th grade*
*Village Oaks Elementary*

**Purpose**
I co-teach a 6th grade Language! class. It is a research based, intensive and efficacious literacy curriculum. The 90 minute lessons include ongoing assessments that cover phonemic awareness, phonics, word recognition, spelling, vocabulary, morphology, grammar and usage, listening and reading comprehension, along with speaking and writing (Sopris,West,2005). In order to document progress of students who are struggling readers (both English Language Learners and
Exceptional Education Students), I will compare 2008 scores on Dibels, FCAT, and Language Fluency assessments and with this focus group of students document their improved student performance on tests, inventories of personal study skills, and attitude towards reading.

Questions
- How will highly structured, fast paced, 90 minute reading lessons affect struggling students reading levels on district and state assessments?

Sub Questions
- Will students’ study skills and attitude towards reading improve?
- Will this standardized intervention provide more focused instruction and eliminate disjointed and inconsistent direct reading instruction and increase reading and working memory of limited English (ELL) and exceptional education students (ESE)?

Method
After taking the Language! C/D in-service, I was instructed to co-teach with a 6th grade teacher. Daily 90 minute lessons were divided into 6 timed (within a 90 minute lesson) steps and as co-teachers (Gen Ed/ESE), we shared in the responsibilities of teaching and planning. The class started out with 24 students who knew they were taking a “reading class because they were not good readers.” As a teacher, I wanted to document how the students felt about reading, and if they had the study skills necessary to help them improve in reading, in the hopes that all subjects would be affected by their improved attitude towards reading. I gave all of the students an inventory on study skills and learning styles, and then chose the ELL and ESE students as my focus groups.

Data Collection
Given students who scored FCAT level 1 and 2 from 2008, along with pre test for Language!, I asked students to complete an inventory on learning styles in October of 2008, another inventory on study skills in January of 2009 and a follow up checklist in April 2009, on their self analysis of study skills. Test data was and will be collected including: FORF/DIBELS, SRI Lexile scores, Collier Writes, FCAT 2008-09, Language! C/D content mastery assessments, word and fluency charts, along with inventories and self-analysis of study skills.

Data Results and Analysis
Data collection continues due to the fact that the Language! C/D class is on Unit 22 and will finish at the end of May 2009. Assessments will be given at the end of May and data will be collected and compared on FCAT Reading scores and Language! at that time. Collier Writes, and FCAT reading scores from 2008 will be compared to 2009, along with learning styles inventory and the study skills self analysis checklist. Focus groups were: Group1=5 ESE/ELL students compared to Group 2=5 exited ELL students. Results of the Learning Styles Inventory showed preference for a visual presentation of materials, but in order to accommodate the needs of all students, auditory, visual, and kinesthetic methods are implemented in the Language! C/D class instruction.

In the Focus Group 1 Learning Styles inventories, 100% of the students preferred visual presentation. 2 out of the 5 students preferred both visual and auditory presentation. In the Focus
Group 2 Learning Styles Inventories, 100% of the students preferred visual presentation, 3 out of the 5 students preferred both visual and auditory presentation. Given study skills questions, the majority of students answered: “Why do you study?” with, “It makes me feel good about myself to do well in school,” and “Parents give rewards” When asked, “What do you think about school,” the majority said, “It can help me later in life.” When asked, “How do you study for a test,” the majority of students said that they “..use a study guide.” It is evident that when teachers take the time to make study guides for their students, the students definitely appreciate it. We need to encourage our parents to continue to reward their children when they achieve good grades!

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</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.5 or higher-3 students</td>
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<td>60% mastery-3.5 or higher</td>
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<td><strong>Focus group 2(ESE/ELL)</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>4 out of 5 achieved 4.0 or higher 4.0,4.0,4.0,4.5,1.5</td>
<td>3 out of 5 achieved 3.5 or higher 4.0,3.5,3.5,3.0,2.5,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>80% mastery-3.5 or higher</td>
<td>60% mastery-3.5 or higher</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Words read per minute Post scores-2009</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>ESE/ELL FORF Average Post</strong></td>
<td><strong>REGULAR Ed FORF Average Post</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>126 words read correctly per minute</td>
<td>127 words read correctly per minute</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Reflection
The complexity of my inquiry has given me new focus and insight. I really want to be able to say that a highly structured intensive reading program called Language! that is delivered in a co-teaching model to struggling readers, would be successful as documented by reading data, and student surveys/inventories. I believe I will be able to document increased scores on district and state assessments, and I can document that my focus groups of both ELL/ESE and regular education students have better attitudes about themselves when assessing their reading abilities and study skills. When one thinks of the many stresses that life throws our way, is it not our attitude that will either help us or hinder us throughout our endeavors? We, as educators, need to remain focused on teaching our students to keep a positive attitude toward learning how to learn, in order to improve in all areas of education. For some students that might mean providing a highly structured reading program and attending to the preferred learning styles of the students.

References


http://www.emstac.org/registered/

http://www.teach-nology.com/teachers/lesson-plans/

http://www.uu.edu/programs/tesl/ElementarySchool/learningstylesinventory.htm

http://www.engr.ncsu.edu/learningstyles/ilsweb.html

Inquiring About Effective Strategies
Heather Parks, Fifth/Sixth Reading
Pinecrest Elementary School

Purpose
My purpose for this Inquiry is to see if using Junior Great Books strategies in core reading will increase student’s success in reading literacy.

Interpretive questions – supported with evidence from the text
Follow-up questions – develop and idea, return to the text to support the idea with evidence and as they learn to listen, respond to one another’s ideas

Questions
• What strategies are most important to stress to my students?
• How will I use those strategies most effectively?

Method
I worked with one group with the Shared Inquiry method to inspire deeper thinking through reading and discussion to see if this method will increase their success in reading literacy. The majority of the students in this group are second language learners.

**Data Collection**

- Student’s ability to write a focus question
- Student’s ability to answer question and then discuss
- Student’s ability to support answers in a written response

**Post Assessment**

- SRI test taken 9/8/08
- SRI test taken 1/27/09
- SRI Test taken 5/13/09

**Data Results and Analysis:**

Teacher observation the Shared Inquiry (discussion of text)
Reflection
After reviewing my data results, I have come to the conclusion that the shared inquiry method of reading has increased my students’ vocabulary, comprehension skills, and has allowed them to use critical-thinking skills that they might not have used prior. The students have become better at discussing the text and referring back to it to support their opinions and ideas about the text. In regards to the students increase in vocabulary and comprehension skills was determined by the results of the SRI test scores. This reading comprehension test is given three times in the school year. The SRI test stated that the students would increase about 100 points over the course of the year. As you can see in my data, some students increase that by midyear. The last test scores will be done in May so I am not sure if I will have those to submit with this project, but I will review to see if any students made substantial gains. The shared inquiry has not just increased the students’ vocabulary and comprehension but has also increased the students’ skills in critical thinking. With critical thinking skill, students were able to engage in interpretive discussion and ask higher level questions to fellow students. Then these probing questions are supported with evidence from the text. The students are then able to arrive at their own interpretation of the text. In order to get the greatest results from this type of questioning, one has to have read the text two times prior to the discussion. I have found that even some of my struggling readers enjoyed participating in the shared inquiry because everyone has sometime to say given the chance. Overall I am very happy with the results that my students have achieved this year and hope I can continue using this type of method with my next year students.

Resources
Core Reader
Junior Great Books
Literacy Team
Training from Junior Great Books
http://www.greatteachersgreatresults.org/
https://springboard.collegeboard.com

Rubric Revelations: How Do Rubrics Affect Student Motivation and Effort?
Lesley Webster, Fifth/Sixth Grade Teacher
Pinecrest Elementary

Purpose
One frustration that seems inescapable in the field of education is motivating students to complete tasks. Although students are aware of the consequences of not completing assigned tasks, this behavior continues. On average, at least 9% of students would rather suffer the consequences and not complete an assigned task. Additionally, of the typical projects completed, approximately 44% meet/exceed expectations, 23% minimally meet expectations, while 18% do not meet expectations, but at least turned something in on the due date. The remaining 6% of students end up turning the assignment in late. This behavior needs to change as students will not meet success in life or their educational careers if they do not complete assigned tasks.
Perhaps part of the frustration students were experiencing had to do with the way assigned tasks were presented. Although rubrics are used by this instructor to score tasks holistically, outside of the writing rubric used for the Florida Writes, teacher-developed rubrics have not usually been shared with students.

Rubrics are tools which can be used for various purposes by either teachers or students. Most teachers utilize rubrics as scoring tools; however, some instructors have learned, whether by direct experience or through a review of literature, that rubrics have even greater value and purpose when used to guide instruction. For one, “rubrics unravel the mysteries of grading by laying out the specific criteria clearly and objectively” (Valenza, 2000, p. 1). Andrade (2005) has found that rubrics also help teachers clarify their own expectations and targets of instruction. Although teachers spend quite a bit of time planning instruction, sometimes the measurable subtasks that will make or break an assignment are overlooked. Rubrics tend to eliminate this issue. Andi Stix, an educational consultant also notes that “rubrics help students understand exactly what is expected of them…[and that] when the criteria are laid out and negotiated, students perform at a higher level” (Valenza, 2000, p. 1). This led me to consider the following questions.

**Question**
- How will rubrics affect student motivation and effort on assigned tasks?

**Sub Questions**
- Does providing students with a rubric clarify assigned tasks?
- Do students understand the purpose of rubrics?
- Are there other ways rubrics can be used to enhance learning?

**Method**
Students will be presented with a generic writing rubric that will be used as a guideline for giving students clear expectations for any writing task. Students will then practice rating their work and the work of others using the generic rubric. After students have become proficient, a task with a rubric will be assigned. Students will practice scoring a sample product. Students will compare their score to the teacher’s on the same product. Students will then complete the assignment. Students will be given an assignment with no rubric. Students will complete the assignment. The teacher will then compare results. Additionally, a pre/post survey will be given to gain insight into students understanding of the purpose, use, and helpfulness of rubrics. The survey will also allow students to freely express what barriers affect their motivation and/or effort in completing an assigned task.

**Data Collection**
Data will be collected from student work, including the percent of students who turned in assigned tasks and the level of proficiency demonstrated by students on assigned tasks. This will be measured with the following ratings: met/exceeded expectations, minimally met expectations, did not meet expectations, assignment not completed. Additional data will be collected from a
teacher developed survey. Most questions will be closed. Questions that seek to gain insight into student thinking will include an “other” option where students can add their own response.

**Data Results**

Overall, students improved their performance in completing assigned tasks whether or not a rubric was presented with the assignment. However, the assignment for which a rubric was provided had more students meeting or exceeding expectations. In fact, of the 71% percent of students who met or exceeded expectations, more than half exceeded expectations, an increase of nearly 14% compared to the average number of students exceeding expectations on writing tasks during the 2007-2008 school year. It was also significant that the number of students who did not meet expectations decreased dramatically when a rubric was used. Most students do not meet expectations because of not following directions or missing key components of assigned tasks. The use of a rubric clarified instructions thereby decreasing this tendency in students.

Students also had a confused understanding of rubrics. In September, although 60% of students surveyed knew what a rubric was, only 29% agreed with the statement, “I know how to use a rubric.” The percent of students who would now agree with this statement has increased to 48%. However, this indicates that more than half of students still do not know how to use rubrics. When asked about the purpose of rubrics, most students associated this instrument as a grading tool used by teachers. Many did not make the connection that they had something to gain from rubrics too. However, by March, the number of students who solely associated the purpose of rubrics with grading decreased to a mere 14%, while 48% of students recognized its multiple uses, even those not associated with grading.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Trial</th>
<th>Met/ Exceeded Expectations</th>
<th>Minimally Met Expectations</th>
<th>Did Not Meet Expectations</th>
<th>Assignment NOT completed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Baseline*</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assignment with Rubric</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assignment without Rubric</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Gathered from average student performance on writing tasks during the 2007-2008 school year. In order to have reliability in comparing results, the same students who were still enrolled in Pinecrest Elementary during the 2008-2009 were specifically tracked.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reasons students do not want to complete an assignment:</th>
<th>September</th>
<th>March</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>It is always too much work</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I don't understand what is expected</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I don't have enough help at HOME</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I don't have enough help at SCHOOL</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I don't know where to start</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Reasons students feel better about an assignment:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>September</th>
<th>March</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The teacher explains what I have to do</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am given an example</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have a rubric</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I get feedback before it is due</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Reflection

This inquiry developed over a wondering of whether or not using rubrics might increase student motivation and effort on assigned tasks. One major complaint of students is that assignments seem like “too much work.” It was hoped that the use of rubrics would help students notice instead the opportunities to challenge themselves. Seventy-one percent of students indicated that not knowing where to start also affected their willingness to even attempt assigned tasks. What this inquirer found instead was that most students placed more emphasis on how well a teacher explained a task, whether or not an example was given, and whether or not a student received feedback before an assignment was due; rather than on having a rubric. Although indirectly rubrics do provide students with all of this information, only 10% were able to make this connection. On the other hand, the first major task assigned was attached to a rubric. An overwhelming number of students (71%) either met or exceeded the expectation on the task, an increase of almost 30%. Also the number of students who did not complete the task dropped to 2% compared to 9% in the past school year. It is this inquirer’s opinion that success provided students with the confidence to approach other tasks, whether or not a rubric was attached, with more motivation and effort. However, this confidence could not have been gained without first providing students with a thorough explanation of the task and expectations by using a rubric and an example that students had the opportunity to score. Consequently, rubrics allow students to have a clear understanding of the task and to internalize what is required (whether to meet/exceed expectations or not meet them at all). One unexpected outcome of this project is this teacher realized that students relished having control over what they would or would not put effort into. In other words, for some students, knowing that they did not have to shine in every single area in order to have success was quite empowering.

This instructor will be utilizing more rubrics next year and will provide students with more opportunities to express their needs using surveys and exit slips. Gaining an understanding of student perception of rubrics compared to a teacher’s was eye-opening. Finally, rubrics will be used more frequently. Eventually, this instructor would like students to design their own rubrics and/or provide input into rubric design.

References


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Specialized Instruction

Our Triumphant Readers
Rebecca Fraley, Virginia Blackburn, Tene’ Carter, Reading Resource Teachers
Highlands Elementary School

Purpose
As reading resource teachers, our responsibility is to support fragile readers at each grade level. The five members of the literacy team have each been assigned a particular grade level to support with regard to the Macmillan Reading Series Collier County School District has adopted. Part of this reading series is an intervention program entitled Triumphs. This piece is intended to support students who are two years below reading level or students who score 68% or below on the placement test accompanying the MacMillan reading series. Traditionally, as reading resource teachers, our primary responsibility has been to support fragile students at targeted grade levels using other means of delivery, i.e. Accelerated Literacy Learning (A.L.L.) model, Acquire Reading Power (ARP intervention), and teacher designed instruction. We are interested in the effects the Triumphs intervention piece has on struggling readers.

Question
• How will using the Triumphs reading series affect fragile readers at first, second and fourth grades?

Sub Question
• Which component of MacMillan reading series promotes the most/least gains?
• Does the delivery of Triumphs correlate with the gains claimed by the MacMillan textbook publishers?

Method
Each resource teacher will deliver instruction provided by the Triumphs intervention piece. Instruction takes place daily for approximately thirty to forty minutes at the previously mentioned grade levels. Groupings for each grade level vary according to need, ranging from two to five students per group.
• lesson plans
• DRA, Flynt/Cooter – Formal reading assessment indicating reading level
• Dolch word assessment – measures high frequency word growth

Becky’s Data Results and Analysis – Fourth Grade
I collected data pertaining to all three students from September to May. Data was collected in several areas of reading – specifically: phonics, comprehension, fluency, and vocabulary. To measure changes in reading fluency, I used the DIBELS test results which was administered in September, January, and May. The fourth grade DIBELS assessments consist of various grade level reading passages. The student is timed for one minute in order to determine the amount of words he/she can accurately read in one minute. Student A scored 108 words per minute in September, 120 words per minute in January, and 125 words per minute in May. Student B scored 86 words per minute in September, 94 words per minute in January, and 100 words per minute in May. Student C scored 87 words per minute in September, 104 words per minute in January, and 110 words per minute in May. Based upon the DIBELS assessment data, I have concluded that all three students made adequate or significant gains in reading fluency. To measure reading comprehension, the students were given the Flynt Cooter Reading Assessment last May. The Flynt Cooter Assessment consists of grade level reading passages with corresponding comprehension questions. This comprehension assessment measures a full school years growth. In September, Student A’s test results indicated an end of third grade reading level. In May, Student A’s test results remained at the end of third grade. In September, Student B’s test results indicated an end of first grade reading level. In May, Student B’s test results indicated he was reading at the end of third grade. In September, Student C’s test results indicated an end of second grade reading level. In May, Student C’s test results indicated he was reading at the end of third grade. Growth in comprehension varied depending on the student. To measure vocabulary and phonics, I used the weekly Triumphs Assessments. The Triumphs Assessments are weekly assessments that focus on the targets taught through the week. The Triumphs program requires an 80% or higher to be considered mastery. The chart below depicts each child’s individual growth on the Triumphs weekly assessments. The students’ growth in vocabulary and phonics varied week by week.

**Virginia’s Data Results and Analysis – First Grade**

A variety of data was collected on my four students from September through April. The DRA (Development Reading Assessment) and Dolch sight words were assessed as pretests given in September and posttests given in May. The DIBELS assessments were collected during the months of September, January, and May, while Triumphs assessments, consisting of controlled high frequency words, comprehension and phonics, and were assessed weekly.

Students Two, and Four, improved their independent reading levels on the DRA (Development Reading Assessment) according to pre and posts tests from one to six levels. Student three neither improved nor regressed on this assessment. However, only Student One reached Collier County’s benchmark of a DRA 14-16.

All students greatly improved their acquisition of the Dolch sight words. Students One and Four however, reached Collier County’s benchmark of recognizing at least 150 words.

DIBELS assesses first graders for phonemic segmentation fluency, decoding nonsense words, and oral reading fluency. Students are timed for one minute for each assessment. During the oral reading fluency component, students read three passages; each passage is timed for one minute and the mean score is recorded. For the phonemic segmentation fluency, students one and three met the benchmark for the year on the first assessment given in September. By the
second assessment given in January, students two and four met the benchmark for the end of the year. Clearly, all four students have mastered this skill. The nonsense word portion of the DIBELS assessment revealed inconsistent results. After assessment one, Student One’s results showed him to be above average. By the second assessment, he had dropped to the moderate risk level, but by the third assessment, he had made enough gains to reach the end-of-year benchmark and considered as low risk. Student Two’s results showed him to be at the moderate risk levels for assessments one, two, and three. Student Three’s results showed her to be at the low risk after assessment one. She then moved to the moderate risk level after assessment two, and then moved to the high risk level after assessment three. Student four began at the low risk level after assessment one, then moved to the high risk level after assessment two and then back to the moderate risk level after assessment three. Although all four students showed gains for the oral reading fluency portion of the DIBELS assessments, they are still considered to be at the moderate risk level on the third assessment.

The Triumphs Assessments were administered weekly and tested controlled high frequency words, reading comprehension, and phonics. Students needed to score at 80% or higher to show mastery. Students One, Two, and Four were able to demonstrate mastery for the high frequency words component. Students One and Two showed mastery on the reading comprehension component, and all four students showed mastery on the phonics component.

**Tene’s Data Results and Analysis – Second Grade**

Data was collected on two students from September to May in the area of reading. Assessments included Macmillan Triumphs Assessments, DRA (reading comprehension), DIBELS (fluency), and Dolch word assessment (high frequency words). Macmillan assessments covered four main components of reading: high frequency words, structural analysis, reading comprehension, and phonics.

Student One scored a 33% average on the first Macmillan assessment and steadily increased on each assessment scoring an 80% on assessment 6. Student Two was not as consistent; he started off strong with an 86% average on the first test but then plummeted to a 53% in the second assessment and then gradually climbed to 82% average on assessment 6. Out of all four components assessed by Macmillan, Student One struggled most with structural analysis and was most successful in phonics. Student Two struggled most with identifying high frequency words and was also most successful in phonics. According to DRA reading assessments, Student 1 and Student 2 made gains, but did not meet the county benchmark for the end of second grade. Both students started out at the same level and both ended at about the same level gaining four to five reading levels.

DIBELS assessments were given in September, January, and May to assess oral reading fluency and nonsense words. Student One did not make many gains between assessment one and assessment two. However, he did demonstrate gains from 31 to 48 words per minute from the second to third assessment. Student Two made dramatic gains in reading fluency from assessment one, scoring 7 words per minute, scoring 30 words per minute on assessment three. While both students showed gains in this area, they remained far below the benchmark of 90 words correct per minute.
Dolch word assessments were provided in October and April. Both students showed improvement in recognition of high frequency words. In October, Student One recognized 106 words and in May recognized 133 words. Student two showed great gains in this area scoring only 75 words in October and 177 words in April. The benchmark for this assessment at the end of second grade is 220 words.

Becky’s Reflection – Fourth Grade
I used the McGraw/Hill Triumphs reading program for eight months. Three students participated in the Triumphs program for 30 minutes, five days a week. The Triumphs program is based on the theory of balanced literacy. The students participated daily in phonics, vocabulary, fluency, comprehension, and writing activities. The length of the activities varied from day to day. After using the Triumphs reading program, I have come to several conclusions. The program is designed for students two years below grade level. Therefore, it starts with very basic skills such as short vowel sounds. Starting with basic skills benefited my students greatly because it ensured that the gaps they had in their reading development were covered. The concepts build upon each other from week to week and the difficulty of the skills increases. All three of the students started out strong. However, as the program became more difficult, Student A started to struggle. I found myself spending more time with Student A. I feel this is due to the fact that Student A is an ELL student. After analyzing the program, I feel Student A would have been more successful with the ELL program called “Treasure Chest” because Treasure Chest is specifically designed to address the needs of the ELL student. In the future I will not include ELL students in my Triumphs group.

The students participated in the different components of the program every day. As we progressed through the program, I started to feel as though some of the components were stronger than others. The phonics component was very strong throughout the entire program. This component was clearly explained and the students were actively engaged. This section held the greatest retention rate as well. The students thoroughly enjoyed this section because they had the opportunity to manipulate words using white boards and markers.

I felt that the stories in the program were lacking substance which resulted in comprehension difficulties. The text was controlled and related specifically to the vocabulary and phonics section. The plots were predictable and boring for the students. I feel the students lost interest while reading the stories and therefore were not using their “thinking” strategies while they read. The comprehension targets were changed weekly which was too quick for the three students. They needed to stick with the same target for a few weeks in order to acquire an understanding for the comprehension target.

In the future, I would use the Triumphs reading program with struggling readers. However, I would not use it with ELL students. I would also try to supplement the program with text from other sources. I feel there are strong components of the program that have benefitted my students greatly. I also feel there are weak areas that need to be supplemented.

Virginia’s Reflection – First Grade
Being able to provide lessons for these four students was a joy and honor. Students One, Two, and Four always met me in the morning with smiling faces and eager to learn. While Student
Three was always cooperative, often she was thinking about other things (mom, moving, illness, restroom. . .) and, not surprisingly, she was the student with the least academic gains in all areas. Her classroom teacher and I often discussed her anxieties and are continually seeking ways to meet her needs.

The Triumphs program is very user friendly. Each lesson provides the needed materials, the discussions to have with students, and what the teacher is to say or ask the students. Each week’s lessons provide plenty of repetition in the skills being taught. Out of all the components provided in the Triumphs program, I especially liked and appreciated the phonemic awareness and phonic components. Each of these sections was logically sequenced to assist fragile readers. The students also tested successfully in these areas. My students however, clearly enjoyed the text sections the most. Each morning they could not wait to get into their poetry notebooks or their texts. I personally felt these texts were contrived to meet the phonics skill lessons and the sight words that were introduced that week.

I can not help but feel disappointed at the results. Although the results I gleaned most assuredly indicated growth, I was hoping and expecting more, especially regarding their independent reading levels. I feel more teacher instruction is needed in conveying the meaning of stories, constantly checking for comprehension. I also wonder how the students would have fared if I had taken them as a reading intervention group, a triad group or as pairs. Another option would be to combine the best traits of both interventions: the phonemic awareness piece from Triumphs along with the strategy talk, scaffolding, and authentic literature from my paired intervention and A.L.L. models.

**Tene’s Reflection**

Providing services for these students was enjoyable but very challenging at times. Both students were inconsistent with practicing high frequency words at home and several times lost the word cards that were given. Both students were also inconsistent with nightly reading practice and had very little reading support at home. Student One started the CAST process (Child and Adolescent Support Team) recently and is expected to qualify for special education services. He also has a speech and language impairment. Student Two is a migrant student who came to school late in September and may leave before the end of the school year. Since Kindergarten he has missed 80 or more days of school each year.

Considering all these factors, both students made what I would consider adequate gains. Both students started off on a Kindergarten reading level and scored about the middle of first grade in April. These students are still very far behind where they should be but considering all of their risk factors, I think they did well.

The Triumphs program was very easy to use and scripted so it took very little planning ahead of time. All the lessons were in the teacher manual and all materials were provided (i.e. white boards, letter tiles, picture cards, letter cards, etc…) which made teaching it very trouble-free. Each unit consisted of 25 lessons and each lesson covered the following areas: Working with Words (phonemic awareness and phonics), Words to Know (high frequency words, oral vocabulary, fluency), and Time to Read (reading and writing).
The student’s really enjoyed the Working with Words section and always looked forward to reading the story. I felt like the phonemic awareness and phonics section was very strong and students learned a lot from this. The oral vocabulary and fluency was weak and students were not successful in these areas. The stories started off seeming contrived to fit the high frequency words which made them uninteresting. However, as the stories got more complicated they also became more interesting and students enjoyed them and did fairly well on comprehension.

Another section that I feel was weak is the writing section. The writing consisted of students completing a provided sentence starter and writing certain words. The students had trouble making connections to the writing and it lacked interest and creativity. Another hurdle that I had was time. I have approximately 30 minutes for each of my lessons and in order to complete the entire Triumphs lesson I would need 40 to 45 minutes.

I would try using the Triumphs again next year but with a few changes. I would keep groups between three and four students. Two students is not quite enough to make a quality group and five students is one too many. I would schedule 45 minutes for each lesson. I would add some activities for fluency, perhaps the use of poetry folders with their daily poem in them. I would also adjust the writing section to make it more interesting to students and allow them to create their own writing.

Overall, while my students did make gains, I was disappointed that their gains were not more significant. I wonder if my students would have made the same gains or better gains if I had used another model for teaching that I have used in the past, such as the A.L.L model.

References
Currently, as well as in the past, struggling readers are referred to reading resource teachers to gain additional instruction in reading. Through these lessons, explicit instruction is delivered at the point of need, scaffolding the known to the new learning, using authentic literature. This method of learning supports the idea that phonemic awareness and phonics is provided in a meaningful context. Strategies are taught that emphasize understanding of text or meaning, in addition to phonics. Routman states, “Opportunities to learn letters and sounds must be embedded in a meaningful context of rich language and literature experiences” (2000. p. 106). Routman (2000, p. 103) also quotes Allington’s research that “There is no research on the benefits of decodable texts. If we start with decodable texts, some kids can’t get out of the habit of decoding every word.”

This year Collier County adopted the Treasures Reading Program produced by Macmillan/McGraw Hill. Accompanying this program was the Triumph program designed to provide intervention for struggling readers who are two years below grade level. Steven McClung, as cited by RedOrbit News (REDORBIT, 2005), states that “Reading Triumphs uses a sound instructional philosophy that has been proven to work with struggling readers”. He also states, Triumphs “not only provides teachers the tools to teach students to read, it helps students learn to enjoy reading.” A large portion of the Triumphs program is devoted to phonemic awareness, phonics, and sight words.
Now I Get It! Vocabulary
Martha Soto, Reading Coach
Pinecrest Elementary School

Purpose
As teachers, we encounter many situations where students have difficulty comprehending what we’re trying to teach. Most of the students that I work with are English Language Learners. My wondering led me to provide an additional reading lesson with extensive vocabulary and word work instruction. This instruction provided drawings and illustrations of specific vocabulary and word practice. I worked with a small group of intermediate students that are monolingual Spanish speaking students.

Questions
- How can I accelerate and motivate my monolingual Spanish speaking students to learn English vocabulary?
- Will intensive vocabulary instruction paired with word work increase comprehension with monolingual Spanish speaking students?

Sub Questions
- How will the students review and retain what has been taught?
- Will this opportunity increase students’ phonological awareness?
- Will this extra time spent on vocabulary building be supportive to the students?

Method
Students were provided consistent instruction three times a week over a three month period. Students completed a pre assessment and this data determined the point of instruction.

Day 1
Students worked with phonological activities that would prepare them for Day 2.
- Letter Identification/sounds
- Blending
- Segmenting
- Word Families

Day 2
Students were introduced to targeted sight words and vocabulary that would be presented in their guided reading book. Students were provided with descriptions, explanations, and examples of new terms. Notebooks were provided for students to illustrate the words.

Day 3
Students were presented their guided reading lesson following the steps as outlined in the Collier County K-2 Instructional Guide.
Data Collection

- pre-assessments
- notebook
- teacher observation
- running records
- post assessments

Data Results and Analysis

<table>
<thead>
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<td>C</td>
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All students demonstrated gains in their letter identification, sight word recognition, and their instructional reading level. Students also showed increased motivation as noted by my observations.

Reflection

My wondering took many turns at the beginning. My intention was to provide intensive vocabulary work with the monolingual students. I had planned to keep a notebook solely for vocabulary, but as I delivered the lessons I noticed that the intermediate students were ready for more guided instruction. At that point, I modified my instructional plan to include an additional guided reading group with extra word work and vocabulary lessons. Students in the upper grades were eager to learn basic reading skills. They were highly motivated to learn vocabulary words using the Marzano steps. I noticed that using the extra time to provide some prior knowledge highly increased the students’ willingness to share, participate and respond. Overall the students gained confidence in learning as well as a solid start towards reading success.

References


Reading with Ease

Marta E. Doherty, ELL Teacher
Eden Park Elementary School

Purpose

I noticed that my group of fourth grade students had a huge problem with word approximation. Word approximation is defined as: the reader reading part of the word, but not fully reading the word correctly. For example, when I had “Annette” read to me, she would come to the word,
“examine”. She would say, “example” instead of the correct word, “examine.” The majority of my students had this problem. In the book, Beginning To Read by Marilyn Jager Adams, Adams states (1990) “Poor readers’ difficulties with long words may be due most of all to poorly developed knowledge of spelling patterns” (p.128). To help students read with ease, they need a strong foundation on general phonics rules and syllable spelling patterns.

**Question**

- How will teaching specific phonics strategies affect reading comprehension?

**Sub Question**

- Will the syllabication pattern be the appropriate method for improving reading performance?

**Method**

I worked with nine fourth graders for nine weeks. They spent 150 minutes with me every day. I taught the District Reading Core Curriculum. This consisted of read aloud, vocabulary and comprehension strategies, such as: activating and using background knowledge, predicting, making inferences, summarizing, visualizing and meta-cognition, and “fix-up” strategies. This Core section lasted 30 minutes. After the Reading Core, the students went to the centers for twenty minutes each (listening, computers and guided reading). At the guided reading center, I worked with small groups to teach the six basic syllable spelling patterns. The syllabication spelling patterns are strategies used to figure out polysyllabic words or multisyllabic words. The syllabication spelling patterns are as follows: closed syllables, open syllables, final e (VCe), vowel digraphs, r-controlled vowels, and words with consonant + -el, -al, -el.

*The Scholastic Teaching Strategies: Teaching Phonics & Word Study in the Intermediate Grades* by Wiley Blevins is a good source. I used the suggested lessons in the book as a starting point. Later, I modified them to the needs of my students. Another good source is the Florida Center for Reading Research (FCRR) website. The website provides a varied selection of advanced phonics activities. Along with syllabication, I had the students read short decodable stories and books to practice the patterns learned. The decodable materials reinforced the learned syllabication patterns and vowels. After centers, students worked on writing for 60 minutes.

I realized that the students struggled with vowel sounds. They did not know how to separate the word into syllables, or “chunk” the word. Instead, they were guessing the words. Obviously, this distorted their reading comprehension. It made me think about the many times I had told my students to reread the text when they did not understand what they read. This strategy was not of any help to them because their reading ability was weak. Teaching the six basic syllable spelling patterns in my class, I noticed that my students began to show improvement in their reading and comprehension. The students’ syllabication took time to learn and to apply appropriately. At the beginning, the students relied heavily on their distorted decoding habits. For example, “Maria” did well dividing words into syllables in hands-on activities, but still had difficulty applying it to her reading. To help her overcome this problem, I had her read decodable books. Using decodable books with “Maria” made a difference in her reading. The decodable short stories and decodable books provided my students opportunities to practice their learned skill. Gradually, the students began to transfer those skills on to regular reading materials, such as non-fiction and fiction texts.
Data Collection
I reviewed my students’ last year’s assessment (FCAT and Stanine). The students’ results were quite similar in terms of the FCAT Reading level. They scored at level one. To pass they needed to have scored at level 3. Student 5 and Student 8 scored at a level 3. They passed; however, they were experiencing difficulty in fourth grade reading. The Stanine results indicated that the fourth grade students were two grades below level.

I also did both formal and informal assessments. The informal assessments were basically listening to students read. Then, I gave them the Nonsense Word pre-assessment and the Nonsense post-assessment on phonics to determine where they were having difficulty and to monitor growth.

Data Results and Analysis
The Nonsense Word pre-assessment’s results showed that the students were capable of decoding simple letter-sound correspondence. However, the students were having difficulty with the following areas: long vowels, other vowels, and multisyllabic words. After nine weeks, the students were assessed on the Nonsense Word post-assessment. The results showed improvement. Comparing the two charts, the pre-assessment and post-assessment, there was a high percentage of students demonstrating progress in the following area: 28% short vowels, 14% diagraphs, blends, 54% long vowels, 131% other vowels and 139% multisyllabic.

Reflection
It is clearly evident that the focus of my study, multisyllabic words, showed improvement (139%). An additional interesting fact is the great improvement across all categories, averaging 52% per student. Perhaps some of this dramatic improvement is due to my 18 years of teaching experience and/or my individual teaching methods. Nevertheless, the 139% improvement in performance with multisyllabic words speaks for itself. Lesser experienced teachers may achieve somewhat lower results but, clearly, they could also help their students achieve significant improvements. Since decoding multisyllabic words is a critical key to reading comprehension, improvement in this area would have a major impact on overall reading performance. An obvious follow-on effect of improving reading performance would be improved success in other content areas which rely on reading comprehension - history, science, and math. Finally, as each individual student’s reading comprehension improves, his or her personal thirst for reading and knowledge will likely increase. I observed this increase in motivation over the course of my study.

References


The Florida Center for Reading Research (FCRR) (http://www.fcrr.org).
Purpose
The purpose of my inquiry was to determine if the Junior Great Books program would help targeted students develop higher-order, critical thinking skills by working on questioning techniques. I chose to work with third and fourth grade students. I wanted to find out if students would have an increased ability to support their thinking using evidence from text. Teaching is about students and teachers who can make intelligent choices, think and analyze critically, and choose to go on learning-in all areas of their lives-even when they are not in the classroom or taking formal course work (Routman, 1991). It was my goal to help these students augment their ability to think, make intelligent choices and develop a deeper understanding of themselves and others.

Question
- Will the Junior Great Books Program affect the questioning techniques of students?

Sub Questions
- Will the students become better at expressing themselves verbally and in writing?
- Will the students develop the ability to find evidence to support their ideas?
- Will students improve their ability to listen and respond to others?

Method
I followed the Junior Great Books Program. Each story was presented and discussed in four time periods of about 40 minutes per meeting. Session 1 included pre-reading, the first reading of the text, and sharing questions. Session 2 included a second reading with directed notes. Session 3 focused on vocabulary and Session 4 was the shared inquiry discussion. Students were also given a writing activity to extend their thinking.

Junior Great Books is based on the idea of shared inquiry discussions. Students were taught how to discuss their answers to open-ended questions about the stories. By collaborating with classmates during discussions, students experience a model of productive and respectful public discourse-an experience that can guide, inform, and enrich their thinking in school and in life (Great Books Foundation, 2006). The students were introduced to and worked with various note-taking activities. They also studied targeted vocabulary using three words from each story. The heart of our lessons was the shared inquiry discussions.

Data Collection
Students were asked to write questions twice during the discussion of each story, once on cards after the first reading, and once in their journal preceding the discussion. They were also asked to evaluate their collaboration in small groups after each story discussion. Notes were kept during the “big discussion” about who answered questions.

Students took the comprehension tests at the end of each unit from the Junior Great Books Manual to determine strengths and weaknesses. The students filled out a survey to determine
their attitude about the program. Finally, observations during the readings and the discussions were valuable.

Data Results and Analysis
From the survey given to the students, it was established that they liked the class, and felt that it had helped them in some ways.

Students Survey   April, 2009
Did you like coming to Jr. Great Books?
9 Yes    0 No
Did you learn to listen and respond to your classmates’ answers?
9 Yes    0 No
Do you think you can write better questions now?
8  Yes    1 No
Do you think you can understand the stories better?
9 Yes    0 No
Which story did you like best?
The Mushroom Man    1
The Selkie Girl    6
The Banza
The Selkie Girl or The Mushroom Man   1
What did you like best about Junior Great Books
“Reading the Stories”    3
“The Big Discussion”    4
“When we look for clues in the book”    1
“Learning something new”    1
What part helped you most as a learner?
“Reading the book/stories”    4
“Learning new words”    1
“To pay attention”    1
“To stop being shy”    1
“Going back in the story”    1
“The stories and the discussion”    1
From the unit tests, it is clear that vocabulary is still a problem. Even after two readings, questions, a PowerPoint with pictures to help explain unfamiliar terms, and many discussions, students did not know all of the vocabulary words in the story.

Students were asked to work in small groups and evaluate their efforts by collaboration in the shared inquiry discussion by agreeing or disagreeing with statements about the discussion. When asked to list their goals for next time, these goals were listed:

“To participate, listen, learn, back up our ideas and put page numbers.”

“To listen and comment on other peoples’ ideas and try to back up our ideas with details from the story.”

“To listen more carefully and to contribute more.”

**Reflection**

This was my first experience with the Junior Great Books Program. It is a structured program, with much history and research behind it. The rules and strategies used can be transferred to many other instructional situations in which discussions are important. It would be interesting to use the questioning techniques in teaching the research process. One thing that students had to learn was that the teacher would not be giving the “correct answer” and would only be a discussion leader. This was difficult for the teacher to learn as well. Students also had to realize that there was not always a correct answer, and that there were different ways of looking at a situation.
This class was a combination of third and fourth grade students, a third grade book was used. When the class started, there were about 15 students. With only 10 books, they had to share. This was not good because they had to continually refer to the stories for evidence when participating in the discussions. Eventually, 6 students dropped out, for various reasons. It was much better when each student had his/her own book.

We will continue through the end of the year. We have not completed Book 1 for third grade. Each unit is structured so that students take small steps in learning how to think critically and write questions that show higher level thinking. As a result of the comprehension tests, we will place even more emphasis on vocabulary by introducing a graphic organizer that uses synonyms/antonyms.

One student expressed that when we started, and the “big question” was put on the board, his mind would be blank and he could not think of anything to write. However, now he could think and write an answer to the question.

In our last discussion, one student who was usually the last to speak, was actually the first to raise a hand.

References

Now I Understand
Patricia Zawodny, Reading Resource Teacher
Pinecrest Elementary

Purpose
I am a reading resource teacher at Pinecrest Elementary School, a Title 1 school. I have been a first grade inclusion teacher for many years so I am quite familiar with the struggling reader in the primary grades. I also have my reading certification. This is my second year as a reading resource teacher. I am working with our most needy struggling readers in second and third grade. For a portion of the day, I work strictly with groups of migrant students. The children are ability grouped with all of them reading below grade level. My number one goal is to help the students to become successful readers. We have made significant gains with our fluency and decoding skills. Comprehension skills, especially the higher level thinking skills, have remained difficult for our children to master. There is a strong need to focus our reading instruction on comprehension. One group I work with is a group of five third grade migrant students. All of these students are reading two years below grade level. Four out of the five have repeated a grade. During the first two months of school I focused on decoding and fluency, with some work on comprehension. The decoding skills and fluency began to improve but the comprehension did not. I wanted to help them better understand what they were reading. I decided to make comprehension skills my main focus for the rest of the year. The purpose of my
inquiry was to see how an extra thirty minutes of daily intensive reading instruction focused on comprehension would affect their reading levels.

**Question**

How will an extra thirty minutes of daily intensive reading instruction, focused on comprehension, affect struggling readers’ reading levels?

**Method**

I met daily for thirty minutes with a group of five third grade students. The students were all remedial, migrant students. I provided intensive reading instruction using leveled readers targeting the reading comprehension skills. I selected guided reading books, both fiction and nonfiction, that were purchased especially for our migrant students. I supplemented the instruction with reading comprehension cards and activities purchased with a grant from last spring. These materials were specifically selected to promote comprehension.

**Data Collection**

The Flynt Cooter Assessment was administered as a pre-assessment in November, a mid-year assessment in February, and a post-assessment in April. This reading assessment provided an oral reading level and a comprehension level. Observations during student activities and discussions were also noted.

**Data Results and Analysis**

Four out of the five students made at least two years’ growth as tested with the Flynt-Cooter reading assessment. The fifth student transferred but had made one year’s growth as of February, 2009. Ideally, passing the fourth grade level at the end of third grade would indicate that they are ready for fourth grade reading. One of the students actually had three years’ growth and passed the fourth grade level. This student started with very low comprehension at the first grade level. Word recognition also remained high, above 95%. Other than helping with individual words, I did not focus on word attack skills at all.

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**Flynt-Cooter Assessment Results**
(Levels Passed)

**Reflection**

This reading group was one of my favorite groups with which to work. The enthusiasm shown by the students was remarkable. Every day, they came to the room excited to see what we were going to be reading. Someone always wanted to write our target for the lesson on the board. They were always predicting if we would be focusing on main idea, cause and effect, comparing, or a variety of other targets. They clearly understood why we were working together and were determined to improve their comprehension.

Another discovery I made was that their language skills also developed significantly during the year because we spent so much time discussing the books. Vocabulary was introduced with every book we read. I am sure this attributed to their gains in the language area.

Finally, I had excellent resources. I had used migrant funding to purchase these high interests, fiction and non-fiction books. The students actually came to enjoy the non-fiction books more than the fiction. They were so interested in learning about the various topics. I also had several hands on activities materials purchased through a grant I received. The students loved the “Hot Dot” pens we used with short story cards. These story cards targeted all of our comprehension skills. The “Hot Dot” pens respond with lights and fun sounds. A gentle wrong answer sound with no lights happened when a student answered incorrectly. These were highly motivating materials.

I know this extra reading time, focused on comprehension, helped these students make their gains. It was an exciting instructional time for me and my students. I lost one student because she had to move, but I will see her again next year. This is part of working with migrant students. Next year, I would like to follow up with these students and begin another group focused strictly on comprehension. It was a perfect group for third grade because they were required to take the FCAT, which really tests their comprehension. This was a fruitful inquiry project for me and I am pleased with the results.

**Resources**

Colleagues using Consultancy Protocol: Sapp, Katherine: Reading Resource Teacher, Inquiry Leader
Comparing Two Interventions for Level II Behavior Support
Michele Meyer, School Counselor
Pinecrest Elementary School

Purpose
Response to Intervention (RTI) laws have required schools to change and show that school staff offers interventions to students having behavioral and/or academic concerns. As the school counselor and leader of the schoolwide Positive Behavior Support (PBS) Team, I was given two resources this year, and I wanted to identify the one with the best results for students. Both programs qualify as level II interventions for behavior according to the RTI and PBS models, and both programs are designed for use by teachers or counselors. The Second Step Curriculum (2002) is a social skills violence prevention curriculum with many visual aids. The lessons are divided into three major categories: Empathy training, Anger management, and Impulse Control and Problem Solving. LEAPS (Provenio Group, 2008) is an online curriculum offering 89 “lower maturity” lessons in 10 categories (198 lessons for both maturity levels). These two programs appeared to have many differences and I sought to find which of these programs was more effective for the students I serve.

Question
• Will one of these curriculums show better results for students?

Sub Questions
• Is one program more user friendly than the other for the group facilitator or students?
• Will the effectiveness of the programs be the same for primary and intermediate level students?

Method
Two different counseling groups were formed in the fall of the school year. The fifth/sixth grade group used the LEAPS curriculum, and the second/third grade group used the Second Step Program. Both groups included ESE and regular education students. Additionally, I incorporated one of the LEAPS lessons into the second/third grade group in the spring, and used a Second Step lesson on Impulse Control in the LEAPS group.

Data Collection
For students in the 5/6th grade LEAPS group, pre assessments were used from the students’ self report. It should be noted that these assessments can be given in three ways: self report, teacher report, or through an interview. Observations, field notes and post group student surveys were used for both groups to assess the programs. Because these groups are considered to be open groups, students may exit the group and other students may enter the group during the course of the school year, which impacts the ability to use decisive pre and post group scores for analysis.
The primary data to compare the effectiveness of the curriculums will be determining the decrease in the number of office referrals for each group from the first to second semester.

**Data Results and Analysis**

From field notes and observations, I found the following benefits of the LEAPS program:
1. Provides excellent data (pre and post assessment are available for each category)
2. Assessments determine which lessons to prioritize for each student
3. Students or teachers can complete the assessments online
4. Lessons are available in ten categories: (Managing Time and Attention, Friends, Social Life, Stress and Anxiety, Respecting Self and Others, School Rules, Decisions and Consequences, Communication and Presentation, Hygiene and Anger and Emotional management)

The following are benefits I found with the Second Step Program:
1. Large pictures provide opportunity for discussion and assist ELL/special need students
2. Incorporates dvd’s for variety in presentation
3. Kits are available for individual grade levels
4. Very little planning time required
5. Fits well into 30 minute time frame
6. Student friendly; students showed more appreciation of this program

The last week of April, I gave student surveys and results from the Second Step Program were far more positive than the responses from the LEAPS group. Although the LEAPS students wrote in five positive comments on their surveys, only 55% of eleven students in LEAPS reported the group has been helpful to them, and only 64% of the students in the LEAPs program reported getting along better with other students since having joined the group. The responses to both of those questions were 100% positive from the students in the Second Step group.

There is no question that the data provided by the LEAPS program is ideal in this age of accountability. Specifically, the pre assessment can lead the group facilitator to knowing which lessons will be most beneficial for the students. The number of lessons (89) also makes it an ideal resource for both counselors and teachers. I have also found that the more challenging vocabulary and lack of visual aids makes the LEAPS program more challenging for all students. The pictures in the Second Step Program provide concrete examples that help to assess students’ prior knowledge of what is being discussed. The Second Step program was more student-friendly according to the data gathered from student surveys, and for me it also required less time to prepare for lessons. The only real drawback to the Second Step program is that it has a limited number of lessons provided.

Based on data gathered from student office referrals, the LEAPS program was far more effective than the Second Step program. Seven students in the LEAPS program for the entire year had a total of 39 referrals for the first semester (avg. 5.6 per student) and in the second semester (as of May 1), they had a total of 17 referrals (average of 2.4 per person). This is an average decrease of 3.2 referrals per student in the LEAPS program. On the other hand, the group of five students
who attended the Second Step group most of the school year decreased their average by only .6,
moving from an average of 3.6 first semester to 3.0 during the second semester (up to May 1).

Reflection
Kilbourn et. al. (2005) states, “Thoughtful inquiry requires reflective time and cannot be hurried
or quickly packaged.” This is insightful because my personal reflections from observations and
student surveys led me to different conclusions than the hard data, which required me to rethink
my conclusion and what I will do differently next year. After examining the decrease in the
number of office referrals from first to second semester, I was shocked to see that students in the
LEAPS program had made so much improvement in their behavior at school.

Early in this inquiry project, I was dismayed that the vocabulary of LEAPS, even in the
assessments, is a challenge for many of our students, the majority coming from low
socioeconomic backgrounds or non English speaking homes. After comparing the benefits and
limitations of both programs, I wonder if it is actually the pre-assessment data that caused the
students in the LEAPS group to fare so much better in terms of decreasing their number of office
discipline referrals. This data could be considered a formative assessment, whereby I found the
learning gaps to target before proceeding with the group sessions.

One thing I will do differently next year is to personally complete assessments for all students in
my counseling groups using portions of the LEAPS pre assessments, regardless of which
curriculum I use. Determining specifically which areas of weaknesses the students have and
which lessons to target is the key to helping them make progress. I will not make use of the
student self report option, as the difficulty in reading level and vocabulary may have led to
inconsistent reporting in addition to taking more time that is already in short supply.

Pending the gathering and analysis of academic achievement data, I will again plan to facilitate
primary level groups using the Second Step curriculum and intermediate level groups with the
LEAPS curriculum. Now that I am more familiar with both curriculums, I will also occasionally
incorporate a lesson from the curriculum not being used when I feel it is in the students’ best
interest based on the pre-assessment. One other option I have to make a difference for students is
to inform the LEAPS curriculum developers that students would benefit from lessons designed
specifically for English language learners or Special Education students who may have lower
reading abilities than their peers.

References
Seattle, WA, retrieved from http://www.GOLEAPS.com

novice observers learn from inquiry into their own practice. *Journal of Curriculum and
Supervision, 20* (4) 298-318.

Reading Quilts: “Sew” Many Kinds of Literature
Kathy Christensen, Reading Coach
Village Oaks Elementary

Purpose
Our students must be taught using the Core/Basal series for thirty minutes daily. This on-grade level instruction follows a predictable structure. There are before, during and after reading strategies with vocabulary activities and appropriate modeling of think alouds. However, students also need interactive reading work that activates schema and fosters connections. Students need explicit teaching of genre so they can better understand and recall information. Students need to be scaffolded to become active participants, rather than passive responders to instruction. When readers make predictions about what they’ll learn, they activate their schema about the topic and what they know about the type of text they are about to read (Miller, 2002). This type of genre work is crucial for aiding students in their understanding of various types of literature.

As a reading coach, I have the opportunity to work with readers from all grade levels, kindergarten through sixth grade. Far too often, when queried about their independent reading, our students respond with a reference to the Accelerated Reader or 100 Book Challenge level of their book, not to the type of book they are reading. When pressed it becomes evident that our students are unaware of the type of literature they have selected for independent reading. Genre can heavily influence the type of interaction a reader has with text. I decided to focus my inquiry on instruction of genre studies with second graders to see if it would aide in their comprehension and foster positive reading attitudes.

Question
• How will genre studies affect my students’ comprehension and reading attitudes?

Sub Questions
• Will genre studies influence a wider type of reading?
• Will genre studies affect students’ ability to respond to literature through writing?

Method
I began our extended unit of study with a kick off activity centered on a picture book, The Patchwork Quilt by Valerie Flournoy. We learned about quilts and quilt pieces. The students were then provided with a notebook to house their responses to each type of literature. As they worked through a kind of literature, they colored in the corresponding quilt piece, ultimately making a paper quilt displaying the various types of genre read and studied. Each type of literature had a focused written response. For instance, when reading a biography the readers were expected to write three important facts about the person and three personal responses to each fact. When reading a How To text, the students recorded the steps on how to do whatever was presented in their chosen book. This continued through various genres, each with an appropriate written response. I pre and post surveyed the students with regards to reading attitudes and beliefs. I also kept anecdotal records and I interviewed the homeroom teacher to check on student comprehension observed in the classroom.

Data Collection
I pre and post surveyed the students using a “Garfield Attitude” survey. I also recorded student observations and did a post interview. The following graphs depict genre preferences and
reading attitudes by gender. I also reviewed the quality and extent of students’ written responses and interviewed the classroom teacher.

**Data Results and Analysis**

According to the “Garfield Reading Survey” the girls and boys seemed to gain confidence in answering questions about what they read. Additionally, the girls and boys showed increased confidence in taking reading tests. Only the girls responded favorably to reading various kinds of books. This contradicts their responses on the Student Survey, which showed a high number of students enjoying various genres. Boys appeared to benefit from the genre study as they responded favorably to beginning new books and reading books in school during free time. It was interesting to note that both groups enjoyed the magazine study. They also enjoyed the study of How-To books. This was apparent during the lessons and these survey results did not surprise me. From the class participation and written responses, I would have thought that some of the students would have preferred the poetry study. It also did not surprise me that the students preferred small group work as conversations and interactions were more personal and extensive during small group work. Small group work appeared to foster higher student engagement and pleasure. I am pleased that the students believe themselves to be “better readers” as a result of the genre study.

**Reflection**
This inquiry project extended over a longer period of time than anticipated due to my inability to consistently work in the classroom. In the beginning each genre was introduced via small groups. I worked with flexible groups with students of varying reading levels. Due to time constraints, I often had to move to full group instruction. At times, I just introduced the genre and response sheets and the work was done primarily independently by the students. I found that I liked the pace of full group instruction more - I felt like I covered more in a quicker time. However, it was much more advantageous to work with the students in small groups. Small groups gave us more time for discussions and sharing. When I surveyed the students, it was interesting to note that they preferred working in small groups as well.

The data analysis was surprising. I was a little concerned at the onset with the extent of writing that was expected. The students responded favorably and proudly colored in their quilt squares upon the completion of each genre study. It was also interesting to note that boys seemed much more positively affected by this study than the girls. The classroom teacher kept me informed on how students would reference a genre when returning from checking books out of the library. However, I know I missed many opportunities to help students make connections to genre because I was in the classroom for just a short portion of the day. Unfortunately this is an aspect of coaching - not having my own class all day.

From the data and personal reflection, I think I would continue this type of genre work with some modifications. I would alternate small group and full group work and select genre that more closely relates to Core or Content Area topics. I would also do an author study every month. It would be ideal if I could use this work as part of the independent work done during Guided Reading. We have a tiny window of time to get kids thinking (McGregor, 2007, p.xii). I see these genre lessons serving as a jumping off point for reading exploration and higher level thinking. It is done in a social context with purposeful reading, discussion, and sharing. It is important for students to have choice and this genre study provides them the opportunity to choose books within a genre and respond with personal connections and insights. I would build upon this inquiry by including more sharing and more open-ended written responses.

References


Lake Trafford Elementary School

Purpose
Last summer I had the opportunity to work as a volunteer for the Waveplace Foundation with their Immokalee Pilot Program. The organization provided about fifty elementary students with free XO computers and trained them in the use of Squeak eToys, which is a visual programming software. We received lots of media coverage including a visit from National Public Radio’s Larry Abramson, who spent an entire day interviewing students and taking photos. After the students left, he met with the instructors. One of the questions he kept raising was, “How will using eToys increase student performance on standardized tests?” I could see the children growing as a result of their experiences with eToys, but how could I justify it? My assertions were shallow since I didn’t have data to support my claims and that frustration gnawed away at me. It became the driving force leading to this inquiry. I was determined to discover if the cerebral process one experiences while writing software scripts translates into success in other academic areas.

Question
- Is there a relationship between computer programming and student achievement in core subjects?

Sub Questions
- Can producing storybooks have an affect on students’ self-esteem?
- Can student motivation be increased using eToys?
- Can providing authentic learning experiences via eToys increase student engagement?

Method
Squeak eToys is a visual programming software designed for children in intermediate grades. It can be downloaded for free at www.squeakland.org. It has two main components; graphic design and programming. The drawing tools are fairly basic. I could see students’ eyes rolling as I demonstrated the first lesson. It wasn’t until I sat with a child and asked how he expected to bounce the bowling ball down the stairs if he didn’t put each item into its own layer, that the fun began. “What Miss, I’ll be able to make the ball roll?” That was my hook, the rest is history! Writing scripts is intense. This is where the higher level thinking takes place. As software designers, the students need to give their objects directions in order for them to move, make sounds, appear/disappear, follow lines, change colors, etc. An additional feature - animation occurs as they place a object into a holder, make slight changes to it in subsequent frames, and then program the script to move from one frame to the next, similar to the technique illustrators use to animate cartoons.

The sixth grade students receive technology instruction three times per week. At the beginning of the school year, we loosely followed the Squeaky Tales Course, which was designed by Waveplace (www.waveplace.org). It consists of 30 fifty minute lessons. On some days, we covered two or more lessons, and conversely some lessons took more than three sessions to complete. During that time students created individual storybooks. They wrote multiple pages, each with its own text, illustrations and animations. We finished the Squeaky course during November. Before winter break, students went to the media center, located picture books, captured pages with our classroom document camera and began to animate the pages and recorded text they read. Their projects resembled children’s storybook software and/or online e-books. Alas, after the first few pages, the children began to tire. There were long waits to access
the document camera, and after awhile, the projects began to lose their novelty. It was then the students were given a hiatus from technology in order to concentrate on math lessons during the next several weeks. After FCAT, we resumed our work with eToys. I met with my students and asked them what they wanted to do for the last quarter. I suggested video production, and some other ideas but each and every child wanted to go back to eToys! Their next adventure was to create games, and they got a lot of mileage from the joystick feature in eToys.

Several weeks ago, I attended the quarterly meeting held by the CCPS Technology Department. One of our presenters demonstrated how to add a voki (avatar) to our websites. I returned to school and allowed students to experiment by making different vokis, and then the following week I challenged them to design their own avatars using eToys.

Data Collection

- Student report cards
- A colleague’s observations
- A school administrator’s narrative comments
- An anonymous student survey
- Student artifacts – storybooks, animated picture books, computer games and vokis
- Students’ written reflections

Data Results and Analysis

The graphs show that in twelve categories; 2nd and 3rd quarter gains in reading, language arts, and math and 2nd and 3rd quarter drops in reading, language arts, and math, the technology students outperformed their peers by achieving higher gains per quarter in each subject area and experiencing fewer drops in grades during the 2nd quarter. It was only during the 3rd quarter that the technology students’ grades fell more than their peers’. During a class discussion, my
students were quick to point out that was when we temporarily suspended eToys to focus on math instruction.
Observing the class one day, our assistant principal wrote, “All students were on task and were excited about doing the project. Each student wanted to show one another what game they were creating, and they were putting quality work into their project.”
One sixth grade teacher commented, “The curriculum has helped each student reach his/her highest potential. They were always excited about their finished project.”
Students said, “I think taking this classes was the most brilliant idea I have ever had,” “I learned how to do stuff I probably never would have learned,” “This week I am making a voki in eToys and believe me, it is hard work,” “I learned how technology really works,” “My teacher says we can get a job in computer animating and programming,” “It is my favorite class of the day” and “I’m just sorry our school year is coming to an end.” Amen.

Reflection
This inquiry exemplifies the symbiotic relationship my students and I developed as a result of working with eToys. We learned and grew together. As I observed their progress, I gained more confidence in my decision to incorporate eToys into this year’s curriculum. That confidence and enthusiasm encouraged the children to develop even greater expertise as programmers. The bolder I got with instruction and challenges, the more brilliant their projects became. Sometimes they took guidance from me, and sometimes my direction came from them.

I was able to establish that there is a relationship between computer programming and student achievement. Based on the students’ comments, I also determined that eToys has a positive effect on student motivation and self-esteem. As a result of observations from other professionals, student engagement was verified. I am so pleased with the results of this inquiry and grateful for the assistance of Ms Eunice Johnson and Mr. Joseph Mikulski, most of all I am extremely proud of my students for the effort they put forth.

References


We Love Retelling a Story
Katherine Sapp, Reading Resource
Pinecrest Elementary

Purpose
I am an intervention reading teacher, and I selected a first grade group of migrant students to work with. These striving readers needed vocabulary, comprehension, and predicting activities to help with retelling a story. They worked well together and the books and activities selected helped them with orally retelling the story and then writing a sentence about the book. They illustrated the story sentence and this helped them with the oral retelling.

Question
Will our migrant students learn and progress in vocabulary and cloze sentences, by using text especially selected and matched to the students interest? 
What activities are most helpful in increasing vocabulary and the retelling of the stories?
Will art and writing activities help my students?

Method
We selected little books that were non-fiction science and social studies areas. We did picture walks through the book to put vocabulary in place. Questions were encouraged and answered or discussed. We practiced with cloze sentences, art work, study buddy, writing, labeling and retelling. By this time the students were to retell their story, but they felt it was a non-threatening situation and they were free to tell about their work and book they had read. By combining science and art or social studies and art, we were using differentiated instruction, which goes along with current research as a valuable tool to help non-English speaking students.

Data Collection
The students were given 10 words (Word Use Fluency Quiz) to see if they could explain the term or use the term in a sentence. Only one student had three of the ten correct on the pretest. The other students did not feel confident in using terms as matter, energy etc. on the pretest. By March, the students had an understanding of these terms as evidenced by the posttest results.

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</table>

Data Results and Analysis
These ELL migrant students showed gains in confidence, vocabulary and oral language development. They are more willing and able to ask questions and retell a story in art and oral language. The art work, or illustrations and labeling, gave them the confidence to retell the story. As they held their work and showed it to us, they were inspired to talk about the story and we let the students (study buddies) tell what they liked about the art and story.

Reflection
Inquiry methods work well to help these students learn story retelling. This inquirer learned more about matching books to readers as we found the student interest, prior knowledge and using differentiated instruction to promote student success.

Assessment drives instruction, and the pretest showed that the vocabulary was an area of critical concern. These students needed to hear and read words for a clearer understanding. The little books were assisting them in learning and I did a “book walk” or looking at each picture and discussing what was happening. The students gained knowledge and confidence to help them use vocabulary and skills in retelling their story. We then reinforced the learning with story writing and art work. One technique was to draw a simple picture of what they were reading about, for example, sea creatures. I found that the students were eager to label the creature. If we drew a fish we could label the fins, gills, scales etc. This helped them remember little facts when they retold their story.

Just assessing is not enough! Then the practice is important; however, we had to determine what type of practice was most beneficial. The cloze sentences certainly helped students choose the right words to fit the answer and their vocabulary improved. The students themselves let me know how much they loved art. They noticed the illustrations in the book so I encouraged them to draw their own version of their favorite part of the story. With Inquiry, I wanted to add the more creative area of art to help the students gain the ability to speak in front of their peers and retell a story. By having their art work to hold onto, they did gain the ability and confidence to tell others what they had learned. We used markers or colored pencils for the art work. These students would ask at the beginning of the lesson if they were going to illustrate their story. This also helped them learn “author” and “illustrator” of each book because they were told they were going to be allowed to illustrate their story.

I plan to use the information and data gained in this Inquiry to help students in the future. I collaborated with other teachers who work with these students to ask if their academics are on target and I would suggest the creative way of helping the student remember, make connections, and be more engaged. My data shows one student in November would not answer questions on the Word Use Fluency quiz. By January, that student was responding and working toward story retelling. This shows the importance of this Inquiry and how student academics can improve.

Resources

ASCD Journal e-newsletter
http://www.edutopia.org/marine-science-artintegrated-studies
Edutopica science / art integrated studies

Cognate Connection for English Language Learners
Joanne Berrios Sewell, ELL Elementary Resource Teacher
Pinecrest Elementary

Purpose
I am a bilingual, Spanish/English, resource teacher at a rural, largely Hispanic, Title I school. I recently completed a training called SIOP, Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol, by Sue Hunt of Pearson Education Inc., where I was excited to learn how important teaching cognates, words that are similar in both languages, is for English Language Learners. I was also moved by the research of Allington and McGill-Franzen (1991). They explained how “students from homes and communities with languages and cultures that differ than the language and culture of a school are frequently evaluated on their inadequacies, rather than on their strengths.” Moll and Ruiz (2002) write, “This perception has too often led to lowered academic expectations of these students. Lower academic perceptions, in turn, lead to lower academic performances. I identified four previously retained Spanish speaking fourth graders who scored Low Intermediate on the reading section of CELLA (Comprehensive English Language Learning Assessment). They need to increase their vocabulary, reading comprehension and dictionary skills. They also need a boost in confidence. This all brought me to my wondering about teaching cognates to increase their performance and give them a boost by teaching to their strengths.

Questions

• How will teaching cognates, words that are similar in both languages, affect students’ vocabulary and comprehension?
• Will teaching to students’ strengths help motivate them to improve their dictionary skills?

Method

During three 30 minute literacy block rotations, I plan on providing constructivist (Inductive) activities. Students in two cooperative learning teams will compete to build lists of cognates by using the following resources: FCAT Spanish/English dictionaries, 100 Book Challenge books and student textbooks. I will pretest the students on their cognate awareness, share and explain with a chart showing the research adapted from: Calderon, M., August, D., Duran, Madden, N., R. Slavin & M. Gill (2003) that found 30% -40% of all words in English have a related word in Spanish. I will also observe behaviors, hold student discussions, and collect student artifacts.

Data Collection

To pretest the students on their cognate awareness, I gave them two examples: telephone/telefono and family/familia. They were then asked to state or write as many cognates/pairs/ they could think of. I observed student behaviors during the activities, held student discussions and collected artifacts.

Data Results and Analysis

At the onset, students could list from 1 to 5 cognates. At the end of our activities they could list up to 47 cognates. They gained proficiency in their dictionary skills. Their improved confidence was obvious. When asked, “Why is it helpful to learn about cognates?” They responded: I like it when they connect. You can figure it out in Spanish or English. I like it because they sound the same. They are fun. I also like it because there are lots of them. I liked writing in English and Spanish. We can learn more English and Spanish. I could observe their enthusiasm and willingness to work on their lists. I could see them searching and searching internally to find possibilities. The thinking I observed was worth its weight in gold.
I consciously choose not to teach “false cognates,” similar sounding words with different meanings, during this project. But now that I am more comfortable with the topic, I will not hesitate.

**Reflection**

I have known about cognates for a long time. I have occasionally cited them during lessons. But I was lost as to how to explicitly teach them. There is so much to cover and time is so tight. How was I going to fit this in? I needed a vehicle to branch out and “just do it.” The inquiry process gave me the push. I found so much background research on the topic by just Googling cognates.

It also helped to bounce ideas around with Kathy Gould, (personal communication, March 18th, 2009). During our phone conference, she helped me to pare down my cohort and goals. I am so glad I did. My project became so much more doable. Also, the feedback from other professionals in our learning community was encouraging. I felt like I was really on the right track for student success and my own.

I see so much value in putting in the time and energy to teach cognates to our English language learners. My favorite comment by a student was when he said, “We know so much!” Another plus was when I saw students in the hallway. They asked, “Can I go with you?” I could tell they were feeling confident about our little project. When we started, I had to help them use the FCAT dictionaries. Now, they were trying to race each other to find words.

We have already created an index card matching game. In the future, I will help students create word walls of cognates based on word endings and subject matter. How about a game on the computer? I cannot wait to share my information with others. I plan on giving our administrators a mini cognate lesson.

**References**


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**Effects of Drill and Practice with Young ESE Students**

Irene Stevens, ESE Inclusion Resource Teacher
Pinecrest Elementary

Purpose
Kindergarten and first grade students need to improve their recognition skills of primary/rote information in order to progress in their IEP goals and in their instructional levels. Content is taught in the general education classrooms according to the Collier County District’s Curriculum Map. General Education Teachers review and practice new information as often as the curriculum map allows. Since the majority of my ESE students have diagnosed learning disabilities and processing deficits in the area of memory (some have both long and short term memory deficits), the time allowed for practice of new content information is insufficient for my students to commit information to their working memory. Also, many of my students were already functioning below grade level standards at the beginning of the school year. Some were repeating the grade and some had been promoted with remediation recommended.

I felt that it was imperative to find a way to repeatedly practice and drill the rote content information so that my students could reach a level of automaticity in the use of the everyday content information that they need to function in the general education classroom. They needed to reach a working level of memory, knowledge and use of the basic content so that they could continue to learn new content and compete with their fellow general education students without being bound by their lack of or slow recall. The challenge then became finding ways to motivate my students to reach this level of proficiency.

Question
• How will the use of drill and practice, used on a regular basis and in motivating ways, affect students’ recognition skills for phonemes, alphabet letters, numerals and mathematics facts?

Method
During daily scheduled time for ESE services, each kindergarten and first grade student participated in drill and practice exercises. Each grade level’s drill and practice reflected that grade level’s curriculum content according to the Collier County Curriculum Maps. Kindergarten practiced Spalding phonemes, recognition of alphabet letters and numerals. First grade practiced addition basic facts early in the school year and subtraction basic facts at the end of the year.

Each drill and practice session focused on one set of information and was repeatedly drilled daily using a variety of flash cards, games and competitions to motivate students. Each set of information was practiced until students could pass quizzes with at least an 80% score, showing mastery. After a set of information was mastered, new information was practiced. Old information was practice by integrating with the new information thus insuring maintenance and retention of all information learned. Practices and drills continued in this way to ensure long term memory was established.

Data Collection
Students were given a pre-test before initiation of any drill and practice exercises to establish baseline levels. Drill and practice sessions were conducted daily. Field notes were taken on these results. Quizzes were given weekly and monthly and the information from these was used to prepare the charts and graphs used on the Expo display board.
### Data Results and Analysis

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**Student Kdg-C**

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The above are the quiz and test results from the drill and practice sessions of three of my kindergarten students. These results indicate the growth in every area that was practiced over this school year. Data is given in number of items known over total number of letters, numerals or phonemes that were being practiced during that month. Each of these students has met the grade level standards for promotion to the first grade.
Drill and Practice Data for Grade 1 – 9/2008 through 3/2009 All data is # of correct problems in a 1 minute drill. Addition facts include +0, +1 and doubles (2+2, 3+3, etc.) Subtraction facts include -0, -1 and doubles (2-2, 3-3, etc.) Both of these students have met the grade level standards to be promoted to the second grade.

Reflection
As an ESE teacher many, if not most, of the students on my caseload have specific learning disabilities with processing deficits in the areas of short term, long term and / or working memory. The teaching for these students really involves finding a way to improve their recall of certain information when they need it. We have used acronyms, chants and rhymes for many years to help students recall steps to a process and specific information for a test. The younger students also have a wealth of basic fact type information that they need to have in their memory bank so that it can be recalled and used in learning the next steps of reading and doing math.

This project helped me discover new ways to motivate my students to practice their basic facts more. The games and competitions that were developed using the existing flash cards helped to motivate students to practice and eventually improved their recall of information. A real “AHA” moment came during this project when the non-ESE students in my classes insisted on participating in most of the games and competitions. This had the side effect of up-lifting my students since they had had more practice and thus an edge over their peers in using their recall. At first, the ESE students won handedly. The other students were then motivated to practice more, too. All in all, the project was a great success. General education teachers only have so much time built into the curriculum to practice basic fact information. Students have to spend time outside of the regular school day practicing what they were taught in order to commit this information to their memory. This project showed that with motivation, students will practice.

References


Reading In The Library
Shirley Wallner, Media Specialist Prek-6th
Pinecrest Elementary

Purpose
As a new media specialist, I was concerned by the low number of books being checked out by the students. It is my belief that a school’s top priority should be teaching our children to read
well and help them develop a love of reading. We should encourage them to become passionate lifelong readers. Unfortunately, many forces outside the control of schools and teachers have negatively impacted our children from learning to love reading. These forces include television, video games, poverty, the breakup of the family and the inability or unavailability of adult guidance. In addition, schools may have lost sight as to why we read with the placement of constant testing and deadly goals such as fluency. Students should be encouraged not to see reading as a subject but as an activity that people who are engaged with the world do all the time. Our students should not view reading as something you do to pass the FCAT.

Additional concerns arose as I observed students making their book selections in the library. Many would choose books that were too difficult to read and end up returning the books the next day unread. My concern was that this pattern of attempting to read, and being unable to do so would result in a student establishing a strong dislike for books. In fact, many students just stopped coming to the library as they viewed reading as something that they could not do and it just was not fun.

**Question**
- Would the use of the program Reading Counts by Scholastic motivate the fifth and sixth graders to read more books and increase the likelihood of them selecting books on their level?

**Method**
The Reading Counts Program was a new reading incentive program purchased by Collier County. Reading coaches received training and were in turn to teach the teachers how to use the program. However, the training received was not sufficient for this inquiry project. Therefore, my first step in my quest to master this new program was to read the manual and guidelines. These were available on line and were easily accessible. I then established a class that would present the necessary information to teachers and students. After meeting with the teachers of fifth and sixth grade they signed up their students to take the class in the library.

Students first learned how to use the Destiny Program of our library. This is the database for all of the books located in the library. Students were shown how to get on Destiny and search for a particular book. They then received instruction on how to take a Reading Counts test. It was at this time that students learned their individual Lexile Level as a result of the Scholastic Reading Inventory test. Information was provided as how this level would allow them to select a book in the library that they could be successful in reading. Selecting a book from the library that was too difficult was compared with having ice skates in Immokalee. It is nice to have the skates, but if you cannot use them, they are not much fun. A Goose Bump book may be nice to have, but if you cannot read it, not much fun. I tried to instill the fact that it is not that they cannot read, it is the fact that the book is just not right for them.

The next step was to collaborate with the teachers in creating a method of monitoring the students and their progress. Individual cards were placed in the library with all students Lexile Level. They would select their card and present it to the Media Assistant at the time of checkout. This was a way to insure that students were selecting their correct Lexile Level.
Data Collection
Scholastic Reading has a report component that allows for easy tracking of points, number of books read, quizzes passed and average Lexile Level of books read. We used these reports to keep track of students’ achievement. In addition, monthly rewards were presented to students in the form of certificates and book coupons. These were given to the top three students in each classroom with the highest points.

In addition to these reports, the number of books circulated or checked out in the library was monitored. Destiny, which is the check out system in Collier County, is capable of running reports monthly for this information. Histories of students checkout were looked at also to insure that student’s book selection were within their Lexile level.

Data Results and Analysis

Grade 5 (95 total students)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>FIRST TEST # of Students</th>
<th>LAST TEST # of Students</th>
<th>Increase/Decrease</th>
<th>Percentage Change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Advanced</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Increase of 11 students</td>
<td>0% to 12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proficient</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>Increase of 9 students</td>
<td>49% to 59%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basic</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>Decrease of 20 students</td>
<td>38% to 17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Below Basic</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Remained the same</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The table above indicates a growth in Lexile level for more than half of the students. In addition, students also showed an increase in their Lexile levels. The number of books read was a total of 965 books. Students’ book circulation in this grade level also increased by 54%.

Grade 6 (115 total students)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>FIRST TEST # of Students</th>
<th>LAST TEST # of Students</th>
<th>Increase/Decrease</th>
<th>Percentage Change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Advanced</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Increase of 4 students</td>
<td>2% to 5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proficient</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>Increase of 29 students</td>
<td>16% to 47%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basic</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>Decrease of 21 students</td>
<td>38% to 17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Below Basic</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Decrease of 12 students</td>
<td>30% to 20%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sixth grade students also showed an increase in their Lexile levels. The number of books read was a total of 965 books. Students’ book circulation in this grade level also increased by 54%.

Reflection
Scholastic Reading Counts is an easy effective method of measuring students’ growth in reading levels and is a successful motivating tool in encouraging students to read. The flexibility it allows in reports and monitoring of progress allows teachers to easily assess their students reading habits. The testing component, SRI provides a student with a Lexile Level that they can easily use when making their selection of what books to read in the library. Students were much more comfortable in selecting books that they could read in the library. The cards provided to them with their levels gave them a guide to which books they could easily read. There were fewer books returned unread as each book selected was at their appropriate level. (This was evidenced by the correlation of books selected and reading Counts taken.)

Students felt successful as readers and were therefore more likely to pick up another book knowing that they could truly enjoy it. If a child is going to grow into a truly special adult –
someone who thinks, considers other points of views, has an open mind, is enable to discuss
great ideas – a love of reading is an essential foundation. Providing a student with the right tools
in selecting the right book for themselves is a first step in creating a student who is not only a
successful reader but a student who loves reading. Scholastic Counts is one method we can use
as teachers to encourage this.

References
Esquith, R. (2007). Teach like your hair’s on fire: The methods and madness inside room 56.
New York, New York: Scholastic Professional Paper, Metametrics, Inc.

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Related Arts for School and Community
Keith Barber-Art teacher PK – 6th Grade
Pinecrest Elementary

Purpose
I am a related arts teacher for an entire Title 1 school of approximately 650 students. My
students have a passion for art, and for many, it is a good reason to come to school. These
students, and their families, should know that their art is appreciated. We needed a unique way
of displaying the students’ art work and thus improving their self esteem, along with their artistic
talents. Art did help activate their prior knowledge and academic skills.

The art displayed for important community and school events appealed to students. They won
prizes and were especially proud. Students’ families realized the importance of related arts
activities, especially as a learning experience.

Method
Related arts are very important to our students and their school day is influenced by
differentiated instruction. These art projects are displayed, and the students felt successful and
worked to accomplish the task at hand. I used differentiated instruction by combining art, social
studies, historical events, traditions, and vocabulary to improve academic skills and student
knowledge. Community events at winter break gave our school first prize in float decorating.

Data
Photos, student art work, and field notes will supply data.

November: Student art work displayed at Florida Community Bank in Immokalee. Made plans
and began projects for Christmas parade float.

December: Made float for parade and it won first place in the float competition. Student
artifacts: photos

January through March: Collected designs and data.
April: Displayed at Expo.

Data Analysis
Our outcomes were met and students did grow in their art skills by one year.

Reflections
Importance of related arts on students, their families, our school and community was verified. This inquirer felt that the displaying of student art and community art projects were especially beneficial to our school. This project will be expanded for next year and maybe in the after school tutoring program.

In the process of my inquiry, I learned that art is a highly important aspect of our children’s education. This was apparent for many reasons, among them:

1. Many students need the visual arts as a form of self-expression.
2. Some students take great pride in participation in art exhibits in the community.
3. A sense of community and friendly competitive spirit can be generated through visual art. For example, our annual Christmas float. This float won first place in the huge community parade.
4. It helps students take pride in their ethnic heritage.

The arts are an important part of every student’s education and this year the school and community benefitted as well.

References
Computer research and books to research art vocabulary and background of work to be displayed. Student interest gathered through discussion. Books: Mark Kistler’s Imagination Station, Mark Kistler’s Draw Squad, etc. Websites: www.suelebau.com, www.pics4learning.com, and www.pppst.com/arts.html

Word Analysis
Iris Borghese, Reading Teacher
Pinecrest Elementary School

Purpose
Word analysis skills are needed for students to be both successful readers and writers. As many of my students are English Language Learners, various factors contribute to their inability to manipulate words and spell effectively. My inquiry leads me to wonder if students demonstrate improved scores on word analysis assignments along with increased motivation to complete tradition word analysis (spelling) tasks utilizing computer based activities.

Question
• Will the use of computer based optional Sortegories activities included in the Language! reading intervention program improve students word analysis skills as demonstrate by increased scores on spelling tasks?

Sub Question
• Will the computer based *Sortegories* activities motivate students to complete word analysis tasks?

**Method**
A group of sixth grade students were selected to participate in this activity. As part of this inquiry, students were provided additional targeted practice with word analysis. This additional practice was conducted utilizing computer based activities called *Sortegories*. *Sortegories* is a supplemental part of the *LANGUAGE! The Comprehensive Literacy Curriculum*. *LANGUAGE!* is designed for students who are reading two or more years below grade level. It uses an integrated approach to literacy instruction to accelerate learning so that students are able to access grade level content. Students completed this additional practice utilizing *Sortegories* in class as a group activity 2-3 times per week. The students were provided with immediate feedback and additional opportunities to practice the skills.

**Data Collection**
At the onset of the inquiry, the scores from a sample word analysis assignment were collected from students. Throughout this process, observation was used to determine student levels of engagement during word analysis tasks. In April of 2009, another sample word analysis assignment score was collected for each student. Also, in May of 2009, the students completed an informal survey answering questions about their interest and attitude towards work analysis tasks.

**Data Results and Analysis**
The graph charts pre and post word analysis assignment scores. The scores show that nine students showed growth and two students earned decreased scores. Students were observed to be more engaged at each *Sortegories* session when compared to the paper and pencil activities. According to the survey, students overwhelmingly preferred the computer based *Sortegories* program to the traditional paper and pencil assignments. All students reported that they enjoyed working on *Sortegories*. 

![Word Analysis (Spelling) Scores](image-url)
Reflection
I think the students benefited from the additional computer based practice. This process also
reinforced the concept that motivation is key. Although the traditional paper and pencil word
analysis activities were requiring the students to use the same exact skills as Sortegories, most of
the students did not like to complete the assignments. However, they enjoyed using Sortegories.
In the future, I think that students would benefit from individual practice as well. I would
provide students with both group and individual time using Sortegories.

This inquiry has encouraged me to continue to indentify innovative ways to increase learner
engagement on tasks in all curricular areas. It is so important to provide a variety of engaging
methods for students to practice skill acquisition.

References

Imokalee High School
Responding To Your Students: Cultivating Learners
Karen A. Torres, Ninth Grade Teacher
Imokalee High School

Purpose
The students with whom I work are 9th grade minority students in a Title I school who are below
grade level in math as measured by their FCAT math scores. In addition, many have very little
confidence in their math abilities. As their historic math data indicates, they have had very
limited success in math since third grade.

I realized that if we were going to make significant progress, I was going to have to increase my
use of formative assessments as well as broaden the range of formative assessment activities that
I implement. In a 1998 study, researchers examined over 250 studies and found that the use of
formative assessment techniques (beyond typical teacher observation and circulating) produced
significant accelerations in learning. Increased and varied formative assessment not only
increased achievement levels, it narrowed the achievement gaps, especially with low-performing
students. These are my students.

Question
• How will increasing the frequency and range of formative assessment activities in our
classroom impact student achievement?

Sub Questions
• Will achievement be accelerated?
• How will this increase in formative activity impact student confidence in math?
• Will students’ attitudes about math become more positive?
• How can I build additional student reflection into their learning?
• How will my teaching be impacted?

Method
To effectively implement the additional formative assessment techniques I chose, I had to first build a classroom community in each of my classes. This had to be the foundation to allow for successful cooperative group work, students sharing their thought processes, and peer and self assessment. A positive classroom community gave students the comfort level to openly reflect on their understandings and to provide me with honest, specific feedback on different techniques that we incorporated in our setting.

As I worked with my students, my focus became finding out what they didn’t know and understand, and not what they did know. This focus also influenced my questioning. I used diagnostic tests prior to new instruction to determine what they didn’t know in relation to the new topic. I verbalized the purpose and shared the decisions for instruction based on those tests. An open, two-way dialogue of where we were, where we were going and why was instrumental in building trust and teamwork between the students and me.

Lastly, I engaged my students in formative assessment with the use of technology. I learned how to use a clicker system with them for immediate feedback for all. When we use the clickers, we get a bar graph of the number of students who picked each answer after a question. I incorporate them within the lesson as we go, not with predetermined questions loaded in the computer. The assessment drives instruction. I can tell if we have a misconception and ask questions accordingly. A student told me she liked seeing the bar graphs after each question. She said she doesn’t feel alone in her thinking if she didn’t understand. With the clickers, I am later able to go into the data and examine each student’s responses. This guides me in my work with specific students. The other technology I find helpful is the use of an Interwrite Pad and Mobi Pads. These pads all function in the same way. The pad puts me among my students. I can write on the white board by using the pad. I am with them, working with them directly as we learn. I also hand the board off to a student to do a problem and explain. Having the 4 pads on at once, I am able to split the white board into 4 quadrants and 4 students can work a problem at the same time. They really like this. Many of them are more comfortable doing a problem from their seat instead of at the board.

Data Collection
Data was collected for the students’ attitudes about math through the pre and post administration of a survey. The survey was 5 questions using a 5 point Likert Scale of strongly disagree, disagree, neutral, agree, and strongly agree. They took the survey the first week of school in August and again in May. The May survey included an extra question about their confidence level in math. In the original survey, it was a written response. I used the district benchmark tests, given at roughly quarterly intervals to collect the academic data specific to Algebra. Lastly, I used their report card grades for math. Data was collected as to the number of each letter grade earned in each quarter. For the last quarter, their interim grades were used.
**Data Results and Analysis**

The math attitude survey showed significant positive changes in how students thought about math. The decrease in the percent of students who had found math difficult was especially noteworthy. Although they may find it challenging, they feel they can learn it. Confidence levels are high. The percentages in the chart represent the combination of agree and strongly agree answers.

Benchmark 1 was given in October, benchmark 2 in December, and benchmark 3 in January. This inquiry project was fully implemented in January. It did take many months in the first semester to build classroom community in each class. My students were dealing with many developmental social issues that warranted consideration and had a very negative attitude toward math. I believe we overcame these issues as indicated by the spike in May of the benchmark percentages of achievement.

The report card grade graph reflects an upward movement of grades. The number of “F”s has decreased from 10 the first quarter to 5 for the final interim. The amount of “C”s increased from 25 to 31. This data is not as sensitive as I would like it to be. It does not reflect a student’s growth from a low percentage in a letter category to a high percentage within that same category. My students have shown greater academic growth than shown in the graph.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Aug. Pd. 1</th>
<th>May Pd. 1</th>
<th>Aug. Pd. 3</th>
<th>May Pd. 3</th>
<th>Aug. Pd. 6</th>
<th>May Pd. 6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I feel positive when I hear the word “math”.</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>62%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I find math to be difficult.</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Math is valuable in my life.</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I use math daily.</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>73%</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel confident in my math ability.</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>69%</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Benchmark Tests: Algebra Portion**

**Reflection**

The results of this inquiry are exciting to me as a teacher. I have overcome a lot. I will take their new
confidence with them to their next math class. They know how much they have grown and inspired each other to try and take risks in sharing their work with each other. I had many students who would not even answer a question early in the year and, thanks to the technology, in April and May they were volunteering to put work up on the board via the technology pads. This is my first year teaching high school students and Algebra. My prior experience is upper elementary level. I will implement what I learned in this inquiry as soon as we resume classes. My new question is how do I accelerate the process? Our growth was impressive. I’ll be working with very similar students next year and I need to find a way to make it happen sooner. Formative assessment has helped me to really know each of my students as a learner and to meet the individual needs of each one. I believe that implementing these diverse strategies also brought us all closer together as a true learning community.

References

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**Unlocking the Keys to Writing**
Maryann Caseres, 10th Grade English Teacher
Immokalee High School

**Purpose**
Most of my students admit to disliking writing, and always seem to always ask, “Do we have to write 5 paragraphs?” Since elementary school students have been taught to write using the five paragraph writing format so they are quite adept with the format by the time they get to high school. By using the format, they put forth very little effort in communicating their ideas effectively with their writing. Most did not use transition words, elaborate with details, use voice to add interest, struggled with grammar and lacked vocabulary to add variety of word choice. This year, for the first time, I was assigned to teach 10th grade English. The data indicated that the majority of my students were writing below 3.5 using the Florida Writes rubric. I began thinking about how I could get my students to be successful writers. “With struggling writers, a great deal of modeling, explaining, and guided practice must take place to assure that the students are in their zone of proximal development as they grow as writers and self-regulators.” (Vygotsky, 1978).

Since they knew how to write, but needed to add that extra kick to their writing, I wondered if conducting writing conferences with an emphasis on vocabulary would improve their writing, and thereby increase their writing scores. Research showed that “conferences are very effective for assessing and teaching students skills in revision, but can be employed for the assessment and instruction of all facets of the writing process, including the choice of topics and content. By conferencing, the teacher also identifies strengths and weaknesses, themes, and student growth in writing” (Romeo, 2008).
Question

- Will conducting writing conferences with an emphasis on vocabulary increase students’ writing scores?

Sub questions

- Will the conferences help students use new vocabulary?
- Will the conferences positively impact students’ attitude about writing?
- How will I meet my students’ needs through conferencing?
- What strategies will I use to specifically increase their vocabulary?
- How will my teaching be impacted?

Method

Before beginning the writing conferences, I had students become familiar with the Six Traits of Writing and the state of Florida Writing rubric. The Six Traits of writing focus on ideas, organization, voice, word choice, sentence fluency, and conventions. These traits were introduced gradually and during small group conferences, and writing assignments were applied to their writing to help them self and peer edit using the state of Florida rubric. “It is the teacher’s responsibility to guide, scaffold, and extend the discussion as well as to explain and model a strategy or component of the process and identify areas that need to be developed” (Tierney, 2003). During the conferences, I was able to read and discuss their writing, but focused on asking them about their word choice. Some students even noticed that they used the same words over and over and began to see the benefits of using synonyms and, what we called “million dollar” words. The words that students began to use were then posted in the room as well as kept in their folders. Conferencing gave me insight into what areas of writing which were troublesome. It also gave me an opportunity to sit with them to discuss and improve their word choice and vocabulary.

To help my students specifically increase their vocabulary, I used a variety of strategies through individual, small and whole group instruction. Students created synonyms and antonyms during bell work. By scoring their papers using the Florida writing rubric, students were able to monitor their improvement and they were actually motivated to write as their writing scores improved. When papers were shared aloud anonymously, we evaluated the words used and if they were used effectively. We also discussed if any changes could be made.

Data Collection and Analysis

Conducting writing conferences seemed to help my students make gains in their writing. Based on Collier Writes scores, their average was 2.91 and on FCAT Writes their average improved to 3.7. Furthermore, when comparing the 2008 Collier Writes to the 2009 FCAT writing, 67% of the students improved their writing scores and 94% achieved a passing score of 3.5 or higher. Only one student dropped in his score. His monthly writing assessments that were conducted from September to April also showed a decline in his writing proficiency.
**Reflection**

Conferencing with my students allowed me to differentiate my instruction for each student based on need. Some students required more help than others on building their vocabulary as well as on writing techniques. The results were positive and did help my struggling writers improve on their writing. Next year, I will again be teaching 10th graders and will begin conferencing much sooner than I did this year. My conferences will focus on helping students build their vocabulary as well as learning how to use the state of Florida rubric. Conferencing has proven to work, and most all, teachers like this one on one or small group instruction. However, time constraints can be an issue when extra help is needed during the conferences. With classes being 49 minutes in length next year and with about 29 students in a class, I will have to make sure that writing conferences do not take a back seat. I will be creative in maintaining writing conferences.

**References**


Making Academic Progress Through Visual Representation to Support Students with Severe and Profound Disabilities
Dr. Janette Bosetin, High School ESE Teacher
Immokalee High School

Purpose
As a high school teacher of students with severe and profound disabilities, I have observed student engagement in reading and word recognition while using pictures with words, as compared to using words without pictures. Upon examining how students engaged in reading using pictures, as compared without picture support, students appeared to engage in learning developing conversations and dialogues with peers, as compared to using only text without picture support. While using pictures with words, students developed engagement in the lesson supporting their learning, communication and interactions with others. I observed students using pictures as a springboard developing conversations, as they connected themes and concepts of information using various modes of communication. Additionally, students engaged in interacting with peers while using pictures. Students interacted conversing through pointing to pictures, showing pictures and interacting using pictures and simple sign language. Furthermore, the aforementioned picture representation, as compared to only text led me to analyze this phenomena further determining if students made greater academic gains while given picture support, as compared to no picture support.

Before reading and instructing, students are provided with vocabulary words given picture representation, as students communicate their understanding. Students engaged in discussions, defining words and terms before reading a passage or reading selection using various modes of communication. Additionally, students developed peer buddy conversations manipulating words and pictures supporting their learning as they compared, matched and developed storyboards. As a result of these observations, I was interested in analyzing how students learned and what supports were necessary for them to continue to make academic progress and further engage in learning. I examined if pictures and words, as compared to using words without pictures increased student learning. Furthermore, using an array of strategies and techniques underpinned by picture representation using words, as compared to using words without pictures led me to this inquiry.

Question
- Do students with severe and profound disabilities improve reading and word recognition skills when presented with pictures and words, as compared to using words without pictures?
Method
I taught small group and individualized instruction, collecting data on all students within my classroom. I focused and reported on three students, who were expressive, able to communicate effectively. Student grade levels were ninth grade, eleventh grade and twelfth grade. Students chosen are struggling readers reading at early emergent to emergent levels of reading. When instructing, I used various instructional strategies, techniques and supports to engage students in learning. Engaging students in learning consisted of using pictures with words, as compared to using only words. Students developed skills matching pictures with words, writing word shapes, analyzing words in mazes and discussing key concepts. After each unit of instruction was completed, I conducted passage reading assessments using pictures and words, as compared to assessing students reading using words without pictures.

Data Collection
Data collection consisted of reading passage assessments using pictures with words, as compared to using only words. I assessed each student on a one-to-one basis after each month’s unit of study. Individual assessments involved lengthy, one-to-one, passage readings, given no time element for reading support. The students read to the teacher. For each word read incorrectly, I put a slash through the word. For each word read correctly, no mark was made. After students completed their passage reading, I scored the student assessment, reviewing it with each student. The final data collections were outcome scores of passage reading evidenced with graphs and charts.

Words, gestures and emotions are always taken in consideration when assessing students. Many times, students tell a story through body language, voice inflections and gestures. Direct gestures and voice fluctuations become meaningful and relate to what is being investigated (Douglas, 1976). Paying attention to how students react as well as how they tell their story is a critical component of research (Munro, 1998). Observing how people express themselves is as important, if not more important, than the transmission of information occurring during instruction and assessments.

Cook (1989) declared having more participants in a study is not always the best approach. Creating depth, saturation and focus provides meaningful information within any exploratory study. This study concentrates on in-depth information as it relates to student learning and human interactions. Sufficiency of information is important as it portrays common or similar experiences revealed through a collection of data representing common thoughts across data collections. Researchers suggest information portraying the same information across data collections is considered saturated. Information that is saturated supports the reliability of information within research studies (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Data Results and Analysis
Data results from each student’s reading passages were documented, collected and analyzed over a five-month period. Reading passage assessment scores were graphed and charted for all students. Student’s academic growth and progress were documented using pictures and words, as compared to using only words. Ongoing analysis and review were conducted synthesizing and evaluating data collections. I chose three expressive students, collecting data from reading passages. Students were assessed one-to-one reading aloud, as I kept a running record for each
student. I chose high school students across grade levels examining data methodically separating it into parts and studying interrelations. Reading passage scores for students were as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Student-A</th>
<th>Student-B</th>
<th>Student-C</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Students</td>
<td>Pictures</td>
<td>No Pictures</td>
<td>Pictures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OCT</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>OCT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NOV</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>NOV</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JAN</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>JAN</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FEB</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>FEB</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MARCH</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>MARCH</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The score are listed as ten, as in ten out of twenty words read correctly. When students were reading passages with text, their scores reflect lower scores, as compared to reading text with picture support. Student’s scores show incremental, yet meaningful academic progress and growth when reading with picture support. When analyzing student data collections academic gains were seen evident when using picture representation, as compared to using only text as seen below.

**Student A**

**Student B**

**Student C**

**Reflection**

The focus of this inquiry was to determine if using pictures with words, verses using words without pictures would increase reading and word recognition. I collected student data over a 5 month period determining if students made academic progress using pictures with words, as compared to using only words. Establishing an approach of why students need to read provided students with ways to discover how to read, increasing student learning (Tovani, 2000). Instruction was structured and systematic. Engaging students in learning encouraged them to
work in small groups toward a common purpose and outcome (Johnson, Johnson & Smith, 1991). Team based assignments created cooperation, communication and collaboration. May (1995) affirms new information presented to learners must be put into action, allowing students to apply the skills they learn. He maintains that students process information in the way information is presented to them. As student’s process information, it should be presented to them in various ways. As students learn new skills, they should have opportunity to apply their learning through feedback, reflection and group tasks. In doing so, learners are engaged actively involved in learning process.

References


Tovani, C. (2000). I read it, but I don’t get it, CA: Stenhouse Publication

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Explicit Guided Reading Instruction with Leveled Text in High School?
Shirley Rainwaters, Reading Coach
Immokalee High School

Purpose
Forty-four percent of the students at Immokalee High scored a level 1 on the FCAT in spring of 2008. I am perplexed as to what constitutes best practices in reading instruction in high school. As a reading coach working in classrooms, I have noticed and heard during department meetings that a large number of high school students are not motivated to read. Scholastic Reading Inventory (SRI) Lexile levels indicate that a large percentage of our students are reading two to five years below grade level. Last year, Read 180 and Achieve3000 (TeenBiz) were the curriculum used in Intensive Reading classes. Both programs provide reading practice; however, teachers using the programs did not provide explicit reading strategy instruction through guided reading. This year there is no designated program or required materials to be used. I am wondering what type of reading model is most effective for secondary students. As a literacy leader in charge of coaching secondary reading teachers, this information is very important to me. All the professional books I have read address teaching reading in the content areas, but not in a reading class. That is why I chose to implement guided reading as my research project.

Question
• What will be the effects of implementing explicit reading instruction in a high school classroom?

Sub questions
• What will be the effects on Maze and FORF scores and SRI Lexile levels?
• What should a guided reading model look like?
• How will students view small group guided reading?

Method
Richard Allington, an education researcher, reports that studies of literacy teachers revealed that effective literacy teachers routinely provide students with strategy instruction for making sense of text. He states, “Effective teachers in our study taught students strategies for thinking as well as for doing” (as cited in Beers, Probst & Reif, 2007, p. 280). Allington also emphasizes the importance of using text at students’ instructional levels. Those precepts formed the basis of the guided reading model I implemented in a tenth grade Intensive Reading classroom.

I created an instructional model that incorporated the following components: fluency practice, explicit skill/strategy and vocabulary instruction. I used nonfiction leveled texts for guided reading lessons from Achieve3000 (TeenBiz). For fluency practice, I used leveled passages from Jamestown readers. Students engaged in timed readings of the fluency passages once a week. I used Power Points to introduce skills & strategies, build background and front-load vocabulary. The Power Points included visuals to help ESE (Exceptional Student Education) and ELL (English Language Learners) students. Strategies used included Cornell notes, graphic organizers and marking text. This model was used for 30 minutes per day from January to April. I met with each of the three groups once a week. The eight students who received the instruction are in an Intensive Reading class because they scored a level 1 or 2 on the previous year’s FCAT.

Data Collection
December: Administer a Semester FCAT type midterm exam.
January: Administer FORF, Mazes and Scholastic Reading Inventory (SRI) assessments and begin using guided reading model.
February: Continue using instructional model.
March: Continue using instructional model.
April: Administer FORF, Mazes and SRI and survey students. Analyze data and present results.
June: Analyze the FCAT scores; comparing 2008 and 2009. In addition, I will compare the semester exam with the final exam.

Data Results and Analysis
I used several different forms of data to analyze the results of this inquiry. I chose to analyze data on the three groups I saw most often. Those groups included five males and 2 females. A survey I created revealed that five out of seven (57%) students preferred reading fiction; whereas, four out of seven agreed that they liked reading nonfiction. My model of instruction focused on reading nonfiction in preparation for the FCAT. The results of the survey indicate I need to incorporate more fiction into the guided reading model to increase engagement. I found that five out of seven students (71%) agreed that they were better able to understand and apply a reading skill or strategy after a lesson that focused on a single reading skill or strategy. The same percentage of students said that they had a better understanding of how to apply a skill or strategy when the teacher modeled it first. Although five out of seven students (71%) said they were more engaged when they worked in a small group versus whole class, only two out of seven (29%) said they would be willing to work in a small reading group next year. That response made me wonder how to make the lessons more engaging next year. One observation I
made was that there seemed to be a stigma attached to being called to the front of the room for a reading group even though I was working with all students in the class. (See chart below for other survey outcomes.)

An analysis of Lexile scores indicated that four out of eight (50%) students had higher Lexile scores in April than in January. The largest gain was 153 points. The smallest gain was 20 points. Spring Maze scores increased for five out of eight students and all but one showed gains on the FORF. The largest Maze gain was 11 points and the greatest FORF gain was 24 words.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reading short text instead of a chapter book made it easier to understand</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
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<tr>
<td>the skill or strategy I was expected to use.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I have a better understanding of a reading skill or strategy when the</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>14%</td>
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<tr>
<td>reading teacher shows me how to apply the skill or strategy.</td>
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<tr>
<td>The visuals (Power Points) used to introduce the lessons (the skill or</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>0%</td>
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<td>strategy and vocabulary) helped me better prepare for reading the</td>
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<td>articles.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Using graphic organizers helped me organize and retain information.</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>0%</td>
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<tr>
<td>I would be willing to participate in a small group guided reading group</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>29%</td>
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<td>next year.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I am more engaged when I work in a small guided reading group than when</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>14%</td>
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<tr>
<td>a reading lesson is taught whole class.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I am better able to understand and apply a reading skill or strategy</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>after a lesson that focuses on a single reading skill or strategy (For</td>
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<tr>
<td>example: main idea, inferring, cause and effect etc).</td>
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<tr>
<td>I prefer to work in a small group.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I like reading nonfiction</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I like reading fiction</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reading nonfiction passages in a small guided reading group better</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
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<tr>
<td>prepared me for reading nonfiction passages on the FCAT.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Note-taking during reading helped me understand and remember the news</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>articles.</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The nonfiction passages from TeenBiz were interesting.</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The survey gave me information to consider when providing guided reading lessons for students next year. I must share the credit for the Lexile, FORF and Maze gains with the English teachers who were also providing small group guided reading instruction following the same model.

**Reflection**

As a reading coach it is my job to model lessons for teachers. I had searched through research articles and professional books to determine what a high school model of guided reading would look like, but I did not find any information about how to structure a guided reading lesson in high school. I informed my colleague in whose classroom I was doing my inquiry that I would be creating a model based on SBRR as I went along. As a former third and first grade reading teacher, I adapted the elementary model of guided reading to fit the academic and emotional needs of high school students.

Many of our students are second language learners; therefore, I knew that I had to find an efficient and effective way to incorporate vocabulary instruction into each lesson. I implemented vocabulary strategies recommended by Isabel Beck, Janet Allen and Robert Marzano, current researchers in the field of education. My aim in teaching vocabulary was to get students to make connections to new words. This entailed using a graphic organizer. In order to scaffold instruction for ESE and ELL students, I provided visuals to build background and to introduce new vocabulary. When I analyzed the survey, it surprised me that only two out of seven (29%) felt that the visuals aided them in understanding.

Another piece of information from the survey that I need to consider next year when tweaking the model is that only one student found the TeenBiz article to be interesting. I will have to look for another source of short text articles that are leveled because research supports the use of short texts. I believe I can pull short texts from novels to teach a specific standard or use poetry.

Next year I intend to continue this study, but I will focus on one group of five to seven students. I was only able to meet with the three groups once per week, which was not often enough to build relationships or to meet their academic needs. My aim will be to meet with a target group daily. As a result of the survey I will also incorporate fiction text.

The survey answered questions about instructional strategies I used, but it failed to provide information about how they felt about being called to the front table for guided reading. That will be a survey question for next year. Another data collection change I will make will be to survey students at the beginning and the end of the inquiry. As a result of this inquiry, I have a better understanding of what a high school guided reading model should look like and adjustments I need to make, which will give me more confidence when I model lessons for my colleagues. I am also convinced that small group guided reading is an effective method for increasing reading achievement. Next year I will focus on motivating students to practice reading. I am waiting with anticipation of improvements in these students’ FCAT scores and the final exam scores.
Increasing Fluency
Marlene Dimas, 11th and 12th grade
Immokalee High School

Purpose
I started this inquiry because of a reading class I had taken. They wanted us to complete an action research. I had learned so much about fluency, that I felt I should explore fluency more and conduct a project to improve student fluency. “Fluency is important because it provides a bridge between word recognition and comprehension since fluent readers do not have to concentrate on decoding the words, they can focus their attention on what the text means. They can make connections among the ideas in the text and their background knowledge. In other words, fluent readers recognize words and comprehend at the same time. Less fluent readers, however, must focus their attention on figuring out the words, leaving them little attention for understanding the text.” (Reading Rockets, n.d.)

I finally realized that fluency is important so the reader can concentrate on the meaning instead of trying to figure out the words in the reading. I only implemented timed readings in the research, which did not help the students with continued research. I decided to incorporate reading of a familiar text. I also noticed that 11th and 12th grade students in my Intensive Language Arts class were not reading fluently according to the FORF (Florida Oral Reading Fluency), which is a state assessment. The majority of the students were at moderate risk and borderline low risk. Along with not reading fluently, they were also not succeeding on the reading portion of the FCAT. Ten students are level 1 and 1 student is a level 2 according to the FCAT. My purpose is to increase their fluency so their FORF scores will increase and then their comprehension may also increase. Last year I conducted a small research on timed readings to see if it would have an effect on fluency, but to my dismay timed readings had no effect on the students’ scores. This year I decided to extend my research to include reading and rereading of a familiar text to improve student fluency.

Question
- Will repetitive readings of a familiar text help 11th and 12th grade students increase their fluency?

Sub-questions
- Will students get bored of the same text before the end of the week and not try reading?
- Will an increase in fluency increase students’ self-esteem?
- Will reading be more positive for the students?

Method
Students received an article at the beginning of the week. The article was a weekly theme and was either fiction or nonfiction. Once the students were given the article they were called into groups by the reading teacher and read the article together. While the teacher was reading with her group, the inclusion teacher would go around and read the text with other students in the class. She went over the material and discussed it with them. She would usually see two groups a day and so would the main teacher. Throughout the week, they were given work on the article as well as time to read it over and over independently or with their group. After the article was read once with the inclusion teacher, she went again and reread parts of the article to ensure they knew what they read. She held more discussions about the article, the vocabulary, and related information. Along with this work the students were given a one question quiz on the reading at the beginning of class after the first day. After they answered the question, the teacher asked the students what the answer was and to find things in the article to support the answer. They were asked to read the sentences that led them to the answer. Both teachers tried to make them repeatedly read the article to help with their fluency. They basically read the same passage for five days. The inclusion teacher mainly targeted the inclusion students as well as the lower less motivated cluster of the class.

**Data Collection**
To ensure that the students improved their fluency, I used their fall FORF scores as their baseline. I then used their winter FORF to see if any gains were made. Along with their FORF scores, I used the students’ scores from the quizzes that went along with the article. The reading teacher and I also made some observations as we collected data over the five weeks and also after the five weeks when we discontinued the inquiry.

**Data Results and Analysis**
Eight out of eleven students increased their fluency rates according to the FORF scores. Five students were at a low risk, five students at a moderate risk, and 1 student was at a high risk according to the FORF winter standards. I was not ecstatic that 73% of the students’ fluency increased, so I reviewed their comprehension quiz scores. Overall six out of the eleven students increased their comprehension quiz scores. Eight of the students started making a steady gain until week four when the inclusion teacher was not there to read and reread with the students. All the student scores plummeted that week. That is when we first discussed the inquiry. We noticed the students were doing so well and then all their grades went down. That moment made me realize that what we were doing was helping the students. After the five weeks were over, the reading teacher and I talked about how the students were reading more and complaining less when she was reading with them in groups and I circulated and read with them at their desks. Almost the whole class was on task as opposed to now where the students are just sitting around pretending to read. We noticed more reading was taking place. After reviewing the results, however, I was not happy so I used FORF scores of 11th and 12th grade students in a separate intensive language arts class. Only three out the eleven 11th and 12th grade students made gains on their fluency according to the FORF. This made me optimistic. Then we found out that all but one student from the inquiry passed either the FCAT reading, the reading portion of the ACT (American College Test) or both. Six students passed the reading portion of the ACT with a 15 or higher. We had a student with an astonishing 23 on the reading portion of the ACT, which surprised us. Two students passed the March 2009 retake reading FCAT and two students
passed both. Overall 80% of the students in the class passed their March 2009 reading FCAT or the reading portion of the ACT. That was her highest percentage out of six classes.

**Reflection**

Overall, I was satisfied with the results from the inquiry, but I think further research should be completed to accurately evaluate if rereading familiar text increases fluency. The students did not show astronomical gains, but some gains were made in the area of fluency. More importantly, the students started reading in the class, which was something they were not doing much of before we started reading with them. The majority of the students in the class do not read outside of the classroom so we had to ensure they were reading as much as they could to help improve their fluency, comprehension, and vocabulary. Some people may say that we babied them because we were reading it and discussing it with them, but I think we were helping them see how reading can be fun and not so scary. When we read with them we modeled strategies; chunking, stopping and talking about the article, and activating background knowledge. More importantly, we got them reading. Maybe now they will read on their own. It was not easy at the beginning, and a lot of the students did not want to read with me. I would always start reading and ask someone to chime in a few minutes later. Someone always seemed compelled to read, and then the students started reading. After a while it seemed routine to them and they actually looked forward to me coming and reading with them so much that when we started having them conduct literature circles they still wanted me to read with them. I did at first, but had to wean them off so they could implement the strategies on their own. The disappointment was that half the students kept reading while the other half just stopped and pretended to read the book. My next goal is to find a way for them to carry on by themselves. While researching fluency and repetitive readings, I discovered that Reader’s Theatre showed gains in fluency and comprehension. I think a Reader’s Theatre would be an engaging activity for the students as well as beneficial for their fluency and comprehension. This would be a good avenue to start a new inquiry. The only factor left is to find activities that would complement the curriculum.

**References**

Reading Rockets. (n.d.). Retrieved March 2, 2009, from

http://www.readingrockets.org/teaching/reading101/fluency


Building NES Lexiles through Phonetic Study
Priscilla Diane Betancourt, High School Reading Coach
Immokalee High School

Purpose
As a Reading Coach at Immokalee High, I have had the opportunity to work in many classrooms and with different ability levels of many students. One area of interest on my new job was how to teach NES students to read and learn to read quickly. I knew most had some school background from their native countries or from a school district sometime during their travels back and forth to Mexico. I decided to focus my efforts on a student who had been in our school system early in their elementary years, left and lived in México, only to return during the middle school years. I have worked in the Immokalee area schools my entire career as a teacher. I know firsthand the struggles a student has when reading is their obstacle for learning. My wondering was, would a phonetic based program, coupled with guided reading lessons, three times a week, give this student the edge at the high school level.

Question
- How will Reading Horizon (a phonetic based program) affect reading Lexile levels for a beginning NES student?

Method
The Collier School District ELL Department adopted Reading Horizon – Discover Intensive Phonics for Yourself. I attended one training at our school and decided to use this with my student coupled with a guided reading lessons. This program is a scientifically-based, explicit phonics program. It provides a complete, systematic foundation of phonetic skills required for effective reading, spelling and comprehension. At the high school level, it is suggested that students use the computer course-ware package which was developed for older students. It provides interactive instruction, which includes pre and post testing, drill and practice, and a management and reporting system. My student was encouraged to complete 3 lessons per week; along with three guided reading lessons per week. I used leveled text from the collection of A-Z reading. I followed a modified ARP lesson plan. I also incorporated the Dolch words along with writing and a retelling component. The student was required to have a library book at the same level, which she often read with the ELL tutor. We began in late November and continued weekly through the second week in March.

Data Collection
I used the pre-post test designed by Reading Horizons. At Immokalee High, we progress monitor three times a year on the FORF, MAZE and SRI. During my guided reading lessons, I used observations, running records, field notes and student writing samples.

Data Results and Analysis
At Immokalee High School we progress monitor three times a year as required by the state of Florida. I used the data from the FORF (Florida Oral Reading Fluency) assessment and the MAZE (fluency comprehension check- cloze passage format). Both assessments are timed. We also require teachers to schedule a lab time for students to take the Scholastic Reading Inventory assessment. This instrument will provide a student’s lexile (reading level). I was able to monitor her progress each time during the progress monitoring dates. In the beginning, she scored at an
extremely low level. I would label her a non-reader. I formulated a plan with her teacher that would include Reading Horizons (software program learning phonetics), three guided reading lessons using a modified Reading Recovery format, fluency with letter sounds and names, Dolch word fluency and later added writing about what we were reading. During the three months of lessons using Reading Horizons and guided reading (A-Z leveled books). I was able to use the pre- and post testing component of the Reading Horizon program. Pre-testing showed that she knew a limited amount of letters and sounds. We started with “the known”...her name, address, school vocabulary and within a short amount of time we had the alphabet mastered. The program Reading Horizons phonetic lessons helped with reinforcement and practicing.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assessment</th>
<th>Fall</th>
<th>Spring</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Scholastic Reading Inventory</td>
<td>Below level reader</td>
<td>Below level reader</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maze</td>
<td>3/28</td>
<td>8/34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FORF</td>
<td>3/127</td>
<td>26/147</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dolch 220 list</td>
<td>15/220</td>
<td>75/220</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Reflection**
As I reflect on my three months of direct and computer assisted inquiry with a NES student, I am somewhat lead to the conclusion that there is much work to be done. My student made gains, however not as rapidly as I had hoped. I was puzzled by the fact the Dolch words were not mastered. I feel strongly that the computer assisted program Reading Horizon helped my student over the initial hump of mastering sounds and letters. Students at this level are somewhat motivated by using the computer and having some control of their learning. My student is still a below level reader, but she is a reader. Intrinsically, she made huge gains. She was able to read a Lexile low level book on her own, take a test on Reading Counts and pass it. She looked forward to going to the library and checking out books to practice. Her teacher shared with me that she was able to join a class group that was very much her same reading level and now participated in the guided reading lesson. The teacher and I both agree that further investigation needs to occur as to why reading gains are being hampered.

**Resources**

FORF (Florida Oral Reading Fluency)


Reading Horizon – Discover Intensive Phonics for Yourself
Take One! at Immokalee High School
Wendy Gallegos, Teacher on Special Assignment
Immokalee High School

Purpose
While there are 144 national board certified teachers in Collier County Public Schools, less than 7% (10) teach in Immokalee, and only 4 teach at Immokalee High School. Research consistently indicates the positive influence national board certification has on teacher practice, morale, professional development, and areas of school improvement—such as leadership development, teacher training, monitoring student performance, team building, and curriculum development—that are critical to raising student achievement. Having gone through the national board process and achieved national board certification, I can attest to the impact on student learning and teacher reflection.

Take One! is a unique offering from the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards that provides a standards-based approach for improving teaching practice and links student learning to effective instruction. Teachers prepare and submit one pre-selected video portfolio entry from any of the current certificate areas of National Board Certification. A teacher can later transfer the score if he or she pursues National Board candidacy. Through my involvement with the National Board DREAM Team, I sought to introduce teachers at Immokalee High School to Take One! and encourage them to pursue national board certification.

Question
- How will participation in Take One! affect the number of national board certified teachers at Immokalee High School?

Method
I met with the district’s executive director of staff development and shared with him the benefits of having nationally certified teachers in Collier County, especially in Immokalee. Through my involvement in the National Board DREAM team, I was able to secure funding to support teachers interested in Take One! at Immokalee High School and through the Staff Development department I was able to secure all remaining fees. Via a rotating staff development day, I shared with the entire staff what national board certification and Take One! were. I invited all interested teachers to meet with me for a more in-depth informational meeting. Sixteen teachers at Immokalee High School committed to the Take One! process, and one committed to the entire national board certification process. I formed a cohort of Take One! participants. I will develop a scope and sequence of support for the participants. I organized support meetings and the participants were encouraged to attend.

Data Collection
Teachers were encouraged to attend. Contact was made via email and phone. Teachers were asked to sign in at all meetings. In April, all participants were asked to complete a survey based on their experience of the Take One! process.
Data Results and Analysis

- **Survey results:**
  - 30% of IHS teachers that committed to the Take One! process completed their entry
  - 100% of the teachers that attended all 6 PLC meetings completed their entries
  - 70% of teachers that committed to the Take One! process deferred until next year
  - 100% of the teachers that deferred will continue the Take One! process next year

**Reasons for deferments:**
- 33% of deferred teachers stated “family responsibilities”
- 42% of deferred teachers stated “not enough time”
- 1 teacher stated more work than expected
- 33% of deferred teachers stated “other”
  - Waited too long to start
  - Selected student that became unavailable
  - Illness

When asked, “What will you do differently next year?”
- 93% said, “Will start earlier”
- 3% said, “Will limit other commitments”
- 4% did not respond

Completed Take One! Teachers:

When asked “What was most beneficial of working on Take One?”
- 100% said:
  - “Learning and implementing the national standards”
  - “Gathering and sharing information with colleagues”
  - “Reviewing my own teaching on video”

- 100% of teachers that completed their Take One! entry will continue the National Board Certification process.
- 60% of teachers that completed their Take One! entry said that if they do not achieve they will do Take One! again.

When asked, “Did the Take One! process impact your teaching?”
- 100% of teachers that completed their entry said, “Yes.”

They wrote:
  - “It gave me more awareness of my teaching practice”
  - “It helped me to think more critically about why I do what I do in the classroom”
  - “Through Take One!, I built stronger professional relationships with my colleagues”
  - “It provided feedback on how I can improve and reflect my current teaching strategies”

They also said:
  - “I am more aware of how important it is to design and implement lessons that are age and ability appropriate for students”
  - “I think any time you reflect on your instruction it makes you a better teacher”
  - “I plan my lessons ahead of time thinking about my goals and my students attitudes regarding learning certain things”
When asked, “What do you hope to gain from going through the Take One! National Board process?”
They said:
  o “I hope to strive for professionalism”
  o “Better instruction”
  o “I hope to improve the process of my teaching”
  o “I hope to learn how to better reflect on how I can improve”
  o “Validation of my teaching practices that are good and improvement of those that are not”
While only 30% of the teachers that committed to the Take One! process submitted their entry, all became aware of the national teaching standards for their subject area. 100% of the teachers that committed and did not complete will continue next year, as no teachers withdrew.

Reflection
The Take One! process positively impacted all of the participating teachers. As I reflect, on the process utilized to facilitate Take One!, I recognize that there are several things I will do differently next year not just with Take One!, but with all professional development I facilitate.  As a result of this inquiry, I will begin to examine how the Take one! participants impact their students’ learning. I will also look at how they incorporate the national teaching standards into their classrooms. While I was disappointed at the high percentage of teachers that deferred this year, I am excited about opportunity to continue supporting our teachers as they strive to achieve National Board Certification via Take One!.

Resources
www.nbpts.org, Retrieved May 1, 2009

2009 Making a RIF (Reading Is Fun)
Ada Campos, Ninth through Twelfth Grade
Immokalee High School

Purpose
Data revealed that 15% of my high school students were in danger of dropping to a Level 2 in FCAT Reading. My students must score a level 2 on the FCAT to receive a diploma. Working with third grade students in an after-school reading literacy program through Teen Trendsetters has helped my students improve their reading abilities and skills in fluency and comprehension. Research supports cross-grade tutoring as an effective method to improve skills for both age groups. I established and monitored an after-school literacy program through Teen Trendsetters. I recruited students at risk of dropping to a Level 2 FCAT Reading to participate in the program. “Peer tutors can effectively model study skills such as concentrating on the material, organizing work habits, and asking questions. Cohen notes that similarity between model and learner increases the influence of modeling. An at-risk child may more easily identify with a student relatively close in age, particularly one of the same ethnic or social backgrounds, than with an
adult. Higher status also promotes the effect of modeling. Cross-age tutoring takes advantage of the higher status inherent in the age difference while still retaining considerable similarity.” (Cohen, 1986)

**Question**
- How will cross-grade tutoring in an after-school reading literacy program affect fluency and FCAT Reading scores for high school students?

**Sub question**
- What is an effective method to increase student participation in the after-school reading literacy program?

**Method**
I partnered with an Immokalee elementary school. Some of my high school students were paired with third grade elementary students from Highlands Elementary. I worked with students in prescribing Scholastic interactive lesson plans provided by Teen Trendsetters that incorporated reading skills, such as main idea, context clues, and vocabulary builder. Progress monitoring assessments (FORF & MAZE) were analyzed to determine the effects of the program.

**Data Collection**
- April 2009 FORF and MAZE scores were used for baseline data.
- Guest speakers were invited from a variety of businesses and organizations such as Florida Community Bank, Collier County Sheriff’s Office, Youth Relations Department, School Admissions Recruiter from Johnson and Wales, Square Peg, Immokalee Foundation and Immokalee High School based teachers to discuss how reading literacy is crucial to the success of improving scores in collaboration with content lessons.
- Students were also partnered with 3rd graders at Highlands Elementary through a newly established after school reading program through Teen Trendsetters. There were a total of 35 mentees from Highlands Elementary paired up with 35 mentors from Immokalee High School.
- Interactive lessons were also incorporated through Teen Trendsetters for mentors and mentees that utilized critical thinking skills and reinforce group dynamics. Teen Trendsetters provided all the reading materials for both groups.
- Surveys were also conducted during the 1st semester for mentors and a final assessment will be conducted in May 2009.
- Photos were taken of mentors working along with mentees at Highlands Elementary

**Data Results and Analysis**
Analysis of data revealed positive results not only in motivation and engagement, but also enhanced reading skills in fluency and comprehension. I would have expected a drop in student participation with the Teen Trendsetters due to lack of transportation to the site. Once I conducted the Mentor Entrance Questionnaires, students provided feedback. Mentors enjoyed the engagement with their mentees and the support system provided to them. Mentee Exit Surveys are also being conducted by the receiving school. At the end of 1st semester mentors put together goodie bags for their student mentees, this proves that both parties have established a positive rapport. Mentees do in fact expect their mentors at Highlands Elementary every Wednesday; unless there is no school or Early Release Day on this particular day. Data shows that Teen Trendsetters had an open enrollment all year for mentor recruitment and mentees.
Reflection

In conclusion, based on data collected from data warehouse and comparing scores from September 2008 and April 2009, mentor and mentee surveys I found reading motivation increased, and students’ fluency and comprehension skills improved for cross-grade groups. I used the interactive lessons provided by the Teen Trendsetter program and teacher made lessons that incorporated group dynamic projects that targeted fluency and comprehension skills. I also invited guest speakers to the classrooms which made an impact in the mentors’ success. All these factors positively impacted and increased test scores.

After conducting this Inquiry, I have concluded that being able to differentiate instruction by utilizing outside resources such as the Teen Trendsetters, an after school literacy program, project based lessons and utilizing a variety of interactive strategies will create a positive learning atmosphere, which will increase student participation in reading. The most significant outcome was mentors realizing that they were making a meaningful contribution for a good cause, in helping a 3rd grader improve their reading skills. The final day for the after school literacy program with Teen Trendsetters will be through May 20th, 2009. I have already received notification from Teen Trendsetters asking if I would like to continue with the program next year, and I am anxiously waiting to implement the program again.

References

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Ring the Bell for Achievement

Joseph A. Miserere, Algebra Teacher
Immokalee High School

Purpose

The purpose of my inquiry is to utilize the information age process that has changed the pace students learn information.

Question

- Can daily bell work meet the information-processing-format for learning?

Method

Bell work was given on a daily basis and graded three times per week. Students worked as individuals, in small and large groups. Engagement varied from traditional, participation at the board, to individual dry erase boards. Bell work consisted of three problems—one from a previous chapter/lesson plan, one from the previous day, and one from the upcoming lesson plan. As a note, bell work and homework were set up on the same basis to help support the learning process.
Data Collection
Data was collected the first, second, and third weeks of January, February, and March of 2009. Data was inclusive of grades recorded as product of computations of work turned in to the instructor, work done at the board, and groups competing in timed math games. Observation of student engagement in individual, small or large group was a daily tool of reflection for adapting strategies and learning tools. Students were encouraged to give feedback on what they felt was needed for themselves as well as for the class. Concepts and techniques were consistently assessed in order to modify content.

Data Results
Students became more active in the learning process. Not only did the number of students engaged grow, but the level of participation by those same students increased as well. Class moral, effort, and attitude became more positive as the students engaged more joyfully in the learning process. Even as the subject matter became more challenging, the students continued to meet the challenge of daily math work as the bell rang every day. Suggestions of how to vary the strategy, extending the time on a subject were the norms. Students were exposed to a number of learning strategies to help encourage them to seek out how they might learn most easily. We built upon this idea by using multiple strategies simultaneously in groups. The result again produced a greater participation and an ongoing building of math skills, one-upon-another.

Reflection
Bell work can be utilized as a great learning tool, a work bench to build off of, and as a fun jump start. Students can engage in a variety of strategies and concepts every day. Creating an environment that is fun and educational is key to a classroom that is conducive to learning—for all students. Bell work can be that key—just ring the bell for achievement.

References
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Unlocking the Keys to Writing
Susan Felt, ESE Inclusion Teacher
Immokalee High School, Grades 10-12

Purpose
The majority of students I work with in the sophomore English classes are scoring below a 3.5 in writing. They are Specific Learning Disabled (ESE) with a variety of processing disorders. They are accustomed to writing using the prescriptive five paragraph format. They do not use transition words, elaborate with details, struggle with grammar, and lack the vocabulary to improve their writing and exhibit voice in their essays. I wanted to discover if conducting individual writing conferences with an emphasis on vocabulary would increase their writing scores.
Question
Will conducting writing conferences with an emphasis on vocabulary increase student writing scores?

Sub Questions
1. Will the writing conferences help students use new vocabulary?
2. Will the conferences positively impact students’ attitude towards writing?
3. How will I meet my students’ needs through conferencing?
4. What strategies will I use to specifically increase their vocabulary for writing?
5. How will my teaching be impacted?

Method
First, I conferenced with each student, sharing previous writing scores, asking them what they thought their weaknesses were, and helping each student set goals for their writing. We compared their scores to the state’s proficiency levels so they understood where they stood. Then I used the tenth grade FCAT writing rubric to help identify the importance of word choice and vocabulary, as well as the impact it had on their scores. The rubric is based on a low score of 0 and a high score of 6.0 with the following levels: insufficient (unscorable-level 1), developing (level 2-level 3), developed (level 4), and fully developed (level 5-level 6). The features on the rubric included focus, organization, support, and conventions. Vocabulary was highlighted within the support feature. Within the classroom setting, we used a variety of strategies to increase vocabulary for writing including: direct instruction within small group, individual conferences, word walls, word sorts, and most importantly, praising and encouraging the students when they showed an effort towards improving vocabulary for writing in the essays they produced.

Data Collection
Data was collected throughout the school year on monthly writing assessments; September, October, November, January, and April. I also used their 2008 Collier Writes scores and the 2009 February FCAT writing scores.

Data Results and Analysis
When comparing writing scores from the fall assessments to the spring assessment, 75% of the ESE (Specific Learning Disabled) students included in the sophomore English classes demonstrated improved scores. When comparing the 2008 Collier Writes scores to the 2009 FCAT Writing scores, 50% of the students increased their scores. On the 2009 assessment, 64% of the students met the benchmark score of 3.5 or higher while 86% met the federal “No Child Left Behind Standard” of 3.0. Only two students, or 14%, scored below a 3.0, both achieving a 2.5.

Most students were able to increase their scores by a full point to two points as the year progressed. The students willingly participated in the conferences and often initiated them. They not only improved in the scores they received but they demonstrated a more advanced understanding of the rubric used to score their essays as well as the grade level expectations for writing.

Discussing vocabulary with the students on an individual as well as group basis did increase the use of new vocabulary words in their writing. Students were often hesitant about including new
or expressive vocabulary words in the essays that were being graded, for fear they would use the new words improperly or spell them incorrectly. During the conferences, I had the opportunity to encourage the students and gave them the confidence they needed to expand their writing. This had a tremendous impact on the students’ attitudes towards writing. They still all complained about composing essays, but we saw a dramatic improvement in several students related to confidence. The conferences gave us the opportunity to meet the individual needs of our students and that meant a great deal to them. We saw more and more students focusing on the expectations of the rubric, even referencing it while they wrote. Instead of sitting in their seats unable to get started on a prompt they had little or no background knowledge of, they were taking chances and using their imaginations and voice to create essays that appealed to the reader.

Within a classroom, there are students at varying levels of the writing process. By meeting individually with students and addressing their specific needs we were able to move each student through the writing process at an entry level and pace that best suited their individual needs. Some students required the pre-writing conference because they lacked the beginning skills necessary to develop a focus for the essay. Others needed to start with the revision process to learn how to develop support and examples, as well as fine tune their essays. All required the grading conference to be sure they thoroughly understood the prompt and expectations. This enabled them to self-edit their essays for conventions, focus, organization, voice, and vocabulary.

This inquiry served to reinforce the necessity to meet the individual needs of students and spend the one-on-one time they desire and need. I will always make the time for and utilize the process of individual conferencing. This project has proven to us that this is an integral part of teaching the writing process and makes a dramatic difference in the confidence our students feel when presented with a prompt for writing.

**Reflection**

For years we have employed the methods of small group and large group instruction in the writing process. Teachers were also well aware that studies showed how Specific Learning Disabled students, as well as all students, benefit more from smaller class size and an individual instruction plan. Conferencing one-on-one with students was difficult from a time management aspect. But in the long run it was well worth the extra effort in planning and implementation. Using pre-writing, revising, and grading conferences that focused primarily on vocabulary, as well as other components of the writing process, allowed me to see dramatic improvement in most students, specifically in the confidence they exhibited and the ability they showed when it came to using their voice in essays. The North Carolina Public Schools have infused one-on-one writing conferences into their standard course of study for English Language Arts, and report great success. In an article presented by Melanie Sperling from Stanford University, she concludes that frequent, brief, individual conferences with students during the writing process are critical events in the business of learning to write. I agree and will continue to employ these tried and true conferences as an important focus in my writing instruction.

**References**