GUIDED READING PROGRAM COMPARISON

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to determine if the Reading A-Z or the Pearson guided reading programs are more effective. The study groups selected for this study were two groups of five students from the kindergarten class. Each group received guided reading instruction in just one program, either Reading A-Z or Pearson. After using only these programs each student was given the DRA-2 Assessment and their scores were compared to their scores on the DRA-2 in September. The analysis results indicated that there was a significant difference between the Reading A-Z and Pearson Guided reading programs as measured by the DRA-2 Assessment. By comparing the mean scores, the Reading A-Z was significantly better.
Introduction

**Background, Issues and Concerns:**

There have been concerns about student performance on DRA-2 and kindergarten students being prepared for first grade expectations. The current goal for kindergarten students is to be at an instructional four or an independent three on the DRA-2 assessment by the end of kindergarten. Some teachers and reading specialist may wonder if the new Pearson Guided Reading Program will help improve students reading levels compared to previous years where teachers solely used the Reading A-Z program.

**Practice under Investigation**

The practice under was comparing two guided reading programs which are Reading A-Z and Pearson Guided Reading Program. There was an investigation to see if there is a significant difference in DRA-2 test scores based on which guided reading program is used.

**School Policy to be Informed by Study (School Policy/Practice)**

The current practice under investigation is which guided reading program is more effective in the classroom. Teachers currently have access to both the Pearson Guided Reading Program as well as the Reading A-Z Guided Reading Program at Pathfinder Elementary.

**Conceptual Underpinning**

Student achievement is often tied into what guided reading program used. Schools need to decide which program will help students reach their full potential. The Pearson Guided Reading Program is better because all of the books have already been printed and
are in color which makes it easier for students to use the pictures to support them as they read. On the outside of the folder used to hold the books you will find the DRA2 reading level, the Guided Reading level, the word count, and reading skill. There is a section called Features of This Text which shows supportive features such as repetitive text, illustrations that support the text, and consistent placement of text. The challenging features section alerts the teacher to items like some animals may be unfamiliar, the length of sentences found on each page, and the use of quotation marks or commas. Directly below this box there is a Focus on instruction section which serves as a summary for the teacher letting him or her know what the reading skill is, the phonics focus, high frequency words, and what the additional activity will be.

On the inside of the lesson plan folder Pearson also lays out a very detailed lesson plan of what to do before, during, and after reading on the left hand side. Having a detailed lesson plan laid out makes it easier for the teacher as well as ensuring that each teacher is teaching the same material. On the right hand side of the lesson plan there is a phonics mini-lesson which incorporates a phonemic awareness activity as well as phonics activity. There is a section for what to do when re-reading and assessing students. In the right column is an area that the Reading A-Z program cannot even touch. It features a section called Options for further instruction with headings called revisiting the text which works on reading fluency, a digging deeper section which incorporates vocabulary, as well as a section for ELL/ESL support. In a school with a diverse population the ESL/ELL Support section is a wonderful addition to a guided reading lesson. In theory, the Pearson Guided Reading Program will increase student achievement.
Statement of the Problem

The problem is some teachers are reluctant to try the new Pearson Program for two reasons. One is that they are reluctant to try something new and the second is that in each grade level only have immediate access to four guided reading levels and there are usually at least a few students whose reading levels are above or below grade level making it inconvenient to borrow guided reading materials from other teachers or to have to check them out in the school library if the library even carries the level you need.

Purpose of the Study

This action research will help determine the most effective method for teaching guided reading in the classroom.

Research Question(s)

Is there a difference in student achievement between the Pearson Guided Reading Program compared to the Reading A-Z Program?

Null Hypothesis(es)

Ho: There is no difference in student achievement between the Pearson Guided Reading Program compared to the Reading A-Z Program.

Anticipated Benefits of the Study

One anticipated benefit from the study would be to help the district decide whether to purchase more guided reading sets so to that teachers have extra levels to pull from if our students go beyond the four levels our district purchased for our classroom. A second anticipated benefit would be to help guide students as to which program is more effective in the classroom. A third anticipated benefit would be that depending on
funding we may no longer need to purchase the yearly subscription to the Reading A-Z program or perhaps could limit the amount of licenses we purchase as a way to cut costs.

*Definition of Terms*

Guided Reading- Guided Reading is where the teacher helps the student apply reading strategies to books that are at their instructional level.

DRA 2- (The Developmental Reading Assessment) is test given to students one on one with results that allow teachers to determine a student’s strengths and weaknesses and reading level.

*Summary*

The problem is that some teachers are apprehensive to try the new Pearson Guided Reading program that was purchased by the school district due to not enough reading levels being provided and being afraid to try something new. This action research will help teachers determine the most effective method for teaching guided reading in the classroom.
Review of Literature

Guided reading is a best practice. Teachers can use guided reading, as a research-based approach to reading instruction. According to Anita Iaquinta, (2006), the author of Guided Reading: A Research-Based Response to the Challenges of Early Reading Instruction, guided reading could address the challenges of early reading instruction. During the first year years of reading instruction the focus is on prevention of reading challenges or difficulties. There has been a lot of research that suggests that students who start off with difficulties and being behind in reading rarely catch up. Guided reading is considered a best practice associated with balanced literacy instruction.

“The National Reading Panel says that it is important to use balanced approaches to reading based on their review of scientific research-based reading instructional practices used by teachers across the United States” (Iaquinta, 2006 p.413). According to Iaquinta, The International Reading Association/The National Association for the Education of Young Children and the National Council of Teachers of English all recommend balanced approaches including guided reading instruction. There are three areas that a quality guided reading program should consist of quality literature, literature that is on each student’s instructional level, and teachers should be asking students higher level critical thinking questions to help stretch students cognitively and also allows students to develop their oral language skills.
A quality guided reading program must be built upon quality literature. With the common core push to non-fiction text it is important to compare visual text features as well as text accuracy. According to Sharron Roth Gill (2009), who wrote an article for the Reading Teacher called, *What Teachers Need to Know About the “New” Nonfiction*, there are many areas that a teacher should look at to pick out high quality children’s literature. Gill writes, “I found several outstanding features: an emphasis on the visual, including illustrations and design layouts; an emphasis on accuracy; and engaging writing styles, including formats that invite interaction”, (p.261). She suggests asking several questions to determine if the text is high quality non-fiction or informational literature for students. “Are the books visually appealing?” “Do they offer accurate, authoritative information?” “Are they engagingly written?” (Gill, 2009, p.266) If the teacher can answer yes to all three questions then they have found a quality piece of children’s literature. Quality literature is only the first step to having a quality guided reading program.

The second thing a quality guided reading program must contain is literature that is on the students’ instructional reading level. A quality guided reading program should be teaching students at their instructional reading level. According to Guastello and Lenz, (2005) guided reading is where the teacher helps the student apply reading strategies to books that are at their instructional level. An article entitled *Teaching Flexibly With Leveled Texts: More Power for Your Reading Block*, the authors, Glasswell and Ford (2010), encourage teachers to be flexible when selecting books for different guided reading levels in order to accelerate the reading of students who are below grade level. In the article it talks about the theory of stretching or challenging students by giving them
books on their instructional level and offering support to help push them to the next
reading level. The article talks about how reading teachers can use leveled reading in the
three areas of guided reading, independent reading, and shared reading. It is important for
reading teachers to offer a variety of books with different degrees of difficulty. These
books need to have individualized instructional formats and integrate the use of alternate
texts. While it is important for teachers to pick quality literature that is on the student’s
instructional reading level, it is also important that the teacher allows time for
collection about the text in order to encourage oral language development and higher
level critical thinking skills.

During guided reading, a teacher will ask concrete as well as abstract questions to
prompt students to develop their oral language skills. The article “From the Reading Rug
to the Play Center: Enhancing Vocabulary and Comprehensive Language Skills by
Connecting Storybook Reading and Guided Play” from the Early Childhood Education
Journal written by Macy (2013), discusses how preschool teachers’ use reading and play
time to develop their students’ oral language skills. Teachers ask concrete as well as
abstract questions during their read aloud time to prompt students to develop their oral
language skills. Teachers must purposefully create a language–rich classroom where
students become a part of the classroom dialogue. According to the article, the
complexity of language that adults use when talking with students impacts the student’s
ability to have cognitively challenging conversations. The amount and quality of
conversation that children have with adults corresponds with their language and literacy
development.
Author Carolyn Swain (2010), discusses the importance of students needing to be asked critical thinking questions as well as having reflective “group talk” when trying to figure out the meaning in children’s magazines. This article mentions a small research project, which was used to discover the potential of guided reading to help create or develop critical thinking and response to reading. There was a case study of two groups of students from similar primary schools. The author offers a critique of guided teaching where he says that this method seems like it would be effective, but he questions the validity of guided teaching being able to facilitate independent critical thought.

Guided reading is a researched based and is considered to be an integral part of a balanced reading program. When teachers incorporate quality text, teaching to the students instructional level and asking higher level thinking questions into their guided reading instruction research has shown that they are laying a strong foundation for students to develop into stronger readers. According to Iaquinta, (2006) “The goal of guided reading is to develop a self-extending system of reading that enables the reader to discover more about the process of reading while reading. As children develop these understandings they self-monitor, search for cues, discover new things about the text, check one source of information against another, confirm their reading, self-correct, and solve new words using multiple sources of information” (p.414). Students who receive guided reading instruction as a component to a balanced literacy program are being given the opportunity to establish good reading habits and strategies that will help them become independent readers.
Research Methods

Research Design

A quantitative study was conducted to see if there is a difference in students reading achievement levels depending upon whether the teacher used Reading A-Z or Pearson Guided Reading programs. The independent variables are (Pearson Guided Reading) and Reading A-Z Guided Reading Program. The dependent variable is student reading levels. If the difference is found significant in scores based on the use of Pearson or Reading A-Z guided reading programs, teachers should strongly consider changing or continuing the way they are teaching guided reading and which program they will use.

Study Group Description

The classroom consists of 25 students. There are a lot of students who move in and out of the district so there is a smaller group that was consistent for this study who did not receive Title I Reading Services which would have given them extra reading support which could affect the results. The group of students who did not move or receive services consists of 10 students five who received the Pearson Guided Reading Program and five who were taught using the Reading A-Z program. When looking at the demographics of the students within this group, there are two students who are Black and one student who is mixed White and Black. The remaining seven students are White/Non-Hispanic. Of my 10 students within this study, two students are receiving free or reduced lunch.

The school is a kindergarten through second grade ranging in age from five years old to nine years old. As of November, 17th 2013, there were 365 students enrolled. Of
those 365 students, four percent of students are Asian, 16.2 percent Black/African American, 12.10 percent Hispanic, and 62.20 percent White. In the school 43.3% of students qualify for free or reduced lunch.

Data Collection and Instrumentation

The DRA-2 assessment was given to find students reading levels as a pre-test. Half of the students were given the Reading A-Z program for guided reading with half of the students and (Pearson) with the other half of the guided reading groups. Then a post-assessment to see if there is a difference.

Statistical Analysis Methods:

A t-test was conducted to find if there is a significant difference in student reading achievement levels based on the use of Pearson or Reading A-Z guided reading programs.
Findings

A t-test was conducted to decipher whether there was a difference in performance on the September 2013 and January 2014 DRA-2 Assessment based on the guided reading program. The following tables, graphs, and charts will depict the organized findings based on the statistical raw data found in my classroom. There are only two quarters of data to look at since the school year began in August 2013.

Figure 1

t-Test Analysis Results for students in both the Pearson in September 2013 on the DRA-2 Pre-test.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Mean D</th>
<th>t-Test</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>p-value</th>
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<tr>
<td>Reading A-Z (n=5)</td>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>-2.9</td>
<td>-1.78</td>
<td>8</td>
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Note: Significant when p<=0.25

Ten kindergarten students were randomly selected for a study to determine if there is a difference between Pearson and Reading A-Z guided reading programs based on DRA-2 test scores. The mean students who received guided reading instruction via the Pearson guided reading program was 1.7 and the mean of the students who received instruction via the Reading A-Z program was 4.6. The Mean D, or difference between the two groups, was -2.9. The t-test result was -1.78 and the df was 8. The null hypothesis states that there is not a significant difference on DRA-2 scores based on the guided reading program students received instruction with. This null hypothesis was rejected because the p-value, 0.11, is lower than the alpha level, 0.25. This shows that
the guided reading program of the student does significantly impact the DRA-2 scores. The Reading A-Z guided reading program produced significantly higher reading scores.

Figure 2

The mean of the students who were taught using the Pearson guided reading program in September is 1.7. The mean of students’ scores on the DRA-2 assessment that were taught using the Reading A-Z guided reading program in September is 4.7. This means that 73% of students who received guided reading instruction in the Reading A-Z program scored higher than the students receiving the Pearson Guided Reading Program at just 27%.
Figure 3

**September 2013 DRA-2 Scores**

There are 41 reading levels ranging from A-40 on the DRA-2 test. The end of the year goal for kindergarten students is to be independently reading at a three or instructionally at a four by the end of the school year. Most students come into kindergarten not knowing how to read. Keeping in mind that students selected for each guided reading group instruction were randomly selected. The chart shows that students’ who would receive the Reading A-Z guided reading instruction scored significantly higher than the students who would be receiving the Pearson program. 60% of students who would receive Reading A-Z guided reading instruction scored a level three or higher, meeting the end of the year goal, and 40 % scored below a level three not
meeting the end of the year goal. 0% of students who would receive Pearson guided
reading instruction scored a three or higher meeting the end of the year goal, and 100%
did not meet the end of the year goal.

Figure 4

**t-Test Analysis Results for January 2014 Pearson and Reading A-Z DRA-2 Post-test Scores.**

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Source</th>
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<th>Mean D</th>
<th>t-Test</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>p-value</th>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Reading A-Z (n=5)</td>
<td>6.2</td>
<td>-2.4</td>
<td>-1.27</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0.24</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Significant when p<=0.25

Ten kindergarten students were randomly selected for a study to determine if
there is a difference between Pearson and Reading A-Z guided reading programs based
on DRA-2 test scores. The mean students who received guided reading instruction via
the Pearson guided reading program was 3.8 and the mean of the students who received
instruction via the Reading A-Z program was 6.2. The Mean D, or difference between
the two groups, was -2.4. The t-test result was -1.27 and the df was 8. The null
hypothesis states that there is not a significant difference on DRA-2 scores based on the
guided reading program students received instruction with. This null hypothesis was
rejected because the p-value, 0.24, is lower than the alpha level, 0.25. The null was
correctly rejected. When the null is rejected, there is a significant difference. By
comparing the mean scores, it appears that the A-Z Reading is significantly better.
The mean of the Reading A-Z January DRA-2 Post-test proficient and advanced test scores in 2014 were 6.2. This means that 62% of students who received the Reading A-Z guided reading instruction out of the sample group of 10 students scored in the top two tiers of the scoring rubric for the DRA-2 Assessment. The pie chart shows that the number of students who received Pearson guided reading instruction reaching the top two tiers was significantly lower with a mean of 38%.
There are 41 reading levels ranging from A-40 on the DRA-2 test. In the Platte County School District the end of the year goal for kindergarten students is to be independently reading at a three or instructionally at a four by the end of the school year. Most students come into kindergarten not knowing how to read. Keeping in mind that students selected for each guided reading group instruction were randomly selected, the chart shows that students’ who would receive the Reading A-Z guided reading instruction scored significantly higher than the students who would be receiving the Pearson program. 80% of students who would receive Reading A-Z guided reading instruction scored a level three or higher, meeting the end of the year goal, and 20% scored below a level three not meeting the end of the year goal. 100% of students who would receive...
Pearson guided reading instruction scored a three or higher meeting the end of the year goal, and 0% did not meet the end of the year goal of reading independently at a level three or instructionally at a level 4.

Figure 7

The DRA-2 assessment was given in September of 2013 and again in January of 2014. Results show that in September 2013, 60% of students who would receive guided reading instruction using the Reading A-Z program scored at an independent level 3 or instructional level for meeting the end of the year goal. In January 2014, the scores of student who received the Reading A-Z program increased to 80% of students meeting their meeting this goal. In September 2013, 0% of students who would receive guided
reading instruction using the Pearson program met the end of the year goal of being able to read independently at a four or instructionally at a level four. In January 2014, the scores for the students who received the Pearson guided reading program increased with 100% of students meeting the end of the year goal of reading at a level 3 or higher.

In conclusion, the students who received guided reading instruction using the Reading A-Z program did outperform the students who had received Pearson guided reading instruction. When looking at the data, all of the students who received the Pearson guided reading instruction met the end of the year goal of reading independently at a level three or instructionally at a level four and only 80% of students who received Reading A-Z guided reading instruction were able to meet the end of the year goal. There was a significant difference between the two guided reading programs. The Reading A-Z guided reading program proved to be more effective with the sample of students used.
Conclusions and Recommendations

The conceptual underpinning is that the Pearson Guided Reading Program is better or more effective than the Reading A-Z Guided Reading Program. Students who received guided reading instruction using the Pearson program showed more reading growth from the pre to the post DRA-2 Assessments. At the beginning of the program none of the students randomly selected to receive guided reading instruction using the Pearson Program were able to meet the end of the year goal of reading at a three or higher and after the post-test 100% of students who received the Pearson program were able to meet the end of the year goal. When comparing these results with Reading A-Z guided reading program 60% of students began the year meeting the end of the year objective of being able to read at a level 3 or higher. When looking at the post-assessment only 80% of students were who received guided reading instruction through the Reading A-Z program were able to meet the end of the year goal.

When looking at the pre-test t-test results the students who received guided reading instruction from the Pearson program scored a mean of 1.7, and the students would receive the Reading A-Z program scored a mean of 4.6, Mean D is -2.9, the t-test is -1.78, the df is 8 and the p-value is .11. The p-value is less than the alpha level therefore the null was rejected. The results of the post-test are that the students who received the pearson program scored a mean of 3.8. The students who had received Reading A-Z guided reading instruction received a mean score of 6.2. For the post-test the Mean D score was -2.4, the t-test -1.27, the df 8 and the p-value 0.24. The p-value was less than .25 so the null was rejected.
When comparing the conceptual underpinning with the actual findings of this study the conceptual underpinning was incorrect with the sample of students used for this study. The argument made was that the Pearson Guided Reading Program would be better because the books are premade and in color and were made by the same company as the DRA-2 assessment used for the pre and post assessments. There are more features found within the lessons provided by Pearson such as a section for reaching English language learners, differentiating instruction to challenge higher learners. The students in the classroom sample come from diverse backgrounds with several students being English language learners, however most of those students were also in Title 1 Reading so their results were not used for this study.

Student achievement is often tied into what guided reading program used. Schools need to decide which program will help students reach their full potential. The Pearson Guided Reading Program is better because all of the books have already been printed and are in color which makes it easier for students to use the pictures to support them as they read. On the outside of the folder used to hold the books you will find the DRA2 reading level, the Guided Reading level, the word count, and reading skill. There is a section called Features of This Text which shows supportive features such as repetitive text, illustrations that support the text, and consistent placement of text. The challenging features section alerts the teacher to items like some animals may be unfamiliar, the length of sentences found on each page, and the use of quotation marks or commas. Directly below this box there is a Focus on instruction section which serves as a summary
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