IMPLEMENTING A READER’S WORKSHOP MODEL VERSUS A BASAL READING SERIES

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ABSTRACT

In the 2013-2014 school year, a rural school district forwent their previous basal reading series to allow teachers to implement a reader’s workshop instructional program. The purpose of this research was to determine if the reader’s workshop program affected student achievement on the Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA). DRA reading levels were compared between the beginning-of-the year scores to the end-of-the year scores. The results were analyzed by using a t-Test Analysis. The two variables in this test were DRA scores from the beginning of the year DRA levels to the end of the year DRA levels. The analysis results indicated that there was a significant difference in student reading levels when using a reader’s workshop program instead of a basal reading series. Once reviewing the findings of this study, current research and literature, and the statistical data from the DRA, it is found that there was a difference in reading levels when implementing a reader’s workshop model.
INTRODUCTION

Background, Issues and Concerns

In this study it was important to see whether or not implementing a reader’s workshop model will increase students DRA reading levels. Four years ago a second through fifth grade elementary school purchased a new program titled Story Town, published by Harcourt. This series was laid out for each teacher in the areas of reading, spelling, phonics, grammar, and writing. While it scripted everything the teacher needed to do and say and had every material needed, including the story in an anthology, it lacked in independency for the student to have “real” text in their hands.

A year ago, the principal asked for teachers to pull away from Story Town and only use it as a resource. This school year (2013-2014), several teachers began implementing a Reader’s Workshop program in my classroom. Currently the school does not have an adopted reading program that the whole school is using. Each teacher has been left to decide what “fits” his or her teaching style and students. Some want to see if there is an increase in DRA reading levels.

Practice under Investigation

The practice under investigation will be looking at DRA reading level scores. There will be an analysis to see if there is a significant difference in student reading levels when using a reader’s workshop program instead of a basal reading series. This will be looking at the data provided by the DRA. If there is a significant difference in reading levels, then there will be a discussion on what reading program each teacher should implement in their classroom.
**School Policy to be Informed by Study**

This school’s Board of Education directs the superintendent to implement methods for continual evaluation of the curriculum of the school district. Such evaluations provide information for planning in the district. An evaluation of both a basal reading series and reader’s workshop model will provide needed data that will help direct the superintendent in the right direction for what is beneficial for students.

**Conceptual Underpinning**

It is said that every student learns differently. It could also be said about teachers that every teacher teaches differently. Teachers need to implement different strategies and intervention in their instruction. As teacher’s we must look at each student as an individual and not grouped as a whole class. Using a reader’s workshop model may provide teachers to bring in their teaching expertise to mini-lessons and then work with students independently to offer the necessary intervention and information each student needs to strive.

Authentic Pedagogy defined as instruction and assessment, which promoted authentic student achievement. Authentic student achievement refers to intellectual accomplishments that are worthwhile, significant, and meaningful - such as those produced by successful adults in today's work force (Askew, 2009). Authentic teaching occurs when the teacher utilizes information about how students learn and designs learning experiences or tasks based upon this knowledge. Lucy “Calkins’ [workshop] approach to literacy grows out of a pedagogical theory that prides itself on being in step with the natural development of both readers and children” (Feinberg, 2007, p.28).
A reader’s workshop model is an instructional technique in teaching reading when there is a block of time set aside for reading activities. The session begins with a read-aloud with mini-lesson by the teacher. It then moves into an activity period where students read independently selected books, or confer with the teacher. Finally it ends with a whole group discussion time. “Calkins is a “constructivist,” believing that children should generate their own texts, using material from their own lives. Her belief in self-expression as a key to learning extends to reading: children develop a passion for reading when they are given freedom to choose books that are meaningful to them” (Feinberg, 2007, p.28).

Statement of the Problem

If there is a difference in reading levels and student perception with the implementation of a reader’s workshop model, than there needs to be a serious discussion on what a reading curriculum should look like in each classroom building wide.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to find if there is a significant increase in student DRA reading levels when using a reader’s workshop model in reading curriculum compared to a basal reading series. The research, on the data collected on the DRA from students who receive instruction following a reader’s workshop model and students who receive instruction following a basal reading series, will show whether there is a significant difference in reading levels between the two.

Research Question

Question 1: Is there a significant difference in student DRA reading levels when using a reader’s workshop program versus a basal reading series?
Null Hypothesis

There is no significant difference in student DRA reading levels when using reader’s workshop program versus a basal reading series.

Anticipated Benefits of the Study

If there is a difference in student DRA reading levels when using a reader’s workshop model instead of basal readers, teachers will need to begin implementing a reader’s workshop model into their classrooms to improve student DRA reading levels.

Definition of Terms

DRA- Development Reading Assessment: assesses a student’s reading ability in the area of comprehension and fluency.

Basal reader- textbook that is designed to teach a series of reading skills to children.

Reader’s Workshop- provides students with a supportive environment that involves them in authentic reading experiences that focus on the strengths and needs.

Summary

A study was conducted to see if there was a significant difference in student DRA reading levels when using a reader’s workshop program versus a basal reading series. If the t-test concludes there was a significant difference, teachers will need to begin implementing a reader’s workshop model into their classrooms to improve student achievement among students. Teachers need to implement different strategies and intervention in their instruction because every child learns differently and every teacher can provide different ways to teach said strategies. After this analysis is completed, other school districts can benefit by looking at the performance data and provide professional development to teachers on using the reader’s workshop model in their classrooms.
REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Over the past decade, there has been an increased focus nationally on the development of literacy for all students (Coyne, Kami’enui, & Carnine, 2007). In 2009, there was a state-led determination to develop the Common Core State Standards (CCSS). Hanushek, Peterson, & Woessmann (2012) pointed out in their article that President Barack Obama, in his 2011 State of the Union address, declared, “We need to out-innovate, out-educate, and out-build the rest of the world” (p.15) The Common Core State Standards Initiative (2014) recognizes the importance of consistent, real world learning goals and launched this effort to ensure all students are prepared for college. In 2010, the Missouri State Board of Education adopted a new set of English language standards for grades kindergarten through twelfth. Missouri schools are implementing the Missouri Learning Standards (MLS), which include the Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts. The MLS replaced the grade level requirements for English language arts.

As stated by The Missouri Learning Standards (2014), these standards do not tell teachers how to teach, but rather what the students need to learn. In consideration with the MLS and the CCSS, a reading model, such as a reader’s workshop model, guides the way teachers support the state standards through emphasis on the interaction between reader and text (Calkins, 2010). Calkins (2010) explains how to teach strategy and skill specific mini-lessons, lead small-group work, and one-on-one conferences.

As indicated by Calkins (2010), “children need at least a protected half hour of independent reading, where they continue to read the books they choose, so they maintain their rate and level of reading” (p.114). Kelley and Clausen (2009) wrote how teacher’s
feel independent reading is a waste of time or time consuming. When done right and used for intervention and conference time, independent reading time can be very beneficial. It is important for students to choose their own books. Rich (2009) writes how she looks closely on what her student’s strengths and weaknesses are in the area of reading to guide them to choosing their own literature and informational text to read. The Common Core State Standards Initiative (2014) includes samples of texts that demonstrate the level of complexity appropriate for the grade level and compatible with the learning demands in the standards. Exemplar texts for each grade level is a guide to what teachers can use in a reader’s workshop mini-lesson and also for when students are choosing a book for independent reading. “Fans of the reading workshop say that assigning books leaves many children bored or unable to understand the texts. Letting students choose their own books, they say, can help to build a lifelong love of reading” (Rich, 2009, p. A1).

Additionally, students should be in charge of their learning. The Common Core State Standards Initiative (2014) clarifies how teachers will still continue to develop lesson plans to the individual needs of the students in their classrooms with the implementation of the CCSS. Szabo (2011) defines goal setting as a strategy to keep the goal setter on the right track and to help make learning and reading more meaningful. Goals help the setter to get mentally prepared to get what s/he wants or wants to achieve in a timely manner (Szabo, 2011). The goals that students make help the teacher guide their instruction and make it individualized for each student.

As a portion of the reader’s workshop model, there is a mini-lesson (or read-aloud) session. Santoro, Chard, Howard, and Baker (2008) discuss that using read-alouds
can improve student comprehension. Research demonstrates that read-alouds, with explicit comprehension instruction and active, engaging discussions about text, can promote comprehension and vocabulary even as students are learning to read (Santoro, Chard, Howard, & Baker 2008). Szabo (2011) says that through class discussion and placement of strategies on bulletin boards, the students learned about numerous strategies and could refer to visuals to decide when they should be used.

Teachers struggle to find time to fit everything into classroom schedules, and were frustrated because their comprehensive reading program was extremely time consuming (Santoro, Chard, Howard, & Baker 2008). Therefore, the reader’s workshop does a great job allowing teachers to act as facilitators as they model the skills and strategies that s/he feels are needed with each student in the classroom. Delacruz (2013) states, “Interactive read-alouds can provide the opportunity for intentional, authentic learning to take place” (p.21). “This instructional practice can be used to scaffold students’ reading so that they can use strategies in their own reading” (Delacruz, 2013, p.26). A teachers teaching time during the independent reading portion of a reader’s workshop model will be one-on-one conferences and small group work that takes place during the independent reading session. In that time you focus on student goals, areas of weakness, strategy work, etc.

Delacruz (2013) reports on a study that compares Developmental Reading Assessment scores with school implementing daily interactive read aloud and a school that does not. Proven by Delacruz’s findings, kindergarten second grade Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA) scores increased from the beginning of the year to the end of the year (Delacruz, 2013). “When students use the information they learned in an
interactive read-aloud in their own reading, then their test scores and knowledge can improve” (Delacruz, 2013, p.26). Interactive read-alouds, or mini-lesson, is an important part of the reader’s workshop model. Delacruz (2013) expresses that the extended impact of using read-alouds could result in increased reading achievement scores or other high-stakes reading assessments.

Different reader’s workshop models are available for teachers. The importance of a reader’s workshop model incorporates mini-lessons and independent reading sessions. “What the teacher does and does not do in the classroom makes a huge difference in whether a student chooses to engage in reading” (Kelley & Clausen-Grace, 2009, p.318). Morrison and Wlodarczyk (2009) suggest that students must interact with texts that will be read aloud to teach strategies. A reader’s workshop model approach provides the needed engagement by putting real books into the hands of children, unlike a basal reader series where all stories are in an anthology.

Reader’s workshop is a model that has been favorably researched and many researchers recommend its components. When considering reading instruction models to use with students, it is important to find a program that is backed by research that works for students in a teacher’s classroom environment. This may vary from classroom to classroom. It is also important that each student’s specific need is determined to set goals on an individual student level as well as teachers. Educating teachers on a reader’s workshop model, how it is implemented and the impact it has on student comprehension will be beneficial. As indicated by the Common Core State Standards Initiative (2014), “the CCSS Actively engages students in learning, requiring them to demonstrate their mastery of content and focus on critical thinking, problem solving and real world
application of skills.” (p.10)
RESEARCH METHODS

Research Design

A quantitative study was conducted to see if there was a significant difference in DRA reading levels. The independent variable being tested was reading programs, while the dependent variable was DRA reading level scores. If the difference is found significant in reading levels based on what reading program students were being taught with, teachers and the building as a whole need to be informed of the impact a reading program has on student reading levels.

Study Group Description

The research for this study will be conducted in a third grade-looping classroom at a second through fifth grade elementary school in a rural school district. In the classroom there are 21 students (10 girls and 11 boys) and one classroom teacher. There are a total of 115 students in third grade. According to the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE), in 2013 there were 466 students enrolled with 54% of those students qualifying for free or reduced lunch.

Data Collection and Instrumentation

Quantitative data of 21 looping students will be gathered from the 2012-2013 Spring DRA reading levels under a basal-reader reading program and compared to the 2013-2014 Spring DRA reading levels under a reader’s workshop model.

Statistical Analysis Methods

A t-test was conducted to find if there is a significant difference in student DRA reading levels from Spring DRA reading levels when using reader’s workshop program versus a basal reading series. The source was broken into two categories: basal readers
and reader’s workshop model. The mean, mean D, t-test, df, and p-value were concluded from this test. The Alpha level was set at 0.25 to test the null hypothesis: There is no significant difference in student Spring DRA reading levels when using a reader’s workshop model.
FINDINGS

A t-test was conducted to find if there is a significant difference in student DRA reading levels from the Spring DRA reading levels when using reader’s workshop program versus a basal reading series. The source was broken into two categories: basal readers and reader’s workshop model. The following figure will illustrate the findings.

Figure 1

t-Test Analysis Results for Basal Reading Series and Reader’s Workshop Model

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>S^2</th>
<th>Mean D</th>
<th>t-test</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>p-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Basal Readers (n=21)</td>
<td>24.29</td>
<td>60.91</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reader's Workshop (n=21)</td>
<td>31.81</td>
<td>63.16</td>
<td>-7.52</td>
<td>-3.1</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>0.0036</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Significant when p<=0.25

As shown in Figure 1, a significant difference (t-test = -3.1; p-value = 0.0036; Mean D = -7.52) in mean scores was found between two instructional models. The null hypothesis was rejected. Students that were instructed under the reader's workshop model (Mean = 31.81, or a middle third grade reading level) scored a significantly higher mean score on the Spring DRA than students instructed under a basal reading series (Mean = 24.29, or an end of year second grade reading level), when compared to the criterion p-value of .25. These findings suggest that a reader’s workshop model should be implemented by teachers in the 2-5 elementary building.
CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The outcomes reported from this study show that there was a significant increase in DRA reading levels when a reader’s workshop model was implemented compared to a basal reading series. The findings show there is a significant difference when using a reader’s workshop model and the null hypothesis was rejected. The t-test results from the 2013-2014 Spring DRA reading levels indicated that the p-value was 0.0036.

The conceptual underpinning of Authentic Pedagogy is reinforced by these research findings. Authentic Pedagogy refers to how students achieve through meaningful and worthwhile instruction. Authentic teaching occurs through information gained from the student, which helps the teacher design specific learning experiences for the students. A reader’s workshop strongly addresses how teachers can get to know each of their students to better implement an instruction that is valuable to what they need in the area of reading. A basal reading program is already set up for you to teach. As the research shows, student achievement increased under a reader’s workshop model. Teachers, who design their instruction around their student’s strengths and weaknesses, are going to see an increase in individual student reading levels. Teachers need to be aware of each student in their classroom and provide an instructional learning experience around them.

After concluding this study there are some further studies that could be conducted. After another year of the implementation of a reader’s workshop model to students, Missouri Assessment Program (MAP) scores can be compared to past years where a basal reader was implemented. There could also be a U.S. wide study to see how student’s reading achievement compares with different school districts. If there is
research out that shows growth, such as Susan Delacruz’s study, then other research can
be done to gain more interest in using a reader’s workshop model.

Professional development is crucial in providing teachers with the right tools
needed to begin a reader’s workshop model in their classroom. It is important to
understand each of the different components of the model; such as, mini-lessons,
independent reading, small-group work, and one-on-one conferencing. If this model is to
be implemented school wide, or even district wide, there needs to be a commonality of
what the model looks like in each classroom so that there is consistency.
REFERENCES


