

Digging Deep for Meaning

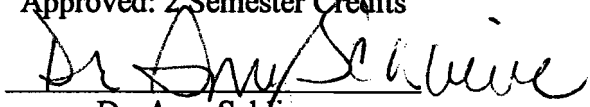
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ABSTRACT

It was hypothesized that students who were taught research-based comprehension strategies will increase their comprehension and reading level scores. Twenty-three first grade students were given a fall, winter and spring reading assessment that indicated their reading level. The reading assessment measured each student's reading accuracy and comprehension retell from a provided text. The study was done to indicate if students were improving with their reading levels and making progress in comprehension through the instruction of the strategies. The comprehension strategies were taught through a gradual release model; one comprehension strategy at a time. Students were able to focus on one strategy at a time and further intertwine the strategies and determine how to use multiple strategies for a text. The data scores from fall to winter indicated there was significant improvement in reading levels; and data results from winter to spring indicated there was significant improvement.

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Dedication

I would like to dedicate this thesis to my daughters Addyson and Ella. I hope that you become life-long readers and find the passion and love for reading. All of the books we have read to you fill your hearts. When reading, remember to look deep and discover the meaning and love of that story.

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Chapter I: Introduction

Linda Hoyt (2005) states “Comprehension instruction and instruction in word recognition and decoding can occur side by side, and even work synergistically.

Research on comprehension should guide the changes in instruction to improve reading comprehension of students throughout schooling” (p. 9).

Elementary students receive phonic instruction, word recognition work to build vocabulary, and comprehension strategies to strengthen meaning of a text. The primary elementary students focus highly on phonics because professional teachers often assume that phonics and a child’s word bank foundation must be stable before comprehension skills are taught. According to Miller (2002), some believe that it is not wise to teach young children strategies for comprehension while they are still learning to decode. In *Comprehension Instruction: Research-Based Practices*, Pearson and Duke (cited in Goudvis & Harvey, 2000), wrote that “Comprehension instruction in primary grades should appear together often and that comprehension instruction in the primary grades is not only possible but wise and beneficial rather than detrimental to overall reading development” (p. 247).

Phonic instruction is an element in the reader’s workshop model that co-exists with comprehension strategies. Miller (2002) stated that professional teachers in primary elementary tend to focus entirely on phonics and word development and “save” comprehension strategies for the intermediate elementary years. Teachers may think that children are not capable of stretching their thinking and digging “deep” into the meaning of a text. Sometimes, children are entering kindergarten/first grade with a vocabulary that is above grade level, but comprehending a text remains difficult. Children

concentrate on word analysis and word recognition and simply read the words without reaching for meaning. Do proficient readers ask questions, make connections, synthesize their understanding, determine important ideas, and use their prior knowledge when reading? Or do proficient readers answer the five questions at the end of the text for comprehension understanding?

The word *read* in Webster's New World Dictionary (cited in Harvey & Goudvis, 2000) defined reading as "getting the meaning of something written by using the eyes to interpret its characters" (p.5). Harvey and Goudvis (2000) stated that "Reading involves cracking the alphabetic code to determine the words and thinking about those words to construct meaning. Teaching reading to provide a life-long skill for learners requires extreme compassion and education on proper skills/strategies" (p. 5).

At the entrance of first grade, some students are assessed extremely high for reading without the comprehension component being a factor. Parents may also be educated to focus entirely on vocabulary and word identification without incorporating comprehension skills through the readings. The parents then receive a false impression when their child is assessed using vocabulary and comprehension as the assessment factors. Parents and educators make the assumption that a child's reading level is based solely on how many words he/she knows. Assessments that are geared toward word recognition achievement and comprehension of the read material provide a more accurate reading level for children. Research clearly indicates that children need to make meaning of written text in order to develop skills and knowledge.

A thesis report described a study called *Improving Reading Comprehension Through Vocabulary* in which Berg, Cressman, Pfanz (cited in Baier, 2005) focused on

using vocabulary to improve reading comprehension. Baier (2005) stated that the study was conducted to examine if the use of games and other study methods would improve vocabulary knowledge; therefore, improve reading comprehension and reading levels. The students were exposed to vocabulary words at least five times throughout each week including pretests and posttests. Baier (2005) concluded that a review of the vocabulary pretests and posttests revealed improved knowledge of vocabulary words and significant improvement in reading comprehension and reading levels in the group.

Howard Gardner (cited in Harvey & Goudvis, 2000) stated that “The purpose of education is to enhance understanding” (p.9). Prior to teaching students the strategies for comprehension, the retell of the story was prompted through the questions at the end of a story orally or written. When teaching for the understanding of a text, readers need to go beyond the literal meaning and reach deep for the meaning of the text. Readers who may understand the meaning of the text develop connections from the text to themselves, other sources, or the environment resources. Students question themselves throughout the text and infer what is happening or about to happen based on the flow of the text. When readers are creating mental images or pictures of characters and settings they reach beyond the words and stretch their thinking about the story. Before reading the texts, students bring forth schema or their background knowledge which impacts what they know about situations based on experience. Miller (2002) stated that schema impacts the understanding of non-fiction material because what a student needs to know relies on what they already know. Comprehension is more than retelling the story in sequence or defining the major events that occurred. Students of elementary age will not acquire the skills for constructing meaning without proper instruction using rich literature.

Harvey and Goudvis (2007) wrote that “Active literacy is the means to deeper understanding and diverse, flexible thinking” (p.44). When students are taught in an active literacy environment, the process of developing the skills for comprehension is intriguing and engages students through interaction amongst peers. Students in an active literacy classroom are supported and strengthened through interaction that promotes literacy and communication among classmates.

All students, including special education students, deserve the teaching instruction that allows them to achieve. Research-based instruction that demonstrates achievement from students will be a requirement starting July, 2008, through Response to Instruction, RTI. Response to Instruction approaches students with a learning disability concern through instructing students with a problem-solving method that meets the needs of students. The instruction is based on research best practices. Batsche (cited in Strangeman, Hitchcock, Hall, and Meo, 2006) states that “RTI may be more broadly defined as an approach that uses students' response to high-quality instruction to guide educational decisions, including decisions about the efficacy of instruction and intervention, eligibility for special programs, design of individual education programs, and effectiveness of special education services” (n.p.). RTI has the ability to identify a learning disabled student through early intervention and proper instruction. The comprehension strategies taught through a balanced literacy program are in conjunction with best practice for RTI.

Statement of Problem

The purpose of this study is to determine the correlation of a child’s reading level and comprehension. The study will indicate if children are progressing in comprehension

as well as word recognition throughout the year. The study will also be a comparative method to determine growth of student's comprehension abilities after an implementation of comprehension strategies. The study will involve twenty-three first-grade students at Hudson Prairie Elementary, Hudson, WI. The study will begin Fall 2007 and conclude in Spring 2008. The research will be conducted through the formal reading assessments, Developmental Reading Assessment, involving word recognition/vocabulary and comprehension.

Research Hypothesis

A review of literature indicates that students, who have been taught reading comprehension skills in conjunction with phonics and vocabulary instruction, achieve an adequate independent reading level for each child. The assessment that demonstrates vocabulary and comprehension is more an appropriate label for reading level identification. Therefore, there will be a positive correlation between the increase in comprehension and a child's reading level after best practice of comprehension strategies have been taught. The null hypothesis is that no correlation exists between a child's comprehension abilities and reading level after best practice has been implemented.

Definition of Terms

The following terms are defined for the purpose of understanding what the terms mean for the instruction of reading.

Comprehension: readers think not only about what they are reading but what they are learning (Harvey & Goudivis, 2000).

Determining Importance: a combination of interesting details and information essential to a basic understanding of a topic (Harvey & Goudivis, 2000).

Inferring: text clues merge with the reader's prior knowledge and questions to point toward a conclusion about an underlying theme or idea in the text (Harvey & Goudivis 2000).

Schema: the sum total of our background knowledge and experience-what each of us brings to our reading (Harvey & Goudivis, 2000).

Synthesizing: combining new information with existing knowledge to form an original idea, a new line of thinking, or a new creation (Harvey & Goudivis, 2000).

Assumptions

The assumptions that lead into the research from past experience were that children who are above grade in reading have difficulty comprehending the text level of their vocabulary. A number of students entering first grade may have a high reading level, but the comprehension level is low in correlation with how many words they know. Students in K-1 are often not taught the intuitive comprehension strategies to gain a high level of thinking during reading.

Limitations

The study will be conducted with twenty-three first grade students which is a small percentage of the first graders who attend a public school in Wisconsin. The capabilities and educational experience may differ for each child depending on previous education/educators in kindergarten. A limitation for this research is that the assessments the public school provides is the DRA kit which has only two reading samples per reading level, which may hinder results due to previous exposure.

Chapter II: Literature Review

Introduction

A child's reading level dictates vocabulary, fluency, word recognition, and comprehension. A child who is reading above grade level may lack the comprehension skills to understand meaning of the text because the child has become focused on decoding the words. Kathleen Francescani (cited in Hoyt, 2005) states "When children think aloud about, question, respond to, and enjoy their literacy experiences, their voices resonate, their smiles broaden, and learning happens" (p.76).

Students with a learning disability and all students' education will be impacted through Response to Intervention , RTI, July, 2008. According to Strangeman, Hitchcock, Hall and Meo (2006) RTI emphasizes student outcomes instead of student deficits and makes a clear connection between identification and instruction. "The process of RTI involves: 1) screening for at-risk students; 2) monitoring of responsiveness to instruction; and 3) determination of the course of action. Student response to the intervention will determine the appropriate placement of a tradition classroom or special services. One of RTIs' purposes is to determine best practice for all students and which research based practices improve achievement. This chapter will include a discussion of comprehension strategies which are devoted to strengthening a child's understanding of text.

Comprehension Strategies

According to Harvey and Goudvis (2000), after ten years of study and practice in comprehension, they are committed that comprehension instruction is not just one more component of instruction. In fact, when it comes to reading, it is likely the most

important element of reading. Children begin to read and become focused on decoding and developing strategies to figure out words. A number of teachers assume that comprehension can be assessed through the questions at the end of a basal or worksheet; however, Dolores Durkin (cited in Harvey & Goudvis, 2000) concluded through hours of observations “that teachers were actually assessing students’ literal understanding rather than teaching them specific strategies to better comprehend what they read” (p.6).

When it comes to reading, understanding is the sole purpose for reading, and teaching comprehension is not just one more task for teachers to add to their reading instruction. Teachers are feeling pressure from state standards and benchmarks for student achievement at a proficient level. Teachers are already teaching comprehension in many differentiated forms, there is not one wrong way to teach it; however the strategies described in this paper engage students in the text and develop understanding of what they read. According to Sinatra, Brown, and Reynolds (cited in Harvey & Goudvis, 2007) “Comprehension strategies are no more than tools that readers employ in the service of construction meaning from text” (p.14).

What strategies do we teach and how do we teach them? Keene and Zimmerman (1997) found that many studies that examine the thinking of proficient readers pointed to only seven to eight thinking strategies used consistently by proficient readers. The authors reiterate if teachers taught these strategies instead of the basal or worksheet questions, readers would better comprehend and analyze text. Keene and Zimmerman state that “The researchers recommended that each strategy be taught with singular focus, over a long period of time, to students from kindergarten through twelfth grade and beyond, and that teachers model and students practice the strategies with a variety of

texts” (p. 21). The connection of terms throughout children’s schooling benefits them and increases their knowledge of the strategies as their reading levels increase.

Reading out loud and demonstrating the thinking strategies, models the appropriate comprehension strategies before readers engage in texts. Book selection for instruction provides key information as to what strategy can be explored or the selection allows a blend of strategies throughout the chosen text. The thinking reader becomes a part of the written text and relates his/her own life experiences for understanding. E.L. Doctorow (cited in Harvey & Goudvis, 2007) says “Any book you pick up, if it’s good, is a printed circuit for your own life to flow through-so when you read a book, you are engaged in the events of the mind of the writer” (p.5). Encouraging readers to think about themselves as a reader and writer develops an attentiveness to the text and the strategies become intertwined through the reading process.

Release of Strategies for Instruction

Teachers are encouraged to deliver the material during instruction of the strategies in a gradual release approach. According to the research, there is not a specific time line in which each strategy should be taught or an order of the strategies. The strategies need to be taught individually, yet, each strategy intertwines with one another in how meaning is constructed. Fiedling and Pearson (Harvey & Goudvis, 2001) identify four components of the comprehension strategy instruction that follow the gradual release of responsibility approach: teacher modeling, guided practice, independent practice, and application of the strategy in real reading situations.

The four components by Fiedling and Pearson (Harvey & Goudvis, 2001) state “during the teach modeling stage, the teacher explains the strategy and demonstrates how

the strategy would be used through his/her own reading experience. The teacher reads and thinks aloud during a shared reading lesson where students can visualize and identify to the teacher. Guided Practice follows the modeling stage where students and the teacher work cooperatively as they experience a strategy through a text” (p.13). The teacher decrease the involvement of his/her ideas and encourages students to share and think aloud about their understandings.

The independent practice is the third sequential stage in the release model which is where students monitor their individual reading comprehension and track their use of the strategies. When students are engaged and demonstrate knowledge of the strategy is when independent practice becomes fully effective. Application of the strategy in real reading situations implies that the students clearly understand what the strategy is and how it corresponds to comprehension. At the fourth stage in the release model, students can adapt the strategies to other genres and peer reflect with the strategies. Teachers are individually reading student writing and listening during reading conferences to determine when each stage is appropriate for the next stage of instruction.

Schema and Connections

The seven comprehension strategies that are profound in proficient readers are: schema, a connection to their prior knowledge, questioning, visualization/mental images, determining importance in non-fiction, synthesizing or retelling, inferring/making judgments and interpretations of the text, and fix-up strategies for when comprehension is broken. Comprehension instruction is instruction that targets the thinking that occurs during reading, and thinking that determines how deeply the text is understood (Keene & Zimmerman, 1997).

Schema and developing connections from the text is a key start for teaching comprehension instruction. Schema is the prior knowledge or background knowledge that one has when reading a text. A proficient reader tends to have more schema about the world which affects comprehension because the reader can relate to more types of text. In *Handbook of Reading Research* (Kamil et al., 2000), children develop schematic representations from recurring events in their lives. Harvey and Goudvis state that “When we apply our background knowledge as we read, we guide students to make connections between their experiences, their knowledge about the world, and the text they read. Connecting what readers know to new information is the core of learning and understanding (pg. 17).

Children have schema about daily routines such as meals, bedtimes, birthday celebrations, and family events. Children experience different events and no two people can bring forth the same schema when reading a book. The emotions and feelings a book creates offers the reader a connection to a prior experience that reminds them of the event. The emotions that link to the characters, knowledge of topic, main idea, and the personal experiences the text offers strengthens the readers understanding of the message or idea the author depicts (Harvey & Goudvis, 2000). The background knowledge from daily events and experiences enhances the ability of inferring and drawing conclusions when reading a text. Miller (2002) defined schema as “the stuff that’s already inside your head, like places you’ve been, things you’ve done, books you’ve read, all the experiences you’ve had that make up who you are and what you know to believe to be true” (p.57). The background knowledge leads readers to make connections from the text. The three

types of connections are: text-to-self, text-to-text, and text-to-world. The definitions for each of the connections are defined by Harvey and Goudvis (2000) as the following:

Text-to-self connections are connections that readers make between the text and their past experiences or background knowledge.

Text-to-text connections are connections that readers make between the text they are reading and another text, including books, poems, scripts, songs, or anything that is written.

Text-to-world connections are connections that readers make between the text and the bigger issues, events, or concerns of society and the world at large.

Mueller (2004) states “Text-to-self connections are the easiest connections for children to make. Often children respond with ‘this reminds me of the time when...’. Children use a personal experience to connect the story information to themselves” (n.p.).

Text-to-text connections remind children of other texts they have read, stories with similar genre, or stories with the same author. Poems that follow a similar theme or writing style remind children of previously read poems, and children can connect the experiences to the present poems. Text-to-world connections go beyond personal experiences and other texts. Students learn information through current events from television, magazines, newspapers, or other people’s personal experiences. Children who can relate world experiences to the text more often explore these experiences during science, social studies, and literature. A key phrase that children use through all three types of connections is “this reminds me of...” which the student must think about the meaning of the text.

The three types of connections are content-based connections. Students can also make connections based on the genre of the book, formats, forms, authors, structure, and writing styles. The types of connections described cause the reader to search for the “true” meaning of the text. If the reader is able to connect the text in one of these ways, the reader has identified the meaning of the text and comprehension is enhanced. Fountas & Pinnell (2001) state that “it is the reader’s ability to go far beyond the particular text they are reading-to extend the meaning of texts that: deepens comprehension, changes the reader in some permanent way, adds to readers’ understanding of life and the world, motivates readers to engage with other texts, expands the reader’s language system, and promote enjoyment” (p. 319).

Questioning

Hoyt (2005) states “Students who develop strategies for questioning gain ownership of the process, a process that will be used over and over not only in reading, but in problem solving and decision making throughout school and life” (p. 117).

Questioning is a strategy that encourages involvement during the reading process because readers are continually wondering and engaging themselves in the text. Questioning is a human tool that one uses to clarify misunderstandings and search for the why. Human beings begin to question at the preschool stage and continue through their readings in life.

Questioning is the strategy that will keep readers from abandoning the book and encourages readers to seek answers for meaning. Questions have often been written as an assessment with answers that are clear and identifiable from the text. Questions in which the reader seeks for more information and knowledge, advance the reader into deepening

their understanding of the author's intent. Serafini (2004) states "As reading teachers, we cannot assume that readers know how to ask quality questions or understand what types of questions can be asked of a text. We must investigate the types of questions we ask and model for readers the types of questions that help us understand what we are reading" (p. 85). The first type of questions that are usually on a standardized test are literal types of questions that are intended for a yes or no answer. The second type encourages the students to think about if the characters and author's perspective are critical or analytical questions. The third type of question that Serafini described is a question where inferential thinking through the events from the story that could have a range of answers because the reader is responding with their idea based on the content of the story.

Keene and Zimmerman (1997) implied that "our questions help us formulate our beliefs about teaching and learning, and those beliefs underlie our instructional decisions. Consistent teaching of questioning will lead students into the habit of questioning and recording questions during reading" (p.100). Mueller (2004) states "self-questioning is an attribute of independent learners, in contrast to children who read only to answer questions from a worksheet or listed by a textbook author" (n.p.).

The purposes of questioning during reading differ, because at various moments readers question to:

- clarify meaning
- speculate about text yet to be read
- determine an author's style, intent, content or format
- focus attention on specific components of the text

- locate a specific answer in the text or consider rhetorical questions inspired in the text. (Miller, p. 126)

According to Mclaughlin and Allen (cited in Hoyt, 2005), there are two types of questions readers develop when reading, thin questions readers ask and thick questions that arise during reading. Thin questions require specific answers based on specific information, while thick or open-ended questions initiate discussion and promote thought. Students need to be taught the difference because it will impact their thought process when reading various types of text like fiction and non-fiction. When readers develop questions, they are more likely to stay engaged with the text because they reach for meaning and understanding of the events that are happening or the information provided in the text.

Readers begin to search for their answers, either through the text, or infer what the answer could be based on the information provided in the text. Students may also need to gather information from other sources and link the resources to develop an answer. Many fascinating questions do not have a particular answer, the answer relies within the reader, reader's schema, and the inference they develop from the text. Harvey and Goudvis state "When our students ask questions and search for answers, we know that they are monitoring comprehension and interacting with the text to construct meaning, which is exactly what we hope for in developing readers (p. 82).

Visualizing and Mental Images

Visualizing and mental images are two terms which mean the exact same thing when reaching for meaning in a text; both terms are thought of as creating a picture or movie inside the reader's head of the story being read. The term mental image is used in

the primary grades, and visualization coordinates with the intermediate grades. Creating mental images allows the story to become alive and real to the reader. Children can create their mental image from a text by using their five senses: what sounds are heard during the story?, what smells are described through the words?, what images are developed as the story progresses, are there any context clues that indicate taste?, and what is in the story that describe how something feels? A sensory web for readers designates each one of the senses, and the reader can respond with their created images using the text's description.

The use of poetry, picture books, wordless picture books, and chapter books provides explicit opportunities for children to draw upon the imagery of where the story could take place or the meaning of the text. During the instruction of mental images, Miller (2002) listed essential possibilities for children to explore when using mental images. Below are factors that Miller (2002) supports the instruction of mental images (p. 80):

- images are created from readers' schema and words in the text
- readers create images to form unique interpretations, clarify thinking, draw conclusions, and enhance understanding
- readers' images are influenced by the shared images of others
- images are fluid: readers adapt them to incorporate new information as they read
- helps reader create vivid images in their writing (p.80).

Harvey and Goudvis (2000) state that "teaching children to construct their own mental images when reading helps them stop, think about, and visualize text content" (p. 23).

Inferring

The teacher stomps into the classroom, slams the door shut, and glares at the students. Undoubtedly every student in that room will make the same inference: the teacher is angry and upset. If you asked the students how they figured this out, they will tell you that they did not need to be directly told. Instead they ‘read’ the situation, put together the information available to them, and made an assumption. Like all of us, children are able to make inferences (Mueller, 2004).

Inferring requires background knowledge to connect concepts and information that will draw conclusions of the meaning of the text. Keene and Zimmerman (1997) defined inferring as “going beyond literal interpretation and opening a world of meaning deeply connected to our lives” (p.152). The theme and intention of the text appears through inferring because questions and prior knowledge provide the student with possible answers and conclusions. Inferring is truly making a prediction, right or wrong, about the ending or outcome of the text. A reader may infer about the conclusion of characters, develop responses to problem/solution, or connect non-fiction information based on prior reading. Poetry is an example of inferring when students imply their prior knowledge with the context of the reading and distinguish the poem’s theme.

Judy Wallis (cited in Hoyt, 2005), stated that “inferring is complex. Because inferencing requires active reading and a willingness to enter into a partnership with an author, modeling the process many time through thinking aloud, guided practice, and independent practice across the curriculum enables students to grow more skilled as readers” (p.142). Fountas and Pinnell state that “making an inference means to induce or hypothesize, to make conclusions based on information from the text” (p. 319). When

readers infer they make a conclusion based on information that was not present directly in the text but implied. Readers infer through character emotions, events that take place during the text, and determine the deeper meaning of the text whether the author implied the message or not.

Fountas & Pinnell (2001), provide direct instruction ideas to help readers learn how to infer:

- construct theories that explain how characters behave or plot unfolds
- have empathy for fictional or historical characters
- use background knowledge and information from text to form tentative theories as to the significance of the events
- create story images related to character, plot, setting, theme or topic
- understand what is not stated but is implied in the text (p.317)

Synthesizing

Synthesizing distinguishes itself from a summary by increasing and changing thinking versus a description of the meaning of the text. Synthesizing text forces the reader to consider the underlying themes, concepts, and information about the text and revolve his/her thoughts through the text. When synthesizing, readers need to stop periodically and think about what they have read and decide if their meaning and understanding of the text has altered based upon new knowledge or information gained from the text. Fountas & Pinnell (2001) identify questions reader address when using the strategy of synthesizing: “What does the information in this text mean to me?, What information is useful to mean and how does it fit (or not fit) with what I already know?, and What am I taking away with me?” (p. 319)

According to Harvey and Goudvis (2000), when readers synthesize, they:

- stop and collect their thoughts before reading on
- sift important ideas from less important ideas
- summarize the information by briefly identifying the main points
- combine these main points into a larger concept or bigger idea
- make generalizations about the information they read
- make judgments about the information they read
- personalize their reading by integrating new information with existing knowledge to form a new idea, opinion, or perspective. (p.25)

Teaching Comprehension Strategies (Mueller, 2004), stated that “synthesizing draws upon making connections, questioning, visualizing, inferring, and determining importance. The strategy allows a reader to step back from a text, and make a generalization, create an interpretation, draw a conclusion, develop an explanation” (n.p.). A reader who is developing meaning by synthesizing is creating a larger understanding through background knowledge that is superior to pieces of understanding. Synthesizing is a gathering of the pieces of knowledge and understanding and connecting the information for a great understanding.

Synthesizing is determining what is important and retelling the information in a complete thought. When readers collect important facts and themes and organize them in a purposeful way, it provides evidence of understanding of the text rather than a summary of what it was about. Synthesizing instruction is a difficult task and requires a lot of think-aloud. Think-alouds can be demonstrated through picture books, chapter books, and informational texts. Modeling think-alouds presents opportunities for students to

witness how thoughts change during reading and the key elements of the text.

Synthesizing is a specific tool used to comprehend text because it narrows meaning to specific components of the text and evolves the meaning from the beginning of the text to the end.

Determining Importance

Determining importance of information from the text can be as simple as the difference between fiction and non-fiction or the important and relevant topics and ideas that are in the text. A combination of schema and inferring aid in the development of determining key elements of the text when reading non-fiction. The reader distinguishes the important and unimportant information for comprehending meaning. In tests, readings, and other comprehension exercises, there is often one main idea or theme the reader is searching for during the reading. In authentic and meaningful texts, there are numerous amounts of information and ideas that the reader determines important.

The text *Mosaic of Thought* (Keene & Zimmerman, 1997) highlighted key levels which proficient readers use to determine important components of the text:

- **Word Level:** Words that carry the meaning are contentives. Words that connect are functors. Contentives tend to be more important to the overall meaning of a passage than functors.
- **Sentence Level:** There are usually key sentences that carry the weight of meaning for a passage or section. Often, especially in non-fiction, they contain bold print, begin or end the passage, or refer to a table or graph.
- **Text Level:** There are key ideas, concepts, and themes in the text. Our opinions about which ideas are important change as we read the passage. Final conclusions

about the most important themes are typically made after reading the passage, perhaps several times and/or after conversing or writing about the passage. (p.94).

Determining important components of a text factors in the reader's purpose and schema can impact what components are essential versus another reader. Readers who are searching for significant ideas that construct the meaning of the text are comprehending what the text is about and identifying the author's purpose and text format.

Determining importance is also necessary for memory. Obviously, we do not remember everything from a text so instead we categorize and list major themes or events from the text. When reading non-fiction material, the importance of remembering key facts from the material impacts short term memory versus remembering a mass amount of information which leaves the reader confused (Mueller, 2004.)

Determining importance impacts the role of and purpose of reading a text. The reader is reading for a particular purpose when non-fiction material has been chosen; to gather new knowledge and learn new information. Determining the important facts and pieces of information paces the reader through the material and provides a better opportunity for remembering and understanding the material.

Assessing the comprehension strategies through observation and written assessment are two key components to determine future instruction on what is needed or critique lesson effectiveness. Listening to a child as they read and determining which comprehension strategy is utilized during the child's reading can determine how successful the child is implementing the comprehension strategies. As children partner read, the conversations developed through discussion of books, can become an

observational assessment by listening to what they say. Written assessment through charts, journals, or recording scripts of what children say provides a document of the instructional success. During reading conferences, one-on-one individual reading with the teacher and student, continues to be a moment when teachers can discover what readers are thinking and applying during reading. The type of questions teacher pose for students can enquire in on the strategy that students are applying and the strength of application for each strategy.

The seven comprehension strategies discussed and defined in this chapter are key components to a balanced literacy program. The comprehension strategies should be implemented as early as kindergarten through literature. Children beginning in first grade can start to use personal texts and reading materials which they can apply the comprehension strategies. A variety of texts available provides opportunities for teachers to instruct the comprehension strategies repeatedly through new experiences of text and reading materials. Phonics and comprehension strategies need to be taught together through rich literature that offers experiences for students to understand meaning of the text and enrich knowledge.

Chapter III: Methodology

Introduction

This chapter includes a description of the study sample, the instruments used, and the data collection procedures involved. In addition, the data analyses used are reported. The chapter will conclude with the identified methodological limitations.

The results are based from a fall, winter, and spring reading assessment that the district provided. The assessments determined a child's reading level and comprehension capability.

Sample Selection

The sample selection is from a first grade classroom of twenty-three students. The classroom selection was based upon the kindergarten teacher's choice. All students in the classroom participated in three assessments and daily instruction of comprehension strategies. The students ranged from six to seven years old. Three students in the classroom received daily reading assistance through Title One. The classroom contained 12 boys and 11 girls from which the kindergarten teachers chose for the designated teacher during class placement. One child was diagnosed with an emotional behavioral disorder, two children received speech therapy, and two children received occupational therapy. The classroom included three students who participated in the English Language Learners program.

Instrumentation

The instrument that was used to assess each child was a Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA), which the public school chose as one of their elementary school assessments for language arts. The DRA is required for each child in the beginning and

at the end of the school year, with options mid-year in grades K-2. The study included three assessments to determine growth of a child's reading level and comprehension skills.

Pearson Learning Group (2003) states "The DRA is designed to inform and shape instruction. Intended to be administered by classroom teachers, who teach within a rich literature environment, the DRA can be used to (1) assess a student's independent reading level and (2) diagnose a student's strengths and weaknesses in relation to accuracy, fluency, and comprehension" (p. 1). Two forms of reliability were examined with the DRA, test-retest and scoring reliability. Salvia and Ysseldyke (cited in Pearson Learning Group, 2003) stated that "test-retest reliability is examined in the following situation: the behavior we see today would be seen tomorrow (or next week) if we were to test again" (p.26). Again, Salvia and Ysseldyke (cited in Pearson Learning Group, 2003) stated that "scoring reliability is if another tester were to score the exam, the results would be the same-we would not usually be confident about a student's test score if different examiners evaluated the same response differently" (p.27).

Pearson Learning Group (2003) states "Content validity was built into the DRA assessments during the developmental process. All texts are authentic, and the student is asked to respond to the text in ways that are appropriate for the genre" (p. 30). Criterion-related validity was also a part of the credibility for DRA; two studies described the validity for DRA. The correlation between the DRA independent reading level and ITBS comprehension grade equivalent July 2000, reported for first grade at .65(<.001). Reading comprehension construct and developmental nature provide validity for

construct validity regarding reading comprehension and the outcomes of two studies define the validity in the DRA technical manual.

Data Collection

The data for this study was collected from each student in the classroom of twenty-three students. The collection was done during the school day and completed individually with each child. Each student read a passage from the DRA kit, it was scored using the rubric within the kit. The student had to read at a 95% reading accuracy and 80% comprehension with no prompts provided during the retell. When the student reached a score at their independent level, 95% accuracy and at least 80% comprehension, the student completed the assessment. When the student has completed the entire process of assessment, the next student was given his/her opportunity. The other students in the classroom independently read during that time. The length of each student's assessment varied according to the difficulty of the text, because as the level increased, the time requirement increased. When the student started to read past level 16, the student began the assessment by reading independently and then was checked for comprehension with accuracy at the end. The levels 1-16 had the accuracy check first in case the reading level was too difficult; the elimination of frustration was important for the assessment.

Data Analysis

The study analyzed the reading assessment from fall, winter, and spring for a comparative study that determined if a child increased from instruction of comprehension strategies.

Chapter IV: Results

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to determine the impact of teaching the seven comprehension strategies through a fall, winter and spring reading assessment. The study began with a fall reading assessment which measures reading accuracy and comprehension. The teaching instruction of the comprehension strategies began by introducing a new strategy each month. A winter reading assessment was given to determine a child's reading growth and the impact that the instruction was applicable. A spring reading assessment determined the overall reading success that each student acquired through the instruction of the comprehension strategies. This chapter will incorporate the data results and tables that indicate each student's reading score.

Item Analysis

The reading assessments that each student participated in ranged in levels according to the child's ability with reading accuracy and comprehension. All reading assessment levels, except level 2, incorporate a comprehension component. The comprehension measurement requires retell of important details from the story the child read. The comprehension is measured on a scale of details responded correctly out of the determined response. The reading level is determined by each student's reading accuracy, 95% or higher, and comprehension of 80% or higher. Each student achieves a higher reading level by improving in reading accuracy and comprehension. The School District of Hudson strives for a fall score of 4, winter score of 12 and spring score of 16. The tables indicate each student and the assessment scores from fall, winter and spring

assessment. The tables indicate the each reading level the child achieved for each assessment.

The number of students that involved in the study was twenty-three. The mean growth from fall to winter was 9.70 reading levels and the growth from winter to spring was 4.78 growth of reading levels. In the fall reading assessment the most frequent score was a 3, the frequent score for the winter assessment was 10 and for spring were 16.

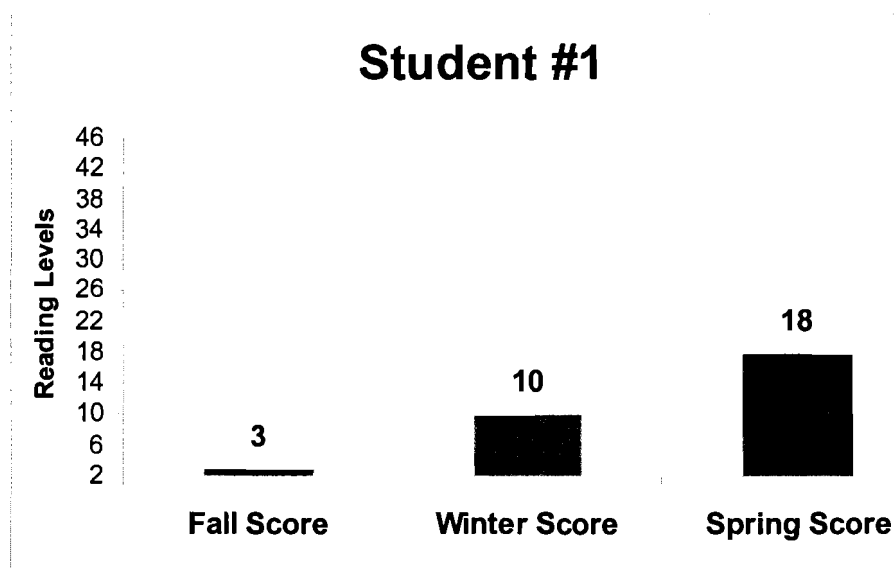


Table 1

Student #1 increased in reading levels a total of 15 increments. Student #1 reached grade level expectations at each assessment.

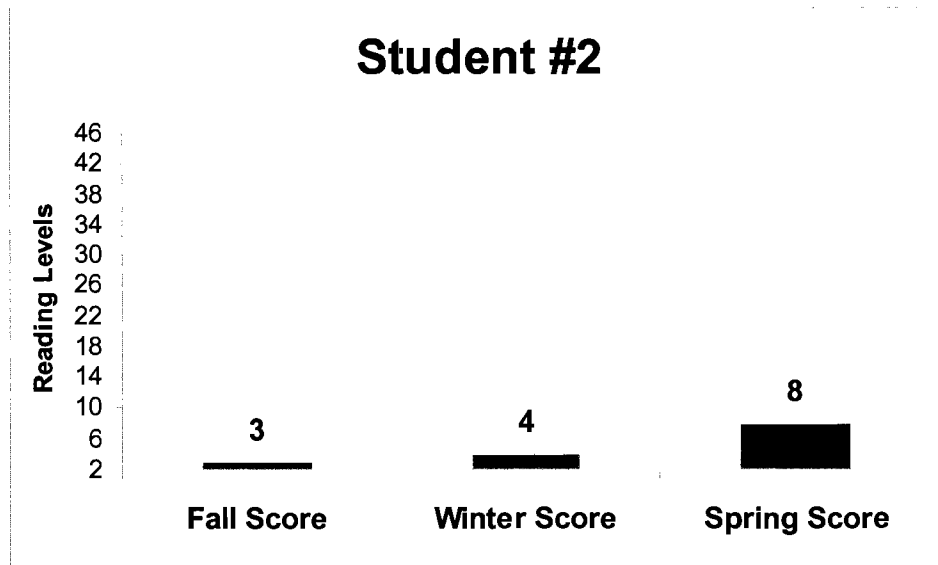


Table 2

Student #2 had minimal achievement in reading levels. Student #2 increased five levels from fall to spring.

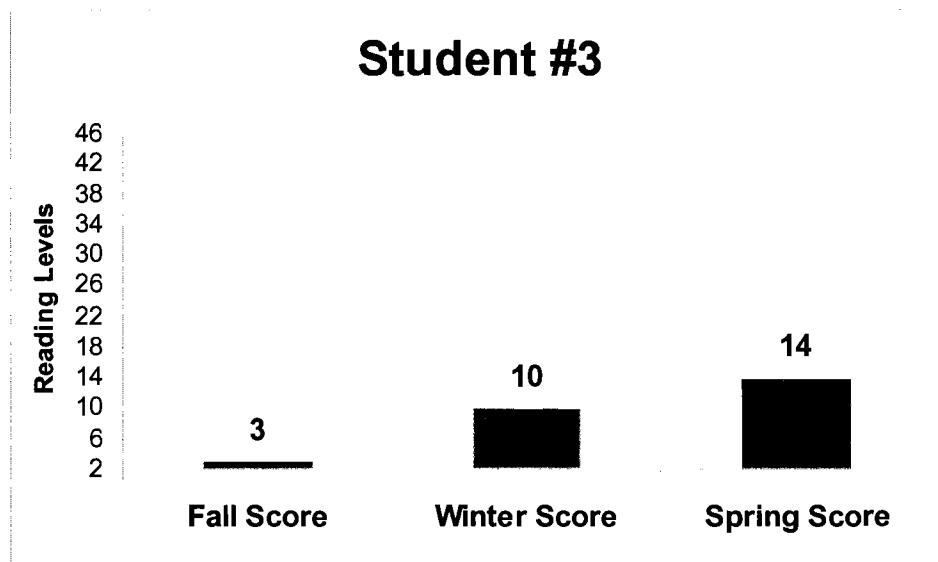


Table 3

Student #3 increased significantly from fall score to winter score. Student #3 made improvements eleven reading levels.

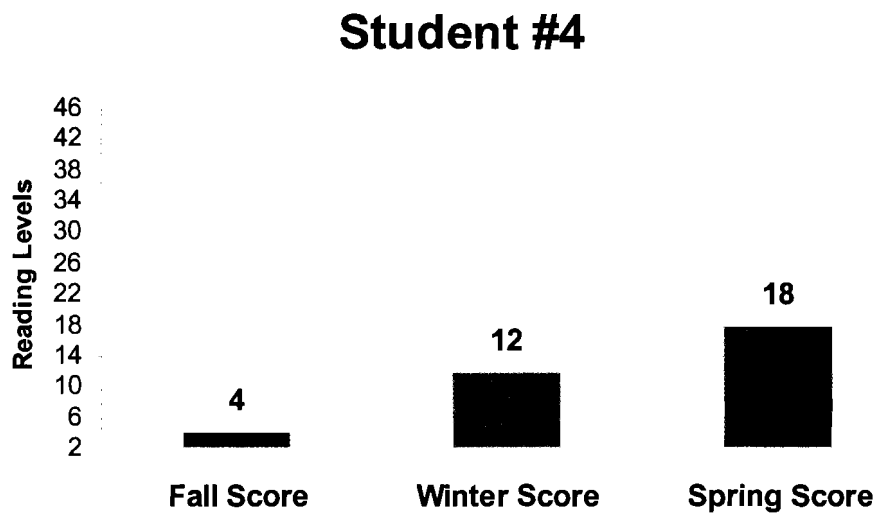


Table 4

Student #4 made significant increases in reading levels. Student #4 achieved the grade level expectations for each assessment and improved twelve levels.

Student #5

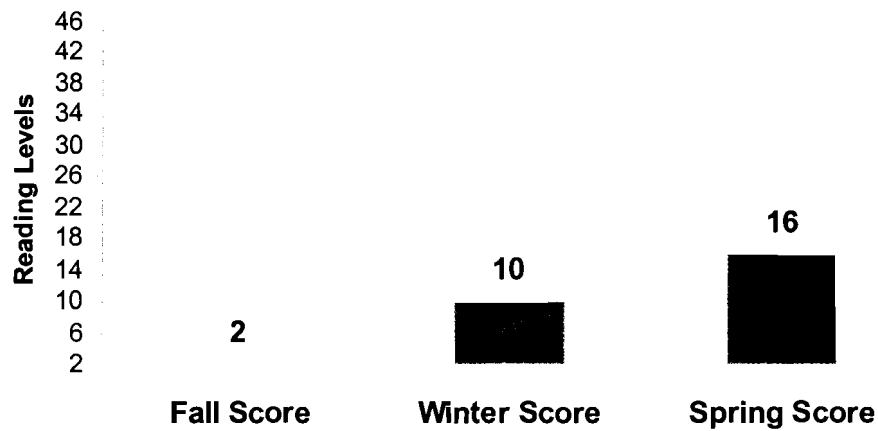


Table 5

Student #5 made significant increases in reading levels. Student #5 scored below grade level in the fall and achieved grade level in the spring. Student #5 increased fourteen grade levels.

Student #6

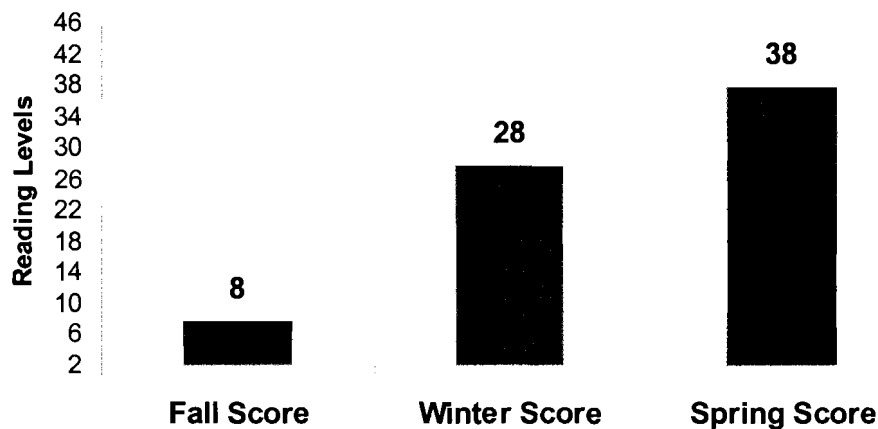


Table 6

Student #6 made significant improvements in reading levels. Student #6 increased thirty reading levels.

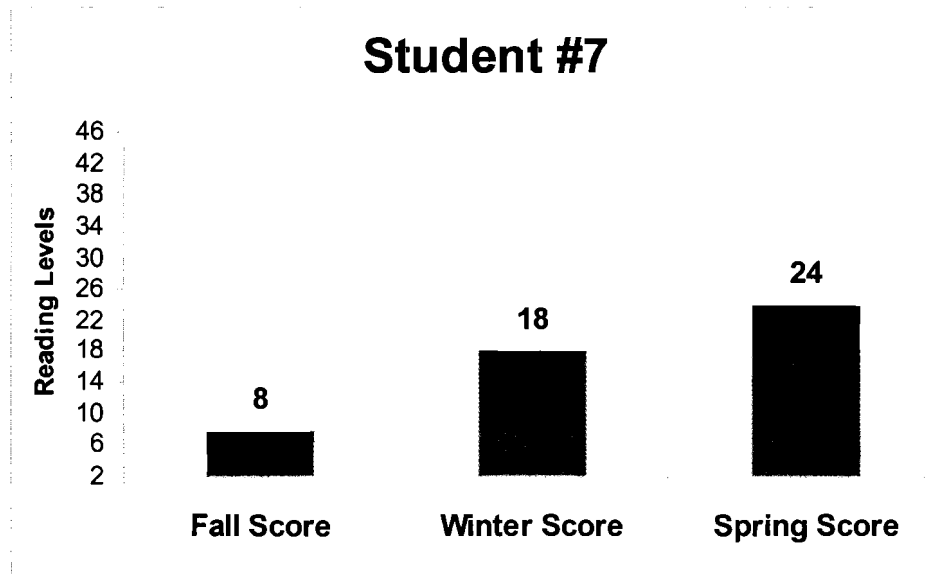


Table 7

Student #7 made significant improvements in reading levels. Student #7 increased sixteen reading levels from fall to spring.

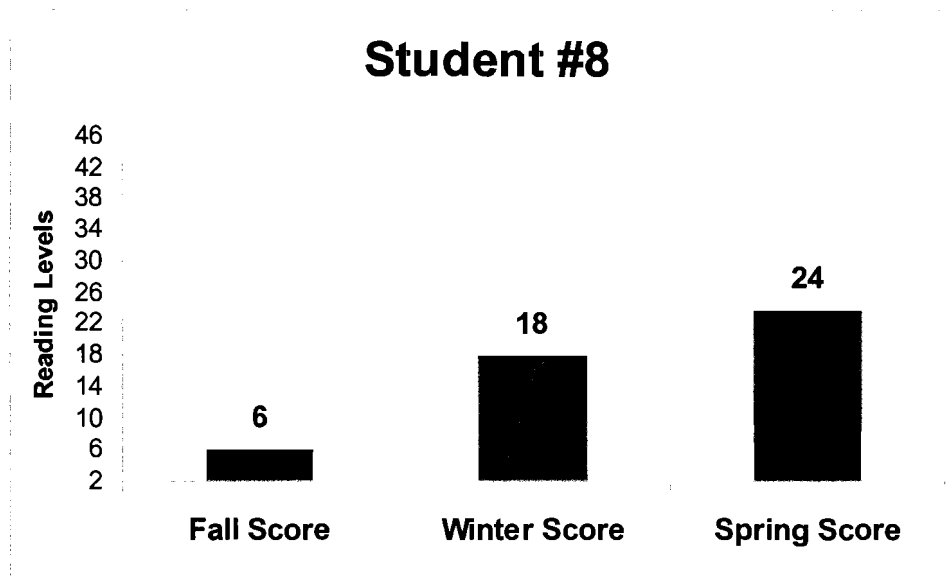


Table 8

Student #8 made significant improvements in reading levels and is reading above grade level at each assessment. Student #8 increased eighteen reading levels.

Student #9

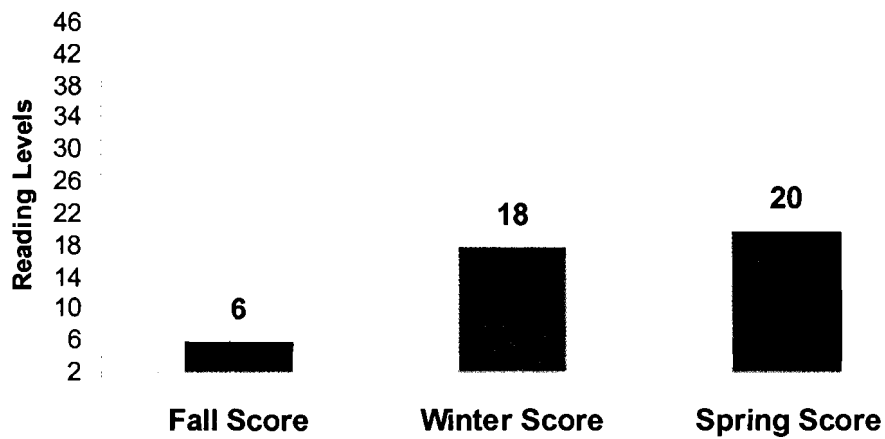


Table 9

Student #9 made significant improvements in reading levels. Student #9 increased fourteen levels total.

Student #10

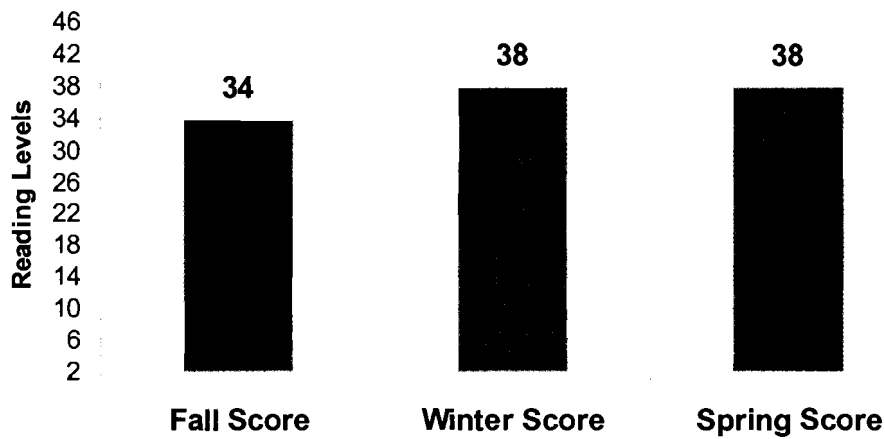


Table 10

Student # 10 made significant improvements in reading levels from the fall assessment to winter assessment. There was no improvement from winter to spring.

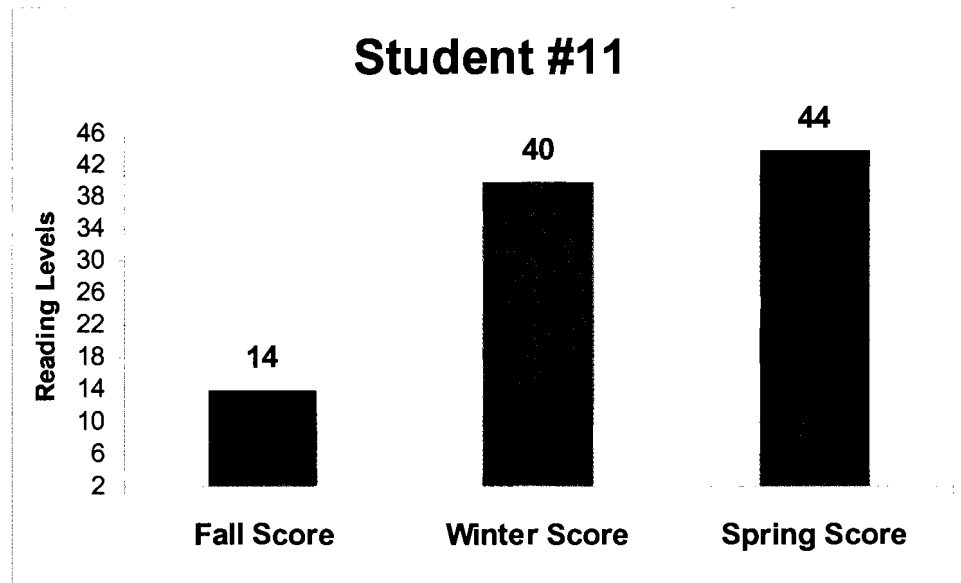


Table 11

Student #11 made significant improvements in reading level. Student #11 increased forty reading levels from fall to spring scores.

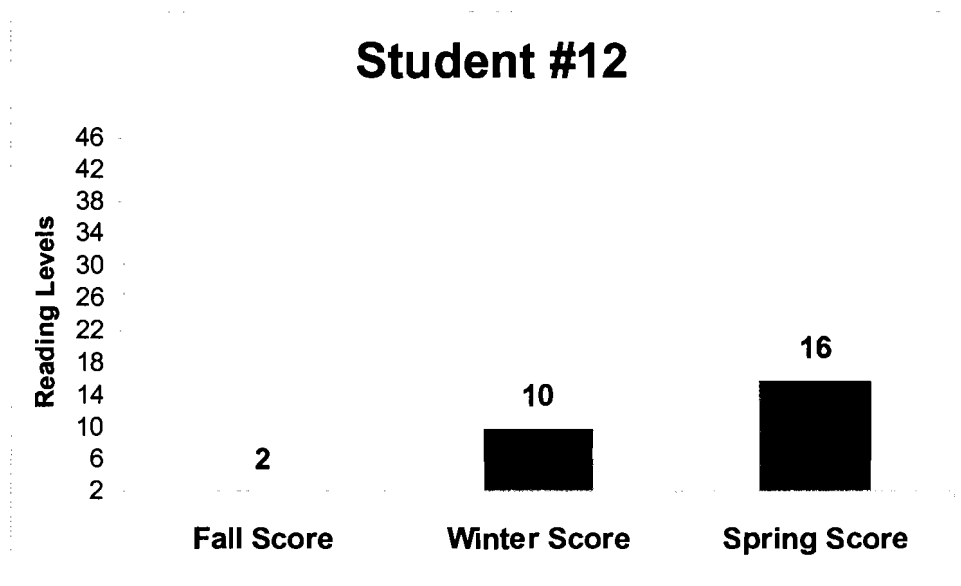


Table 12

Student #12 made significant improvements in reading levels. Student #12 achieved grade level expectations in spring assessment and increased fourteen levels.

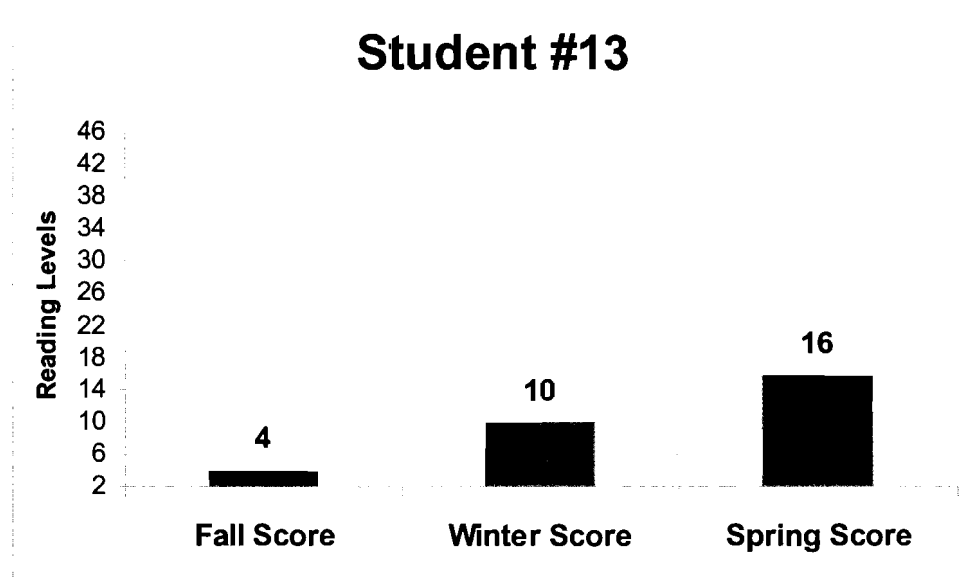


Table 13

Student #13 made significant improvements in reading levels. Student #13 is reading at grade level expectation each assessment and increased twelve levels.

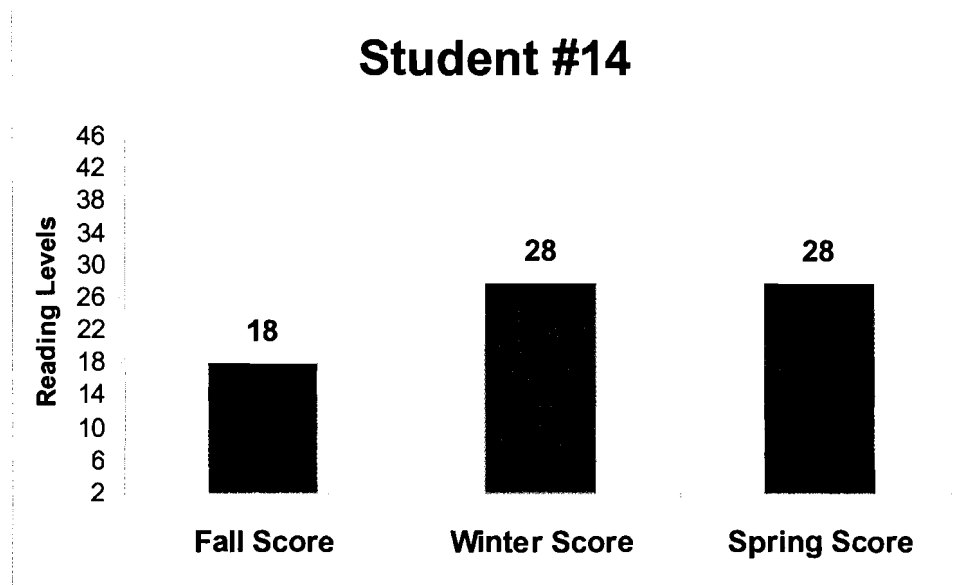


Table 14

Student #14 made significant improvement in reading levels from fall to winter scores. Student #14 did not increase from winter to spring assessment.

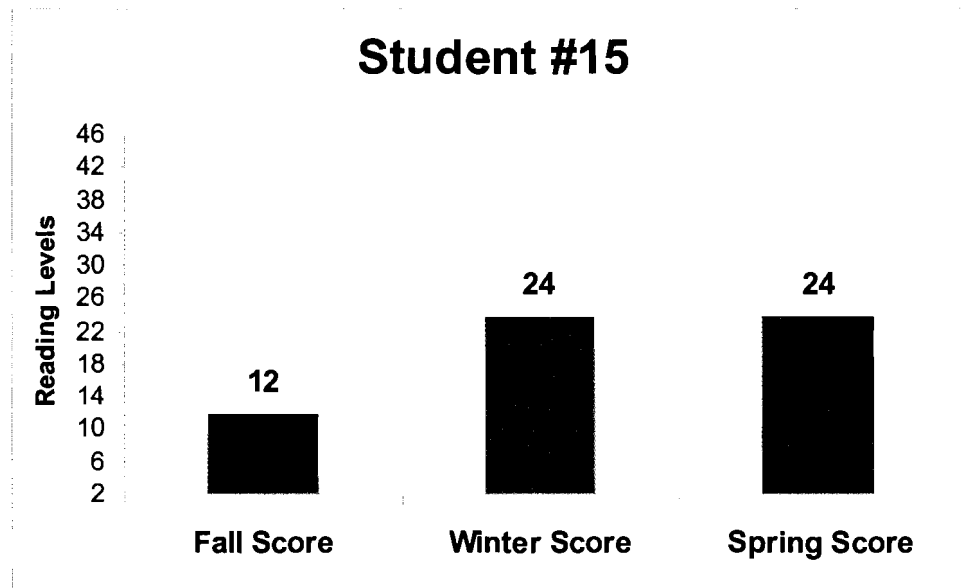


Table 15

Student #15 made significant improvements in reading levels from fall to winter assessments. Student #15 did not improve in reading levels from winter to spring.

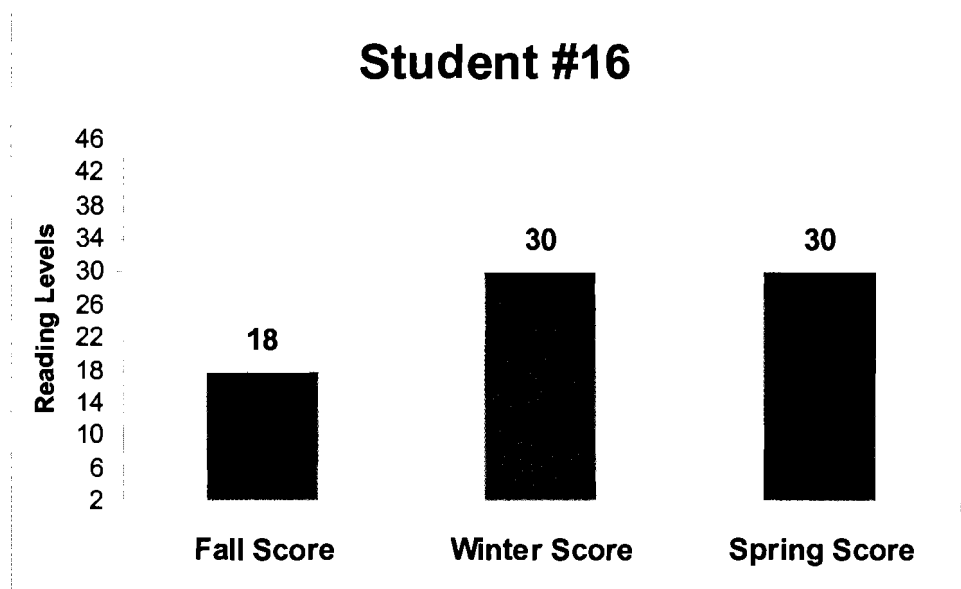


Table 16

Student #16 made significant improvements in reading levels from fall to winter assessments. Student #16 did not improve in reading levels from winter to spring.

Student #17

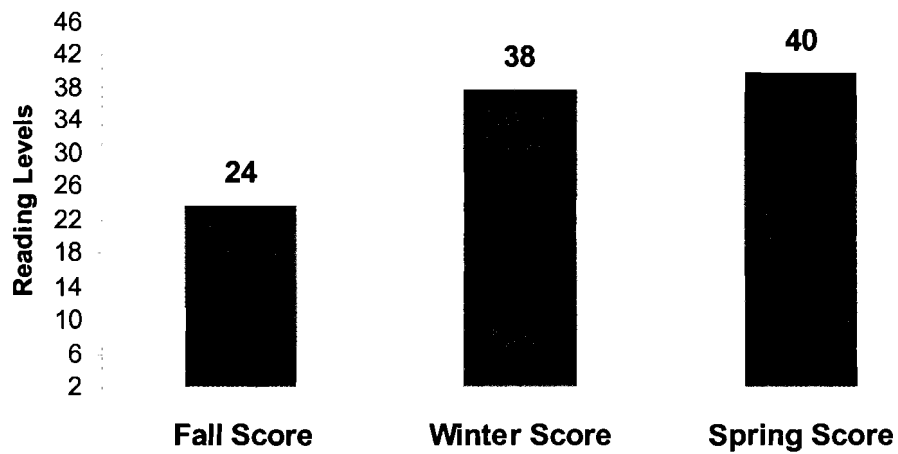


Table 17

Student #17 made significant improvements in reading levels. Student #17 has above grade level expectations for all three assessments and increased sixteen levels.

Student #18

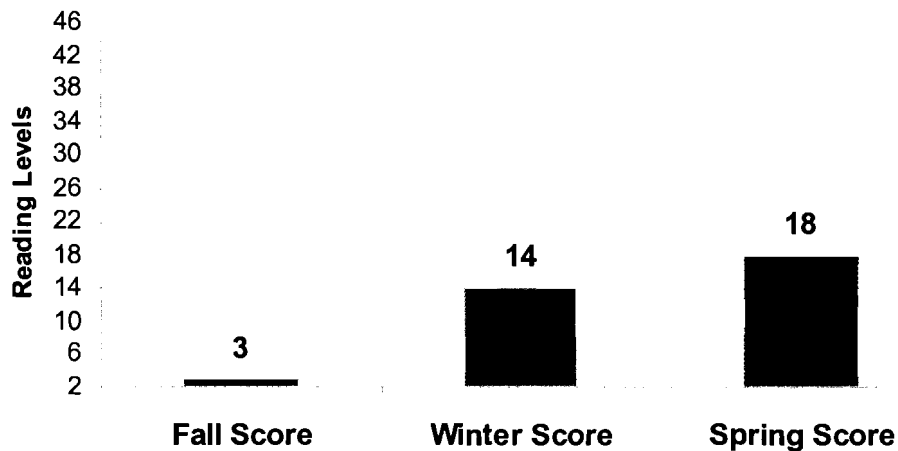


Table 18

Student #18 made significant improvements in reading levels. Student #18 achieved grade expectation for each assessment and increased fifteen levels.

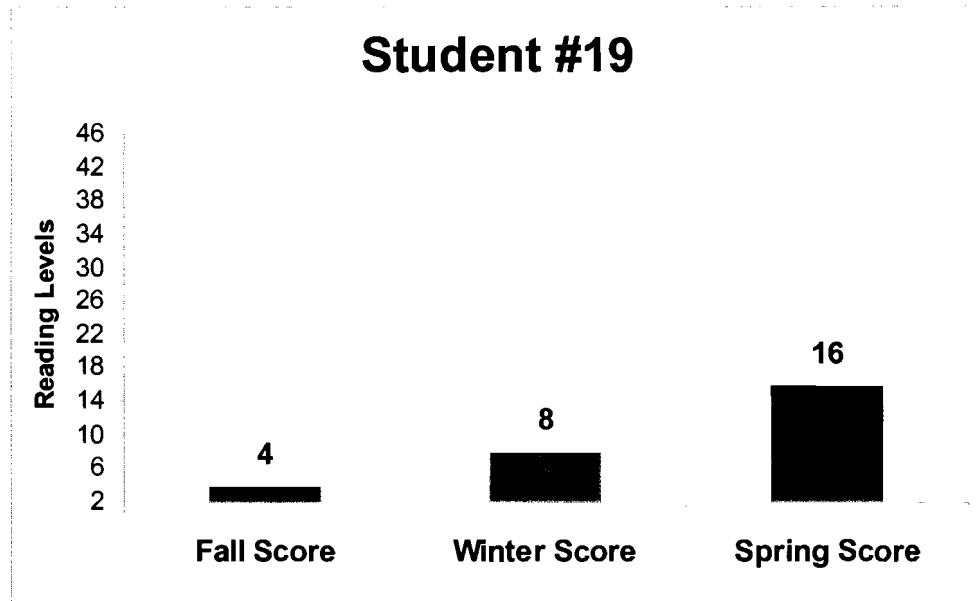


Table 19

Student #19 made significant improvement in reading levels. Student #19 made the greatest improvement from winter to spring and increased twelve reading levels.

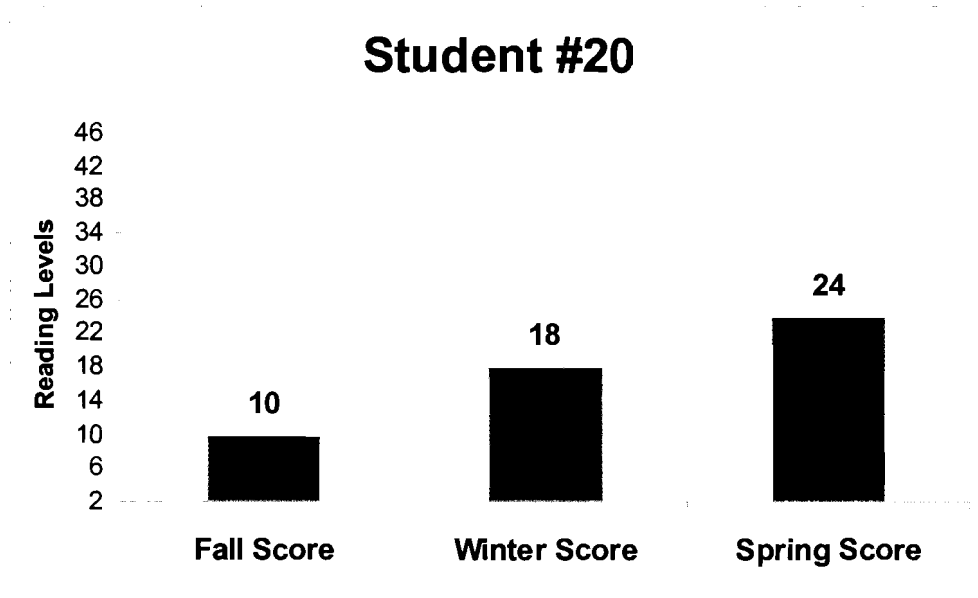


Table 20

Student #20 made significant improvements in reading levels. Student #20 achieved grade level expectations at each assessment and increased fourteen levels.

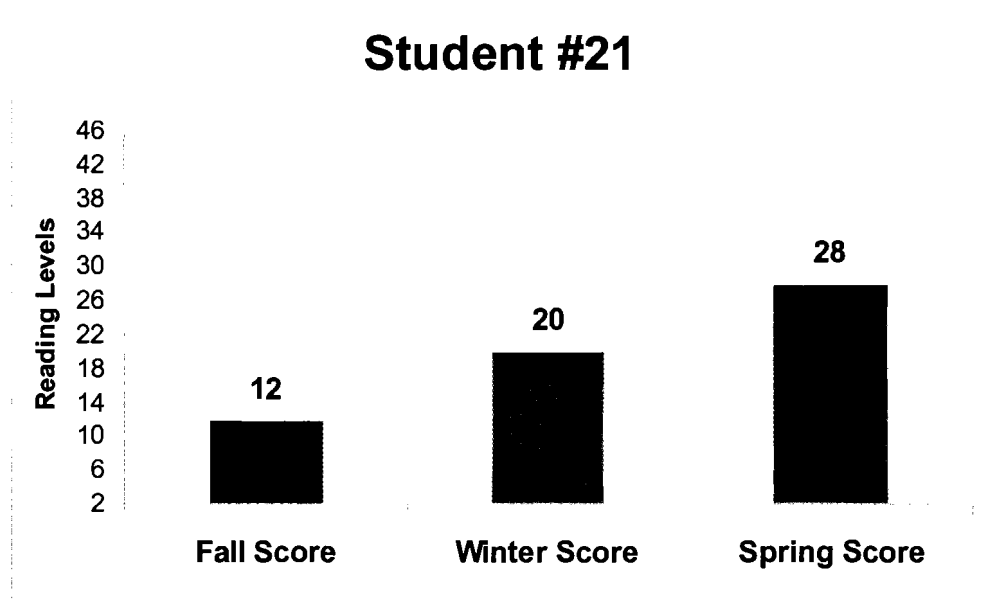


Table 21

Student #21 made significant improvements in reading levels. Student #21 increased a total of sixteen reading levels from fall to spring.

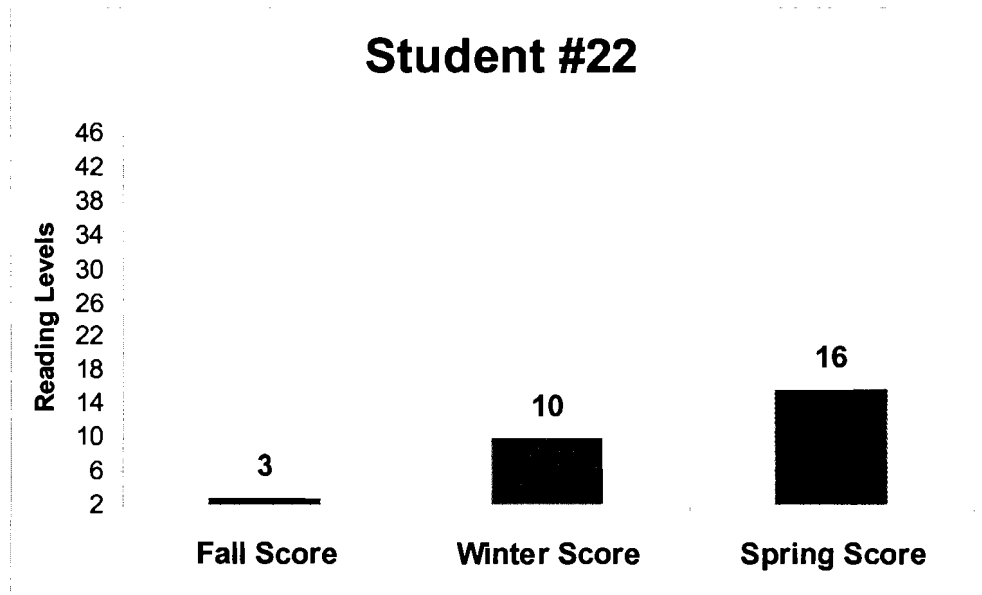


Table 22

Student #22 made significant improvements in reading levels. Student #22 achieved grade level expectations each assessment and increased thirteen levels.

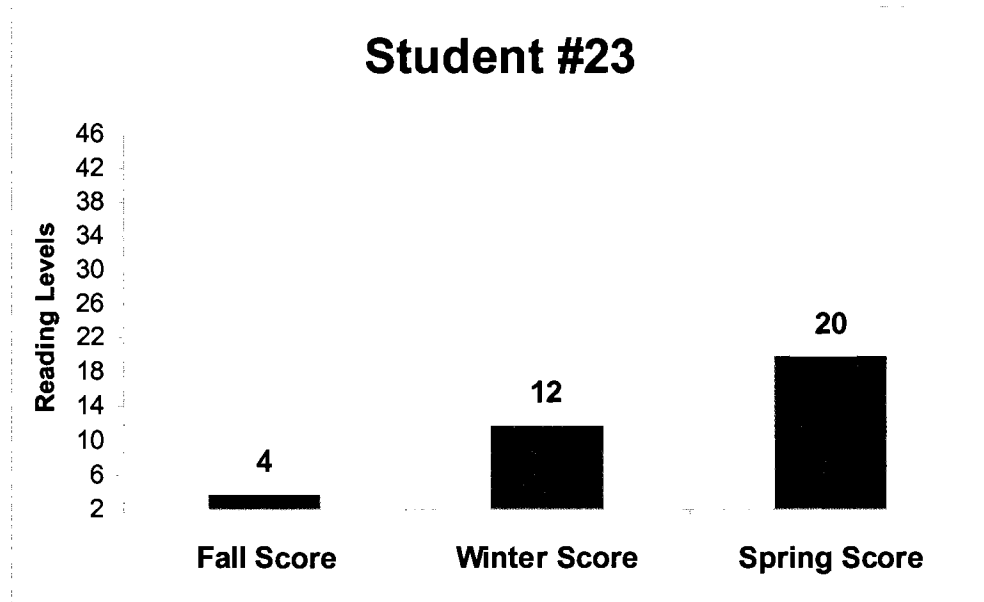


Table 23

Student #23 made significant improvements in reading levels. Student #23 increased eight reading levels each assessment.

Hypothesis

The null hypothesis was that no correlation exists between a child's comprehension abilities and reading level after best practice has been implemented. A t-test was run on the data. The results indicated that there were statistically significant differences found (fall-winter, $t = -8.853$; $p = .000$; winter-spring, $t = -7.807$; $p = .000$) between the groups, therefore the null hypothesis was rejected.

Chapter V: Discussion, Conclusion and Recommendations

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to determine if research-based instruction improves a child's reading and comprehension ability. The study began by assessing each child and recording their independent reading level. The instruction of the researched-based comprehension strategies began implementation about one per month throughout the school year. A reading assessment was given in winter to determine if instruction of the strategies was making a positive impact and to discover insight for improvement. The spring assessment concluded the study and determined that there was significant improvement in each student's reading level because of the incorporation of the comprehension strategies.

Discussion

In the review of literature it was determined that students who are instructed with comprehension strategies and phonics develop positive reading habits and skills to understand the meaning of the text. In Chapter II, Sinatra, Brown, and Reynolds, (cited in Harvey & Goudvis, 2007) stated that "comprehension strategies are no more than tools that readers employ in the service of construction meaning from text" (p.14). Throughout reading instruction and the reader's workshop instruction, students grew insight to the strategies and began verbalizing their awareness. The knowledge of when apply the comprehension during individualized reading came about distinctively. The focus of individual instruction for each strategy provided more knowledge of student achievement and opportunities for a better quality instruction. The gradual release of the strategies Fiedling and Pearson (Harvey & Goudvis, 2001) described provided a pace of instruction

that students and teachers can achieve. The gradual release approach coincides with the developmental appropriateness for students to be successful.

Conclusions

The results indicated that there were significant improvements amongst the students reading levels. The satisfaction that the whole class made progress with their reading indicates that the instruction is valuable and important. The comprehension strategies have given students a better understanding of why reading is important and the purpose of reading.

Recommendations

The assessment tool that the district provided reflects reading accuracy and comprehension. A suggestion for the district would be to find a reading assessment that truly measures the comprehension strategies individually and can determine the effectiveness of the instruction for each individual strategy. The assessment tool limited the opportunity to reflect on instruction of each strategy. For the future, having a tool like a rubric which corresponds directly to the comprehension strategies or an assessment tool which measure the comprehension strategies specifically would better correlate with the instruction goals.

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