

2005

Effective strategies for reading improvement

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Effective strategies for reading improvement

Abstract

Longfellow Elementary has had a history of poor results on the Iowa Test of Basic Skills. To address the problem, many innovations have been implemented such as Small Group Reading Instruction, vocabulary building, phonemic awareness, and sight word instruction.

This study was completed in an effort to determine if what teachers did on a daily basis to teach reading had an impact on students. This is important because teachers need their teaching to be efficient and effective. Test scores must increase at our school and we need data to prove that what we are doing is worthwhile. The question for study in this research was to determine if these innovations and extensive training transfer to higher scores on the Reading Comprehension and Vocabulary test of the ITBS and have an impact on the lowest achieving students.

Effective Strategies for Reading Improvement

Submitted
In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts in Education

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May, 2005

This Research Paper by: Susan Pelleymounter

Entitled: Effective Strategies for Reading Improvement

Has been approved as meeting the
research paper requirement for the degree of

Master of Arts in Education
Educational Psychology: Professional Development for Teachers

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5-25-05
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Introduction

Purpose

Longfellow Elementary has had a history of poor results on the Iowa Test of Basic Skills. Teachers and the school's various administrators have pondered the reasons for the low scores, and while there have been a few futile attempts to raise the scores, the results continue to be abysmal. The staff had several theories and even found situations to blame for the poor results year after year. First, while most grades had the same teachers for years, the third grade had a new team of teachers for the past five years. Second, our school had four new principals in the past eight years. Each principal had a unique style and focus which shifted the focus of the school. Third, our school has a high mobility rate. It has been estimated that the mobility rate is about 35%. With these inconsistencies in students, teachers and administrators, we are not completely surprised at the lack of proficiency on the ITBS.

The results of the Vocabulary Test on the ITBS has been low across the building with each grade level having struggled in that area. The building of vocabulary has been examined and different strategies have been tried. Some efforts have been more effective than others, and some grade levels have seen the scores on the ITBS go up due to the efforts put forth.

To address the problem, many innovations have been implemented at Longfellow Elementary such as Small Group Reading Instruction, vocabulary building, phonemic awareness, and sight word instruction. Small group reading instruction was implemented in the fall of 2000 through a district wide initiative. This implementation was the most comprehensive innovation undertaken by the district in recent history. Professional consultants, Gail Saunders-Smith, Ph.D. and Angela Maiers were brought in to train the teachers, and professional books were purchased for each teacher and school. The reading program in the district was given a set curriculum including a timeline for teaching the lessons. The purpose of a structured curriculum was to allow students to transfer from school to school without developing large learning gaps. Reading Coaches were assigned to each school to provide assistance and continuity.

Despite the daily use of Small Group Reading Instruction, some students have

difficulty making progress in their reading. Additional strategies and teaching must take place to improve the reading in the students who are making inadequate gains. The use of phonics instruction and more specifically, the direct teaching of phonemic awareness, was implemented in a first grade classroom to boost the achievement of the lowest four students. The teaching of sight words was intensified in the first grade to increase reading levels.

The purpose for the transformation and alignment of our reading program was to increase the reading achievement of our students. This study was completed in an effort to determine if what teachers did on a daily basis to teach reading had an impact on students. This is important because teachers need their teaching to be efficient and effective. Test scores must increase at our school and we need data to prove that what we are doing is worthwhile. The question for study in this research was to determine if these innovations and extensive training transfer to higher scores on the Reading Comprehension and Vocabulary test of the ITBS and have an impact on the lowest achieving students?

Significance

The significance of this study is to help teachers at Longfellow in the future use the most effective methods for teaching reading. Teachers are bombarded with possible strategies to try and there is limited time in which to try them all. This study will benefit teachers by discovering the effectiveness of the four methods studied at Longfellow.

Limitations

The study had some limitations. When examining the Reading Comprehension scores on the ITBS, only grade four was included in the study. This is only one of four grade levels that takes the test. The data does not include the test for the most current year, Fall 2004. It is believed that the trend to improve scores continues, but the data wasn't available at the time of the study.

A limitation for the vocabulary study is that specific learning strategies weren't examined. An overall trend was indicated by test results from the ITBS, but exactly which strategies at each grade level that influenced the trend cannot be determined. A limitation for the phonemic awareness study is that only four students took part in the study. All four students were from one classroom. The same limitation exists for the sight word study.

The four students that were part of the study came from one classroom. A future study might look at three first grade classrooms using increased direct teaching of phonemic awareness and sight word learning strategies, and examine if there is an increase in achievement in students from all three classrooms.

Review of Literature

Introduction

Small Group Reading Instruction, vocabulary instruction, phonemic awareness, and sight word instruction will be discussed in the literature review. In the literature on Small Group Reading Instruction, guided reading was defined, and the goal of guided reading was described. The implementation of guided reading begins with the grouping of the students and following a five step lesson. The benefits of guided reading as a method for teaching reading were evident in the readings. In the literature on vocabulary instruction, the importance of students building their vocabularies to become better readers was emphasized and it was found that vocabulary can be taught directly and indirectly. The literature on phonemic awareness discussed how crucial a solid program in our schools is for young children as they learn to read. Five parts to phonemic instruction are discussed. The literature on sight words described three methods for improving sight word acquisition.

Small Group Reading Instruction

Guided reading is small group reading where teachers support each reader's development of effective strategies for processing text at increasing levels of difficulty. Teachers, based on their knowledge of children, possible texts to use, and the processes involved in reading and learning to read, make a series of complex decisions that influence and mediate literacy for the young children in the group (Saunders-Smith, 2003). The goal of guided reading is for students to become fluent readers who can problem solve strategically and read independently and silently (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996). Fountas and Pinnell tell us that in guided reading, the teacher works with a small group of children who use similar reading processes and are able to read similar levels of text with support. The teacher introduces a text to this small group, works briefly with individuals in the group as they read it, may select one or two teaching points to present to the group following the

reading, and may ask the children to take part in an extension of their reading. The text is one that offers the children a minimum of new things to learn; that is, the children can read it with the strategies they currently have, but it provides an opportunity for a small amount of new learning.

For the implementation of guided reading, consideration is given to the grouping of students, books chosen for the lesson, and the steps to follow in the lesson (Saunders-Smith, 2003). The students are placed in small groups with other students that are able to read about the same level of text. The students read a variety of materials, fiction and non-fiction, and the difficulty of the text is increased as students progress. The teacher introduces the book and assists the student through coaching techniques and questioning skills. The groups change as the needs of the students change.

Gail Saunders-Smith breaks the guided reading lesson into five parts. The first step of the lesson is setting the scene. This is a conversation between the teacher and the students where the teacher orients the readers to the concept, genre, and author. This conversation readies the readers for what the author has to offer. The second step of the lesson is the picture walk. The picture walk guides the attention of the children through the pages, alerting them to potential sources of information for strategy use. The third step of the lesson is the reading of the text. The text is read orally in guided reading and silently paragraph by paragraph in transitional guided reading. This is the part of the lesson that the teacher receives assessment opportunities. The teacher listens to the children as they read aloud and notes any difficulties or observes any particular strategy that the student is using to solve problems. The fourth step of the lesson is the return to the text. What the students do during the reading of the text determines what the teacher will return. Skills, vocabulary building and strategy teaching takes place in this step. The teacher can point out what strategies the students used while they read. The last step of the lesson is the response. Responses can be oral, written, or visual and help children get back into the text to expand their understanding and make connections to the text.

A benefit for guided reading, according to Saunders-Smith is that all students are learning to read at their level. In large group reading, the instruction is too easy for some of the students, too hard for others, and just right for the rest. In Small Group Reading, the

instruction is just right for all of the students. The instruction is specifically designed for the needs of individual students. What they need to become a better reader at that moment is taught.

Vocabulary Instruction

Students should have an understanding of a wide range of vocabulary because vocabulary is essential to reading. If children do not understand the meaning of the words they read, the process becomes meaningless decoding (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996). An important part of comprehension is having a fluent understanding of many words.

Anderson and Nagy (1992) have pointed out that students must learn about three thousand words a year to keep up with the demand of learning to read and staying on grade level. There is evidence that students learn vocabulary from context, although some students don't have enough background knowledge to be able to use context alone. Fountas and Pinnell have written about four guiding principles that lead to the acquisition of vocabulary.

- New words should be integrated with familiar words and concepts.
- Students should experience words in repeated, meaningful encounters.
- Students should apply the words they learn, using them in other contexts and associating them with other knowledge.
- Instruction should engage students in active processing of word meanings.

The learning of vocabulary happens in a variety of ways. Students learn most vocabulary indirectly, but some vocabulary should be taught directly (CIERA, 2001). The Center for the Improvement of Early Reading Achievement (CIERA, 2001) states that the direct teaching of vocabulary can take a great deal of class time and that time would be better spent having students read. Each text may have too many unknown words for direct instruction, but students can understand most texts without knowing the meaning of every word in the text. Students should be given opportunities to use word learning strategies to learn new words on their own. However, a guideline to follow for the direct teaching of vocabulary comes from CIERA. The researchers from CIERA suggest teaching important words, especially words that are important for the understanding of the concept or text. Useful words are words that a student will see again and again and should be taught

directly. Difficult words should be identified and may need direct teaching for students. Some words are difficult due to spelling or content and need further instruction. Different methods for direct instruction include drawing a picture of the word to show understanding, students acting out the meaning of the words, and writing the words in sentences.

Teachers can facilitate the indirect learning of vocabulary by reading aloud to students. Students of all ages should be read to from various kinds of text to promote learning of new words. Read Aloud time should include a discussion of what is being read before, during and after the reading. Students should be reading independently from many sources during the school day (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996). Parents should encourage their children of all ages to read independently at home. Children also expand their vocabularies by engaging in conversations with other people. Parents can increase their child's vocabulary by talking with their children (Anderson & Nagy, 1992).

Phonemic Awareness

According to the National Reading Panel (1999), teaching children to manipulate phonemes in words was highly effective under a variety of teaching conditions with a variety of learners across a range of grade and age levels and that teaching phonemic awareness to children significantly improves their reading more than instruction that lacks any attention to phonemic awareness. Teaching systematic phonics instruction to students in kindergarten through 6th grade produces significant benefits for all students and for students who are having difficulty learning to read. The panel describes Systematic Phonics Instruction as an approach with five parts.

1. Analogy Phonics - Teaching students unfamiliar words by analogy to known words.
2. Analytic Phonics - Teaching students to analyze letter-sound relations in previously learned words to avoid pronouncing sounds in isolation.
3. Embedded Phonics - Teaching students phonics skills by embedding phonics instruction in text reading.
4. Phonics through Spelling - Teaching students to segment words into phonemes and to select letters for those phonemes.

5. Synthetic Phonics - teaching students explicitly to convert letters into sounds and then blend the sounds to form recognizable words.

This type of phonics instruction benefits both students with learning disabilities and low-achieving students who are not disabled. Children who had a low socioeconomic status made significant gains in alphabetic knowledge and word reading skills when the phonics instruction was used compared to an instructional approach that was less focused on these reading skills. Teachers need to use the most effective teaching strategies that help students become independent readers. Phonics skills and phonemic awareness make up only a small portion of the National Reading Panel report. These skills combined with reading comprehension, text reading and fluency provide a well balanced reading program that benefits all students (Shanahan, 2003).

Sight Word Instruction

There is a correlation between the number of sight words a child knows and the text level they can read. Low scores on the sight word test generally means a low text level. Once students are reading text, there are other strategies used to help them read, but being able to read sight words provides the students with anchors to help them along. Some students in first grade readily learn sight words with very little direct instruction or drill. Others need more direct teaching or strategies to help them learn the words. The students must be able to read the words quickly and accurately in many text situations.

Three strategies to help students learn sight words, and especially the students for whom learning sight words is difficult have been examined. The strategies are the Integrated Picture Cueing System and the Handle Technique, the Constant Time Delay, and Interspersal of Known Items.

The first strategy, the Integrated Picture Cueing system and the Handle Technique (Sheehy, 2000) are two similar ways to help students remember sight words. In the Integrated Picture Cueing system, rebuses, pictures used for words, are embedded within the word to be taught. There is a visual cue placed within the word that prompts the children. For example, drawing a chair for the "h" in the word chair. These can come from a standard rebus glossary. In the Handle Technique, the students tell what meaning and understanding they have of the word and then the child's meaning is turned into a handle or

a visual. This is a small, simple, abstract shape that acts as a trigger for the word. The technique uses a non-pictorial, personal, mnemonic cue to prompt recall of the word's name. The student is asked about the word and its meaning or association. The student's meaning is then turned into a "handle" or small abstract shape which acts as a mnemonic device to trigger recall. The handles are personal and make sense to the student, but probably aren't easily identifiable to the teacher. The difference between the two is that the Handle comes from a meaning or idea that the child had. The Integrated Picture cueing comes from a standard, teacher selected source. The pictures or handles are gradually faded out as the students learn the words.

Knight, Ross, Taylor, and Ramasamy (2003) compared two procedures for the teaching of sight words to students with mild mental retardation and learning disabilities. Constant time delay is an instructional strategy in which pre-response prompts systematically fade by inserting time between the presentation of a sight word card and a prompt for correct performance. Initially, a 0 second delay occurs by presenting the target word and immediately saying the sight word. Subsequent presentations of target words are followed by fixed intervals of time, up to four seconds, before saying the sight word. Only three words are chosen for a drill period, and the students are given up to ten tries for each word. A benefit of using this technique is that there is pre-response prompting and that is considered more effective than post-response prompting. A limitation is that only three words are worked on each drill period. It would take many sessions to learn a sight word list of 25 words.

Interspersal of known items is a method of sequencing unknown words with known words. Using sight word flashcard drills, students are presented with a specific percentage of unknown words to known words. For example, 30% unknown words to 70% known words. A benefit for using this technique is that the student controls the rate of the flashcard presentation and more words are presented in one session than the Constant Time Delay method. An additional benefit found was when using this technique, the students have a higher level of confidence when they know some of the sight words. It can be frustrating for students if all of the words in a drill session are unknown to the student.

METHODS

Introduction

The purpose of this research was to determine if the teaching strategies in grades Kindergarten through 5th grade at Longfellow had a positive effect on the ITBS scores for the students. Small Group Reading Instruction was implemented in Waterloo in 2000 replacing the anthology reading series that had been used for large group reading instruction. Teachers taught reading daily using guided reading, transitional reading and literature circles depending on the developmental level of the students. Several strategies for increasing sight words in students in first grade were implemented. An extra dose of phonemic awareness was provided for struggling students in first grade. Does the direct teaching of sight words and phonemic awareness and the school wide implementation of Small Group Reading Instruction increase the Reading Comprehension score of the Iowa Test of Basic Skills? The Reading Comprehension scores from the 4th grade and the Vocabulary scores from the ITBS were analyzed for grades 2-5. Sight word achievement and phonemic awareness for two small groups from 1st grade were analyzed.

Setting

Longfellow Elementary is located in Waterloo, Iowa. The Waterloo Community School District consists of fourteen elementary schools, four middle schools, and three high schools. The total enrollment for the district in 2003-2004 was 10,451 students. There are 4,749 Title 1 students, 1,554 special education students, 1,069 English language learners with a total of 8 different languages. In all of the Waterloo schools, 55% of the students qualify for free or reduced lunch. All Waterloo schools provide a free breakfast to all students each morning. The average class size for elementary schools in Waterloo is 21.1 students.

Longfellow has an enrollment of 332 students from preschool to 5th grade. Longfellow is composed of two preschool teachers, three teachers each in kindergarten through fourth grade. There are two teachers in fifth grade. Enrollment has dropped in the past two years at Longfellow because of the opening of three new schools in Waterloo. Longfellow had an average attendance of 93.9% in 2003-2004. That is up from 92% the

previous year. 91% of the students at Longfellow receive free or reduced lunches. We are a Title 1 School and are eligible for extra services. We are a smaller school and can provide extra resources to our students such as Title 1 teachers, extra books paid for by Title 1 funds, and a teacher leader. We have generous partners in education who provide many extras for the students such as Student of the Month lunches, soccer, printing, volunteer time with the students and holiday gifts.

Student Participants

ITBS Participants

The Iowa Test of Basic Skills was administered to the students at Longfellow in grades 2-5.

Sight Word Analysis

There were seven boys and seven girls in the first grade classroom. All students were regular education students. The teacher administered the tests and implemented the teaching strategies. The acquisition of the sight words for two students from the low group, two students from the medium group, and two students from the high group was analyzed. The students were ranked in order from low to high using the August sight word pretest. The students were also ranked from low to high using the August DRA (Developmental Reading Assessment). From these two rankings, the students were divided into low, medium and high groups. From these groups, two students from each group were randomly chosen for study.

Phonemic Awareness

Four students from my first grade classroom were chosen for this study because they were the lowest achieving students out of the class when considering DRA text level scores. The four students were at about the same text level and the children appeared to be lacking in the same skills.

MH is completing his second year in first grade. He is an intelligent little boy. He is quite creative, has strong interests in science and social studies and is doing well in math. He writes stories about characters that he creates and is never at a loss for words or ideas. He struggles with decoding and poor memory with sight words. He doesn't appear to enjoy reading and does not choose to read for independent activities. He does enjoy

looking through science books. MH tested at a DRA level 3 in August of 2003 after a year of first grade. He ranked in about the middle of the class at the beginning of the year, but dropped to the low reading group by January when considering text level. He has made growth, but is still behind his peers. MH has been in a supplemental reading group for 2 hours weekly with a Title One teacher all school year. He has received speech 40 minutes per week all school year.

MAH has been recommended for retention. She would benefit from repeating first grade due to her slow academic growth and her immaturity. The kindergarten teachers had considered retention for MAH, but it was decided to pass her to first grade. She also does not appear to enjoy reading. She tested at a level 1 in August and is presently at a level where first grade students are expected to be by December. She has made about 1/2 year growth in a full school year. She also has had 20 weeks of Reading Recovery. She is currently seen in a supplemental small reading group for 2 hours weekly with a Title One teacher. She is low in writing and math. MAH demonstrates a short attention span for learning situations, especially in large groups. MAH has received speech 40 minutes per week all school year. She had a full Reading Recovery program, but had limited progress.

SS has an IEP for reading and math. She tested at a A- in August which indicates she did have the one to one matching skill in place. She has received a full program of 20 weeks in Reading Recovery. She has received 40 minutes of speech weekly all school year. A special needs teacher is in the room for her math time daily. SS was the lowest in the class when looking at text level at the beginning of the year. She has an Individual Educational Plan (I.E.P.) in math and had a full program of Reading Recovery.

AT came to our school in March. She was recommended for retention at her previous school. She is currently receiving Reading Recovery, but will not complete the program due to her late entry date. She has made progress, but will likely repeat first grade. She reads lower in reading than the other students. She tests at the same level as the other three, but doesn't read in the reading group that the four our in as well as they do. She is low in writing and math as well as reading.

Instruments

Small Group Reading Instruction

The Reading Comprehension test of the Iowa Test of Basic Skills is the assessment used for SGRI. The nine subskills represented in the Reading Comprehension test Iowa are organized around three main process skills: Factual Understanding, Inference and Interpretation, and Analysis and Generalization. The three skills differ from one another in the processes they require of the reader, in the depth and breadth of understanding each demands, and in the extent to which the reader must depend on information stated directly in the passage.

Vocabulary

The Vocabulary test of the Iowa Test of Basic Skills was one of the assessments used for the data analysis. The vocabulary test measures reading vocabulary. Students read a target word in context and then choose the word or phrase that is most the same as the target word. Target words were chosen so that a variety of nouns, verbs, and modifiers are included. Words that are a part of a general vocabulary are tested. No technical terms or words with specialized meanings were used.

Sight Words

One of the benchmark tests for first grade students in the Waterloo School District is knowing basic sight words. Students are required to know a set number of words and are tested four times a year at each grading period. The district benchmark requires 25 words learned by the October grading period, 75 words learned by the January grading period, 125 words learned by the March grading period and 175 words learned by the May grading period. The Sight Word List has 250 words on it and are tested in grades one and two. The students are given a pretest in August during the first few days of school. The ability to quickly identify sight words will help the beginning reader when reading simple text. These high frequency words will appear in almost every one of the texts that the student is reading. Knowing the sight words will give the students confidence in reading by providing known anchors that they can build upon.

Phonemic Awareness

In January of 2004, several district level assessments were administered to assess student achievement in phonemic awareness.

1. DRA (Developmental Reading Assessment) is a text level reading test. The reading text levels for first grade range from 1-16. A text level of 8 is needed in January for first grade students to meet district guidelines. A text level of 16 is needed in May to meet district standards and benchmarks.

2. Sight Words: Note that sight word analysis was used to assess phonemic awareness. See above for description.

3. Phonemic Analysis: This district benchmark test is administered to the class at one time. The teacher reads 10 words and the students write the sounds they hear. The same words are repeated for the 4 times the students take the test throughout the year. 15-19 sounds are to be written to meet district guidelines in January. 20-25 sounds are to be written to meet district guidelines by March and 26-30 sounds are to be written by May.

4. The Diagnostic Phonemic Awareness Test, including the Yopp-Singer Test of Phoneme Segmentation was given to the students to identify any phonemic awareness skills that were below grade level. This test was given only to the four students for the purpose of this study. It is not routinely administered to first graders. The D-PAT is given individually to students and is a tool to measure students' abilities on six phonemic awareness tasks: rhyming, segmentation, isolation, deletion, blending, and phoneme segmentation. The test takes about 5-10 minutes to give. There are 72 points possible.

Procedures

Data Collection

Small Group Reading Instruction

All Longfellow students in grades 2-5 were given the ITBS, but the ITBS scores from the Reading Comprehension test were analyzed for the 4th grade only. This is the grade whose test scores are analyzed by the district and the state for No Child Left Behind. In the fall of 2000, small group reading instruction was implemented through a district wide initiative. SGRI is used in a small group setting. The small group provides a degree of intimacy between readers and instructor. The group consists of three to four students, one

on one in rare cases and up to six students in one group. By having only a small amount of students, it makes it easier for the teacher to observe the students as they read. The teacher provides coaching cues and analyzes text. Teachers group students together by using several assessment tools. The Rigby Reading Test, Developmental Reading Assessment, writing samples, and observation of students are just a few of the methods used to group students for their reading lessons. In the beginning, the reading groups are homogeneous, but this homogeneity is short lived. Children learn at different rates, so groups must be kept flexible. Groups change as the needs of students change. Reading groups are taught daily for about 15-20 minutes per group.

Vocabulary

The ITBS was administered to the students in the fall of each school year. Data from the Vocabulary test was collected from a three year period - 2001, 2002, 2003, so a trend or pattern might be observed. School norms were used. School norms consist of scores (averages) of school building grade groups that are representative of such groups nationally. For this analysis, student norms were not considered. Student norms are used mainly to interpret the scores of an individual student. Students are compared with other students. Schools are more similar to one another than students are. Building scores for each grade level were gathered and the NPR for the past three years was graphed.

Sight Words

The randomly selected students from first grade were tested individually over their known sight words at the end of August and at the end of October.

Phonemic Awareness

Baseline data considered for analysis was taken from January assessments of 3 tests: the DRA, Phonemic Analysis, and Sight Words. Three of the students from the lowest reading group in first grade were tested for this baseline information. AT was not enrolled at the school in January, so her baseline data comes from her first week at Longfellow in March. The 3 tests were administered again in March with the D-PAT included. The DRA, Phonemic Analysis, Sight Words test, and the D-PAT were administered again in April for all four students.

Teaching Method

Small Group Reading Instruction

In the fall of 2000, small group reading instruction was implemented through a district wide initiative to improve reading achievement. SGRI is used in a small group setting. The small group provides a degree of intimacy between readers and instructor. The group consists of three to four students, one on one in rare cases and up to six students in one group. Having only a small amount of students, makes it easier for the teacher to observe the students as they read. The teacher provides coaching cues and analyzes text. Teachers group students together by using several assessment tools. The Rigby Reading Test, Developmental Reading Assessment, writing samples, and observation of students are just a few of the methods used to group students for their reading lessons. In the beginning, the reading groups are homogeneous, but this homogeneity is short lived. Children learn at different rates, so groups must be kept flexible. Groups change as the needs of students change. Reading groups are taught daily for about 15-20 minutes per group at all grade levels K-5. The teacher can observe each student as they read and can provide coaching cues when the student gets stuck on a word. Fiction and nonfiction books are used. Because students progress at different rates, groups change as needed.

Vocabulary

Vocabulary instruction was administered in direct and indirect methods. The second grade implemented a direct model in an effort to raise the ITBS vocabulary score. The second grade teachers were interviewed and it was explained that 2nd grade students were taught vocabulary words through the direct teaching model. They were given words to learn on a daily basis by the Title One teacher through a variety of methods. They wrote out definitions, drew pictures, and acted out the meanings of the words to be learned. Vocabulary was taught through several indirect methods as well as direct methods. Practice tests are given to students in grades 2-5 in the fall of each school year to prepare students for the test. The practice tests include all testing content areas, not exclusively vocabulary. Test taking strategies were taught using ITBS format. Strategies were taught so the students would know how to narrow down choices to increase their chances of getting the correct answer. Read alouds were used to develop vocabulary along with the use of

nonfiction books in small group reading instruction.

Sight Words

Three implementations were utilized to increase the sight words for each student. All implementations were used in each of the three groups.

Implementation 1: The sight words are divided into 10 lists with 25 words on each list. The students were given List One sight words printed onto card stock. Each student had a list of words they kept in an envelope. Each morning as soon as the students arrived, they were instructed to read their sight words. The adults that were in the room (the teacher and the student teacher) would listen as they read the words and tell the student the word if they didn't know it. Students helped each other with unknown words. As students learned List One words, a certificate was written out and placed on the bulletin board. The student was then given an envelope with the next list for practice. This was done routinely for the first three weeks of school for about 10 minutes. As students tested out of List One and Two, this implementation was reduced to about once a week. Because Mahaleigha already knew List One words, she was given the classroom set of higher lists of words.

Implementation 2: Students were given typed out sentence strips that had sentences using several of the sight words in them. Students were instructed to read the sentence, cut it up and glue it onto paper in order. This gave the students the opportunity to read the sight words in a sentence, and manipulate the words back into that sentence. Students would complete 1 - 4 sentences during one activity period. This implementation was done five times during the nine week period using words from lists 1 - 3.

Implementation 3: The third implementation was done more randomly. The List One words were posted near the carpet area where the students sit for large group lessons. A game was played called "Read Until You Miss." Students take turns reading the words with a pointer. As soon as they miss a word, their turn is over and someone else gets a try. This was not done on a regular basis, but it was highly motivating for the students. All of the students were paying attention to the words in order to catch the reader in a mistake. The students would hear the words being read as they were pointed to over and over while students read the list. When most students had List One learned, List Two words were posted.

Phonemic Awareness

The four students met together for guided reading daily. The teaching sequence for this small group reading instruction was as follows; setting the scene, taking a picture walk, doing an oral read and returning to the text to do some direct teaching as determined by the first read. Books were chosen for the students that would be at an instructional level. The students would be able to read them with a 90% accuracy. Different genres were selected to provide a wide variety of reading experiences, including fiction and nonfiction.

The following activities were experienced by all students in the classroom, but this group was receiving an extra dose of phonics instruction during guided reading time. This direct teaching of phonics was more structured and focused than what was taught to the rest of the students. The extra direct teaching of phonics was taught after the return to the text portion of the lesson. An extra 10 minutes was added to the lesson daily for six weeks. Words from within the book were used for the students to work with in different ways to become more knowledgeable with how words work and to develop phonemic awareness. Word families were created with student sets of magnetic letters using a familiar onset and rime pattern. Some words were taken apart to find the little chunk that was familiar. White boards were used so the students could each practice their word work simultaneously. Some verbs had the endings taken off and new ones put on, for example, jumping, jumped and jumps. The students clapped words and counted syllables and decided where to break them. Occasionally, the students would spend their small group time rereading familiar books from previous lessons. The rereading of familiar books is a strategy to increase the fluency and increased fluency increases comprehension of the text.

Results

Introduction

After analyzing the ITBS scores from the Reading Comprehension part of the test, Small Group Reading Instruction has had a small, but positive impact on the students at Longfellow. In the Vocabulary Test of the ITBS, the scores for the 2nd and 3rd grades increase over a three year period. For the 4th and 5th grades, the scores stay consistent over a three year period. For the classroom Sight Word project, the ranking of the students

stayed the same, with the exception of one student. The students who were low in August were low in October. The exception was one student who was in the middle for the August Sight Word test moved to the high group in October. The students that began the school year in the high group stayed in the high group in October. For the Phonemic Analysis project, the students all made progress as shown by the results of four assessments.

Small Group Reading Instruction

When analyzing the ITBS scores from the Reading Comprehension test, a trend was identified in the percentile ranking of students in the Low, Intermediate and High groups. The percent of students in the Low group has gone up and down over the past six years. The Low percentile group fluctuated between 61% and 85%, with the highest number of students in that group in 2000, the year we began SGRI and the lowest number of students in that group in 2003. In the Intermediate group there was also a fluctuation. In 2002, the fewest number of students were in the Intermediate group and then the next year, 2003, the highest number of students were in that group. The percentage of students in the High group was 0 until 2001. By 2003 the number of students in the High Group raised to 2%.

Table 1 shows the ITBS Reading Comprehension test scores from year 1998, two years before SGRI was implemented, to 2003, 4 years after it was implemented.

Table 1	low	intermediate	high
1998	68%	32%	0
1999	70%	31%	0
2000	85%	15%	0
2001	65%	33%	2%
2002	84%	13%	3%
2003	61%	37%	2%

The number of students in the low group has gone down significantly since the implementation of SGRI. The number of students in the intermediate group has gone up significantly since the reading was taught in small groups. For the first time, we have students in the high range on reading comprehension.

Vocabulary

According to the Iowa Test of Basic Skills for all grade levels in the area of Vocabulary, there is a noticeable trend to examine. In 2001, scores progressively decreased by 5% for each grade level from grades 2-5. In 2002, the second grade ranked highest in NPR, but the fourth grade was the only grade that showed an improvement. The most striking results came in 2003. Second grade students achieved a dramatic rise from the previous years and the scores are considerably higher than all the other grade levels. At the fourth and fifth grade levels, the scores have been consistent for the past three years. Grades two and three showed consistent scores for the first two years examined, and then showed a dramatic increase in 2003.

The following three graphs show the building vocabulary scores for years 2001, 2002, and 2003.

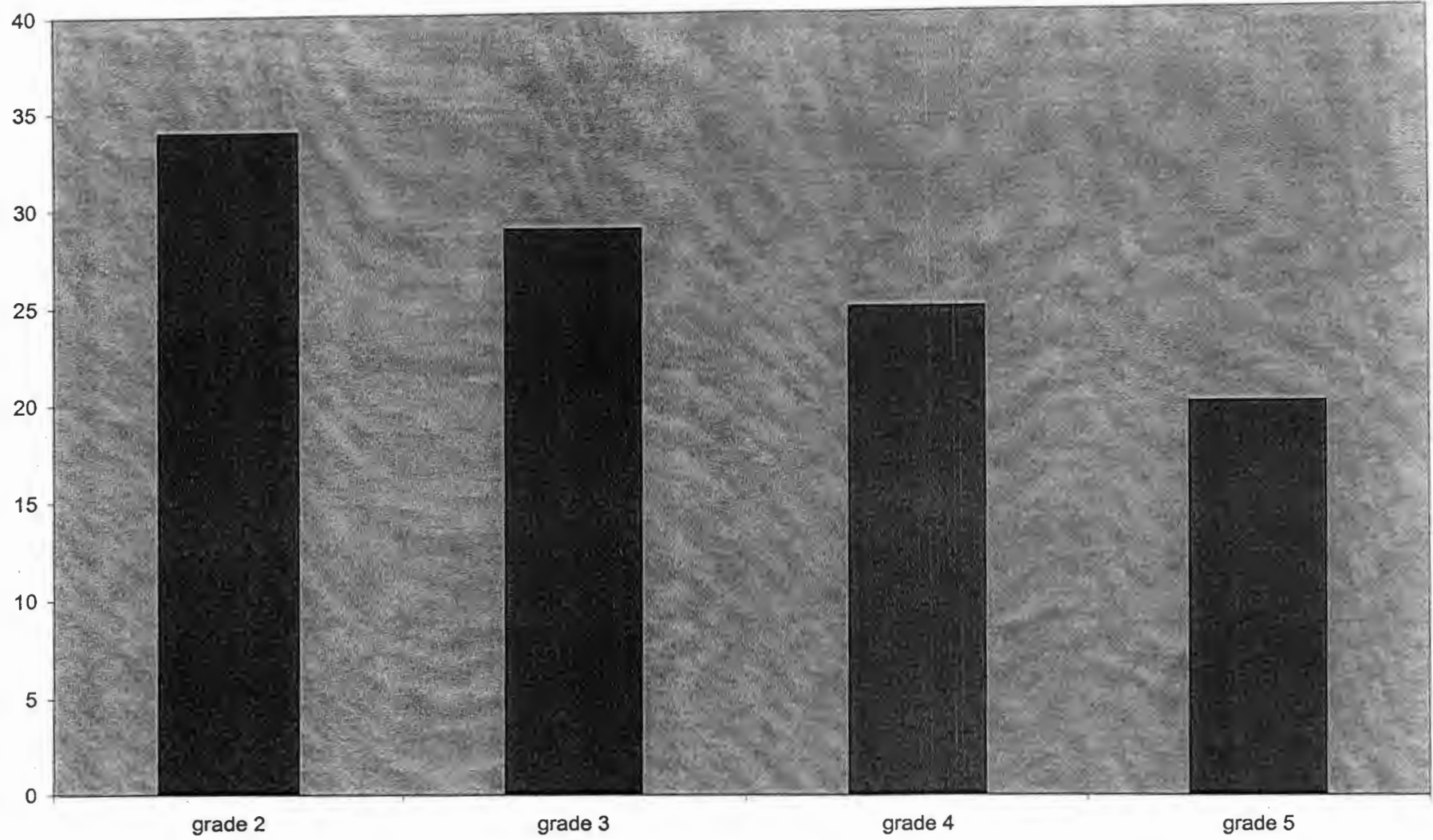
Sight Words

The results of this analysis were gathered on October 28th and 29th, 2004. The lists of words were read to the teacher by the students. The correctly read words were counted. Table 2 shows the results.

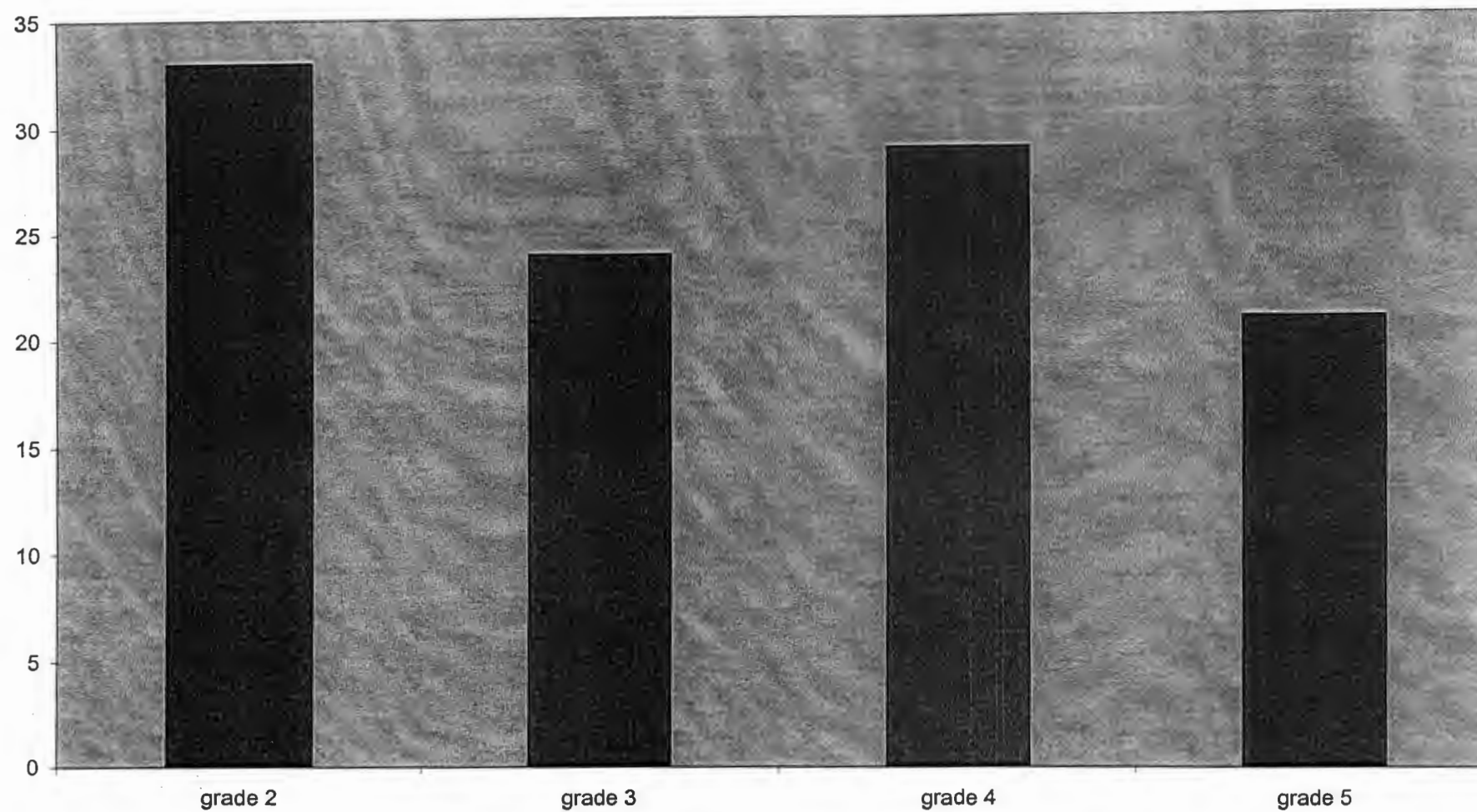
Table 2

Names of students	Number of known sight words in August	Number of known sight words in October
Shaquan (L)	0	30
Tyeisha (L)	2	40
Tyffanie (M)	6	50
Makayla (M)	16	128
Dayshaun(H)	55	120
Mahaleigha(H)	158	242

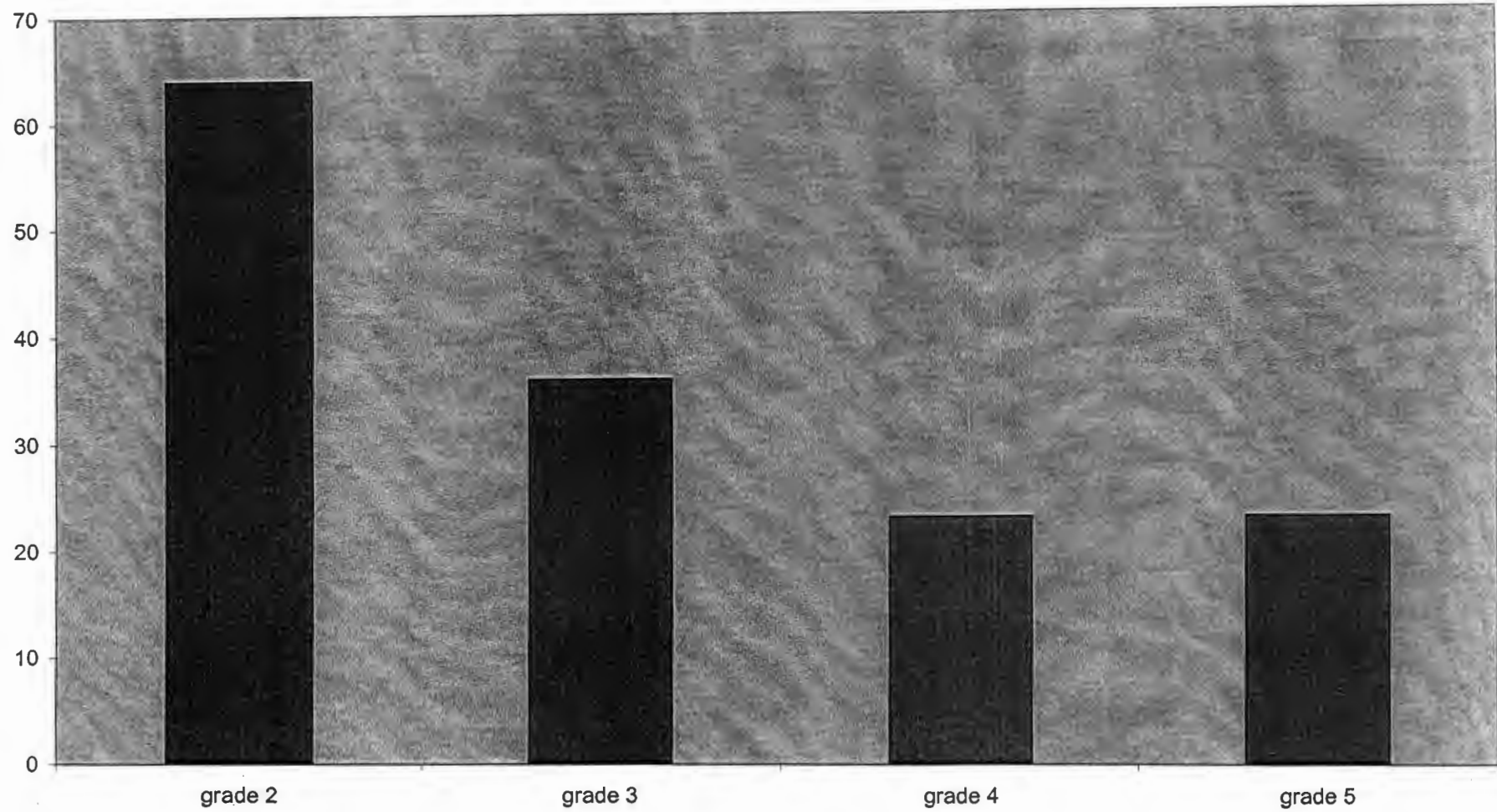
**Building Vocabulary Scores
National Percentile Ranking
Fall 2001**



**Building Vocabulary Scores
National Percentile Ranking
Fall 2002**



**Building Vocabulary Scores
National Percentile Ranking
Fall 2003**



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According to sight word scores in August and October, the students ranking in the class stayed almost the same for Shaquan, Tyeisha, Makayla, Mahaleigha and Dayshaun. In August, Tyffanie ranked fourth from the top out of 14 students. In October, she was in the middle. Seven students ranked higher than she did.

All of the students met the goals for achievement except for Tyffanie. She didn't learn as many sight words as expected, even though she passed the district guidelines.

Phonemic Awareness

The following tables show the results of the phonemic awareness assessments given in January, March and April of 2004.

Phonemic Awareness

Results: January, 2004

	MH	MAH	SS	AT
DRA	6	4	4	N/A
Phonemic Analysis	29	N/A	29	N/A
Sight Words	77	77	78	N/A

Results: March, 2004

	MH	MAH	SS	AT
DRA	6	6	6	6
Phonemic Analysis	33	27	39	29
Sight Words	120	169	132	37
D-PAT	69	63	60	67

Results: April, 2004

	MH	MAH	SS	AT
DRA	10	8	8	6
Phonemic Analysis	27	38	38	34
Sight Words	133	191	165	80
D-PAT	72	71	71	70

In April, 2004, MH was the only student who met the DRA text level goal of 10. MAH and SS tested at DRA levels of 8 and AT tested at a level 6. These low text levels make it difficult for children in 2nd grade. DRA results are a primary consideration, although not the only one, for retention of our students in first grade.

Sight Words improved greatly, but only MA met District guidelines with a score of 191, 16 words over the district benchmark. SS was only 10 words away from meeting the guidelines, while MH was 42 words away. AT read only 80 words which is about a first grade mid year score. The Phonemic Analysis test showed adequate improvement for all students except for Michael. He heard and wrote 27 sounds and needed 30 to meet the district benchmark. The students did well on the D-PAT. Not all goals were met, but significant gains were made. MH met the goal of a 72, MAH and SS had a score of 71, and AT scored a 70.

Discussion

After analyzing the improvement of the Reading Comprehension Test of the ITBS, we feel Longfellow and the Waterloo School District are on the right track for reading achievement. In the past three years, we have made progress in the critical areas of reading comprehension by implementing the Reading Comprehension Strategies presented to the district teachers by reading consultant Angela Maiers. With the implementation of our SGRI we are focused as a school on the teaching of reading and reading achievement in our students. Data is collected on students so teachers know what

reading level the students are currently on. Our reading curriculum is vertically aligned from grade level to grade level. Most importantly, each student is being taught reading at his or her reading text level for maximum effectiveness.

Small Group Reading Instruction was implemented in the Fall of 2000. Prior to those years, there were 0 students in the High group. The percentage of students in the High group went from 0% to 2% the year SGRI was implemented and it has stayed consistent since then. We have seen an improvement in reading comprehension scores on the ITBS in the past four years.

In analyzing the results from the Vocabulary Test of the ITBS, some insights were discovered. There was a dramatic jump from the year 2002 to 2003 in grade two. One reason for this increase was the time and effort devoted to test taking strategies and general vocabulary development. The Title One teacher explicitly taught the second grade students every day vocabulary that they appeared to be lacking. Test taking strategies were taught using the ITBS format. Strategies were directly taught so children knew how to narrow down choices to increase their chances of getting the correct answer.

The six students in the sight word study showed excellent progress. Makayla made impressive growth in the number of sight words she learned. A factor that could have made a difference is that she reported to me that she read the words at home. All of the students were given a sight word list to have at home, but not all of the students practiced their words outside of school. Makayla did and it could be a reason she learned 112 words in two months time. The students who made the most improvements also read their guided reading books during independent reading time. The students who didn't practice at home, or spend as much time reading independently, did not make the gains in words learned.

The daily, and then almost daily, reading of the words by the students was the most effective implementation. Learning sight words needs to be an almost daily skill worked on in order for the words to become automatic. Putting the words into sentences for the students to cut apart and glue and playing the "Read Until You Miss" game made the learning more interesting for the students. These two implementations were effective, also, but because they weren't utilized as often, they didn't have as great an impact on the results. Writing the sight words in sentences gave the students a chance to see them used

in meaningful ways.

The implementations will be continued this school year. The goal is for all of the students in the two highest reading groups to learn all 250 words by May and the students in the other two reading groups to learn 200 words by May. Daily or almost daily practice, keeping the parents informed of the achievement of the students at conference and report card time, and encouraging home study will be continued in an effort to meet these goals.

When considering the four students that were given extra phonemic awareness practice, the students showed little growth in DRA text level from the January to March testing. MH showed no text level growth from January to March and then increased from a level 6 to a 10 in 6 weeks time. MAH and SS showed steady growth, increasing text level from a 4, to a 6, to an 8. However, they achieved the 4 to a 6 jump in 2 months time and the 6 to an 8 in 1 month time. That indicates a faster learning rate, learning the same amount in 1/2 the time. AT has remained at the same text level, but is expected to show some growth by the end of the school year.

Recommendations

SGRI has proven to be an effective method for teaching reading. To continue this upward trend in scores, we need to follow several recommendations. It is the job of the reading coach to train new teachers coming into the building in SGRI methods. Our school has several new teachers to the district and they need the same support and training that the teachers who were in at the beginning of this innovation had. We need to continue ongoing professional development, so we don't lose this momentum. Teachers need to keep learning best practices for teaching reading through professional development either provided by the district or individually pursued. There is an ongoing need to replace old materials and purchase new books. Our focus needs to continue on the teaching of reading in small groups as guided reading, transitional reading, or readers' workshops.

One of the implications of this study is that all grade levels would benefit from the direct teaching of test taking strategies and year round vocabulary development. Kansas University Strategies for test taking are available through AEA267. Students in all grades can be taught these strategies to improve performance on a multiple choice test. There are other commercially made tests that students can take in the classroom for practice in taking

tests.

Vocabulary development can be fostered indirectly through daily teacher read alouds. Vocabulary can be directly taught as a subject and through small group reading instruction using nonfiction to increase a student's schema of the world. These are steps that all teachers in all grade levels should be taking. Students in all grades can be taught these strategies to improve performance on a multiple choice test. There are other commercially made tests that students can take in the classroom for practice in taking tests.

Phonemic Awareness is a critical component in teaching reading. Many of the students, especially ones who quickly learn to crack the reading code, learn without considerable direct teaching of phonics and phonemic awareness. For the students struggling with reading, phonics must be directly taught and that teaching must often repeat itself often. Most importantly, a balance of phonics instruction, text reading, comprehension skills and writing must be in place for struggling readers to become successful.

For future study, strategies for teaching vocabulary should be more closely examined at Longfellow. Researched strategies should be identified and implemented, goals for learning set, and data on the effectiveness monitored. All grade levels should participate even though only grades 2-5 are tested on the ITBS.

Longfellow has implemented strategies that are effective and are improving student scores. With continued efforts, students and teachers will be successful in reading achievement.

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