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Using Balanced Literacy to Improve Literacy Instruction

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Using Balanced Literacy to Improve Literacy Instruction

by

Laurie Kaczanowski

Spring 2008

A thesis submitted to the Department of Education and Human Development of the State University of New York College at Brockport in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science in Education
Using Balanced Literacy to Improve Literacy Instruction

by

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Chapter 1: Introduction

In recent years, most classroom environments have adapted into creative, student-centered, assessment driven thinking tanks. In elementary classrooms, teachers are not sitting behind desks correcting papers, but rather working with students to improve their reading, writing, speaking, and listening skills on a daily basis. Teachers have the resources to work one-on-one with students, teach small reading and writing groups, and model appropriate reading and writing strategies. In today’s classroom, a person could also observe some students reading silently on bean bags, listening to books on tape, working in centers, or working on a power point presentation based on a personal narrative. This is a balanced literacy classroom.

According to Frey (2005), balanced literacy is “...a philosophical orientation that assumes that reading and writing achievements are developed through instruction and support in multiple environments in which teachers use various approaches that differ by level of teacher support and child control” (p. 272). In other words, the balanced literacy approach allows children to work at their independent levels in writing and reading with teacher guidance. The approach assists teachers to provide individual instruction, small group, whole group, and meaningful literacy activities for differentiated learners. Balanced literacy has three main participants: the student, the teacher, and the parents/guardians. The combined efforts and cooperation among these participants allow for a successful classroom learning environment for every student.

Why the change in classroom learning environment in recent years? In 2001, President George W. Bush introduced his educational reform movement, No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act. The main principles of the NCLB include stronger accountability of
results, more parental options, and increased teacher credential requirements. Kasmin and Farmer (2006) explains that the NCLB calls for higher government expectations by stating, “These expectations include accountability for adopting approaches [of school districts] that increase academic achievement for all students and eliminate achievement gaps between various racial, ethnic, and income groups” (p.181).

In New York State, the Education Department revamped its standards to fulfill the requirements of the NCLB Act. Standardized testing also changed in New York State to align assessment data to federal expectations. Before 2005, students took standardized tests in English Language Arts (ELA), math, and science in fourth and eighth grade. During fifth and eighth grades, students were also tested in social studies.

In 2005, all students in grades three through eight took standardized tests in ELA and in math. Students in fifth and eighth grade were still tested in social studies and students in fourth and eighth were tested in science. According to the United States Education Department website (2007), the NCLB Act expects “to have 100 percent of students in the United States achieve proficiency according to the academic standards set by their state by the year 2014” (par. 2). New York State teachers have been told all students will be tested in every subject in grades three through eight in 2008 to meet the requirements of the NCLB (BOCES Workshop, 2006).

As a result of the pressures of being held accountable for all students, challenging standards, and creating quality schools, local school districts reviewed their programs currently being taught in the schools. Many of the programs being used could not provide the resources for teachers to help meet the requirements of the NCLB. Although programs were older and teachers were comfortable teaching the curriculum, the
programs were not successful for all the students. Some students were not reading and writing at grade level. The standardized tests, based on the expectations of the NCLB, included more reading and writing, especially in math. The NYS math test consists of word problems and explanations of answers. Students are expected to read and write at grade level to help in order to help them pass the standardized tests (BOCES Workshop, 2006).

In addition to the state and federal pressures, parental rights of the NCLB and other acts affected the programs being implemented within the schools. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 (IDEA) requires students with special needs be blended or included into the regular classroom as much as possible. Parents are active participants in the schools and make sure the act is followed in the school districts.

General education teachers are faced with Individualized Education Plans (IEP) and implementing teaching strategies for a variety of learners. Local districts realized some programs needed to be eliminated and others adopted to ease the concerns of the parents. Research has indicated the importance of creating a successful partnership with the home will help increase with student achievement. According to the National Education Association (2006), “The evidence is beyond dispute: parent involvement improves student achievement. When parents are involved, children do better in school” (par. 1).

Consequently with the NCLB and IDEA, school districts researched programs that were specific to the needs of every student in the classroom. The “old” ways of teaching reading were not sufficient in teaching reading and writing, and some students
were being promoted through grades without even knowing how to read. Reutzel and Cooter (2000) explains “the three instructional practices for reading are traditional approaches, the whole language approach, and the balanced literacy approach” (p. 4). Due to declining standardized test scores and low reading abilities of high school seniors, many districts discovered traditional and whole language approaches were not working in the schools. The districts moved toward implementing a research based approach in order to teach reading.

Educators debated over the best approach to teach reading, and in the 1990s the California Department of Education researched the idea of balanced literacy and created the California Task Force to help the statewide declining scores in reading. Drake of the Orton-Gillingham Institute for Multi-Sensory Education (2006) states the California Task Force concluded, “A balanced reading program should include: a strong literature, language, and comprehensive program that includes a balance of oral and written language” (p. 3). The task force also concluded that teaching students to read is the major link in creating successful academic learning in all areas.

According to McKenzie (2002), the United States Department of Education finds the balanced literacy approach is a research based reading instruction that has the greatest potential for students to become successful readers. McKenzie also states, “Balanced literacy employs the fundamental of letter-sound correspondence, word study and decoding as well as holistic experiences in reading, writing, speaking, and listening to create one integrated model that addresses all facets of literacy” (p. 2).
Problem Statement

Although the NCLB promotes student achievement, students are still not meeting standards and are unmotivated in school, especially in reading. According to the National Right to Read Foundation (2006),

"42 million adult Americans can't read; 50 million can recognize so few printed words they are limited to a fourth or fifth grade reading level; one out of every four teenagers drops out of high school, and of those who graduate, one out of every four has the equivalent or less of an eighth grade education" (par. 4).

As an educator reflecting on the above statistics, I recognized the importance of implementing a quality reading and writing program that will meet the needs of all students. It is evident all educators need to prepare the students of today to become successful independent learners or literate students for the future.

The purpose of this study was to research the balanced literacy strategies and build my knowledge of the components to encourage students to become lifelong motivated readers in school and at home. I believed a balanced literacy approach provided me with the tools and skills to differentiate my instruction and increase student achievement.

My thesis focused on strategies to engage and motivate students to read and provide a better understanding of the reading process, including reading approaches, reading strategies, and activities for teachers. I provided activities for parents to support their child and continue with positive reading behaviors based on the balanced literacy approach at home. It was important to keep the three participants (parents, teachers, and students) connected in the balanced literacy approach.
Significance of the Problem

In my undergraduate experience, balanced literacy was barely discussed and my student teaching mentors used the traditional approaches to teach ELA. It was not until my first year of teaching when I was introduced to balanced literacy. My teaching experience is in grades second, through fifth. I taught three years in an urban school district and two years in a suburban school district. In both school districts, the focus on reading and writing instruction has evolved from traditional instruction to whole language, and currently to balanced literacy. Fortunately the various experiences gave me the opportunity to teach components of a balanced approach at different ability levels. This helped me to witness the effectiveness of this approach.

Through my teaching experiences, I continued to learn, teach, and build my knowledge of the components of balanced literacy. My first four years of teaching were in different grades and every year brought new challenges. Although I had many opportunities to implement the different strategies of balanced literacy, I have not felt successful in teaching and mastering some of the strategies. As a result, my professional goal of this action research study was to help students become successful and motivated readers and writers.

Last year, I was hired as a fifth grade teacher in a suburban school district. This district expected every teacher to implement the balanced literacy approach in the classroom. The district offered workshops on balanced literacy to help teachers with teaching the strategies of reading, writing, listening and speaking. I participated in every opportunity to attend workshops and classes to increase my understanding of the balanced literacy approach. This action research study was used to research and practice
the different strategies taught in the workshops to help me and my students in the classroom.

My plan was to conduct a survey and conference with parents and students for their understanding of the different reading strategies, genres, and opinions towards reading. This plan helped build the partnership and give an indication of learning and reading habits of the student. I helped my students become motivated readers and writers in every content area by creating activities that generated excitement, less pressure, and encouragement to believe each student is a reader and writer.

Through recorded conferencing, running reading records, and anecdotal notes of observations, I understood my students and helped them achieve personal goals in reading and writing. To help my students, I gave formal reading assessments based on the Differentiated Reading Assessment (DRA), informal reading assessments, created learning centers, and incorporated technology into my instruction. I hoped the plans increased reading levels and motivation to lead my fifth graders towards becoming lifelong learners in all content areas.

**Rationale**

Why are students dropping out of high school? Why are some students graduating high school with a fifth grade reading level? It may be due to their lack of reading, writing, speaking, and listening experiences in the classroom. When implemented, a balanced literacy program provides an effective strategy for success. As with any new program, teachers and parents uncomfortable with the approach will appear. It has become the responsibility of school districts to offer professional development for staff and opportunities for parents to become better informed of programs within the schools.
These opportunities should clarify questions and ease concerns of the teachers and parents. It is my hope that this action research study may be used by my colleagues to gain better insight into this newly created balanced literacy program.

Summary

The reading debate has been around for centuries. What is the most effective and efficient way to teach reading? Today, politicians and parents play important roles in what is being taught in school. The standard for a quality education has turned to research-based programs to create success for all students.

When I started this action research paper, my main focus was to see if balanced literacy was a quality reading program. It was important to me to reach all of my students and help them succeed in all areas. However, with all the recent reports of students graduating at a fourth grade or lower reading level, I felt responsible for all my students to be at least reading at grade level. I was hopeful balanced literacy could provide activities that would reach my goal.

After identifying the target students that would benefit from closer monitoring throughout the year, I started implementing the components of balanced literacy based on my research. I was very surprised to see balanced literacy helped all of my students, not just the target students.

It seems from professional development opportunities with other school districts, most districts are moving towards balanced literacy instruction. With the changes from government reform movements and schools being held accountable, the research-based programs are necessary for student achievement. In the next chapter, I provide research based on balanced literacy, government involvement in literacy, and parental involvement.
Definition of Terms

**Balanced Literacy:** a research based program that combines traditional approaches and whole language

**English Language Arts (ELA):** includes the teaching of skills of reading, writing, speaking, and listening

**Differentiated Reading Assessment (DRA):** reading assessment based that includes a running reading record, reading goals, reading expression, and comprehension.

**Guided reading:** small group reading instruction based on individualized reading levels

**Guided writing:** teacher provides mini-lessons and conferences based on individual writing

**Independent reading:** reading for pleasure by the student

**Language and Word Study:** students explore literary language, investigate words and learn about the conventions of writing

**Letter Study:** students use what they know about words to solve new words

**Literature study:** large group reading instruction where all the students are reading the same book

**No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act:** federal reform that holds high expectations and greater accountability for state and local school districts, provides more options for parents, increases academic achievement, and decreases the gaps between students

**Writing Workshop:** students learn the writer’s craft by exploring a variety of genres, formats, and audiences
Chapter 2: Literature Review

Balanced literacy is a fairly "new" way of teaching reading and writing compared to the other styles of teaching literacy. There are many components of balanced literacy that create effective literacy teaching. To understand why balanced literacy is an effective way to teach literacy, it is important to understand the history of reading instruction, the components of balanced literacy, the government's influence on reading instruction, and parent involvement in literacy education.

The Reading Debate

The debate over the best way to teach reading has been ongoing for centuries in the United States. The emphasis of this long debate is on the approach or method, as well as how to teach reading and writing at a more efficient and effective pace. The debate focuses on the phonics and whole language approaches. Both are different philosophies with stresses on different skills, specifically comprehension and fluency (Wren, 2001).

Comprehension and Fluency

According to Harvey and Goudis (2000) reading fluency is a skill that helps provide teachers with an indication of how a student is progressing with reading. If a student is reading aloud smoothly and accurately (pronouncing words correctly, pausing in appropriate places, using expression in their voice) the student is focusing on comprehension rather than decoding skills. Therefore, fluency and comprehension are connected and high fluency allows students to read for meaning. Fluency is a skill that begins in the primary grades and continues through the intermediate grades and eventually becomes a life-long skill.
The phonics approach focuses on instruction of rules of printed text. Students are taught letters in isolation and it is believed fluency leads to comprehension. The goal of phonics instruction is to provide students with the rules of spelling-sound relationships in order to sound out words that will eventually lead to comprehension (Wren, 2001).

Reading fluency also incorporates decoding words at an appropriate speed with phrasing and expression. One research-based method to increase fluency is to have the students read passages repeatedly. This method has been effective with all students including ones with learning disabilities. Peebles (2007) suggests providing students the opportunity of a Reader’s Theater as another strategy to increase fluency. Reader’s Theater is an approach where students rehearse and perform lines from a play. Eventually the students present their lines in front of others and work on movement, expression, and gestures to portray their character. Pebbles also explains the importance of providing different settings for plays. This includes whole group and small groups to encourage presentations skills, along with fluency.

Educators that advocate for the whole language approach believe when children are immersed into reading, it will become a natural process. Students become readers by reading familiar and simple passages repeatedly. Wren (2001) states the primary goal of whole language is to make connections to the text while reading. Whole language (or whole word) focuses on comprehension and eventually fluency is learned.

Whether an advocate of phonics or whole language philosophies, the latest research suggests a combination of both. Both philosophies provide skills that help students learn to read. Pressley has conducted many studies on balanced literacy. In his book *Reading Instruction that Works: The Case for Balanced Teaching* (2006), Pressley
suggests, “...a balance of decoding and comprehension skills instruction with elements of whole language and phonics will create an effective and attractive elementary literacy curriculum” (p.16). By combining the two philosophies and implementing reading components that are research based, supporters of balanced literacy believe all the needs of the students will be met.

Understanding the history behind teaching literacy

Through the 15th to 18th centuries, changes were happening throughout the United States and around the world. In education, many different books were used to teach reading. In 1690, the New England Primer and the Horn Book were instructional tools that combined religious instruction with the learning of the alphabet sounds, and words using the phonetics approach. For most children, the Horn Book was the first introduction to Christianity and reading (Wilson, 2007).

Although the readers and spellers were used for centuries to teach reading, educators started advocating for other reading methods in the 1800s. In 1837, Horace Mann based his reading method on the works of Thomas A. Gallaudet. Gallaudet taught deaf children to repeat words from a controlled vocabulary. Mann’s method began with the memorization of whole words rather than learning the letter sounds and blending the sounds into words. Mann referred to this approach as the whole language approach (Sweet, 2006).

The Progressive Movement was an education movement based on the work of G. Stanley Hall in the late 1800s and into the 1900s. Hall believed a child would learn words naturally and the role of the teacher was to understand the development of the child. The
Progressive Movement encouraged institutes to teach student teachers the whole word method and move away from teaching the phonics approach. (Wilson, 2007).

In the early 1900s, the phonetic approach continued to be the primary approach taught in classrooms. Wilson (2007) comments that the roles of the teacher and students were very simple: the teacher would use direct instruction, while the students would sit, listen, and learn. The teacher would provide opportunities for reading practice and work with the students on reading fluency and pronunciation. During this time, children were considered readers if they could pronounce words fluently on a page.

According to Pearson (2007), educators wanted to move away from the mindless drill and practice of the phonics approach, and increase the speed of learning to read. The *Dick and Jane* series was a popular reading series that was used throughout the 1930s to the 1960s. The *Dick and Jane* series were basal readers that taught reading through the use of short stories. The basal reader provided teachers with textbooks, manuals, worksheets, assessments, and activities. The books relied on sight reading or whole word reading and repetition. Little phonics was taught with the basal series.

Throughout the 1940s and 1950s, the basal reading series continued to dominate reading instruction. Publishing companies influenced the way reading was taught through production of textbooks, teacher manuals, and machines designed to improve reading. Despite these services from publishing companies, literacy rates declined within the United States (Wilson, 2007).

In 1955, Rudolf Flesch wrote *Why Johnny Can't Read*. In his book, Flesch criticized the *Dick and Jane Series* by disagreeing with the whole word method. Flesch stressed teaching phonics to beginning readers was the appropriate way to teach reading.
developmentally. According to Stokes (2007), Flesch felt that the publishers were deciding how reading was taught in the schools and in result students were reading at a failing rate.

During the 1960s and 1970s, many studies based on Flesch’s book demonstrated strategies which claimed would increase reading scores. A common theme among the studies included the implementation of reading reforms. Direct Instructional System for Teaching and Remediation (DISTAR) and Initial Teaching Alphabet (ITA) were two reading reforms set out to improve reading instruction. Stokes (2007) explains “DISTAR incorporated intense, systematic phonics instruction, teacher directed with constant teacher-student interaction” (p.5). The reform movements were implemented in schools to help students become better readers.

In addition to the increase in reading studies, colleges and universities played a role in reading reform movements. Courses on reading problems and disabilities began being offered to education majors. Reading specialists and remedial reading teachers started to enter local schools, and classes were created to instruct student teachers how to improve their students’ rate of eye speed, reading speed, and comprehension (Wilson, 2007).

In the 1980s, the reading debate pendulum started to shift back towards the phonics approach. “Becoming a Nation of Readers” was a report written by the Commission on Reading and released by the US Department of Education (1983). The commission concluded research favored the teaching of phonics to children at an early age. Phonics provided the necessary skills to learn individual letter sounds, blending of letters, and eventually words (Sweet, 2006).
According to Pressley et al. (2002) the 1990's was a period when parents and politicians started to influence the reading debate. Standardized testing allowed the public to view what was being taught in school based on test scores. School districts and teachers were being held accountable for student success and failure. Consequently, educators collaborated to study all approaches to reading instruction. The focus of reading instruction was not on what approach worked, but on research-based strategies that incorporated reading components to meet the needs of all students.

**Overview of Balanced Literacy**

In recent years, drop-out rate statistics as well as the number of seniors graduating at a fifth grade reading level have taken the educational spotlight. Literacy programs have been analyzed and left the public uneasy, knowing students in America are falling behind other countries in education. Teachers, administrators, and parents recognize there should be a balance of traditional, whole language, and research based teaching in a literacy program (Henley, 2007).

According to Rasinski (2004), teachers and specialists found whole language, phonics, literature-based, comprehension-orientated, and word based approaches are significant in reading instruction. All of the approaches provide effective literacy components and balanced literacy combines these components along with research-based strategies to help teachers provide the best literacy instruction.

The idea of balanced literacy originated in 1979 by Don Holdaway. Holdaway wrote a book called *Reading in Junior Classes*, and according to Reutzel (2000), Holdaway described balanced reading to “include daily encounters with fiction and nonfiction trade books and traditional programmed reading materials” (p.5). This idea of
teaching literacy would expand to the teaching of reading, writing, listening, and speaking and grow into an ELA program called balanced literacy.

Although the idea of balanced literacy was introduced by Holdaway in 1979, it was not until the 1990s that it was implemented in school districts. In 1995, the state of California recognized the present reading programs being taught in the schools were not producing quality readers and writers. Based on diminishing test scores and low graduation rates, the State of California Education Department began researching alternative literacy programs (Drake, 2006).

The education leaders of California addressed the literacy problems and created a plan to help with the reading issues of their state. Every Child a Reader: The California Task Force on Reading (1995) concluded there was a need for reading specialists, teachers, and administrators to focus on research-based reading instruction in order to improve the literacy role of every child in every grade. The task force also stated reading is an influential skill that is needed for success in all academic areas. Literacy instruction should integrate reading and writing everyday through a “strong literature, language, and comprehensive” program (Drake, 2006, p.1-2).

According to Frey (2005), “balanced literacy programs include community, home, and library involvement as well as structured classroom plans and use of activities such as read aloud, guided reading, shared reading, and independent reading and writing” (p. 272). Balanced literacy combines whole language and phonics approaches to meet the needs of all the students. Using this approach, the integration of reading, writing, speaking, and listening skills allow for differentiated instruction for all levels in the classroom.
Pressley et al. (2001) conducted a study based on balanced literacy in the classroom. He explained in previous years, phonics was the way to teach reading, and eventually people thought children learned best when taught how to read through reading and writing experiences. However, Pressley and his fellow researchers suggested combining or balancing the skills of phonics and holistic teaching to create the most successful way to teach reading. The study conducted focused on schools that were considered effective based on high achievement of the students. Pressley found that one set approach was not effective when teaching language arts.

Pressley researched other characteristics of high achieving quality schools using balanced literacy. Most students spent their school day reading and writing. Classroom teachers were excellent classroom managers that created positive reading and writing places. Teachers also provided a balance of teaching skills (systematic teaching of skills and holistic reading and writing experiences) and connected reading and writing to what was taught in other classrooms. The most important characteristic the investigators reported was the monitoring of individual students and providing feedback through individual conferences on their reading and writing.

Heydon et al. (2005) researched the importance of the teacher’s role in a balanced literacy classroom. The teacher makes the decisions of what is being taught daily. The teacher takes an active role in all the components of balanced literacy. Teachers read aloud, model writing, and teach literacy and grammar skills. Not only do the students benefit from individual conferences, but the teachers do too. Ongoing assessments including the conferences help the teacher understand how each student is progressing and what needs to be taught.
According to Reutzel and Cooter (2000), there are several principles that guide teachers implementing balanced literacy. First, teachers should understand the reading processes and the stages of reading. The stages include Second, assessments throughout the year provide information about progress and individual needs for each student. The assessments also help teachers plan their instruction. Third, reading should continue at home; therefore, teachers should encourage parental support with reading.

Reutzel continues to support balanced literacy by providing more advice to guide teachers. Teachers should create small reading groups based on instructional levels. By integrating reading and writing, teachers will help students develop stronger reading and writing skills. Reutzel also found the teaching of skills in isolation in not beneficial and therefore students should read, write, listen, and speak every day.

Components of Balanced Literacy

In addition to an effective teacher, a balanced literacy program needs creative and successful instruction. The balanced literacy framework is based on Reader’s Workshop, Writer’s Workshop, and Language and Word Study. Whole group, small group, and individual activities occur during the time span of the three areas in the framework (Willows, 2002). Fountas and Pinnell are two researchers of the best practices of reading and writing. They believe Writer’s Workshop, Reader’s Workshop, and Word Study are the best ways to teach reading, writing, listening, and speaking (Fountas and Pinell, 2001).

In Reader’s Workshop, engagement of learning is displayed through students listening, speaking, reading, and writing together or independently. The components of Reader’s Workshop create a balance for implementing reading, writing, speaking, and
listening skills. Reading instruction includes guided reading, independent reading, read aloud, and shared reading. The workshop gives the teacher the ability to differentiate instruction to meet individual needs (Fountas and Pinnell, 2001).

Writer’s Workshop is the time during the ELA block when students write independently on a topic of choice. Fountas and Pinnell define Writer’s Workshop as “a combination of writing experiences…and it encompasses focused writing—both assigned and self-selected—in a variety of genres and content areas including longer research projects” (p.50). The purpose of Writer’s Workshop is to provide students an opportunity during the day to become effective writers. The teacher’s role is to work with students in small, whole, and one-on-one instruction. The components of Writer’s Workshop include independent writing, guided writing, and investigations.

The language and word study component of balanced literacy focuses on language skills. During the time block, teachers work on word patterns, conventions of the written language, and grammar rules. Berry (2005) also suggests word study includes: phonological awareness, phonics, word structure analysis, sight word recognition, and vocabulary development.

Within the framework of balanced literacy, the components that are taught vary among grade levels. The primary grades focus on teaching students how to read, while the intermediate grades focus on higher level thinking skills of reading and writing (Pressley, 2001).

The components of balanced literacy allow for effective instruction in reading, writing, speaking, and listening. The components of balanced literacy in grades third through sixth include guided reading, literature study, independent reading and writing,
research projects, letter study, centers, and learning the conventions of writing. All of
these components create a "balance" for teaching ELA. Students are taught strategies to
read at their individual level, write about different genres, and practice communication
skills. Teachers support their students by reading and writing with their students and by
modeling proper techniques. Students learn from the modeling and are encouraged to
apply their knowledge in independent activities. The teacher provides support when
needed to the students (Berry, 2005).

Table 2.1 on the following page provides an outline of the components of
balanced literacy for grades three through six. The table includes a description of each
component, how the teacher can provide instruction, and a time frame for each
component.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Teaching Options</th>
<th>Format</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Language/Word Study</strong></td>
<td>Focuses on developing children’s language and word study knowledge and skills through interactive language and literacy, conventional use of written language, and word study.</td>
<td>Development vocabulary, handwriting lesson, test preparation skills, topic writing, grammar, spelling, phonics principles, modeling reading or writing to expand literacy understanding, or poetry</td>
<td>20-30 minute whole group mini-lesson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Reader’s Workshop</strong></td>
<td>An organized set of language and literacy experiences designed to help students become more effective readers and extend students’ understanding and enjoyment of reading.</td>
<td>Independent Reading, Guided Reading, Literature Study</td>
<td>60 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Independent Reading</strong></td>
<td>Individual students read a text based on their choice.</td>
<td>Teach students different genres, model different reading strategies</td>
<td>Occurs during 40 minute work time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Guided Reading</strong></td>
<td>Small group of students working with the teacher on reading strategies. Students have similar reading abilities. The teacher selects the text, introduces it, and provides support for understanding the text.</td>
<td>Introduction to the text, making connections, revealing structure of the text, introduce vocabulary, questioning strategies, summarizing</td>
<td>Occurs during 40 minute work time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Literature Study</strong></td>
<td>Groups of students discuss various aspects of a text. The teacher chooses the text to read for the small groups.</td>
<td>Teacher models how to work together in small groups, along with teaching how to conduct research and completing projects.</td>
<td>Occurs during 40 minute work time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Writing Workshop</strong></td>
<td>Focuses on providing opportunities to write within the school day.</td>
<td>Independent Writing, Guided Writing, Investigations</td>
<td>60 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Independent Writing</strong></td>
<td>Teacher provides a mini-lesson based on individual needs. The students work on writing pieces on their own using the writing process.</td>
<td>Teach the writing process, along with conferring with the students on their writing pieces.</td>
<td>Occurs during 40 minute work time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Guided Writing</strong></td>
<td>Small group of students working with the teacher on the writer’s craft, strategies, and skills.</td>
<td>Teach how to write about different genres and development of writing skills.</td>
<td>Occurs during 40 minute work period</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Investigation</strong></td>
<td>Focuses on reading, writing, and technology in writing. Students use research skills to create a project for an oral presentation.</td>
<td>Development of technology and research skills. Teach how to give an oral presentation.</td>
<td>Occurs during 40 minute work period</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

United States Government Involvement and Action

In the past century, the United States government has taken an active role in what is being taught in public schools. Many presidents passed education reform acts; however, the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act made tremendous impacts on schools, students, teachers, and parents. President George W. Bush implemented his education reform act in 2001. The federal government raised expectations and accountability of schools by providing additional funding to schools that were successful in meeting set guidelines. Besides the previously mentioned, the federal government required research-based teaching and provided parents with additional options for children attending public schools (Weaver, 2007).

The NCLB brought many changes to education, especially the teaching of reading in elementary schools. According to the government website (2007), in 2001 78% of fourth graders were performing below proficient achievement level. The leaders of our country recognized a major reform was needed to help students become successful learners. The NCLB required schools to implement research-based programs that were successful for all students. The funding from the NCLB provided schools with money for professional development for teachers and is based on accountability through ongoing assessments (Lips, 2007).

Hardy (2006) found that children who learn how to read at an early age become life-long readers. NCLB funds literacy instruction for public schools by one billion dollars yearly. The specific programs NCLB focused on occurs during the elementary years. The programs of the NCLB are Reading First, Improving Literacy Through School Libraries, Early Reading First, and William F. Goodling Even Start Family Literacy.
Program (NCLB, 2007). Please refer to table 2.2 for an explanation of the objectives of each program.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program</th>
<th>Focus</th>
<th>Objectives</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Reading First                    | Focuses on students in kindergarten through third grade | • Identifies five essential elements of reading programs: phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and text comprehension  
• Requires reading programs to be based on scientifically based research  
• Requires classroom-based screening, and instructional and diagnostic reading assessment  
• Provides funding for professional development |
| Early Reading First              | Focuses on preschool age children     | • Enrich children’s growth of the knowledge and skills needed for successful reading development in kindergarten and after  
• Enrich children’s early language and literacy development |
| William F. Goodling Even Start Family Literacy Program | Supports partnerships of districts and other public and private entities | • Assist parents with literacy or basic education skills  
• Help parents become partners in the education of their children  
• Help children reach their full potential |
| Improving Literacy Through School Libraries | Supports libraries in school         | • Update to school library material  
• Advance in technology is school libraries  
• Employ certified school librarian or media specialists  
• Increase of after hours to school libraries  
• Professional development for teachers |
| Reading is Fundamental-Inexpensive Book Distribution | Focuses on distributing inexpensive books to help parents and students | • Prepares younger children for reading  
• Motivates older children to read |


According to Mitchell and Reutzel (2007), the Reading First Program provides great opportunities for literacy instruction; however, the schools receiving funding have to follow guidelines to receive any funding. First, the schools have to use literacy programs and strategies that are scientifically researched to improve reading. Second,
each school is required to use valid and reliable tests to prove each student is meeting standards according to the NCLB requirements.

Since the implementation of NCLB in 2001, higher standards and accountability have helped with the quality programs being taught in schools and the quality of teachers. According to the government’s website (2006), “in 2005, America’s fourth graders posted the best reading and math scores in the test’s history” (par.2). The NCLB also required teachers to be highly qualified according to NCLB standards (Trachtman, 2007).

The importance of parental involvement and reading success

A major part of a successful balanced literacy program is parental involvement. Exposure to reading at a young age and continued encouragement in school as well as at home are positive ways to practice reading. Effective student-parent-school relationships create a positive impact on everyone involved. Bird (2003) explains the “initial research findings indicated that where parents were specifically involved in reading activities, students gained in reading scores” (p. 21).

There are benefits of parents taking an active role in their child’s education. According to Ferrara and Ferrara (2005), students are more likely to attend school, graduate, be socially accepted and achieve higher in math and reading when parents are involved. Unfortunately as students get older parent involvement diminishes. In the upper grades (6th-12th) the curriculum is harder, students have more teachers, and students want more independence with their schoolwork. Cotton and Wikelund (2003) suggests teachers still need to keep parents involved, especially in reading to help students be successful socially and academically.
In literacy development, Bird (2003) said parental involvement plays a vital role in reading success. She also suggests in early development parents should provide several reading activities. These activities include reading aloud, taking family trips to the library, singing, repeating nursery rhymes, and playing with letters and numbers. Bird found when parents take an active role in reading development, their children become better readers.

Parents are influential in motivating a student at any age to read. Kuresten (2006) also suggests the home environment can be turned into a mini classroom to support reading. In all developmental stages, parents can model reading, create a set reading time every night, provide reading material around the house (including magazines), play books on tape or CD in the car, encourage non-fiction reading, and use books from the library. The National Education Association (NEA) has studied parental involvement and has many suggestions for parents to create reading success.

For students in grades kindergarten through third, the NEA suggests parents read to their child even if they cannot read. This suggestion can start before the child is in kindergarten. Children at this age are learning how to read. Parents are encouraged to discuss reading with their children, including interests in books and authors. While reading, discussion about the book, including the beginning, middle, and end are excellent early reading strategies. Asking questions and making predictions prepare students for school activities. The NEA also encourages parents to make reading enjoyable for the children by not forcing reading (NEA, 2006).

Students in grades third through sixth are exposed to different genres and start to learn to comprehend what they are reading. Students at this age still enjoy being read to
and the NEA suggests continuing the previous strategies from early years. Parents can practice taking turns reading aloud. Comparing and contrasting authors and books, asking questions about the setting and characters, and discussing books are other excellent strategies for parents. Parents can also ask teachers for reading materials or ideas for strategies at home (Cotton and Wiklund, 2003).

Parents are influential in motivating middle and high school students to read. “Parental modeling is a critical ingredient in motivating kids to continue reading on their own through middle and high school” (NEA, 2006, p.2). Parents should continue to provide reading material based on their child’s interest. Academic reading becomes a major focus of homework during these years. Parents can support the reading by reading the material aloud together. A simple strategy of asking questions while reading will help with comprehension. Although students are more independent at this age, parents still need to support their children in all academic areas (Kuersten, 2006).

Willis et al. (2007) worked with parents once a week for an entire year on reading issues. Willis called the meetings Parent Book Clubs and the meetings were an avenue to discuss reading strategies, children’s books, and the importance of reading at home. At the meetings, parents were taught how to read books with their children. Parents were encouraged to ask questions, make connections, and read aloud to their children. Willis tracked the children’s progress of the parents who attended the meeting and reported all students made significant progress throughout the year (2007).

The connection between parents, teachers, and the school is vital in creating success for a balanced literacy program. Parents of older students can stay involved by being active in the politics of the school. This includes suggesting funding to go into
libraries or reading initiatives. Parents can also support professional development for teachers in reading instruction or even encouraging reading activities for the schools (Kuersten, 2006). Parents are a reliable resource for any program, especially reading.

Although the idea of balanced literacy has been around since the early 1980s, it has not been fully implemented until the late 1990s. The components of balanced literacy are research based and meet the needs of the students. With the collaboration of the parents and schools, the high government standards will hopefully be met using the balanced literacy approach.
Chapter 3: Applications and Evaluations

Introduction

The focus of this action research paper was to research and learn the components of a balanced literacy approach to teaching reading in the classroom. My purpose was to implement the strategies used with students in my fifth grade class.

Goals

My goal was to learn how to implement the balanced literacy approach to meet the individual needs of my students. By using the research based practices, my goals included teaching my students the strategies that would help them be successful independent readers, increase their reading ability levels and motivate them to read outside of school. Part of this process included educating parents and guardians about the importance of supporting their child’s reading success both at school and home.

Participants

The participants of my action research paper included ten students from my fifth grade classes. Our school is a suburban intermediate school with a total population of 600 fifth and sixth grade students. The students come to our building from three district elementary schools, parochial schools and private schools. This population creates a diverse spectrum of student needs.

The fifth graders were assigned to a two teacher team with approximately 46 students. Each teacher had their own ELA class. Students switched for math class and/or science and social studies.

For my target group I chose five students from my ELA class (Group 1) and five students from my teaching partner’s ELA class (Group 2). The range of reading abilities
included students functioning above grade level, at grade level and below grade level. I obtained the student levels from the NYS ELA test and their Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA) scores from their fourth grade literacy profile.

My team teacher and I started teaching the components of balanced literacy during the 2005-2006 school year. The district starting implementing the approach the year before and every teacher in the district was required to participate in workshops based on balanced literacy during the summer of 2005. All teachers in the district taught the components of balanced literacy throughout the 2006-2007 school year.

Procedures

While teaching in two districts, I was exposed to some aspects of balanced literacy. I did implement reading and writing workshop, along with a skills block. I also worked with other teachers in book groups to learn the best strategies in teaching reading. Based on my previous years of teaching, professional development workshops, and research, I implemented several procedures to see if the components of balanced literacy were effective teaching strategies during the 2006-2007 school year.

Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA)

My first procedure was based on a new requirement that was put upon every K-8 teacher. All teachers were required to implement the Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA) to each student. The DRA tests reading engagement, reading fluency, and comprehension. Each student was tested individually and the assessment took about 60 minutes (including grading the test) for each student in fifth grade. All students were tested during the beginning of the year and at the end of the year. If a student was reading
below grade level, that student was also tested in the middle of the year. I used the tests as a baseline for the target students.

Each month, I conducted an informal reading record based on the DRA scores. The reading record allowed me to see how the students were progressing each month with reading fluency. I would also use the DRA forms during parent-teacher conferences to show reading progress throughout the year.

**Student Survey**

The students were given a student reading survey in the month of October (see Appendix A). The answers from the reading surveys provided information about the student’s personal opinions. The questions included statements about reading at home and at school, preference of genres, and opinions about reading activities. The students completed the survey in 20 minutes and I collected each survey and compiled the data. The students had the option of putting their names on the surveys; however, each survey had a code to distinguish between each student. The information from the survey was used during individual conferences with the targeted students.

**Skills Block and Guided Reading**

During the word skills time of the ELA block, I implemented a word study and skills unit based on the book *Adios Falcon*. I decided to use the Houghton Mifflin Anthology, an English program, and trade books available to teachers as resources. For one week, *Adios Falcon* was the whole group reading selection, while guided reading groups read books connected to the theme of *Adios Falcon*. The guided reading books included *Whales*, *Saving Peregrine Falcon*, *Come Back Salmon*, and *Playing with Penguins*. 
The unit lessons focused on different skills throughout the week. The lessons were on proper nouns, vocabulary, listening skills, comprehension, and researching skills. For every whole group lesson, I modeled a mini-lesson; the students participated in a center relating to the skill, and completed a worksheet on the skill. During guided reading, I dedicated more time on the skills using the guided reading books.

For the target group, I used the balanced literacy approach for the five students in my ELA focus class. For the five target students in my team teacher’s focus, I put together a packet and asked the students to complete it independently with minimal teacher modeling and guidance. I corrected the packets of all the target students and compared the grades to see the differences between balanced literacy instruction and independent learning.

**Literature Studies**

All fifth grade students were required to read three books in the district. The three books were: *Because of Winn Dixie*, *Maniac Magee*, and *Island of the Blue Dolphins*. Fifth grade teachers were told to make sure each student read the books, but each teacher bases their instruction of the books according to the needs of the students. I decided to use *Maniac Magee* and *Island of the Blue Dolphins* as literature studies. The students read *Because of Winn Dixie* independently while I conducted the DRAs in the beginning of the school year.

With *Maniac Magee*, the students were separated into groups based on their work habits, motivation, and reading levels. Each group consisted of high, medium, and low students. Each week the students would work on explicit and implicit questions, vocabulary, and reading aloud or independently. I also provided weekly reading
strategies for each student to work on independently. While the students met with their
groups, I would conference with students individually to work on reading strategies. I
would also meet with each group everyday to monitor the groups work habits and
cooperation. (Refer to Appendix C)

My teaching partner and I decided to combine our ELA students to read the Island
of the Blue Dolphins. We divided the team into groups of four to five students. The
groups were based on end of the year DRA scores, along with motivation and work
habits. We set up a schedule to meet two to three times per week. While the students
met, I observed the target students on certain reading behaviors (see Appendix D). I
compiled the data from the reading behavior checklist to see how the target students
worked in a group setting and independently during a literature study.

Independent Reading Observation

Another study I conducted was an observation of the target students. The first ten
minutes of the ELA block was dedicated to independent reading. The students read
silently and ate their snack at their seats. Throughout the year, I observed the students and
looked for certain reading habits. I also used the checklist (see Appendix E) during
individual reading conferences to go over what was expected during DEAR (Drop
Everythings And Read) time.

Individual Conferences

Throughout the 2006-2007 school year, I met and held conferences with every
student asking questions about their reading (see Appendix F). I would record the
student’s answers, go over the observation log, and discuss DRA books or literature study
books. I would record the discussion on the Conference Sheet and file the sheet into the
student’s reading folder. The reading folder was an organizational tool I created to keep all reading forms together for each student. I met with the target students at least every month to record their reading habits for this action research paper. I also used the conference sheet during parent-teacher conferences.

*Home Connection*

To connect reading at school with reading at home, each student had the opportunity to participate in the Pizza Hut’s *Book It* program. The Pizza Hut’s *Book It* program provided an incentive for students to read at home from the months of October to March. The district expected each student in fifth grade to read 20 minutes each night. I downloaded a calendar and a book report worksheet for the students to record their information throughout the month. Each student was required to fill out both sides of the *Book It* worksheet and obtain a parent signature on both sides. For the months of October through January the students had the option of participating in *Book It*. For the months of February and March, *Book It* became daily homework and each student was required to participate. I kept track of the target students’ involvement in *Book It* for the whole year.

Besides *Book It*, I joined the Read Across America Committee. The Read Across America Committee challenged the students to read in school and at home for an entire week. The week usually occurred around Dr. Seuss’s birthday. Each day, the entire school would stop everything and read for 10 minutes. The principal would come over the announcements to declare, “Stop, Drop, and Read.” The committee also set up special areas around the school for the students to read. The special areas included pillows, couches, and chairs to create a relaxing reading environment. The teachers signed their classes up to sit and read in the special areas.
At home, the students were asked to keep a log of the amount of minutes they read each night. Every morning, the teachers would collect the logs and add up the minutes for the school day and at home. The entire school worked together to read 100,000 minutes for the entire week (this included reading in school and at home). Each student that participated in Read Across America received a sundae during their lunch period on Friday. I asked for every student to participate in Read Across America in my classroom. I kept track of the minutes of the target students and their participation in this reading initiative. I collected the target students' logs to compile the reading at home data for the week.
Chapter 4: Data and Results

Throughout the course of the year, I implemented surveys, assessments, and instruction based on balanced literacy research. Every study was related to one of the components of reading for fifth grade. The target students were five students from my focus class and five students from my teaching partner’s class. In some studies, all 46 students participated; however, I kept the data of only the target students.

*Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA) Data*

Table 1 displays the results of DRA scores of the target students throughout the year. The school district required all students to be tested in September and in May; however, any student reading below grade level was tested a third time in mid-year. The results of the DRA assessment displayed how the target students were progressing throughout the year.

Instead of using names, each target student was given a number. For Table 4.1, the DRA levels represent the different levels of reading assessment. The DRA levels are based on different books for the grades. For example, a DRA level of 20 represents a book for a student reading at a second grade level. Therefore, a DRA level of 50 is equivalent to a book for fifth grade.

The DRA tests the students on three different areas: reading engagement, reading fluency, and reading comprehension. All three areas are based on a worksheet and rubric that either the teacher or student completes. The reading engagement was the portion of the assessment the students completed first. The students were asked questions based on books they were reading in school and at home. The students were also asked about
reading strategies they use before, during, and after reading. The students also wrote down reading goals.

After the students completed the reading engagement section, each student was tested on their fluency. The student was required to read 100 words within a set amount of time. The student read aloud to the teacher while the teacher recorded any repeats, omissions, and insertions of words. This is called a Running Reading Record (RRR). After the fluency section of the test, the students completed the test by reading the rest of the book. The students worked on a packet that tests the following reading strategies: predicting, questioning, summarizing, comprehension, interpretation, and reflection of the text.

Table 4.1
DRA Scores of Target Students

According to Table 1 above, students 1, 2, 6, 7, and 8 were either reading at or above grade level in the beginning of the year. The same target students increased by one DRA level at the end of the year assessment.
Target students 3, 4, 5, 9, and 10 were reading below grade level in the beginning of the year. These students were tested in the middle of the year to monitor progress in reading engagement, fluency, and comprehension. Target students 4 and 5 increased a level; however, target students 9 and 10 remained at their beginning of the year level. Fortunately all four target students moved up levels by the end of the year. Target student 10 was the only target student that did not meet grade level reading requirements. In that case, the student was recommended for extra ELA support for the next year.

Table 4.2 displays the reading engagement (RE), reading fluency (RF), and comprehension (C) of the DRA assessment for each target student. The target students were distinguished by the numbers 1-10. The students reading at grade level were tested in the fall (beginning of the year) and the spring (end of the year). Students reading below grade level at the beginning of the year were also tested in the middle of the year. The numbers in Table 2 represent the scores on the provided rubric. The reading engagement section of the rubric allowed a total of eight points. The reading fluency section of the rubric allowed a total of 16 points, and the reading comprehension section allowed a total of 24 points.

A grey shaded area means the student was not tested in the middle of the year. Table 4.2 is found on the following page.
Based on Table 4.2, students 1, 2, 6, 7, and 8 were all reading at or above grade level at the beginning of the school year. For these target students, the reading engagement average for the fall was 31 points out of 40 points. In the spring, the reading average was 34 points out of 40 points. The students reading engagement improved an average of three points over the course of the year.

In the beginning of the school year, students 3, 4, 5, 9, and 10 were reading below grade level. In the fall, the reading engagement average was 25 points out of 40 points. In the middle of the year, the students’ average was 30 points out of 40 points and 28 points

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Target Students</th>
<th>Fall</th>
<th>Mid-year</th>
<th>Spring</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>RE</td>
<td>RF</td>
<td>C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Possible Points</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
out of 40 points at the end of the year. The students reading engagement increased in the middle of the year but decreased at the end of the year.

For reading comprehension, students 1, 2, 6, 7, and 8 scored 64 points out of 80 for the fall and 67 points out of 80 points for the end of the year. The average comprehension increased for these target students. By looking at the chart, target students 2 and 6 scores did not increase, and target student 8 stayed the same.

Target students 3, 4, 5, 9, and 10 scored an average of 45 points out of 80 points in the fall on reading comprehension. These target students scored 64 points out of 80 points mid-year and 51 points out of 80 in reading comprehension at the end of the year.

The DRA results of the target students showed what each student did on the assessments throughout the entire year; therefore, this allowed the teacher to work with the students in specific areas or show growth throughout the year.

**Student Survey**

Table 4.3 displays the results of only one question from the student survey. The purpose of the student survey was to show student involvement in reading at home and school. The nature of the questions focused on the students’ opinions about reading, genres, and reading strategies. The question about reading strategies was important because it helped with planning for instruction throughout the year. The survey was distributed in November.

The one question focused on reading strategies the students used before, during, and after reading. On the student survey, the students chose between predicting, questioning, summarizing, making connections, visualizing, and responding. (See Appendix G)
While completing the survey, the students wrote down the strategies they used. To distinguish between the strategies in Table 4.3, each reading strategy has a certain legend pattern to correlate with the graph.

| Table 4.3 |
| Results of Student Survey |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reading Strategies</th>
<th>Predicting</th>
<th>Questioning</th>
<th>Summarizing</th>
<th>Making Connections</th>
<th>Responding</th>
<th>Inferring</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rereading</td>
<td>27</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading Ahead</td>
<td>14</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Predicting</td>
<td>17</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Questioning</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summarizing</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Making Connections</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responding</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inferring</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

According to Table 4.3, 18 students said they reread while reading. Eight students said they read ahead, 27 students made predictions before they read, 14 students questioned while reading, 5 students summarized after they read, 17 students made connections while reading, 29 students visualized while reading, 2 students responded while reading, and zero students inferred while reading.

Adios Falcon

For the literacy study section of my research, the target students were divided into two groups and given numbers to distinguish between the students. Group 1 included target students 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5. Group 2 included target students 6, 7, 8, 9, and 10. The target students in Group 1 received direct balanced literacy instruction. The target
students in Group 2 received a packet with instructions to read the story independently and complete the packet during their ELA block.

The students reading above grade level in Group 2 (students 6 and 7) read the story and completed the packet independently at a successful level. The students reading below grade level of Group 2 (students 8, 9, 10) struggled with reading and completing the packet. All three students needed clarification of directions and did not comprehend the story.

Table 4.4 and Table 4.5, found on the next page, provide the total points each target student scored for each skill assessed. Both groups completed assignments that focused on comprehension, proper nouns, and vocabulary based in the book, Adios Falcon. Each assignment was worth 10 points and answers were either right or wrong.
### Table 4.4
Result of Target Students with Balanced Literacy Instruction

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Group 1 Students</th>
<th>Average Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total Points</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comprehension Questions</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10 10 10 8 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>92%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proper Nouns</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10 10 10 9 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>92%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocabulary</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10 9 9 7 7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 4.5
Result of Target Students without Balanced Literacy Instruction

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Group 2 Students</th>
<th>Average Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total Points</td>
<td>6 7 8 9 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comprehension Questions</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10 10 8 6 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>69%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proper Nouns</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10 10 9 8 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>86%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocabulary</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10 9 7 7 2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

According to Tables 4.4 and 4.5 above, the students that received direct balanced literacy instruction scored 23 percent higher on the comprehension assignment, 6 percent higher on the proper nouns assignment, and 14 percent higher on the vocabulary assignment than the students that did not receive balanced literacy instruction. Group 1 scored a total average of 14 percent higher on all three assignments combined than Group 2.
Book It!

Book It! was a monthly home reading incentive for the students. All 46 students were provided the opportunity to participate in Book It. Table 4.6 displays the target student’s participation in Book It from October until March. The target students were given a letter to distinguish between them without using names. If there is an X in the column, the target student participated in Book It for that month. If the column is blank, the target student did not participate in Book It for that month.

Table 4.6
Book It Results for Target Students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Months</th>
<th>Target Students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Target students 1 and 5 participated in Book It for the March and April. Target students 2 and 3 participated in all six months of Book It. Students 4 and 8 participated in the program for only the month of March. Target students 6, 7, 9 participated in Book It for five months, while target student 10 did not participate at all.

After the Book It program, I conducted a conference with each target student to go over their participation. Target students 1, 2, 3, 6, 7, and 9 enjoyed reading at home. They also stated that their parents had a set reading time every night dedicated just to reading. Target student 1 expressed she did not think about doing Book It for the first four months, but she was glad she participated in it the last two months.
Target students 4, 5, 8, and 9 said in their conference they do not like to read and it is hard to read at home. The students did not have a set reading time at home and had to remind themselves to read independently. During Parent-Teacher conferences, I always encouraged parents to have a set reading time and showed research pertaining to reading at home and positive results in school.

*Read Across America*

Read Across America was a school wide reading initiative to encourage students to not watch television and to pick up a book for one school week. All 46 students participated in Read Across America and I kept track of the target students’ minutes for a period of 5 school days. Table 4.7 displays the minutes the target students read at home for the week.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Target Student</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>9</th>
<th>10</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total Minutes</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Students 1, 2, 3, 5, 7, and 8 (reading above grade level) read an average of 20-25 minutes per night. These students followed the expectation of reading at least 20 minutes each night. Students 4, 5, 9, and 10 read about 10 minutes each night, and did receive the reward because they read every night.
Chapter 5: Conclusions and Recommendations

The following conclusions and recommendations are based on the research, procedures, and data from the implementations of balanced literacy components in a fifth grade classroom.

Conclusions

In my first year teaching in the district, I implemented the Quantitative Reading Inventory (QRI). In my second year, the district transitioned from the QRI to the Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA) based on research from the district literacy team. In my opinion, the DRA is an excellent reading assessment for the students, teachers, and parents. It provides information on individual effort in reading fluency and comprehension. I used the DRA information in parent-teacher conferences and reviewed how their child completed the test and the results. The district also has a data base website to track every student from kindergarten to eighth grade. Parents and teachers have access to the website.

According to the DRA data, the target students reading above grade level and at grade level in the beginning of the year made progress throughout the year. There overall DRA scores increased from the fall to the spring. My concern was with the students reading below grade level. Scores dropped in reading engagement, reading fluency, and comprehension from the mid-year to the spring. I believe the students did not make sufficient enough progress because they were tested in March and then in May (for some students the end of March and the beginning of the May). Also, some target students were being tested in books that were an entire grade level higher from the mid-year to the spring. Usually, a growth in a grade level is over a course of a year, not two months.
Although most of the target students made progress throughout the year based on the DRA scores, one target student was reading at a fourth grade reading level going into sixth grade. The same target student did not participate in Book It the entire year. On another note, the same target student struggled in all academic areas, but did not qualify for any special education services. I did recommend Academic Intervention Services (AIS) for ELA.

Student Survey

The student survey questions allowed me to understand each student’s opinion about genres, what reading strategies they use, and how they felt about reading at home and in school. Based on the reading strategies question, I recognized I needed to teach mini-lessons on summarizing and inferring. Only two students said they infer when they read and five students said they summarize after they read.

I decided to teach summarizing and inferring during guided reading to help the lower readers understand the strategies better. Since summarizing and inferring are higher level thinking skills, it was easier to focus on the strategies with them, in small groups. Overall, all students in my focus class did a much better job on the summarizing and inferring section of the DRA assessment at the end of the year. I also worked with my teacher partner and came up with mini-lessons on inferring and summarizing for the next year. The survey also allowed me to understand what students like to read and what books to include in my classroom library.

Adios Falcon

The most effective procedure for me was the Adios Falcon study, or balanced literacy versus no balanced literacy instruction. By looking at the data, the students that
received the balanced literacy instruction did a lot better on the assignments than the other students who did not. I was surprised in the difference of grades between the students in the balanced literacy group and how effective balanced literacy really was for all of the students.

The target students reading above grade level scored the same on all the assignments. In October of 2007, I received the ELA test scores for all the students. The target students reading above grade level all scored a level 4 (above state standards) on the test. I feel the four students are hard workers and new concepts as well as retaining information comes easy to them; therefore, they were successful on all three assignments.

In my opinion, for the students that were reading at or below grade level, balanced literacy instruction was a major factor in helping them learn the concepts, retain information, and understand the reading strategies. I believe students that do struggle need whole group instruction with teacher modeling, small group instruction, and re-teaching of concepts during conferencing. Target student 10 (did not receive balanced literacy instruction) failed two of the three assignments. Luckily, the assignments were only for the study and did not count towards any grades.

**Book It and Read Across America**

Reading at home is an important part of balanced literacy. Although the district policy for homework includes a 20 minute time limit for fifth graders to read each night, it is hard to monitor for every student. I thought Book It was an excellent program to encourage my students to read and hold them accountable for reading each night.

For the target students that were in my focus class, I asked for weekly parental signatures for the month of March. I recognized that students reading below grade level
were not participating every month. With the weekly parent signature, all five target students received the Pizza Hut reward in March. I realized holding the students and parents accountable led to more reading at home.

For Read Across America, all students were required to receive a parent signature on a form each night indicating how much they read at home. Students were also told about the end of the week reward for participating in Read Across America. I did notice a weekly award motivated the students reading below grade level to read each night at home, even for 10 minutes.

Recommendations

Balanced literacy is not a program that has daily lesson plans a teacher can just open a book and teach. Many resources are used to meet the individual needs of the students. My first recommendation is for all teachers to observe other balanced literacy classrooms. Beside workshops on the different components, it is vital for teachers to actually see and apply what they learn about balanced literacy. Professional development should continue throughout a teacher’s career and the latest researched strategies should be taught.

My second recommendation is to implement a team teaching approach in ELA. With two teachers in the room, students will benefit from the added assistance. The teachers can learn from each other and work on their strengths and weaknesses. For example, I am not a strong writing teacher, but my team teacher is and I have benefited from our conversations as well as watching her teach writing.

If the classes were in separate rooms the teachers could work together to make sure the lessons run smoothly. Once the students were working independently or in
groups, one teacher could float between the two rooms. At this point, the other teacher could observe other teachers for 15 minutes. In order for this to work, classroom management would play a key role in success.

My final recommendation is to involve parents as much as possible into the ELA block. Parents are a valuable resource for a teacher. Parents can read aloud, guide independent literacy groups, or help out with students that are struggling. Some parents work throughout the day, however, many parents are never asked to help out in the classroom. High school students, college students, and the elderly are another possibility for volunteers in the classroom.

In conclusion, I have learned by working on this paper that teachers, administrators, parents, in essence, all persons that work within the school system really are working towards higher standards for each individual student. I believe the focus should not be on what was taught in the past, but what works for each student today. With schools being held accountable for success in all the subject areas, researched based practices will benefit all in the education process. As a fairly new teacher, I am glad to be working with professionals that are willing to recognize programs that are the best for the students. My research has provided a clear indication that a balanced literacy approach is reaching the needs of every child, and I am happy to have had this experience to take a deeper look into my teaching practices in ELA.
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63.


Appendices
Appendix A: Student Survey

Please circle the letter next to the answer or fill the lines with your answer.

1. Do you like to read at home?
   a. Yes
   b. No

2. Do you like to read at school?
   a. Yes
   b. No

3. When you read, what do you enjoy reading? Circle all that apply.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>fiction</th>
<th>non-fiction</th>
<th>magazines</th>
<th>fantasy</th>
<th>newspapers</th>
<th>science fiction</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>mystery</td>
<td>poetry</td>
<td>realistic fiction</td>
<td>historical fiction</td>
<td>biographies</td>
<td>memoirs</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4. Please circle all the reading strategies you use before, during, or after you read.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>rereading</th>
<th>reading ahead</th>
<th>predicting</th>
<th>questioning</th>
<th>summarizing</th>
<th>making connections</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>visualizing</td>
<td>responding</td>
<td>understanding word patterns</td>
<td>sounding out words</td>
<td>book talks</td>
<td>inferring</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5. What books have you read so far this year?

   _______________________________________________________
   _______________________________________________________
   _______________________________________________________

6. What are your hobbies?

   _______________________________________________________
   _______________________________________________________

7. Do you enjoy reading aloud to others?
   a. Yes
   b. No
8. Please rank (1-11: 11 being your favorite and 1 being your least favorite) your favorite types of reading activities from the list below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Listening to books on tape</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>PowerPoint projects based on books you have read</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Book report projects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Responding to your reading</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>DEAR Time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Reading Aloud</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Reader's Theater</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Partner Reading</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Shared Reading (Reading with the teacher)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Book It!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Centers</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

9. What types of books would you like Mrs. Kaczanowski to buy for the classroom library?

____________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________

Thank you for answering this survey. 😊

CODE # _____
Appendix B: Parent Survey

Dear Parents/Guardians:

I am currently conducting a research project on student motivation and reading and would appreciate your involvement. The enclosed questionnaire is totally voluntary and you are not required to complete it by any means. However, by completing this questionnaire, I will receive a better insight into your child’s reading habits. Please answer the following questions and have your child to hand it in by ___________. Thank you! 😊

Optional Parent Survey
Research Project-Optional Parent Survey Mrs. Kaczanowski

Please circle the letter next to the answer or fill the lines with your answer.

1. Do you (parent) have a set silent reading time at home?
   a. Yes
   b. No

2. Do you (parent) read
   a. Every night
   b. Every couple of days
   c. Little time to read

3. When you have a chance to read, what do you enjoy reading? Circle all that apply.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>fiction</th>
<th>non-fiction</th>
<th>magazines</th>
<th>fantasy</th>
<th>newspapers</th>
<th>science fiction</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>mystery</td>
<td>poetry</td>
<td>realistic fiction</td>
<td>historical fiction</td>
<td>biographies</td>
<td>memoirs</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4. Do you recall any reading strategies you learned in elementary school? Circle all that apply.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>rereading</th>
<th>reading ahead</th>
<th>predicting</th>
<th>questioning</th>
<th>summarizing</th>
<th>making connections</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>visualizing</td>
<td>responding</td>
<td>understanding word patterns</td>
<td>sounding out words</td>
<td>book talks</td>
<td>inferring</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5. What types of reading does your fifth grader enjoy? Circle all that apply

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>fiction</th>
<th>non-fiction</th>
<th>magazines</th>
<th>fantasy</th>
<th>newspapers</th>
<th>science fiction</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>mystery</td>
<td>poetry</td>
<td>realistic fiction</td>
<td>historical fiction</td>
<td>biographies</td>
<td>memoirs</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

57
6. What are your fifth grader’s hobbies? Please list.

________________________________________________________________________

7. What does your fifth grader like to do for fun?

________________________________________________________________________

8. At home, does your child read…
   a. Every night-without any reminders
   b. Almost every night-with reminders
   c. Seldom

9. What is your opinion of a fifth grader listening to a read aloud?
   a. Strongly Agree
   b. No opinion
   c. Strongly disagree

10. As parents/guardians, what do you think we could do at school to promote reading?

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

Thank you for answering this survey. 😊

Please remember to have your child return this survey to me no later than __________.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student</th>
<th>Did the student complete their assignment for the group? (in class)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Does the student actively participate in group discussions?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Did the student complete their assignment for the group? (at home)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What are some reading strategies you used while reading today?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Are you making any connections with the book?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Do you have any questions about the book?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>How is reading the book at home?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student</td>
<td>Comments on Reading Behaviors—based on individual conference</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is the book appropriate?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does the student start reading immediately?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does the student read for the entire 10 minutes?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you reread with your DEAR BOOK?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are you making any connections with your book?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you have any questions about your book?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What do you like/dislike about your book?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix E: Reading Behaviors Checklist</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Directional movement/return sweep</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One to one matching</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uses meaning cues</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uses initial letters/sounds</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uses chunks of words</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rereads</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recognizes basic vocabulary</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Monitors</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Corrects</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uses fluency</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uses phrasing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using Expression</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Looks for details</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connects to personal experience</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Predicts</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Questions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summarizes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opinion about reading</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix F: Reading Conference Sheets

Reading Workshop: Teacher-Student Conferences

Name ______________________ Date ______________________

Questions to ask during conference by teacher.

1. What book are you reading during DEAR time?
   Title: ___________________________ Genre: _______________
   Level: __________

2. Why did you choose this book? ____________________________________________

3. Tell me about your reading experiences with this book. What do you especially like
   or dislike? ____________________________________________________________

4. Have your read books like this before? ______ Can you compare the books? How
   are they the same or how are they different? ________________________________

5. Would you recommend this book to others? What would you tell them about the book?
   ____________________________________________________________________

6. How do the characters and/or events connect with your own experiences?
   ____________________________________________________________________

7. Would you read another book by this author or in this genre? ________________

8. What reading strategies do you use before reading? PUT B
   9. What reading strategies do you use during reading? PUT D
   10. What reading strategies do you use after reading? PUT A
       
       | rereading | reading ahead | predicting | questioning | summarizing | making connections |
       | visualizing | responding | understanding word patterns | sounding out words | book talks | inferring |

11. What strategies would you like to work on? ________________________________

12. Running record of Guided Reading Book
   Title of the book ______________________
   Mistakes _________ 100 wpm _________ Level __________

Appendix G: Reading Strategies

The following reading strategies are usually taught in third-sixth grades. These strategies are used to understand the meaning of the text or reading informational or non-fiction texts.

Strategy: **Predicting**-students make a conclusion of what they think may happen in the text.

Strategy: **Making Connections**-students understand the characters better when they have a similar experience. Students can make text-to-text connections, text-to-self connections, or text-to-world connections.

Strategy: **Questioning**-students should be asking questions before, during, and after reading. They can question the content, the author, the events, the issues, and ideas in the text.

Strategy: **Visualizing**-students should be creating mental images while reading. Visualizing helps the reader make the words into concrete images. This is like playing a movie in your head while reading.

Strategy: **Making Inferences**-students should be using their prior knowledge, asking questions, and making their own discoveries without direct comment of the author. When readers infer, they draw conclusions based on clues in the text, make predictions, or use pictures to help gain meaning of their reading.

Strategy: **Summarizing information**-students should be putting together important information while reading. When readers summarize, they can present the general idea from their reading.

Strategy: **Synthesizing Information**-students should be putting together information from the text and from personal, world, and literary knowledge to create new understandings. When synthesizing, readers bring together parts or elements to form a whole.