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The Effects of a Balanced Reading Program on Second Grade Reading Achievement

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SUNY COLLEGE AT BROCKPORT

THE EFFECTS OF A BALANCED READING PROGRAM ON
SECOND GRADE READING ACHIEVEMENT

By

Theron Mong

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Development in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
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Abstract

The purpose of the thesis was to examine the positive effects a well-balanced reading program had on second graders reading achievement. There are many components that go into a well-balanced reading program. This study defined how some of the components were implemented, and in turn how the students benefited from a program that has the essential components students need to become successful independent readers.

The subjects in this study were ten second-grade students from an urban elementary school. Each of the subjects was in the same first and second grade classroom with the same teacher. The students looped with the same teacher from first to second grade. They were taught both years using the same reading workshop format. Components of the balanced reading program are clearly defined in the study. The focal point of the research centered on the benefits of guided reading used during the researchers reading block. Running records were used on an ongoing basis to document student growth. The study tried to determine what elements contributed most to student growth in the area of reading.

The findings revealed that using a reading workshop format with a strong guided reading component significantly helped students achieve as readers. The findings reveal one model that can help foster independent

readers at a developmentally appropriate rate using texts that are at the child's level and strategy and skill based mini-lessons.

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CHAPTER I

Statement of the Problem

Purpose

The purpose of this study is to investigate the correlation between a well balanced reading program with guided reading being the focal point, and improved student reading performance.

Introduction

A child's ability to read is one of the most important skills he or she learns in elementary school. How the child is taught to read depends on the philosophy of the teacher, and sometimes the school district plays a role in determining the types of instructional approaches that will take place in the classroom. What is certain is that children need a balanced reading program. Baumann and Ivey (1997) determined that students in a balanced literature and strategy based classroom grew in knowledge, interest and attitudes toward reading.

It is very important that the elements of a balanced reading program are well defined. One very important part of a balanced reading program is guided reading. It gives teachers a chance to teach and coach students while they read books at their instructional level. Bruce, Snodgrass and Saleman (1999) claim that guided reading with at risk students improves student's literacy skills.

Need for the Study

A well-balanced literacy program is the key to a child's success as a reader in school. There is significant evidence that there are many elements that contribute to a well balanced reading program. If we put all the elements together, what is the result? The result should be improved student reading and enjoyment of literature. The need for this study is based on the assumption that a well-balanced reading program fosters student achievement in the area of reading. This assumption is based on the classroom experiences of the researcher and is echoed by other teachers using the same methods. However, other educators

suggest the same methods are not beneficial. They favor a skills based program. In order to demonstrate the effectiveness of their program teachers need to systematically study and document their own classroom practices and the achievement of their students.

Research Question

What is the relationship between a well-balanced reading program with a strong guided reading component, and student reading achievement?

CHAPTER II

Review of the Literature

Balanced Literacy

Describing a balanced literacy program is a difficult task when examining it from a research perspective. According to Freppon and Dahl (2000):

To describe balanced instruction and its classroom implications requires identifying the relevant scholarly works. For the most part, information on balanced instruction itself is not yet in the research reports. Instead, specific versions of balanced are described in books in which the authors cite various supportive bodies of research. Some authors draw on the same studies and interpret the implications for classroom practice differently. Other authors draw on different or additional bodies of research and, thus, present contrasting descriptions of balanced instruction. (p.240)

The origin of the term balanced literacy comes from the state of California. In 1996 the California Department of Education (as cited in Asselin, 1999) reported low reading test scores in there state, and they blamed them on whole language. A new curriculum called balanced reading instruction was mandated. The major points of emphasis were:

(1) phonics is foundational to comprehensive and higher order thinking and needs to be taught systematically and explicitly; (2) instruction is composed of regular but separate periods of explicit skills instruction and literature-based experiences. (Asselin, 1999, p.69) The events that took place in California lead to the present trend of literacy instruction.

It is very important to clearly define what elements come together to form what is defined as balanced reading instruction. According to Reutzel (1998) balanced reading is a combination of whole language and phonics instruction. He also states that, “the visual image held by many in the balanced reading movement is that of the scale of justice, with phonics and whole language weighing equally.” (p.322) This definition shows the blurry vision a person can have concerning balanced literacy if it isn’t clearly defined. According to Spiegel and Lee (1998):

Education in the United States is at a crossroads. Once again many state legislatures and school boards seem to be searching for the silver bullet, the answer to literacy education for all children. A single answer is neat, clear, and comforting. Special interest groups are exerting pressure all over the nation for mandates to move away from the whole language philosophy, which some legislators and school

boards had previously identified as the silver bullet, and to swing all the way back to programs with a heavy and exclusive phonics emphasis. (p.114)

As Stoicheva (1999) states, “the challenge, then, is to identify where to situate phonics in a balanced reading program, whether to separate it and teach it explicitly or to teach it within the context of an integrated language-based program” (p.145).

The most important question when dealing with balanced reading instruction is the implications it has on the teacher and the students.

Fitzgerald states (1999):

The quintessential philosophical outlook in the balanced perspective is that three broad categories of knowledge-local knowledge about reading, global knowledge about reading-are equally important and that the areas within subcategories also are themselves equally important. As a result, a teacher who holds a balanced philosophical view of the reading process makes these multiple categories of knowledge the goals for his or her children’s learning. (p.104)

Baumann and Ivey (1997) found that second grade students in a literature strategy based classroom developed into good readers by

being engaged in literature. The students grew in the areas of word identification and fluency.

A balanced reading program has many components that need to work together to foster student growth. Feitelson, Goldstein, Kita and Rosenhouse (1997) found that reading aloud to children on a daily basis enhances children's vocabulary. Their study used daily exposure to listening to stories in the classroom and looked at the reading achievement of the students. Their studies found that the group that was read to daily showed statistically significant differences in the areas of decoding, reading comprehension, and picture storytelling.

The research also indicates that students who interact socially when reading are active readers. Guthrie, Schafer, Wang and Afflerbach (1995) concluded that children who talk with friends about reading and writing are more active readers than children who do not talk with friends about reading and writing. Providing students with time to interact with print is a key to a balanced reading program. Mathes, Howard, Allen, and Fuchs (1998) found that peer assisted reading at the first grade level helped students achieve in reading. Their study found

that students who read together, and assisted each other using strategies that were taught benefited in the area of reading achievement and social skill development.

Another important element of a balanced reading program is guided reading. The guided reading component is the focal point of the researcher's study.

Guided Reading

Determining what is the best text for beginning readers is a question teachers must ask themselves. What most teachers do agree on is that students should read authentic literature. Whole stories that are of high quality, and don't have contrived language are the best way to describe authentic literature. Guided reading is the piece that accomplishes this objective. Mooney (1995) describes the key role of guided reading:

In the same way that reading to children and sharing books with children who are considered to be fluent readers should continue to be essential daily activities within a balanced language program, so should guided reading. At any stage of a reader's development, guided reading allows you to make children aware of the "why and how and the knowledge that you know" of reading. (p.75)

Guided reading is the essential component of a well-balanced reading program. As Fountas and Pinnell (1996) state “the critical element is the skillful teaching that helps young readers learn effective strategies they need to become independent” (p.1). According to Short (1999) in order for children to learn about language they need to take a close look at it.

It is very important that a clear definition of guided reading is provided. While there are many adjustments and variations that are related to the level of the children here are the essential components and procedures.

- ◆ A teacher works with a small group
- ◆ Children in the group are similar in their development of a reading process and are able to read similar text.
- ◆ Teachers introduce the stories and assist children’s reading in ways that help to develop independent reading strategies.
- ◆ Each child reads the whole text.
- ◆ The goal is for children to read independently and silently.

- ◆ The emphasis is on the reading of increasingly challenging books over time.
- ◆ Children are grouped and regrouped in a dynamic process that involves ongoing observation and assessment. Regrouping is based upon the students needs and progress. (Fountas and Pinnell, 1996, p.4)

There has been a good amount of research conducted that focuses on the benefits of guided reading instruction. According to Cunningham and Allington (1998) “the essentials of guided reading are that the teacher explains or demonstrates for the children the important things to be done while they read” (p.54). Bruce, Snodgrass and Salzman (1999) found that students who participated in a guided reading program made significant gains in the areas of word identification, writing vocabulary, sentence dictation and text level comprehension. Their research also found students improved their reading strategies. Wilkinson and Anderson (1995) found that most school systems use some form of small group reading instruction.

Other research points to the positive effects guided reading has on low readers. Anderson, Wilkinson and Amson (1991) found that guided reading has its greatest successes with low and average readers. They found that good readers already have the schemata needed to read well. Guided reading lessons help low and average readers activate the schema they need to be successful at reading. The study concluded that poor readers benefit most from a guided reading approach.

Reitsma (1998) determined that students gain more efficient word identification skills for specific words while they are reading. However he determined that there wasn't a significant difference between guided reading practice and independent practice with regard to reading speed. In his study providing guidance to student to correct errors didn't improve fluency.

Guided reading has its challenges in the classroom. The teacher plays a vital role in the guided reading program. The teacher must deal with a lot of material and has many teaching points to consider. The teacher must make knowledgeable decisions when deciding what to teach during mini-lessons based on the students needs. Durkin (1990)

stated that there is , “the need for introspective teachers who persist in asking themselves, ‘Why am I doing what I’m doing?’” (p.476). Guided reading is a current trend in literacy. Teachers need to look at the benefits of the program and realize why it’s such a valuable tool to use to teach students to be independent readers.

The focus of the teaching during a guided reading lesson takes place at the start of the lesson. The focus is giving students strategies to use while reading. Cunningham and Allington (1999) have established clear strategies students should be taught and use during reading:

- 1) Calling up relevant background knowledge
- 2) Predicting what will be learned and what will happen
- 3) Making mental pictures or “seeing it in your mind”
- 4) Self-monitoring and self-correcting
- 5) Using fix-up strategies such as rereading, pictures, and asking for help when you can’t make sense of what you read
- 6) Determining the most important ideas and events and seeing how they are related
- 7) Drawing conclusions and inferences based on what you read
- 8) Deciding “what you think”-Did you like it? Did you agree? Was it funny? Could it really happen?
- 9) Comparing and contrasting what you read and what you already know
- 10) Figuring out unknown words
- 11) Summarizing what you have read (p.55)

In order to provide student's practice in developing strategies teachers need to find appropriate texts. Teachers often ask themselves what kind of text is best for beginning readers? Brown (1999) describes three types of text suggested to teachers. Predictable text that emphasizes rhythm, rhyme, and repetition is one common way to teach reading. The second approach is decodable text with a focus on common letter-sound relationships. And finally there are the proponents who believe beginning readers should read authentic literature, which can bring together the first two types of text. Brown (1999) believes a guided reading approach using authentic literature is the most appropriate way to teach beginning readers.

Textual scaffolding allows us to reframe our original question about text for beginning readers. Rather than asking "which is best" we can ask, "which type of text is best suited to achieve what purposes with whom and when?" Framing the question this way helps teachers address the wide range of students abilities that are not likely to be met by "one-size-fits all" text. By matching different types of text with students development, teachers are able to work in young readers changing zones of proximal development-the bridge between what they know about the reading process and what they still need to learn. (p.293)

This demonstrates the important guided reading has in a classroom setting.

Guided reading also gives students a chance to develop fluency, which is a crucial factor that determines a child's success as a reader. According to Strickland and Morrow (2000) fluency starts in the primary grades. For the majority of students, grade 2 is the most important year for reading fluency.

It is very important to remember that the goal of guided reading is for children to improve as readers and read for meaning. As Malik (1996) states students need to acquire meaning building strategies. The teacher is the leader who must make decisions based on the student's development. The teacher's questions and comments during the beginning portion of the lesson are crucial in building students comprehension strategies. Mooney (1995) clearly defines what the teacher needs to make students aware of before they start reading:

- 1) Expectations of content, characters, setting, and action engendered by the title and cover information.
- 2) Background knowledge they'll be able to bring to the reading.
- 3) New knowledge they would like to gain.

4.)The purpose of the reading and how this will affect their reading and style. (p.59)

As Fawson and Reutzel (2000) state, “Guided reading is an important ‘best practice’ associated with today’s balanced literacy instruction. It allows teachers to address specific reading strategy needs of children in their classrooms” (p.96). It is the responsibility of teacher preparation programs to provide the training needed to implement a guided reading program in a classroom. School districts must provide the materials and additional training for teachers to successfully implement a high quality guided reading program.

CHAPTER III

Design of the Study

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to investigate the correlation between a well balanced reading program with guided reading being the focal point, and improved student reading performance.

Research Question

How does a well-balanced reading program with a strong guided reading focus influence students reading achievement?

Methodology

Subjects

The subjects in this study included ten second grade students from an urban elementary school in the Rochester City School District. Each of the subjects was in the same first grade class and they looped to second grade with the same teacher. They were all taught in the 1999-

2000 school year using a reading workshop format. During the 2000-01 school year they were also taught using the same consistent reading workshop format with the same teacher.

Materials

The students read stories that were at their instructional level during the guided reading portion of the workshop. The students read leveled texts from the Scholastic Guided Reading Program by Gay Su Pinnell.

The students also read from a Houghton Mifflin basal reader and big books. These texts were only used for shared reading and mini-lessons.

Students reading levels were assessed using the Developmental Reading Assessment. This tool has leveled books from level 1 to 50. Running records were used to assess student progress. (See Appendix A)

Procedures

In the classroom being studied one and a half-hours are allocated for reading workshop. Here is an overview of the workshop:

1. Shared reading (10-15 minutes)

-whole class focus on specific reading concepts

2. Reading workshop (40 minutes)

-group: guided reading session/ others independent

-consolidate and extend skills already introduced

- teacher works with up to 2 groups, others through varying activities

- roving conferences

3. Share time (10 minutes)

4. Skill work (30 minutes)

- spelling

- word attack

- implicit and explicit phonics instruction

While this program incorporates skill work, it is one segment of our literacy block. Combining time for shared reading, small group reading, and independent reading with skills work provides a balance for

students. The various components demonstrate that the skills are tools readers use to help them understand and enjoy books.

The subjects in this study were first graders during the 1999-2000 school year. They were tested using running records starting in October of 1999. Throughout the time leading up to December of 2000 the students were assessed using running records to monitor their reading progress and group them accordingly.

The students received strategy and skill instruction during whole group mini-lessons and small group guided reading lessons. The goal was to use running records on an ongoing basis to determine if the student's reading performance was improving and decide on grouping for guided reading instruction.

Analysis of Data

Each student was assessed using leveled texts starting in October 1999. The students were assessed on an ongoing basis. The final running record was conducted in December 2000. The researcher determined how many levels the students improved over a one-year period. The researcher determined what factors of the balanced literacy program contributed to the student's progress or lack of progress based on anecdotal records, observations, and teacher reflections.

CHAPTER IV

Analysis of the Data

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to investigate the correlation between a well balanced reading program with guided reading being the focal point, and improved student reading performance.

Research Question

How does a well-balanced reading program with a strong guided reading focus influence students reading achievements?

Data Analysis

The analysis of my data has allowed me to look very closely at what works with the balanced literacy program used in my classroom. Searching for the answers to why my students have made solid reading progress can be hard at times. Putting my finger on the one ingredient

within a balanced reading program that helped each student grow, as a reader was an impossible task.

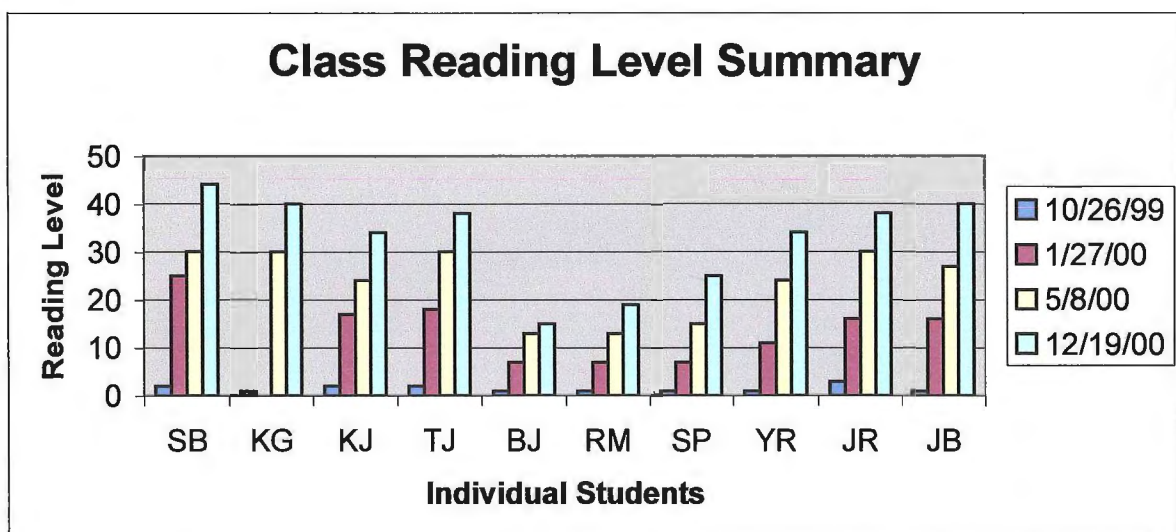
What became apparent was that the consistent format of our reading block was very comforting for my students. When they learned the procedures and tasks they were required to do during our reading block, student were almost always engaged in the act of reading and responding to what they read. The students were always very excited to work independently some of the time during reading, and then join the teacher for a new exciting book for another part of the reading block. The students always felt confident coming to guided reading because they knew they would be able to handle the text that was presented. Student confidence can be linked to the observations of the teacher. Students come to guided reading enthusiastic based on the exposure they have to this form of reading. The low group in this classroom was never asked to labor for many days in a text that did not support their development. Using appropriate text allows the children to read many books and build their confidence in themselves. These important factors reveal why the students were confident in dynamic guided

reading groups. They were also aware that over the course of time they were reading books that were more difficult.

As I reviewed my running record scores I was able to see the dramatic improvement my students were making. This gave me the confidence in a balanced reading program with a guided reading focus. I was now able to pinpoint exactly what reading level each student was at. A basal text didn't allow me to accomplish this goal.(See Appendix 1)

The first crucial data were the students running records at the end of first grade. The standard for the end of second grade was level 15 or 16. That means that I was looking to see how many of my 10 students were able to meet or exceed this standard. The results were very

Table 1



positive. (Table1)Eight of the ten students in the study met or exceeded the standard. The two students who didn't meet the standard were reading at level 13, which was very close to meeting the standard. Seven of the ten students exceeded the second grade standard which is level 22.

These results empowered me to realize that the strategies the students were taught in their mini-lessons and guided reading lessons were helping them be successful independent readers who were very prepared to go to the second grade. It was also very satisfying to see the growth each student had made over the course of the year. No matter how dramatic or minimal the progress, I was able to see first hand where each student started and where he or she moved to in terms of his or her level. Monitoring and supporting each child's growth and development daily gave me a chance to see the students using strategies they had learned. Daily I was able to see examples like Tom who came to the word "avalanche" in a reading passage from a text that was quite challenging for him. It would have been easy for him to simply slip over his first reading of the word as "avach." But he didn't because he

knew it didn't sound right. Tom then takes a closer look at the word parts and is able to self correct himself by looking at parts he knows. Two very powerful things happened that illustrate the significant effects that guided reading has had on Tom. He was able to self-monitor himself as a reader and realize that what he read wasn't correct, he therefore knew if he kept reading he might lose the meaning of what he was reading. Secondly he was able to apply strategies he was been repeatedly taught to solve a very challenging word for a first grade student. When students are able to show reading behaviors like Yanahan, they are praised for their ability to grow and develop as readers. This reinforcement from the teacher on a daily basis leads the students to the progress the results in the study have shown.

It also showed that my ability to group them dynamically through out the year at their instructional level had an impact on them as readers. Students were constantly monitored. The group that needed the most support always received guided reading instruction three days out of a five-day week. This was done to ensure the students who students needed the most teacher support got it during the course of the

week. Students who improved were moved to groups that were reading more difficult text. And students who were struggling with fluency or comprehension were moved to a group that had easier text. This form of dynamic grouping allowed me to constantly meet the needs of each individual student.

One on one interaction with struggling readers allowed me an opportunity to meet the specific needs of each child. Jen was a student who struggled with comprehension. Through careful observations it was quite clear that Jen didn't really understand that she was reading for meaning. To her it was more important to correctly read words. Through repeated lessons that taught her rereading and specific comprehension questions such as being able to discuss the theme of a book Jen's comprehension has improved. Jen now is showing the confidence to take a chance and initiate conversations around the books we read in guided reading group.

Teaching the students self-correcting and self-monitoring strategies was evident when they were assessed. All students were aware of their

strategies and used them as well as word attack skills to read to the best of their ability.

One important factor in my student's success I believe was the consistency of the program. All students received guided reading instruction at least twice a week. I was able to monitor and coach them individually to help them become proficient at the act of reading. I never felt like this approach to teaching them to read was a struggle. I think this is because the students were always in material that was at their instructional level. They felt confident with the material they were reading. I really can't recall any students who were very unhappy to come to there guided reading group.

Being able to loop with the ten first grade students from my multiage classroom allowed me to keep working with my sample. Knowing exactly where each student left off in reading the year before allowed me to pick up right where I left off with the students in September. Some informal assessment indicated I would need to start the students in material that was a little below where they were in June

2000. Due to the lay off over the summer it seemed like an appropriate instructional decision.

The format for the reading block didn't change. This allowed the students to feel confident with our reading block. The new students quickly became engaged in our daily reading block because they had excellent models to learn from.

From my point of view I was able to meet the students needs as readers by knowing what level they were at and their strengths and weaknesses as readers. Being able to observe the students reading behaviors on a regular basis allowed me to coach the students along as they read. I was able to push my lower group towards fluency by giving them easy books that built their confidence. With my more advanced readers we worked on rereading to search for meaning. With every group I tried to meet the students individual needs based on the level they were at as a reader.

The mini lesson at the beginning of reading played a key role in the balanced literacy program. During this time we conducted shared reading using a basal and teacher selected big books. We worked on an

array of skills and strategies. I gave students things to think about as readers before we started small groups and independent reading. Our shared readings allowed students of all levels to participate and learn key comprehension lessons as well as explicit phonics lessons that were crucial to our balanced literacy program. These mini-lessons also allowed me to address issues during our reading time such as how to pick appropriate books, the noise level, and ways to respond to reading.

While I was with one guided reading group, the other students were independently reading and responding. The students were given a lot of choice. My collection of books is grouped according to genre. Students could pick from fairy tales, animal books, stories, science, etc. They also had book bags, which I put together for the students. I made decisions about what books to put into their book bags based on student needs. For students who were working on fluency I put several easy books. For some of my advanced readers I put chapter books that they would be comfortable with. I would change the books about every three weeks. I was able to make instructional choices for their

independent reading. The students were always so anxious to see what their new selections were.

The students were accountable for their reading during group time. Each student had a reading notebook. In their notebooks they had to respond in some way to the story they read. Sometimes it was as simple as a favorite part. Other times, students did extensive story maps or thoughtful kwl charts. We would share for about ten minutes at the end of our reading time. This held the students accountable for their independent reading. I would also collect their journals randomly and write comments to the students. It was amazing to see the depth of their comprehension based on their responses. It was very apparent the students were developing as independent readers and their understanding of what they read was evident as well.

My final running record assessment midway through the students' second grade school year yielded some very impressive results. Of the ten students in the study eight of the ten students had exceeded the second grade standard of a level 22 book. Seven of the ten students exceeded the third grade standard which was a level 27. These results

showed the success a balanced literacy program can have when it is consistent. It also showed that all students moved up reading levels at their own developmentally appropriate rate.

Student Reflections

Two important aspects of a balanced reading program are that children are exposed to many different books over the course the year, and that they are taught important strategies and skills. But, it is also important to see them develop an enjoyment of reading. I asked the subjects in my class two basic questions. First, what is reading? And secondly, what is a good reader? I was really looking to see if the students in my study felt the same, or differently about these two questions.

My first question, what is reading produced two central themes. First, many students viewed reading as an act of choosing a book you like and reading it. Many students said that, “reading is when you read a lot and you get better if you try hard.” The other consistent answer was that reading is about figuring out hard words and getting better at

it. The student responses reflected an understanding that it does take effort to succeed at reading.

My second question, “What is a good reader?” yielded many similar responses. Many students said, “a good reader reads a lot, and it takes practice to become a good reader.” The other theme of the responses was that a good reader can figure out difficult words by using strategies. This really showed me that students were able to really reflect on the act of reading and what it involves for each of them. Each student demonstrated a thoughtful and specific answer to these questions. This showed me that my students think that reading is more than just something the teacher makes me do. I feel that the balanced literacy program I used has helped create thoughtful and proficient readers.

CHAPTER V

Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to determine if a well-balanced reading program with a strong guided reading focus would improve student reading achievement. This study allowed a balanced literacy model to be looked at closely. The results indicate that students reading achievement improved dramatically over the course of a year. More importantly of the ten subjects in the study, all showed steady progress over the course of the study.

This study really shows how carefully monitoring student reading levels can benefit them as readers. The continual monitoring of student instructional reading levels allowed the students to be placed in reading material that was comfortable for them to grow and develop. The students were able to apply strategies they were taught in mini-lessons and guided reading groups. More importantly students were allowed to grow as readers based on their development. The diverse results show that almost all students reached grade level standards. Some exceeded

grade level standards dramatically and were allowed and taught at their appropriate level to ensure that they continued to excel.

More importantly the students who needed the most support and teaching don't slip through the cracks with this type of program. Working with them using instructionally appropriate material allowed these readers to grow and improve without frustration. Basal programs just don't offer this to students who need extra support to improve their reading.

It was evident to me that students who are immersed in a well-balanced reading program grow to enjoy reading. The students can monitor their improvement by seeing how many levels they have improved. But more importantly they seemed to understand the act of reading and how they could improve as readers daily. This was evident by their awareness of strategies while they were reading. I was able to point out what they were doing well as readers, and this praise just helped to reinforce their growth and development over the course of the study.

It becomes very clear that a guided reading program is a form of reading instruction that can accommodate a variety of student abilities and needs. If competent teachers understand how children acquire literacy, it becomes very clear that putting children in appropriate texts and teaching them using a guided reading format makes logical sense. This will allow the child to achieve reading success to the best of his or her ability.

As a teacher I really felt that my daily one on one interaction with the students helped me know each student well as a reader. I was able to observe each child's reading behaviors. This allowed me to build on what they did well, and helped me make teaching choices based on what the students needed more practice with.

Implications for the Classroom

There are many approaches used to teach a child to read. Is there one sure-fire way to teach a child to read? The answer to this question is of course, no. What is clear is that using a balanced reading workshop approach can yield children who are competent readers. Teachers need to clearly understand that balanced literacy means

teaching strategies and skills, as well as allowing children to read books at their instructional levels. If properly and consistently implemented with a strong-guided reading focus, the teacher, students and parents will clearly see students improving as readers. If progress is not evident, the teacher should be aware of it from constant monitoring.

What is clear is that guided reading is a very good model to be used with beginning readers. It gives students great satisfaction to feel the success involved with reading well. And it gives the teacher the crucial interaction he or she needs to foster successful readers.

Implications for Future Research

Having a 12-month period to track the progress of the subjects in this study was a good chunk of time. However it would be beneficial to track and monitor progress over an even longer span to determine if all students eventually achieve grade level standards.

The results of this study revealed the significant progress students made using one model of a balanced literacy program. It would be helpful to compare student progress this model with other models.

Another very useful comparison would be to compare student-reading levels of students in a balanced literacy program, to a program that strictly uses a basal reader, or a program that has a phonics first approach. This would reveal if there is a difference between the three models in terms of student progress and engagement. It would also indicate the interaction level the teacher has with her students using a basal reader. I think we really have to ask how teachers truly assess the growth and development of students who are struggling through a basal reading program. Further research could shed some light on the shortcoming of one-size fits all approach to teaching our younger students the process of learning to read.

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Appendix 1

Grade Level	Fountas & Pinnell (Red Crates)	Heading Recovery Levels (Blue Crates)	Standard By End of Year
K	A	1	
K	B	2	Kindergarten
1	C	3 - 5	
1	D	6 - 8	
1	E	9 - 10	
1	F	11 - 12	
1	G	13	
1	H	14	
1	I	15 - 16	Grade One
2	J	17 - 19	
2	K	20	
2	L	22	Grade Two
2	M	23 - 24	
3	N	25 - 26	
3	O	27	Grade Three
3	P	Reading Recovery Levels Do Not Apply	
4	Q	Reading Recovery Levels Do Not Apply	
4	R	Reading Recovery Levels Do Not Apply	