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Ability Level Instruction Results on Broad Reading

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By

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Page

Abstract

The purpose of this study is to determine the effects of ability level grouping on seventh-grade broad reading skills. The study aims to determine whether ability level instruction will lead to positive growth in seventh-grade students' broad reading skills. The study will look at seventh graders in a reading course with three levels: 1) students who have met or exceeded MCA standards, 2) students who have partially met MCA standards, 3) students who have not met MCA standards and examine possible growth of broad reading skills when provided instruction with students of similar abilities. Effects of ability level instruction will be measured using data collected by student participation in a district-mandated assessment.

Chapter One

Introduction

Ask teachers about the challenges they face in the classroom and you are apt to hear a common theme emerge. Presumably, teachers will address the challenge to provide appropriate, challenging instruction to all of their students. They will likely note the vast spectrum of abilities and skills their students have, the challenge to ensure each group of students is being pushed to grow and master concepts, as well as the struggle to ensure each learning group is engaged in purposeful instruction.

As teachers share their challenges with you, "A prominent and consistent theme in education in general and reading, in particular, is how to provide instruction so that it is effective for all children" (Chorzempa & Graham, 2006, p. 529) may become apparent. Teachers may share with you accounts of the students in their class who cannot read, students who are just below grade level, the students at grade level, and those that are exceeding expectations. They may try to express the difficulties of providing purposeful instruction to children of all groups simultaneously. Teachers may talk about the number of 'groups' they have for each subject and how they provide differentiated instruction to the different student groups in an effort to meet the students' needs.

This "ability grouping" gives teachers the ability to provide instruction to each group of students at their skill and/or ability level and is used in classrooms across the country. Ability grouping has been, and continues to be, practiced and studied with a prominence that has fluctuated over the course of time (Chorzempa & Graham, 2006, p. 529), in part due to the mixed research results. Ability grouping

is an especially popular practice in the area of reading. On a practical level, teachers note ability grouping allows them to adapt learning goals and outcomes, as well as the instructional activities and pace to meet students' unique needs; additionally, teachers are able to provide supplemental and enrichment support to students' as needed (Lou et al., 1996; Vaughn et al., 2003).

However practical it may seem, there has also been a backlash against the practice of ability grouping, with several studies demonstrating ability grouping is not effective and, in some cases, even detrimental to student learning. Opponents of ability grouping argue that students in low-ability groups may face social stigmatization and fewer academic demands (Elbaum, Schumm, & Vaughn, 1997; Hiebert, 1983). Opponents also state that ability grouping may increase the achievement gap because students in lower ability groups receive inferior instruction (Hiebert, 1983; Moody, Vaughn, & Schumm, 1997). The abundance of information and research examining the use and effects of ability grouping is, by all means, inconclusive and conflicting, which has continued to drive researchers and educators to examine and use the practice of ability grouping as they seek effective ways to meet the unique needs and ability levels of all students within a class.

General problem/issue. The struggle to meet the unique needs of all students in a class was the catalyst for this study. The extensive reading needs demonstrated by a sizeable class of students was recognized by administration and staff, and after thoughtful conversations and creative scheduling, a leveled class (Reading Workshop) was created in an effort to meet the needs of students in the class.

Subjects and Setting

Description of subjects. The participants in this study included the entire population of 7th-grade students in a rural mid-western school. The population of the 7th-grade class is 52 students; 98% are Caucasian, which largely reflected the homogeneous population of the student body. The student body, Kindergarten through 12th grade, is composed of 507 students and is 99% Caucasian and 1% Minority. Almost half, 46.8%, of the student body receives free and reduced meals and 18% of the student body has an Individual Education Plan (IEP); while 23% of the 7th-grade class has an IEP.

Selection criteria. Prior to the beginning of the school year, all 7th-grade students were enrolled in a daily Language Arts class. They were all also assigned to a new required course: Reading Workshop. The students were assigned to one of three Reading Workshop groups based on their previous Minnesota Comprehensive Assessment (MCA) Reading scores. The 21 students whose MCA reading scores exceeded state MCA standards were assigned to the first Reading Workshop group and received one additional instructional period per week. The second Reading Workshop group was composed of 17 students who partially met state MCA standards and received two additional instructional periods per week. The 14 students in the third Reading Workshop group had not met state MCA standards and received two additional instructional periods per week.

Description of setting. The study took place in a small mid-western town where approximately 21% of the residents have an income below the poverty line, which is reflective of the county. The county is consistently rated one of the poorest

counties in the state with the second lowest per-capita income, the fourth lowest median family income, and an unemployment rate of 6.3% (Hansel, 2017). Almost half, 46.8%, of the student body receives free and reduced meals. The student body is 99% Caucasian, reflective of the county population, which according to the United States Census Bureau, is 96% Caucasian. The average class size is 37 students. All Pre K-12th grade students are housed in the same building. Several teachers provide instruction Kindergarten through 12th grade and some spaces in the building are utilized by all of the students at some point during the school day (cafeteria, gyms, music, library, art). Co-curricular (FFA, BPA, Speech, Knowledge Bowl) and extra-curricular activities (sports, trap team) are a livelihood of students, teachers, and community members, with most students being in several activities throughout the year. Several co-curricular and extra-curricular activities are paired with a neighboring school community and many teachers serve as coaches, officials, judges, and statisticians.

Informed consent. Permission to conduct this study was obtained from the Institutional Review Board at Minnesota State University and from the school district. The school district's IRM procedure was followed to obtain permission and conduct research. This involved receiving permission from the Superintendent.

Protection of human subjects participating in research was assured. Participants were informed of the purpose of the research and any procedures required by the participant, including disclosure of risks or benefits. The choice to participate or withdraw at any time was outlined in both verbal and written form. As none of the students were eighteen, their parents were informed of the nature of

the study and were asked to give written consent for their child to participate in the research study.

Problem statement. A large number of students in the 7th-grade class have basic reading skills that are below state standards. However, some students in the class have met and exceeded state standards. The district is concerned about improving the basic reading skills of students who are below state standards, yet, does not want to impede the learning of those students who have met or exceeded state standards.

Chapter Two

Review of Literature

Although ability grouping in schools has been researched for decades, the mixed research results continue to drive current research and fuel the debate between advocates and opponents of the pros and cons of ability grouping in the educational setting. Slavin (1987) reviewed results of multiple research studies and determined research supported within-class ability grouping and unclear results of studies using between-class grouping. Sorensen and Hallinan's (1986) conclusion on the effects of ability grouping was also mixed but acknowledged a positive effect when the instruction was provided to small, homogeneous groups. A study in the UK by Wiliam and Bartholomew (2004), on ability grouping in math, showed that ability grouping did not improve the achievement of students. The reviewed studies noted variables in student effort, teacher-student relationships, behavior patterns and teacher experience as variables that were not measured but were likely impactful on research results.

Definition of terms. For the purpose of this study, the following terms are defined:

Homogeneous: "organization of instructional classes on the basis of students' similarity on one or more specific characteristics" (Esposito, 1973, p. 165)

Heterogeneous: "students of mixed ability" (Chorzempa & Graham, 2006, p. 529).

Ability grouping: "students are assigned to heterogeneous homeroom classes for part or most of the day, but are 'regrouped' according to achievement level for one or more subjects" (Slavin, 1987, p. 295).

Within-class ability grouping: “teachers organizing students into small reading groups according to reading level as determined by informal assessments, teacher judgment and/or standardized tests” (Schumm, Moody, & Vaughn, 2000, p. 477).

What is Ability Grouping?

Ability grouping is a controversial practice in the field of education, yet a prevalent practice in many public schools. Ability grouping is the practice of placing students into homogeneous instructional groups (with other students who have similar skills and abilities) to reduce the heterogeneity of the group (Slavin, 1987). Teachers and administrators typically make groupings based on a number of things, the most common including standardized test scores, school-wide assessments (STAR, FastBridge, DIBLES, etc.), and teacher observations and input. Esposito (1973) reviewed data from several studies and determined homogenous grouping is a predominant practice by thousands of elementary and secondary schools across the nation. The effects of ability grouping, along with the different types of ability grouping, have been researched for decades and continue to be a topic of interest for the educational community as educators look for the best techniques and strategies to meet the diverse needs of their students.

Within-class ability grouping. Within-class ability grouping is one of the most common and widely used ability grouping techniques in early reading instruction (Schumm, Moody, & Vaughn, 2000; Slavin, 1987). Researchers estimate that within-class ability grouping first came into practice in schools around 1913 and became an increasingly popular practice in schools by 1960, with an estimate that 80% of elementary schools used within-class ability grouping through the

1980s (Barr & Dreeben, 1991; Austin & Morrison, 1963; Weinstein, 1976). Recent research is unclear about the popularity of the practice of ability grouping. Research conducted by Baumann, Hoffman, Duffy-Hester, and Moon Ro (2000) indicates the use of ability grouping has declined, with only 27% of survey respondents indicating they used the practice of ability grouping. However, Schumm et al. (2000) determined ability grouping to be one of the most common ways teachers' group students for reading instruction.

Within-class ability grouping is also one of the more controversial grouping techniques, especially in the content area of reading. Teachers who use this ability grouping technique typically organize students into "small reading groups according to reading level as determined by informal assessments, teacher judgment and/or standardized tests" (Schumm, Moody, & Vaughn, 2000). The ability to group students by ability within the classroom, allows teachers to provide instruction of specific skills and concepts to the students who need it the most without students moving to and from other classrooms. Teachers who use this grouping arrangement are able to adapt learning goals and individualize instruction to meet students' needs as they grow.

Between-class ability grouping. Between-class ability grouping is another common grouping technique used by schools and is most commonly seen used for reading and mathematics courses. Between-class ability grouping is the most common grouping technique in middle school and junior high (Slavin, 1993) and is used in different forms. One way in which between-class ability grouping is used in the upper levels is assigning students to tracks of classes (advanced, basic, and

remedial) and all courses in the track are at the ability level. Another form of between-class ability grouping commonly used in middle school and junior high is assigning students to all academic classes based on ability, but allowing students to be placed in multiple ability groups. For example, a student who demonstrates advanced math skills and average reading skills would be assigned to the advanced math course and the basic reading class. Grouping students by ability level for only certain classes (i.e. only reading and math) is also a common between-class ability grouping technique frequently used in middle-high schools. In this grouping, students are typically assigned to heterogeneous homerooms and course for much of their day but are reassigned by ability level for one or more subjects (Slavin, 1987). For example, all of the students in the grade are scheduled to have reading at the same time. During this time, they are assigned to different groups based on their ability. While they are all receiving the same amount of reading instruction, they are receiving it with their grade level peers who have similar skills and abilities in reading. Reading and mathematics are the most common courses that use between-class ability grouping.

Arguments for and against grouping by ability. Although much research has been done on ability grouping and student achievement, several arguments for and against ability grouping have been identified and voiced by advocates and opponents. The mixed research results are demonstrated in the arguments both for and against ability grouping. Despite years of research, it seems a definitive conclusion has not been reached, and therefore, continues to be of interest.

Proponents of ability grouping cite the cognitive-development perspectives of Piaget (1954) and Vygotsky (1978): "the interaction among students around cognitively appropriate tasks increases mastery of critical concepts via discovery, idea generation, argumentation, and verification, and criticism" (Lou, Abrami & d'Apollonia, 2001, p. 478). At a practical level, advocates note that by reducing the heterogeneity of a group of students, teachers are increasingly able to provide appropriate and purposeful instruction, and are better able to consider individual differences and needs. This ability to provide appropriate instruction is supposed to improve student skills, abilities, and achievement, as well as make it possible for the teacher to provide instruction that is neither too easy nor too challenging for most students (Slavin, 1987).

Another argument provided by the proponents of homogeneous grouping is the increased ability of the teacher to "adapt methods of instruction and instructional materials to the aptitudes and preparations of individual children" (Sorensen & Hallinan, 1986, p. 519). This ability to adapt instruction and materials also allows teachers to adjust the pace of instruction and provide remedial assistance or enrichment opportunities as needed (Chorzempa & Graham, 2006). Students who are exceeding expectations are able to receive instruction at a higher level and/or increased pace, while students who have not yet mastered content are provided repetition and review, allowing success to be placed within reach and competition with more able classmates eliminated. While opponents argue that adaptations such as those above decrease the learning opportunities of students in

lower ability groups, advocates note that greater utilization of opportunities occurs in ability groups (Sorensen & Hallinan, 1986).

Alternatively, among the debate about ability grouping is the argument that students in lower groups receive subpar instruction, spend less time on reading tasks than non-reading tasks, and the achievement gap actually widens (Chorzempa & Graham, 2006). Teachers of ability groups adjust expectations and learning outcomes to best fit each group, which opponents argue decreases the learning opportunities for these students. Furthermore, students in low performing groups, particularly in reading, have "been observed to experience a slower pace and lower quality of instruction than do students in higher achieving groups" (Slavin, 1987, p. 296). The students may spend more time being read to or reading aloud than engaging in reading and reading strategies or focus on a simpler vocabulary than peers in other groups and therefore, opponents argue, students in these groups cannot be expected to learn what they have not been taught. Adversaries of within-class ability grouping also argue that students in homogeneous groups receive less overall instructional time from the teacher than students in ungrouped classrooms. Opponents argue that the instructional time of the teacher must be divided between each ability group, whereas teachers who do not use within-class grouping can give their entire instructional time to all of the students and therefore, the total amount of information taught and time spent teaching, over the course of a year, maybe less (Sorenson & Hallinan, 1986). This division of teaching time is argued to potentially increase the achievement gap rather than decrease it.

Another argument presented by opponents includes the social stigmatization and segregation that students may feel or experience when assigned to homogeneous ability groups. Students who are in homogeneous groups may experience an inflated or deflated sense of self-worth (Esposito, 1973). The change in self-worth may, in turn, negatively impact the level of effort and motivation of students in lower achieving groups and cause a wider gap in achievement. Opponents also argue students that heterogeneous grouping allows lower ability peers to observe and practice skills with good peer models and thus, miss this learning and experience when ability grouping is in place. The technique of grouping students by ability is also argued to increase the divisions of class, race, and ethnic groups as disproportionately larger placements of students of color and low social statuses are assigned to lower achieving ability groups (Slavin, 1987).

Additional arguments can be brought forward on both sides of this controversial issue, and continue to be brought forward as the research on ability continues on. With the number of years of research, studies, and reviews of studies completed in the past 80 years one would believe there would be clear data to support one argument or the other. However, a past review by Findley and Bryan (1971) suggested there are no conclusive answers for or against with-in class or between class ability grouping, while reviews by Slavin (1987) and Lou et al. (1996) suggests positive effects for ability grouping. Research by Wiliam and Bartholomew (2003) determined that ability grouping in math was beneficial for higher achieving students, but detrimental to lower achieving students, while Sorensen and Hallinan concluded their study with mixed results. Adding to the mixed results is a more

recent review by Slavin (1993), which indicated no effects on middle school students who were ability grouped, and a 2010 study by Nomi concluding that ability grouping works in some schools, but not others. While this is not a definitive list of studies done on the topic, it is representative of the inconclusive and mixed results of past studies, which leaves the technique open for continued debate and practice by researchers and educators around the world.

Statement of Hypothesis

Students in 7th grade Reading Workshop will demonstrate positive growth in broad reading skills when provided homogeneous ability level instruction, as measured through FastBridge aReading assessments.

Chapter Three

Research Question

As a special education teacher who has taught at both the elementary and secondary levels, I am frequently working with and observing struggling readers. I have observed struggling readers become frustrated with text and be uninterested and unmotivated to read. At the same time, I have seen these students occasionally try to pick up and read a 'popular' book their peers might be reading, only to put it back before completing it. Yet, when given instruction in a smaller setting with students of the same level, these same students have been eager to share their thoughts about text and express a desire to read. While education has shifted away from pull-out special education services, I wondered if there was a more effective way to meet the needs of struggling readers without being removed from the general education setting, without missing the instruction, literary discussions and conversations their peers were experiencing in the general education setting.

When the administration determined they were not only moving me from the elementary to the high school but that they were also piloting a new ability level Reading Workshop class, I wondered:

1. Will students, when receiving instruction by ability group, make positive growth in reading?
2. Will students' attitudes toward reading improve when receiving instruction with peers of similar abilities?
3. Will students' feel social stigmatization being in a certain ability level group?

Research Plan

Methods and rationale. Due to the large size and demonstrated need of the 7th-grade class, it was determined by the administration to require all 7th graders to participate in a Reading Workshop class in addition to their required daily Language Arts 7 class. The students were assigned to one of three Reading Workshop classes. The first group consisted of 21 students who had met and/or exceeded MCA benchmarks, the second group was 17 students who partially met MCA benchmarks, and the remaining 14 students, who had not met MCA standards, were assigned to a third Reading Workshop class. Group one would receive one fifty-minute period of Reading Workshop per week, while the other two groups would receive two fifty-minute periods of Reading Workshop per week.

Each group was co-taught by the 7th grade Language Arts teacher and a Special Education teacher, with lesson plans designed specifically to meet the needs of each group. Group one focused on reading, analyzing, and discussing literature and literary elements of current young adult novels, in the form of book clubs. The second group also participated in book clubs to read, analyze and discuss literature and literary elements, but also receive re-teaching of literary elements taught in the Language Arts 7 class. The third group engaged in a whole group book club lead by the teachers, received re-teaching of literary elements taught in the Language Arts 7 class, as well as additional instruction in word recognition, decoding, and vocabulary.

Data was collected from FastBridge, a district-wide assessment, which was required to be completed by 7th graders at least three times per year, but no more

than five. The assessment was taken by all 7th-grade students on the same day and was a date within the district's FastBridge assessment windows. As FastBridge is a universal assessment used by the district, it was determined to be an effective method of data collection. Data could be collected for all 7th graders without having to administer 1:1 assessment, which would cause significant interruption to instruction and was considerably more time-consuming.

Instrument. The FastBridge aReading assessment was used as the measuring instrument. The computer-administered adaptive assessment was designed to measure individual student performance in broad reading. Universal screening occurs a minimum of three times per year and is not to exceed five times per year. The format is similar to many state-wide assessments students are expected to take and consists of multiple choice and fill in the blank with both auditory and visual stimuli. The assessment automatically adjusts to the student's skill level, was designed through National Reading Panel recommendations crossed with National Common Core Standards, and is based on ten years of research (FastBridge, 2018). Considerable research evidence indicates that aReading assessments provide strong estimates of reading achievement grades K-12 (FastBridge, 2018). Scaled scores (scores with an equal interval scale) are independent of grade level and can be used to measure and compare growth of student learning from one year to the next and are compared to same-aged peers in the district (District %), as well as with same-aged peers across the nation (National %). The FastBridge aReading assessment received the highest ratings possible for validity, reliability, and diagnostic accuracy from the National Center for Response

to Intervention (FastBridge, 2018). aReading item development and selection from Kindergarten through 5th grade was completed by research assistants, teachers, and content experts, whereas item selection for 6th through 12th grade was constructed to reflect the Common Core State Standards, as well guidelines for reading established by the National Assessment of Educational (FastBridge 2018). Once written, items were reviewed for feasibility, fairness, construct relevance, and content balance. Writers were selected through a stratified system in order to enlist writers of a diverse group and included writers from urban, suburban and rural areas. The item writers wrote, reviewed, and edited assessment items over multiple years. The aReading assessment utilizes a research-based skills hierarchy and unified construct of broad reading achievement to institute a relevant assessment; each aReading assessment is individualized through software and built-in algorithms, resulting in an accurate measure and precise information, regardless of whether a student functions at, above, or below grade level (i.e., same age and grade peers) (FastBridge, 2018). FastBridge assessments are evidence-based and have undergone numerous studies with diverse population samples of students in many geographic locations (e.g., NY, GA, MN, IA, and WI) (New York State Department of Education). Fitting with the definition of evidence-based, many large, multi-site studies with student samples from K-12 populations were completed. Sample sizes for the majority of all studies over exceeded the requirement of 50 students; in total, more than 15,000 students participated (New York State Department of Education). Additionally, norms were established for each FastBridge assessment, grades K-8,

using samples of approximately 8,000 students and a collective total of 72,000 students (New York State Department of Education).

Schedule. While the Reading Workshop class is a yearlong class, required for all 7th graders and FastBridge assessments are completed five times per year, due to the time constraints of the research study, assessment results from the first two FastBridge scores of the year will be analyzed. All of the 7th graders will complete the assessments on the same day, as per the district assessment window.

Ethical issues. Possible ethical issues that could potentially arise are the perception that more resources are being provided to a group of students, as well as students or parents who feel as though a group of students in one Reading Workshop may receive more or less instructional time than the other group/s. The instructional group students are placed in may impact their feelings of self-worth and the possibility of students being placed in the incorrect group are other ethical issues that may potentially arise during the study.

Anticipated response. If any of the ethical issues above arise, they will be dealt with accordingly. Books purchased for Reading Workshop will be available for all students, regardless of which group they are placed in. Lessons and instruction for each group are planned to meet the needs of the students in the group and are not intentionally designed to be poorer or less for any group. In order to ensure students and parents do not feel deceived by being in one group or another, they will be reassured that all students will be receiving instruction based on their unique reading needs. Students and parents will also be made aware that adjustments can be made to class rosters if students' demonstrate growth or

regression that justifies a move from one group to another, to allow the student's needs to continue to be met and that FastBridge assessment scores will not be used in any fashion towards the Reading Workshop grade. The Reading Workshop grade will be a Pass/Fail scale to reduce potential anxiety with students. Finally, students and parents will know that they can withdraw from the study at any time and their results will not be used in the findings, nor will student grades be impacted by their participation, or lack thereof, in the study.

Chapter Four

Data Analysis and Interpretation

The purpose of this study was to determine how between-class ability grouping would impact the basic reading skills of 7th-grade students.

Description of Data

During the study, data was collected via FastBridge on two different occasions, as per the FastBridge guidelines. All 7th-grade students took the aReading assessment to assess the growth of their basic reading skills. After each aReading assessment, the data was automatically calculated and compiled by FastBridge. The data was broken into individual data as well as whole class data. Each student received an individual, normatized score and that score was determined by FastBridge to be: High Risk (0-19.99 percentile), Some Risk (20-29.99 percentile), Low Risk (30-84.99 percentile), or Above Benchmark (85 percentile and above).

Baseline Data. Twenty of the 21 Group 1 students, students who had met or exceeded state standards, completed the first aReading assessment. All of the students in Group 1 scored at or above the 30 percentile; 12 of the scores were Low Risk and 8 scores were Above Benchmark (Figure B1). Group 1 had an average score of 539, putting the group as a whole at Low Risk (Table A1). The highest score in Group 1 during baseline data collection was 558 (At Benchmark) while the lowest score was 523 (Low Risk).

Group 2 students scores ranged from High Risk to Low Risk on the first aReading assessment. One student score was High Risk and the other 14 scores

were Low Risk. Two students in this group did not complete the first assessment (Figure B2). The average score for Group 2 was 523, a score that fell in the Low-Risk range (Table A2). The lowest achievement during baseline data collection in Group 2 was a 497 (High Risk) and the highest achieving score was 536 (Low Risk); achieved by two students.

The third group also had scores ranging from High Risk to Low Risk. Eleven students in Group 3 had High-Risk scores, 1 student score was Some Risk, and there were two students with Low-Risk Scores (Figure B3). Each of the 14 students in Group 3 completed the first assessment. Group 3 had a collective average score of 496: High Risk (Table B3). The range of scores in Group 3 during baseline data collection was 520 (Low Risk) to 471 (High Risk).

As a class (all 52 students), the average score was 522, falling in the Low-Risk category. There were 12 students who received High-Risk scores, 1 Some Risk score, 28 students scoring Low Risk, and 8 students scoring Above Benchmark (Figure 1).

Research Questions

Will students, when receiving instruction by ability group, make positive growth in reading? Given instruction by ability group, each group made positive growth in basic reading skills from the first aReading assessment to the second. As a grade, the students went from 522 (Low Risk) to 528 (Low Risk), gaining 6 points (Table A4). As a class, there were 7 students who scored High Risk, 4 Low Risk, 24 Some Risk, and 14 Above Benchmark; in contrast, after the first assessment, 12 students were High Risk, 1 Low Risk, 28 students at Some Risk, and 8 were Above Benchmark (Figure 1).

Group 1, as a group increased their scores by 6 points and moved as a group from Low Risk to At Benchmark; their average for the second test was 545 (Table A1). Of the 19 students in Group 1 who completed the second assessment, five students' scores decreased; 14 increased (Table A1). The greatest growth was 19 points and the largest decrease in skills was 9 points (Table A1). There were 7 Low-Risk scores and 13 Above Benchmark scores, in comparison to the 12 Low Risk and 8 Above Benchmark after the first assessment (Figure B1).

As a group, Group 2 improved their average score by 7 points, from 523 to 530; both scores are considered Low Risk (Table A2). All 17 students in Group 2 completed the assessment. Two student scores decreased and 15 scored increased; the greatest increase was 23 points while the largest decrease was 11 points (Table A2). One student scored Some Risk, 15 earned Low-Risk Scores, and 1 student scored Above Benchmark, in contrast to the first assessment where 1 student scored High Risk and 14 students scored Low Risk (Figure B2).

Group 3 grew 3 points as a group, improving their group average from 496 to 499; High Risk (Table A3). Thirteen of the 14 students in Group 3 completed the assessment. Four students had scores that decreased, 2 students scores remained the same, and 7 students saw growth (Table A3). The greatest gain in skills was 17 points and the most regression was 16 points (Table A3). After the second aReading assessment, Group 3 had 8 High-Risk students, 3 Some Risk student scores, and 3 Low-Risk scores; in comparison, 11 students were High Risk, 1 Some Risk, and 1 Low Risk after the first assessment (Figure B3).

Results of the study are similar to that of research: mixed. While the majority of students showed growth, a small group of students demonstrated regression in basic reading skills while an even smaller number maintained their skills. These results are similar to that of previous research; Slavin's (1987) review of multiple research studies determined research supported within-class ability grouping, while Sorensen and Hallinan's (1986) conclusion showed some mixed results and a study by Wiliam and Bartholomew (2004) showed ability grouping was ineffective. However, Sorensen and Hallinan (2004) acknowledged a positive effect when instruction was provided to small, homogeneous groups, which, one can argue is the population of the 7th grade class, and even the district as a whole. And like Sorensen and Hallinan's 2004 study, as well as Slavin's (1987) review, the 7th grade groups and the group as a whole did show positive growth in basic reading skills.

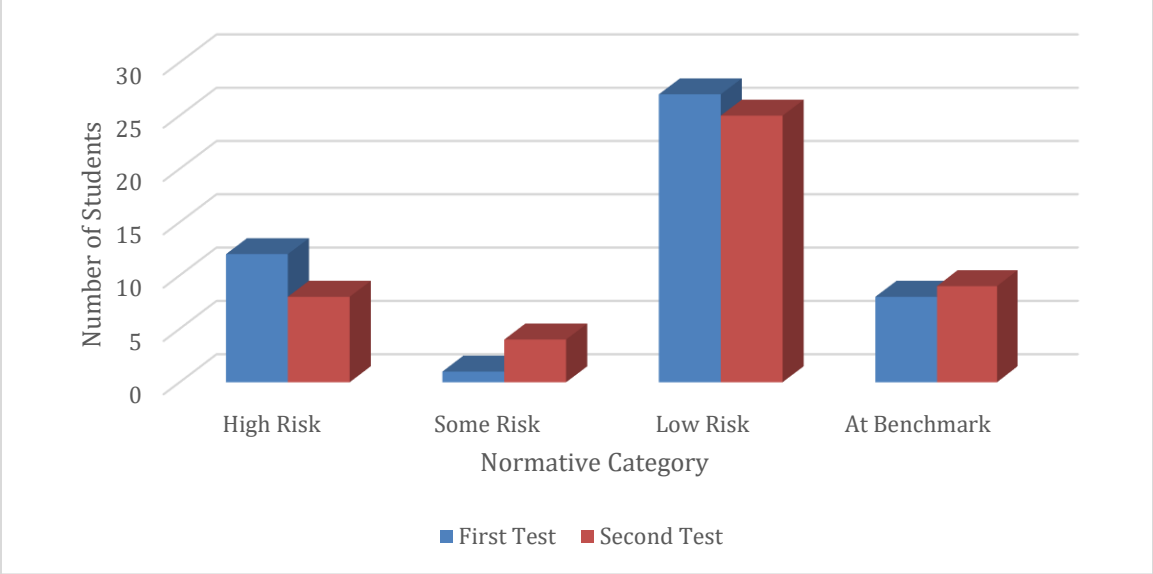

Figure 1. 7th grade students in each normative category in the first and second assessment.

Will students' attitudes toward reading improve when receiving instruction with peers of similar abilities? This question was not answered in the data collected during this study. This question will be addressed at the end of the school year, for further study, after students have had an entire year of additional reading instruction.

Will students' feel social stigmatization being in a certain ability level group? This question was also not addressed during this study. This question will be discussed at the end of the school year, for further study, after students have had an entire year of additional reading instruction.

Conclusion. Similarly to the research examined prior to commencing the study, results of ability grouping had mixed results on the 7th-grade class' basic reading skills. The vast majority of the students showed improved basic reading skills given additional instruction in ability groups. There were a small group of students whose skills in reading regressed or made no growth, positive or negative.

At the conclusion of this study, each ability group did make positive growth overall, as did the class as a whole. However, it is noted that the results are based on the administration of a single test on two separate occasions. This may not be enough data to firmly solidify the benefit of ability grouping, especially in the field of education where there is much debate over the administration of formalized assessments. Because there are only two test scores, it could be argued that a student was having a particularly 'good' or 'bad' day and their results were inflated and not a true assessment. It would be recommended that data continues to be analyzed over the course of this year, as there are three more assessment dates yet

to come, and the results of all five assessments may be a more accurate reflection of the 7th-grade classes basic reading skills when provided ability level instruction.

One could also argue that the scores of the students may have naturally increased simply because they are given additional time to read as part of the Reading Workshop class. Additionally, as the reviewed studies noted, there could be variables in student effort, teacher-student relationships, and behavior patterns that were not measured but likely impacted research results. It is noted that these areas could also be addressed in future studies of ability level grouping.

Chapter 5

Action Plan

Given the small amount of data collected at this point, it is recommended that the data continue to be analyzed through the remainder of the year. This would provide the researcher, co-teacher, and administration with a more complete and comprehensive set of data to make future decisions. However, given the current data, it is clear that the vast majority of students are demonstrating growth in their basic reading skills, indicating that the students are benefiting from the extra reading instruction and time to read. The growth demonstrated by the students over the course of this research has lead the researcher to restructure current instructional time in other courses to implement more opportunities for reading instruction and reading time for students who are not currently in Reading Workshop 7.

Plan for Sharing

The following is a plan for disseminating the results of this research:

1. Presentation and discussion with the administration. This presentation and discussion will provide the administration with information to determine if Reading Workshop is beneficial to students, the possibility of continuing the course in future years, and for planning and scheduling purposes.
2. Presentation to peers through a Professional Development session. Two fifty-minute sessions will be offered, morning and afternoon, in order to accommodate peers who have other commitments before or after school.

3. Informational session to be presented to families and the general public during student lead conferences.

Overall, the data in this brief research study shows the majority of 7th grade Reading Workshop students are making positive growth in their basic reading skills when given additional instructional time based on ability. This study investigated the effects of ability grouping instruction on reading skills and the researcher recommends the continued study of the class for the remainder of the year to ensure a comprehensive and conclusive set of data can be generated and used to make instructional decisions about the future of the Reading Workshop class. After analyzing the results, the researcher, co-teacher, and administration can move forward with decisions regarding the future of Reading Workshop by ability grouping and inform peers and the public, using the data generated by this study, to support the decision of continuing or discontinuing ability grouping Reading Workshop.

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APPENDIX A
Tables

Table A1

Group 1 Assessment Results

Student	First	Second	Growth
42	552	555	+3
38	539	540	+1
34	523	540	+17
33	558	553	-5
30	541	549	+8
26	534	535	+1
25	549	555	+6
18	540	553	+13
13	534	539	+5
9	533	552	+19
6	549	540	-9
5	557	558	+1
2	544	545	+1
1	532	542	+10
3	NA	560	NA
12	514	NA	NA
16	535	NA	NA
28	554	545	-9
31	524	521	-3
39	551	547	-4
44	528	540	+12

Note. First average = 540. Second average = 546. Growth = +6.

Table A2

Group 2 Assessment Results

Student	First	Second	Growth
52	NA	534	NA
48	528	536	+8
47	524	527	+3
43	497	520	+23
40	519	533	+14
36	526	546	+20
35	NA	511	NA
27	534	523	-11
23	521	524	+3
19	517	533	+16
11	517	533	+16
8	528	535	+7
4	528	535	+7
22	536	534	-2
29	522	526	+4
37	519	525	+6
41	536	544	+8

Note. First average = 523. Second average = 530. Growth = +7.

Table A3

Group 3 Assessment Results

Student	First	Second	Growth
50	503	512	+9
49	471	479	+8
46	500	487	-13
45	518	518	0
21	484	501	+17
17	504	519	+15
14	494	508	+14
10	473	473	0
7	520	517	-3
15	502	509	+7
20	496	NA	NA
24	474	489	+15
32	505	490	-15
51	509	493	-16

Note. First average = 496. Second average = 499. Growth = +3.

Table A 4

Class average results

Group	First	Second	Growth
1	539	545	+6
2	523	530	+7
3	496	499	+3

Note. First class average = 522. Second class average = 528. Growth = +6.

APPENDIX B
Figures

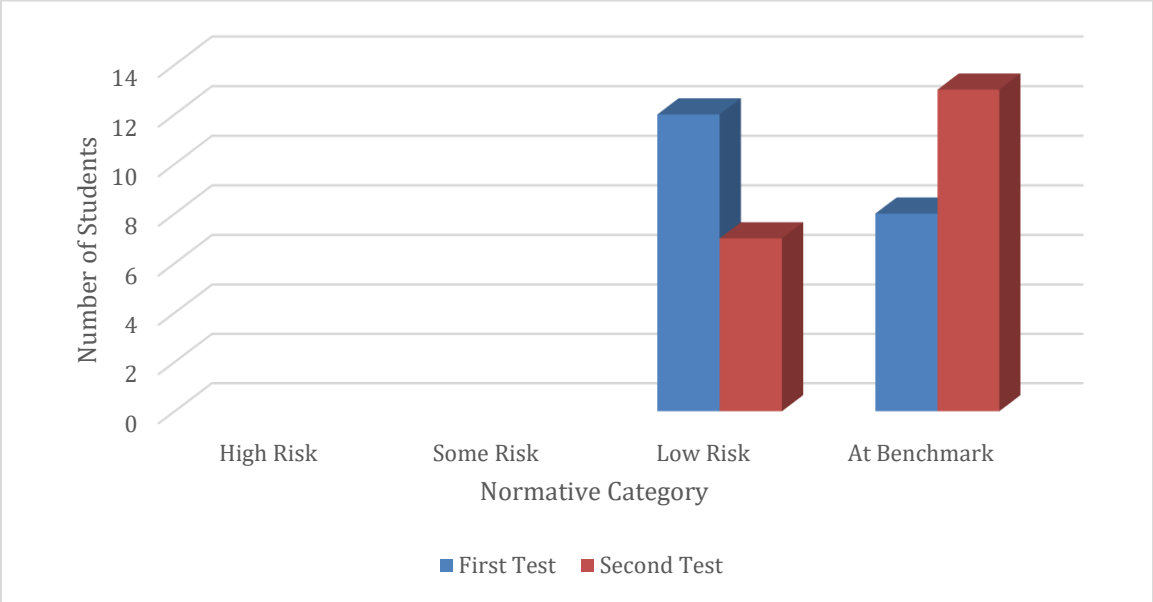

Figure B1. Group 1 students in each normative category in the first and second assessment.

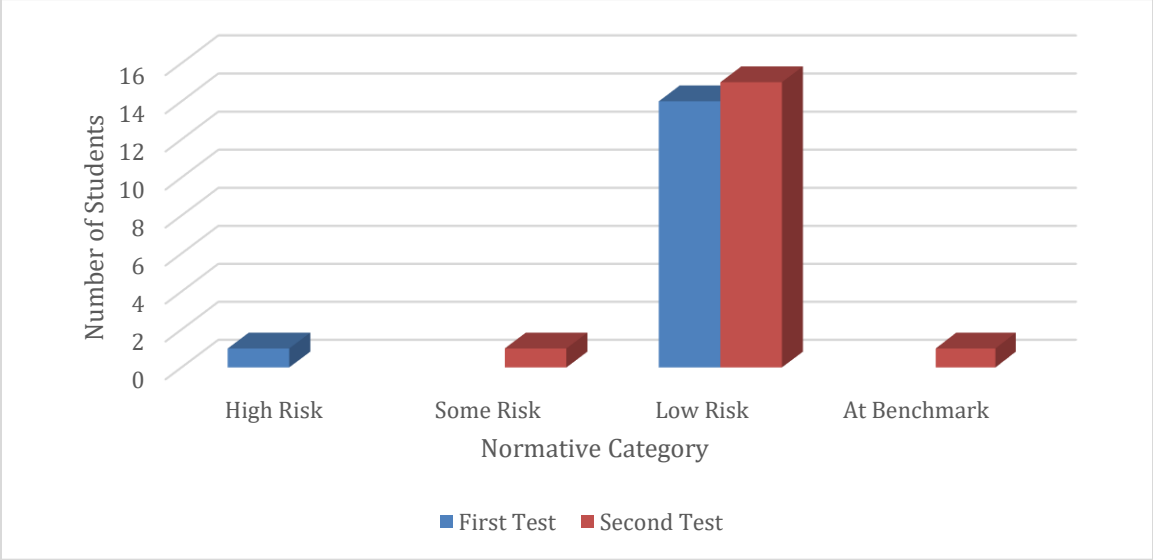

Figure B2. Group 2 students in each normative category in the first and second assessment.

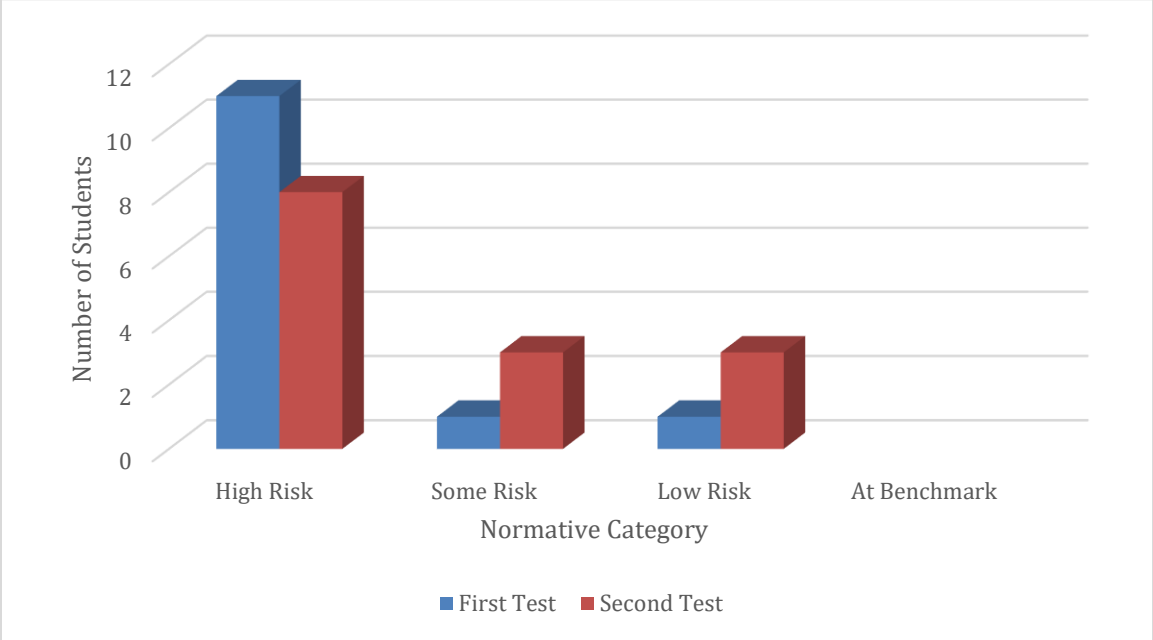

Figure B3. Group 3 students in each normative category in the first and second assessment.