


Spring 5-14-2021

Implementation of Word Solving Strategies During First Grade Guided Reading

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Implementation of Word Solving Strategies
During First Grade Guided Reading

A Project Presented to
The Graduate Faculty of
Minnesota State University Moorhead

By
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In Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Science in
Curriculum and Instruction

May 2021
Moorhead, Minnesota

ABSTRACT

Effective reading instruction in the primary grades is essential to students' future academic success. Research has shown that there are different methods in which students can be taught to figure out unknown words as they are reading. The study took place during small group, guided reading time. The study included five first grade students in the researcher's classroom that were reading below grade level. The purpose of this purposive study was to determine the effectiveness of two different word-solving strategies. The first research question that guided this study was, "What impact does utilizing the cueing system during guided reading have on students' reading ability that are reading below grade level?" The second research question that guided this study was, "What impact does utilizing decoding and other word solving strategies have on students that are reading below grade level?" The researcher conducted Running Record assessments weekly to determine her students' reading progress. Data were analyzed to determine which word-solving strategy was most effective at helping students progress with their reading and word-solving skills. It was determined that neither strategy was most effective at helping students progress with their reading and word-solving skills, rather the needs of the students dictated the most effective and appropriate strategy.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to my mom and dad. This process would not have been possible without their love, support, and encouragement.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Introduction

Reading is an essential component of all students' educational success. There are many methods in which reading instruction can be approached. Guided reading is a commonly used method to teach young students to read. There has been controversy over the most effective ways to teach students how to read during guided reading. Wall (2014) argues that using meaning cues rather than graphophonemic cues allows students to make sense of what they are reading, rather than encouraging students to focus on phonics skills. Hanford (2019) argues that when all the emphasis in a guided reading program was placed on cueing, students did not have the opportunity to enhance their orthographic mapping and phonics skills. Because of this recent controversy and noticing the struggles that the researcher's own students who are reading below grade level have had in the classroom, the researcher decided to examine the effectiveness of two different reading instruction methods that can be taught during guided reading. The first method involved focusing on using a cueing system during guided reading. For example, when students were struggling with a word, they might look at the picture to help solve the word. The second method involved using decoding and other word solving strategies. For example, students would look at a word they were stuck on and try to sound out the word. Implementing these two different strategies during guided reading provided insight on which method was most effective when teaching students that are reading below grade level how to become more effective, more proficient readers.

Brief Literature Review

While teaching students during guided reading, a three-cue system can be implemented to provide students with the opportunities to expand their literacy skills. The cueing system comprises three categories: meaning, structure or syntax, and visual (R.M. Schwartz, 2005). The meaning category of the cueing system asks students to examine their understanding of a sentence. In other words, students could ask, “Does this sentence make sense?” The structure or syntax category comprises sentence structure. Students could ask, “Does this sentence sound right?” The last category of the cueing system is visual cueing. Students could ask, “Does this sentence or word look right?” According to R. M. Schwartz (2005), the errors students make while they are reading must be analyzed in order to determine what types of errors students are making. Along with cueing strategies, students must also be taught how to use mental strategies, like searching and monitoring, early on in the reading process (R.M. Schwartz, 2005). Teacher feedback is also an essential component of guided reading instruction. Struggling readers often lack feedback about their word-solving attempts (R.M. Schwartz, 2005). Providing feedback to students as they are developing their word-solving strategies ensures that students are developing the skills they will need to employ word-solving strategies independently.

Recently, there has been controversy surrounding the strategies that are utilized during guided reading. People have started to question the long-standing research of Clay and Fountas and Pinnell, who are the founders of Guided Reading programs used widely in schools today (S. Schwartz, 2019). When students rely on the three-cue system, they are not always looking at the words, themselves. This can lead students to make guesses, rather than examining what they know about the letters in a word (S. Schwartz, 2019). The predictability of texts in encouraging

students to rely on pictures to solve words is impeding the development of their orthographic mapping skills (S. Schwartz, 2019).

Because of this newfound controversy, the researcher felt it was important to place more of a focus on decoding and other word-solving skills during guided reading lessons. The researcher found that her students that were reading below grade level did not yet have a strong enough knowledge base to use the cueing system to figure out unknown words. According to S. Schwartz, teachers must be able to identify the needs of their students to determine the appropriate next steps for instruction, rather than relying on a boxed curriculum to determine the next steps for students (S. Schwartz, 2019). Decoding and other word-solving strategies provided the researcher's students that were reading below grade level with the skills that they needed to become effective independent readers and found success with reading.

Statement of the Problem

The research problem was measuring the growth that students that were reading below grade level made when using a decoding and word-solving system rather than implementing the cueing system. The researcher's students showed this growth in their reading abilities through running records. Running records are assessments that monitor students' fluency, accuracy, and comprehension as they are reading. Because the researcher is a first grade teacher, it was important to develop students' basic literacy skills, as these skills only become more difficult as students progress through their schooling. Since the researcher's students that were reading below grade level often struggled with word solving, the researcher wanted to determine if placing a focus on these skills during guided reading, versus focusing on the cueing system, provided her students with the skills they needed to improve their reading skills.

The decoding and word-solving strategies were utilized during our small group, guided reading time. Because of the hybrid model of instruction due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the lessons only occurred twice a week. If we moved to a distance learning setting, or if students were out of school due to COVID-19 related reasons, the lessons were completed virtually through the use of the Seesaw app.

Purpose of the Study

Because the researcher is a first grade teacher, she saw the importance of students developing strong early literacy skills. Reading is a skill that students will not only need in school but for the rest of their lives. The purpose of this study was to investigate if using a decoding and word-solving system to teach the researcher's students who were reading below grade-level to read and solve unknown words was more effective than focusing on a cueing-system. The research showed that providing students with more tools to solve words helped them to become stronger, more independent readers who were reading at or above grade level.

Research Question(s)

The first research question was: What impact does utilizing the cueing system during guided reading have on students' reading ability that are reading below grade level? The second research question was: What impact does utilizing decoding and other word solving strategies have on students' reading ability that are reading below grade level?

Definition of Variables

Variable A was the system of instruction that the researcher was using during her guided reading lesson. This was either the cueing system or the decoding and word-solving system. Those were my independent variables. Variable B was the progress that the researcher's students

who were reading below grade level made to reach grade-level reading proficiency. Their reading progress was measured using Running Records (Fountas & Pinnell, 2012).

Significance of the Study

According to Fiester (2010), reading proficiently by the end of third grade can be a make-or-break benchmark in a child's educational development. Three quarters of students who are poor readers in fourth grade remain poor readers in high school (Fiester, 2010). As a primary educator, these statistics were troubling. The researcher also believed that these statistics prove the importance of developing strong early literacy skills. The researcher needed to provide her students with a solid foundation of skills that they could use to help them become proficient, independent readers. Teaching word solving and decoding skills that the researcher's students could eventually practice independently would provide them with the foundation that they need to become successful readers.

As a primary teacher, the researcher felt that these statistics show how important it is to provide students with the opportunities and tools that they need to become successful readers. Reading is an essential skill that students will need to use not only through their schooling, but also in their everyday lives. It is the researcher's hope that this research helped her to determine successful methods of teaching her students the important early skills, like word solving, that they needed to become successful, lifelong readers.

Research Ethics

Permission and IRB Approval. In order to conduct this study, the researcher will seek MSUM's Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval to ensure the ethical conduct of research involving human subjects (Mills & Gay, 2019). Likewise, authorization to conduct this study

will be seek from the school district where the research project will be take place (See Appendix X and X).

Informed Consent. Protection of human subjects participating in research will be assured. Participant minors will be informed of the purpose of the study via the Informed Consent letter (See Appendix C) that the researcher will read to participants before the beginning of the study. Participants will be aware that this study is conducted as part of the researcher's Master Degree Program and that it will benefit her teaching practice. Informed consent means that the parents of participants have been fully informed of the purpose and procedures of the study for which consent is sought and that parents understand and agree, in writing, to their child participating in the study (Rothstein & Johnson, 2014). Confidentiality will be protected through the use of pseudonyms (e.g., Student 1) without the utilization of any identifying information. The choice to participate or withdraw at any time will be outlined both, verbally and in writing.

Limitations. There were some limitations that potentially affected the results of the research. The first limitation was that we are currently in a hybrid model of instruction due to the COVID-19 pandemic. That meant that the researcher only saw her students two days a week for in-person instruction. In a typical school year, the researcher would provide guided reading instruction to her students five days a week. At the time of this study, the researcher's students only received guided reading instruction two days a week. The amount of guided reading instruction that students received each week was cut in half. A second limitation was also related to the COVID-19 pandemic. Because of the rate of community spread of the virus at the time of the study, the researcher often had students that were out of school for weeks at a time due to quarantining. When students were in quarantine, the researcher could not provide them with in-

person reading instruction. This drastically limited that amount of time that the researcher was able to meet with her students for guided reading instruction.

Conclusions

In this chapter, the researcher described the importance of developing early reading skills. She also described the importance of finding effective ways in which to teach students that are reading below grade level how to become proficient, grade-level readers. Because of the importance of developing early reading skills, she researched which method was most effective at teaching below-grade level readers how to become proficient, grade-level readers (cueing or decoding and word-solving). It was the researcher's hope that this research provided other educators with information that they need to help all of their students become proficient, grade-level readers. In the next chapter, the researcher will discuss the literature that has been found related to methods of teaching students how to read during guided reading.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

Guided Reading instruction is an individualized approach to teaching students with a variety of strengths and weaknesses how to read. Teachers use assessments to drive the grouping of students and determine the focus of their instruction. While all guided reading instruction follows a similar format (teachers meet with students in small groups, working with texts that are at students' instructional levels), there is controversy regarding which strategies are most effective at teaching primary students how to read. Because the foundation of all learning is rooted in the development of early literacy skills, the goal of the researcher's action research was to implement two methods of instruction in to her daily guided reading lessons to determine which method was most effective at enhancing the reading skills of her first grade students that were reading below grade level (Copley, et. al., 2008).

Body of the Review

Context

Guided Reading was first introduced in the United States in 1996 by Fountas and Pinnell (Fountas & Pinnell, 2010). Their methods outlined several specific procedures that teachers must include for a guided reading lesson to be effective. One of the most important procedures outlined by Fountas and Pinnell involves the responsibility of the teacher during a guided reading lesson. Teachers are to incorporate a variety of strategic actions, including word solving, self-monitoring, and maintaining fluency (Fountas & Pinnell, 2010). For teachers to effectively implement guided reading instruction in their classrooms, they must use their knowledge of literacy development and their students' progress to determine the next steps in their guided

reading lessons (Iaquinta, 2006). How to approach the next steps in a guided reading lesson has become a source of controversy. Because of the controversy regarding the most effective ways to teach students how to read, the researcher felt it was important to examine the effectiveness of two different methods that can be implemented to teach students how to read unknown words.

Guided Reading instruction offers teachers with the opportunity to work individually with small groups of students to enhance their literacy skills. In order to facilitate the enhancement of their students' literacy skills, teachers often rely on the use of a cueing system. The cueing system encourages students to think about what they are reading, which encourages them to make meaning of what they are reading. According to Wall (2014), using meaning cues rather than graphophonemic cues allows students to make sense of what they are reading, rather than encouraging students to focus on phonics skills. Struggling readers may need more practice with graphophonemic skills, but these skills should not replace students' opportunities to make meaning of the text (Wall, 2014).

Recently, there has been controversy regarding the use of cueing systems in guided reading. The three-cue system is based upon the idea that skilled reading is dependent on the use of three information systems, which include semantic, syntactic, and graphophonic cues (Hempenstall, 2002). Hempenstall (2002) stated, "Semantic cues involve enlisting the meaning of what has just been read to assist with decoding words about to be read" (p. 44). Syntactic cues require students to use their knowledge of sentence construction and grammar (Hempenstall, 2002). Hempenstall (2002) also noted that, "Graphophonic cues refer to the correspondence between graphemes and phonemes" (p. 44). While cueing was an effective strategy for students who were reading at or above grade level, struggling readers did not have the graphophonemic skills that were necessary to begin to make meaning of a text using the cueing system. According

to Hanford (2019), when all the emphasis in a guided reading program was placed on cueing, students did not have the opportunity to enhance their orthographic mapping skills. According to Ehri (2013), orthographic mapping involves the formation of letter-sound connections to bond the spellings, pronunciations, and meanings of specific words in memory. Instead of using phonics skills to decode a word, students resorted to looking at pictures to make meaning of words. When teachers focused their instruction on the cueing system, they were negatively impacting students' orthographic mapping skills, especially in the primary grades (Hanford, 2019).

Although controversy exists in how students should be taught to read, there are many benefits in teaching student how to read through small group, guided reading instruction. Guided reading enables teachers to differentiate their reading instruction to meet the needs of all students in their classroom (Iaquinta, 2006). Teachers use assessments to form dynamic groups, or groups that can change over time. The flexible grouping ensures that students will always be in a group that is meeting their instructional needs. Students have the opportunity to move out of groups and into different groups as they make progress with their reading skills. Teachers must use the behavioral evidence of students' progress, collected through the implementation of regular assessments, to ensure that students are working with books at their instructional level to help them enhance their literacy skills (Fountas & Pinnell, 2012).

Guided Reading Using Cueing Strategies

Guided reading instruction occurs daily in the classroom. Within the guided reading structure, there are many strategies that can be implemented to help students develop literacy skills. During guided reading, the three cue system can be implemented to provide students with the opportunities to expand their literacy skills. The cueing system comprises three categories:

meaning, structure or syntax, and visual (R. M. Schwartz, 2005). The meaning category of the cueing system asks students to examine their understanding of a sentence. In other words, students could ask, “Does this sentence make sense?” The structure or syntax category comprises sentence structure. Students could ask, “Does this sentence sound right?” The last category of the cueing system is visual cueing. Students could ask, “Does this sentence or word look right?” R. M. Schwartz (2005) states, “Analysis of the errors that a student makes and how the pattern of errors changes over time reflect developing processing strengths and strategies” (p. 438). The examination of students’ errors is an important part of the cueing system, as the errors students make help to determine the next steps in their instruction.

Along with the cueing system, mental strategies must be implemented into instruction in order to enhance students’ literacy skills. Searching and monitoring are two reading strategies that students implement early in the reading process (R. M. Schwartz, 2005). Searching enables students to make an attempt to solve a word that they are unsure of. After the attempt to solve a word has been made, students use monitoring to determine if their attempt made sense. As students are using their word-solving strategies, teacher feedback is imperative to their success. According to R. M. Schwartz (2005), struggling readers often lack feedback about their word-solving attempts. Teachers need to play an active role in the guided reading process. Providing feedback to students as they are developing their word-solving strategies ensures that students are developing the skills they will need to employ word-solving strategies independently.

During guided reading instruction, teachers must also be mindful of when to intervene and when to let students attempt to do their own problem-solving (Iaquinta, 2006). Teachers must use their understanding of the development of literacy skills to determine when it is appropriate to introduce a new skill to their students. Because guided reading is a differentiated

process, this will occur at different times for different groups of students. The texts that are selected, the skills and strategies that are taught, and the amount of teacher intervention that is implemented will be individualized for each group of students. According to Iaquina (2006), the framework of a guided reading lesson ensures that the teacher's role is scaffolded, and that they are providing the essential elements, like the three cues, so that students can develop good reading habits and strategies.

While implementing the three-cue system during guided reading instruction, it is also important to remember the essential components of a lesson. Guided reading lessons contain three important components: what happens before, during, and after reading (Ford & Opitz, 2011). Before a lesson begins, teachers have the opportunity to set students up for success. This is when unfamiliar words or phrases are introduced. Picture walks can also help students gain an understanding of what might happen in the story. During the reading, teachers must monitor the cues that students are using to help them figure out unknown words or phrases. This is also when the teacher must decide to intervene or to let students do their own problem-solving. After reading, teachers can provide students with the opportunity to write about what they read and expand their comprehension skills. According to Helfrich and Lipp (2016), guided reading lessons provides teachers with the opportunity to help students become strategic problem solvers, which enables students to become more effective independent readers.

Guided Reading Using Decoding and Word-Solving Strategies

Recently, there has been controversy surrounding the strategies that are utilized during guided reading. People have started to question the long-standing research of Clay and Fountas and Pinnell, who are the founders of Guided Reading programs used widely in schools today (Schwartz, 2019). These guided reading programs encourage students to use cues to solve words

(meaning, syntax, and visual cues). When students use these cues, they are not always looking at the word, itself. This can lead students to make guesses, rather than examining what they know about the letters in a word (S. Schwartz, 2019). The predictability of texts in encouraging students to rely on pictures to solve words is impeding the development of their orthographic mapping skills (S. Schwartz, 2019).

Because of this newfound controversy, it is important to place more of a focus on decoding and other word-solving skills during my guided reading lessons. According to Schwartz, teachers must be able to identify the needs of their students to determine the appropriate next steps for instruction, rather than relying on a boxed curriculum to determine the next steps for students (S. Schwartz, 2019). Decoding and other word-solving strategies will provide students that are reading below grade level with the skills that they need to become effective independent readers and find success with reading. It is essential to provide students with opportunities to become successful readers because poor reading habits can often follow students into high school and beyond (Hanford, 2019).

Theoretical Framework

The research on guided reading aligned with Lev Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory of Cognitive Development. According to Mcleod (2020) Vygotsky believed that the community plays a central role in the process of meaning making. Vygotsky also believed that cognitive development was enhanced by social interactions from guided learning (Mcleod, 2020). The guided reading lessons that the researcher implemented with her students aligned with Vygotsky's theory. During the guided reading lessons, the researcher prompted her students to help enhance their understanding of literacy skills. The researcher's students also interacted with one another when discussing comprehension questions.

Another theory that the research aligned with is Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (Mcleod, 2020). The researcher's students were placed in guided reading groups based on assessments (running records and benchmark assessments). Using this information, the researcher determined her students' instructional reading levels. When students were reading at their instructional reading level, the text was considered appropriate. The text was not so easy that it provided no challenge for students, and it was not so difficult that it became frustrating for students. The text was selected to provide students with an appropriate challenge. According to Mcleod (2020), Vygotsky's theory supports the idea that the texts were appropriate for the researcher's students because they were working on skills that they could learn with help. During guided reading, the researcher could assist her students with developing literacy skills. Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development supported the researcher's students reading at their instructional text levels (Mcleod, 2020).

Research Question(s)

The research is being driven by the researcher's interest in teaching reading, as well as a need to find more effective strategies to teach my students that are reading below grade level how to read independently. The researcher has developed two research questions to help guide her research. The first question is: what impact does utilizing the cueing system during guided reading have on students that are reading below grade level? The second question is: what impact does utilizing decoding and other word solving strategies have on students that are reading below grade level?

Conclusions

This chapter reviews the literature that highlights the strategies that are utilized when teaching students reading in small group, guided reading settings. The research on guided

reading focuses on two different strategies: teaching reading while focusing on a cueing system and teaching reading while focusing on decoding and word-solving strategies. Cueing systems have previously been used when teaching students how to read. Recently, research has suggested that cueing systems may not be the most effective way to teach students to read, as they impede the development of their orthographic mapping skills. Research suggests that going back to basic phonics skills, like decoding and other word-solving strategies may be more effective methods to teach students how to read. In the researcher's action research, her goal is to determine which method (either cueing strategies or decoding and other word-solving skills) is more effective when teaching her first grade students that are below grade level how to become confident, on grade-level readers.

CHAPTER 3

METHODS

Introduction

Reading is an essential component of all students' educational success. This study examines two different methods of teaching student how to read unknown words. Because successful early reading instruction is imperative to students' educational achievement, it is vital to understand the most effective methods in which to teach students early reading skills. In this chapter, the researcher implemented two different methods to teach students how to solve unknown words: the cueing systems and decoding and other word solving strategies.

Research Question(s)

The first research question is: What impact does utilizing the cueing system during guided reading have on students' reading ability that are reading below a first grade reading level? The second research question is: What impact does utilizing decoding and other word solving strategies have on students' reading ability that are reading below a first grade reading level?

Research Design

According to Fraenkel, Hyun, and Wallen (2015), the most appropriate design for this action research was a Single Subject A-B design. The students in the action research group were divided into two groups. A baseline assessment was given (Running Record) during week one of the intervention to determine beginning instructional reading levels. The first group of students received guided reading instruction that focused on using a cueing system to solve unknown words while reading. The second group of students received guided reading instruction that focused on using decoding and other word solving strategies to solve unknown words while

reading. Weekly Running Record assessments were given to determine students' progress in both of the intervention groups.

Setting

The study took place at an elementary school in a metropolitan area in Eastern North Dakota. The metropolitan area has a population of 246,145 people. The town where the school is located within the metropolitan area has a population of 36,500 people. The community has several colleges, universities, and technical schools. Agriculture, healthcare, and manufacturing are some of the major industries that comprise the area's economy.

The district in which this elementary school is located has approximately 11,000 students. 73.2 percent of the students are Caucasian. 16.2 percent of the students are Black. 4.4 percent of the students are Asian. 3.5 percent of the students are Hispanic. 2.7 percent of the students are American Indian/Alaskan Native, and 0.1 percent of the students are Pacific Islander. Of those students, 12.8 percent receive special education services. Eight percent of the students receive English Language Learner services (West Fargo Public Schools, 2020). During the 2019-2020 school year, 28.8 percent of the student received Free and Reduced lunch. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, all students are receiving free lunch during the 2020-2021 school year.

Participants

There were four first grade students that participated in the study. The students ranged in ages from six to seven years old. Two of the students were female, and two of the students were male. Seventy-five percent of the students that participated in the study were Caucasian, and twenty-five percent of the students that participated in the study were Hispanic. All of the students that participated in this study were reading below a first grade reading level. Fifty

percent of the students in the study were receiving additional Tier-Two reading services outside of the general education classroom.

Sampling. The four students that were selected to participate in this study were students in the researcher's class. Students were selected to participate in the study because they are reading below a first grade reading level. Because the students were selected from the researcher's class, this was a purposive sample.

Instrumentation

The instrument that was used for data collection for this research was a Running Record. During the Running Record, students read a book aloud to the teacher. As the student read the book, the researcher tracked what they were reading. If they read a word correctly, the researcher put a check above the word. If students made a mistake, the researcher marked the mistake above the word. At the end of the reading, the researcher asks the students a set of comprehension questions. When students have completed the assessment, the researcher calculates their accuracy rate. A rate of 95 percent and above means the text was at the student's independent reading level. A score of 90 percent to 94 percent means the text was at the student's instructional level. A score of below 90 percent indicates that the text was at the student's frustration level, meaning the text was too difficult for students. The amount of time that the Running Records took to complete depended on the student and the difficulty of the text, but generally took ten minutes to complete.

Data Collection. A baseline Running Record assessment was given to students during the first week of the study. This assessment was used to determine students' beginning instructional reading level. Running Record assessments were given to students at the end of each week of the study.

Data Analysis. Running Record assessments were given to students at the end of each week of the study. These data were tracked using a table. The table indicated the week of the study, as well as students' instructional reading level and accuracy rate as determined by the results of the Running Record for the given week of the study. Students' scores were recorded on the table at the end of each week of the study. The table was analyzed to determine if students were making progress towards reading at a first grade level.

Research Question(s) and System Alignment. The table below (i.e., Table 1) provides a description of the alignment between the study Research Question(s) and the methods used in this study to ensure that all variables of study have been accounted for adequately.

Table 1

Research Question(s) Alignment

Research Question	Variables	Design	Instrument	Validity & Reliability	Technique (e.g., interview)	Source
RQ1	IV: Guided reading instruction with the use of the three cue system to solve unknown words. DV: Reading level progression.	Single Subject A-B Design	Running Record Assessment	All students involved in the study were assessed weekly using the same Running Record assessments.	The techniques used were formative and summative assessments in the form of Running Records.	Four first grade students that were reading below a first grade reading level.

Research Question	Variables	Design	Instrument	Validity & Reliability	Technique (e.g., interview)	Source
RQ2	IV: Guided reading instruction with the use of decoding and other word solving strategies to solve unknown words. DV: Reading level progression.	Single Subject A-B Design	Running Record Assessment	All students involved in the study were assessed weekly using the same Running Record assessments.	The techniques used were formative and summative assessments in the form of Running Records.	Four first grade students that were reading below a first grade reading level.

Procedures

The study took place over a six week period. To begin, the researcher completed a baseline Running Record assessment with all five students in the research group. Each student was assessed one-on-one by the researcher to determine their instructional reading level. Students were placed into groups of two based on their initial Running Record assessment results.

After the groups were determined, the students met with the classroom teacher (the researcher) each day of school for fifteen minutes during the Daily 5 block. During the fifteen minutes of small group instruction time, one of the two focus groups received reading instruction that focused on using the cueing system to figure out unknown words. The second focus group

received reading instruction that focused on using decoding and other word solving strategies to figure out unknown words. Students received instruction using the same books. At the end of an instructional week, students completed a Running Record assessment (see Appendix A). The assessment was completed in a one-on-one setting with the classroom teacher. The students read a book that was new to them. The student's progress was documented on a table. Adjustments to instruction were made based on the results of the Running Record assessments. For example, book levels had to be adjusted so that students were continually reading texts that were at their instructional level. This process was completed each week of the six-week intervention.

Ethical Considerations

Before this study was conducted, permission was received from the school district, the participants, and the parents and guardians of the participants. Participants and their families were given detailed information about the study, as well as made aware of any risks that might have been associated with the study. The confidentiality of the participants was protected by eliminating names. Participants and their families were also notified that they could withdraw from the study at any time.

Conclusions

Reading instruction is an essential component to students' educational success. This chapter examined two different methods that can be used to help first grade students that are reading below grade level solve unknown words as they are reading. In the next chapter, the results of this action research will be examined.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

This study was conducted to investigate if using a decoding and word-solving system to teach the researcher's students who were reading below grade-level to read and solve unknown words was more effective than focusing on a cueing-system. The researcher was seeking to determine which system was most effective at helping her first grade students that were reading below grade level to gain the skills they needed to become independent, grade-level readers.

Data Collection

A baseline Running Record assessment was given to each student in the study to determine their instructional reading level. Students were placed into two groups based on their beginning instructional reading level. Group A received small-group reading instruction that focused on the cueing system. Group B received small-group, guided reading instruction that focused on decoding and other word-solving strategies. At the end of each week of the six-week study, students were asked to complete a Running Record assessment. The Running Record assessment was completed and analyzed by the researcher to determine students' instructional reading level. The results were input into a table to track students' reading progress. At this point in the school year, students needed to be reading at an instructional level H to be considered reading at a first grade level. Adjustments to the reading groups were made weekly based on the results of the Running Record assessments.

Results

RQ1: What impact does utilizing the cueing system during guided reading have on students' reading ability that are reading below grade level?

Table 2 shows the data for Reading Group A. This reading group received small group, guided reading instruction that focused on using the cueing system. Student one started the study reading instructionally at a level G, which was below a first grade reading level. At the end of the six week study, they were reading independently at a level H, which is above grade level for first grade. Student two started the study reading instructionally at a level G, which was below a first grade reading level. At the end of the six week, study, they were reading independently at a level H, which is above grade level for first grade.

Table 2

Weekly Instructional Reading Levels with Accuracy Percentage

Group A	Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4	Week 5	Week 6
Student 1	G (91%)	G (95%)	H (93%)	H (91%)	H (92%)	H (95%)
Student 2	G (93%)	G (98%)	H (96%)	H (96%)	H (95%)	H (98%)

Data Analysis. The researcher chose to focus on the cueing system with this group of students because the two students in this group seemed to only rely on decoding and other word-solving strategies when reading. If they came to a word they didn't know, they would rely on decoding, which was difficult for them when the word didn't follow typical phonetic patterns or rules. The researcher felt that focusing on the cueing system would provide these students with more tools to solve unknown words when they were reading. According to Hall (2014), using the cueing system rather than graphophonemic cues allows students to make sense of what they are

reading, rather than encouraging students to focus on phonics skills. The students in Group A demonstrated a lack of understanding of what they were reading. They focused solely on graphophonemic cues, which made it difficult for them to make sense of what they were reading when the text contained words that couldn't be decoded.

RQ2: What impact does utilizing decoding and other word solving strategies have on students that are reading below grade level?

Table 3 shows the data for Reading Group B. This reading group received small group, guided reading instruction that focused on decoding and other word solving strategies. Student one started the study reading instructionally at a level G, which was below a first grade reading level. While this student was reading fluently at this level, they struggled with their comprehension skills. At the end of the six week study, they were reading independently at a level H, which is above grade level for first grade. Their comprehension skills also improved. Student two started the study reading instructionally at a level G, which was below a first grade reading level. At the end of the six week, study, they were reading independently at a level H, which is above grade level for first grade.

Table 3

Weekly Instructional Reading Levels with Accuracy Percentage

Group B	Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4	Week 5	Week 6
Student 1	G (97%)	G (98%)	H (97%)	H (97%)	H (97%)	H (99%)
Student 2	G (90%)	G (96%)	H (90%)	H (91%)	H (90%)	H (97%)

Data Analysis. The researcher chose to focus on the decoding system with this group of students because the two students in this group seemed to only rely on cueing strategies. For

example, when they came to an unknown word as they were reading, their first strategy was to look at the pictures in the book to see if they could find a cue to help them figure out the unknown word. This was difficult for them because as texts get more difficulty, examining the pictures to attempt to figure out an unknown word is not effective. The researcher felt that focusing on the decoding system would provide these students with more tools to solve unknown words when they were reading. According to Schwartz (2019), when students use cues, they are not always looking at the word itself, which can lead students to make guesses rather than examining what they know about the letters in a word. The students in Group B had an understanding of phonics and phonemic awareness, but they were not applying those skills when they came to an unknown word as they were reading.

Conclusion

Both the cueing system and the decoding system were effective at helping first grade students gain the skills they needed to become independent, grade level readers. The results of the study show that guided reading is most effective when the needs of the learners drive the instruction. Decoding was effective at helping first grade students to become independent, grade level readers when they already had an understanding of the cueing system and relied on cueing when they came to an unknown word. The cueing system is not always effective for solving unknown words, so utilizing decoding provided students with the skills that they needed to solve unknown words that follow phonics rules or patterns. A combination of decoding and the cueing system helped these first grade students to become independent, grade level readers.

The cueing system was effective at helping first grade students to become independent, grade level readers when they already had an understanding of the decoding system and relied on decoding when they came to an unknown word as they were reading. Decoding is not always

effective at solving unknown words, especially when the words do not follow phonics patterns or rules, so utilizing the cueing system provided students with the additional skills that they needed to solve unknown words. A combination of the cueing system and decoding also helping these first grade students to become independent, grade level readers.

The results of the study suggest that neither decoding or cueing is the most effective strategy at helping students that are reading below grade level develop the skills that they need to become independent, grade level readers. Rather, when decoding and cueing are used in combination, students develop the variety of skills that they need to become independent, grade level readers. An effective reading program will encompass both decoding and the cueing system, as both strategies are necessary for students to become independent, grade level readers.

CHAPTER 5

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

Action Plan

Through my action research, I have learned that students' needs must be considered when determining whether the cueing system or decoding should be implemented into guided reading instruction. Relying on only one word solving strategy does not provide students with the tools that they need to figure out unknown words. In my guided reading instruction, I have already become more mindful of the strategies that my students utilize when they are attempting to solve unknown words. For example, the word "cat" has appeared in some of the books that we read during guided reading. I have been more mindful to observe how my students attempt to solve this word if it is unknown to them. Many of my students will use the cueing system and look at the pictures in the text to help solve this word. While this is an effective strategy, "cat" is also a word that could be solved by using decoding. Instead of allowing my students to continue reading, I have been prompting them to think of different ways that they could have figured out the word "cat." The results of my action research have lead me to be more conscious of what my students are able to do in terms of solving unknown words, which has also helped me to become more effective at determining the areas in which my students require further instruction.

The results of my action research have also helped me to gain a better understanding of how to help my students that are reading below grade level. I often struggle with how to best support my students that are reading below grade level. The results of my study have helped me to see the importance of students having a strong foundation in phonemic and phonics skills. Using the cueing system is an effective way of figuring out unknown words, but it isn't always applicable. Developing a strong foundation of phonemic and phonics skills will help my students

to decode unknown words that cannot be figured out by using the cueing system. A combination of these skills is essential to students becoming independent, grade level readers.

Plan for Sharing

My first step in sharing the results of my action research is to share the findings with my teammates. As a team, we often discuss the best ways that we can support our students that are not meeting grade level expectations. The results of my action research will provide my team with some insight into how to help students become independent, grade level readers.

My second step in sharing the results of my actions research is to use my findings to help guide parents that are seeking to help their student with reading at home. I often have parents ask how they can help their student read at home. Before this study, I often struggled with what to tell parents, other than to read nightly with their child. After completing this study, I have a better understanding of how to determine the skills that my students are using effectively and those that they need further instruction with to be successful, grade level readers. This information can be passed on to parents, and parents will be able to reinforce the skills at home.

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LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: Research Question(s) Alignment

Research Question(s) Alignment

Research Question	Variables	Design	Instrument	Validity & Reliability	Technique (e.g., interview)	Source
RQ1	IV: Guided reading instruction with the use of the three cue system to solve unknown words. DV: Reading level progression.	Single Subject A-B Design	Running Record Assessment	All students involved in the study were assessed weekly using the same Running Record assessments.	The techniques used were formative and summative assessments in the form of Running Records.	Four first grade students that were reading below a first grade reading level.
RQ2	IV: Guided reading instruction with the use of decoding and other word solving strategies to solve unknown words. DV: Reading level progression.	Single Subject A-B Design	Running Record Assessment	All students involved in the study were assessed weekly using the same Running Record assessments.	The techniques used were formative and summative assessments in the form of Running Records.	Four first grade students that were reading below a first grade reading level.

Table 2: Weekly Instructional Reading Levels with Accuracy Percentage

Weekly Instructional Reading Levels with Accuracy Percentage

Group A	Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4	Week 5	Week 6
Student 1	G (91%)	G (95%)	H (93%)	H (91%)	H (92%)	H (95%)
Student 2	G (93%)	G (98%)	H (96%)	H (96%)	H (95%)	H (98%)

Table 3: Weekly Instructional Reading Levels with Accuracy Percentage

Weekly Instructional Reading Levels with Accuracy Percentage

Group B	Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4	Week 5	Week 6
Student 1	G (97%)	G (98%)	H (97%)	H (97%)	H (97%)	H (99%)
Student 2	G (90%)	G (96%)	H (90%)	H (91%)	H (90%)	H (97%)


APPENDIX A

Recording Forms	Recording Form		More Than a Pet • LEVEL J • NONFICTION	
	Student _____	Grade _____	Date _____	
	Teacher _____	School _____		
Recording Form Part One: Oral Reading				

Place the book in front of the student. Read the title and introduction.

Introduction: Dogs can be more than pets. They can help people. Therapy dogs help people feel better and service dogs help people do things. Read to find out about these two kinds of dogs and what they do.

Sources of Information Used

Page	 Start Time ____ min. ____ sec.	More Than a Pet Level J, RW: 263	E	SC	E			SC		
					M	S	V	M	S	V
2	Do you know anyone who has a pet dog? Maybe you have a dog in your family. Dogs are good pets.									
3	Some dogs are more than pets. Two kinds of dogs do special jobs. Dogs that make people feel better are called therapy dogs . Dogs that work are called service dogs .									
Subtotal										

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APPENDIX B

Institutional Review Board



DATE: February 2, 2021

TO: Ximena Suarez-Sousa, Principal Investigator
Kimberly Gienger, Co-Investigator

FROM: Lisa Karch, Chair
Minnesota State University Moorhead IRB

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Lisa Karch'.

ACTION: DETERMINATION OF EXEMPT STATUS

PROJECT TITLE: [1709824-1] Implementation of Word Solving Strategies During Guided Reading

SUBMISSION TYPE: New Project

DECISION DATE: February 1, 2021

Thank you for your submission of New Project materials for this project. The Minnesota State University Moorhead IRB has determined this project is EXEMPT FROM IRB REVIEW according to federal regulations under 45 CFR 46.104.

We will retain a copy of this correspondence within our records.

If you have any questions, please contact the [Minnesota State University Moorhead IRB](#). Please include your project title and reference number in all correspondence with this committee.

This letter has been issued in accordance with all applicable regulations, and a copy is retained within Minnesota State University Moorhead's records.

APPENDIX C



Dear Parent or Guardian,

Your child has been invited to participate in a study to determine which word-solving strategies are most effective at helping students improve their reading skills.

Your child was selected because they are in my regular education classroom. If you decide to allow your child to participate in the study, please understand that your child will be asked to do the following. These activities are a regular part of our classroom, and they pose no risk to your child.

1. Your child will be participating in small group, guided reading instruction. This instruction will occur during our Daily Five time, which is from 9:15-10:15. Your student's small group instruction will last approximately 15 minutes.
2. Students will be asked to complete a Running Record each week. While your child is reading a book, I will keep track of errors and self-corrections. Your student will then respond to comprehension questions. This information helps me to determine their independent and instructional reading levels.

I will be using the information from the study to help me complete my final paper for my master's degree. I am currently pursuing my master's degree at Minnesota State University Moorhead. Although Principal Carol Zent (Approval for Action Research Administrator) has granted me permission to conduct this study, I am required to have parental consent to use this information in my final paper. I want to ensure you that this is information that I collect on a regular basis in my classroom, whether or not I'm in the process of obtaining my master's degree. You also have the ability to withdraw your student from this study, at any time. If you sign this form, you are giving me consent to use the information that I gather. Please know that all information that I collect will remain confidential, and no names will be used.

Please feel free to reach out to me with any questions that you might have regarding this study. You may contact me through my school email: kgienger@west-fargo.k12.nd.us. You may also reach out to my instructor from Minnesota State University Moorhead, Dr. Ximena Suarez-Sousa, by emailing: suarez@mnstate.edu or calling 218-477-2007, or the Chair of the MSUM Institutional Research Board, Dr. Lisa I. Karch, by emailing: irb@mnstate.edu or calling 218-477-2699.

You will be provided with a copy of this form to keep. Your signature indicates that you have read the information provided and have determined that your child may participate in this study. You may withdraw your child from this study at any time, even after signing this form, should you choose to discontinue your child's participation in this study.

Signature of Parent or Guardian

Date

Signature of Investigator

Date

APPENDIX D

GCC-A

RESEARCH STUDY REQUEST

I hereby request permission to conduct a research study in the West Fargo Public School District during

the period from Jan. 2021 to May 2021.

TOPIC: Decoding strategies (using word and sound knowledge vs. pictures and other context clues)

If this request is granted, I agree to abide by the district policy governing research studies, refer to the Administrative policies in each building Administrator's office or in the Human Resources office.

Signature of Researcher: Kim Gienger

Institution of Higher Education: Minnesota State University Moorhead

Signature of Graduate Advisor: Ximena Suarez-Sousa

Date: 01/08/2021

In addition to completing the Research Study Request Form, a copy of the following items is attached for review:

1. Abstract of the project
2. Questionnaire(s) to be used
3. Consent letter to be sent to parents

Endorsement: This request is ☒ approved ☐ disapproved

Administrator: Carol Zent

Date: 1-18-2021

A copy of the approval form must be presented to the school building principal and the assistant superintendent before conducting any survey. The principal has the final approval to conduct a survey in a school building.

Please **print** your name and the mailing address where you want this form returned:

Name: Kim Gienger, Independence Elementary

Street Address: 3700 54th St S

City, State, & Zip: Fargo, ND 58104

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