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ABSTRACT

A program was developed for improving the reading of first-grade students in a progressive suburban community in northern Illinois. The problem was originally noted by an increase in the need for support services and low standardized test scores. Analysis of probable cause data revealed that students lacked knowledge of the relationship between reading and writing processes. In addition, a review of the district's general curriculum and textbooks revealed that academic concepts were taught in isolation. Solution strategies suggested by knowledgeable others, combined with an analysis of the problem setting, resulted in the selection of three major categories of intervention: development of activities for students to integrate the reading and writing process, communication of student originated ideas in reading and writing, and demonstration of higher-order thinking through reading and writing. All strategic solutions occurred through curricular modifications and changes in teaching practices. All symptoms of the original problem were reduced as projected: students' integration of reading and writing improved; students' ability to communicate original ideas increased; and students demonstrated higher-order thinking skills through reading and writing. (Contains 34 references and 4 tables of data. A total of 11 appendixes presenting data, student writing samples, checklists, and lesson plans are attached.) (Author/RS)

INTEGRATION OF READING AND WRITING STRATEGIES TO IMPROVE READING

by

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Abstract

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Analysis of probable cause data revealed that students lacked knowledge of the relationship between reading and writing processess. In addition, a review of the district's general curriculum and textbooks revealed academic concepts were taught in isolation.

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Chapter 1

STATEMENT OF PROBLEM AND DESCRIPTION OF CONTEXT

Problem Statement

First grade students' abilities in the areas of reading and written language were inadequately developed to meet the curriculum requirements in first grade classrooms as evidenced by 20 percent of the students' involvement in supplemental reading programs and by standardized test scores.

Description of Immediate Problem Setting

There were 485 primary level students in this elementary school in a midwestern suburban community. The student population of the school consisted of 95 percent Caucasian, one percent Black, two percent Mexican-American, one percent Asian, and two-tenths of one percent Native American children. Data concerning family socio-economic status of the school indicated that 19 percent of the families were in the low income bracket. Twenty-five percent of the children in this building participated in the free or reduced lunch program. Absenteeism and tardiness occurred in five percent of the school population. The student mobility rate for students entering and leaving the school during the year was 24 percent. A large percent of the families in the school attendance area lived in rental

property. A substantial portion of the students' parents had not graduated from high school (School Report Card, 1992).

The academic school staff consisted of one principal, two kindergarten teachers, four first grade teachers, five second grade teachers, and five third grade teachers. The staff also included one first, one second, and one third grade transitional teachers. Support staff in the building included one full time Chapter I reading teacher, one half time Chapter I reading teacher, one half time Reading Recovery teacher, one special education resource teacher, one half time speech clinician, one part-time nurse, one part-time social worker, one part-time psychologist, and four reading tutors. Additional support staff consisted of one half time physical education teacher, one half time art teacher, one half time music teacher, and one half time learning center teacher. The years of teaching experience of the academic staff ranged from three years to thirty-three years. Fourteen teachers in the building had master's degrees in the educational field. The office staff consisted of one secretary and two secretarial aides. Additional staff consisted of five part-time resource aides who assisted in the preparation of classroom materials.

This kindergarten through third grade elementary school was located in a residential area. Each clasroom was a self-contained room. Time devoted to the teaching of core subjects for a five day week was as follows: reading ten

hours a week, math five hours a week, and written language three hours a week. The district used the Holt Reading Series and the MacMillian Math Series from kindergarten through sixth grade. Students were grouped according to reading ability in all of the first grade classrooms. All of the first grade teachers used a whole language approach to enchance student's reading and writing skills. The first grade teachers also utilized the Basic Phonics Series to reinforce phonics skills.

Description of Surrounding Community

The school district served two progressive suburban communities. One city with a population of 15,462 and the other city with a population of 19,033 comprised this school district of 20 square miles. The district was located adjacent to a metropolitian area.

The median household income was $31,147 and $33,791 for the two cities. Seven and eight-tenths percent of the community's residents were retired. The unemployment rate was four and five-tenths percent. Females made up 13 percent of the head of households. The work force consisted of 41.2 percent blue collar workers, 40.2 percent gray collar workers, and 18.5 percent white collar workers.

The community was experiencing gradual residental and commerical growth. This was primarily due to the development of open land throughout the northern part of the school district. As the community was growing the school

population was also gradually increasing. The district's small minority population, of one percent, was integrated through the district's curriculum which had been carefully developed to provide students with an understanding of ethnic groups, their cul ıres, and the important contributions of all groups of Americans.

The district's flat topography and concentrated population allowed the district to provide education in neighborhood schools. Minimal bus transportation for students was provided. Students living more than one and one-half miles from their school were eligble for transportation on district owned buses.

The community was vocationally oriented. Fifteen percent of graduated seniors attended a local junior college. Eight percent of graduated seniors attended a four year university.

The student population of the district was 5,676. The ages of the students ranged from three to twenty-one. Special educational services were available to mentally impaired, hearing impaired, visually impaired, physically impaired, speech and language impaired, and learning impaired. Due to the district's growing population the school board recommended a redistricting of attendance boundaries and reopening of buildings.

The central office administration consisted of a superintendent, an assistant superintendent, a business manager, a director of human resources and labor relations,

and a director of special education. An elected school board met twice monthly. Its responsibilities were to deal with situations pertaining to budget, curriculum, staffing, facilities, and discipline.

State and National Context of Problem

Nationally, longitudinal studies (Pinnell, 1989) showed that children who made poor beginnings in reading and writing tended to stay behind year after year, not changing their rank in the school group. In spite of a considerable investment of money, time, and committment to compensatory education, many children remained at risk of failure, especially in reading, an area where large numbers of low-achieving children received extra help year after year.

Although many questions and issues surrounded efforts to help at-risk children, most educators, as well as the general public, were acutely aware that the number of people at risk was increasing. According to Smith, (1993), executive director of the Rockford Area Literacy Council, fifty percent of adults nationwide were illiterate. The state of Illinois fell within the 34 percentile in state literacy rating (Secretary of State Literacy Office, 1992). Functionally-illiterate adults were unable to fill out an application, read a medicine bottle or newspaper, locate a telephone number in a directory, use a bus schedule, or do quality comparison shopping. When confronted with printed material such people could not function effectively

(Rockford Register Star, 1993). There was general agreement that efforts to help children become literate was of national concern.

Teachers may have contributed to poor reading performance by providing inadequate instructions. It has been found that the type of instruction delivered to poor readers differs from the instruction given to good readers. Allington suggested that increased reading instructional time produced higher achievement levels. Observations within the regular classroom setting indicated poor readers were more off task and less engaged in reading than good readers (Allington, 1983).

Studies have shown that poor readers spend less time reading silently than good readers (Allington, 1983). The instructional activites provided to poor readers tended to rely on decoding strategies rather than actively engaging the student in text. Poor readers over-attended to visual information and sounded out every word (Lyons, 1989). This approach to reading made it more difficult for poor readers to enjoy reading and they found the reading process tedious and boring.

Observations of classroom instruction found high level comprehension questions were directed to students with better reading skills. Prior theories had suggested students learned to read through a sequential process. New evidence suggested more advanced reading skills, which relied on higher order thinking, should be part of the

instructional program for poor readers (Means and Knapp, 1991).

The problem with the lack of reading progress was evidenced by an increased number of students and adults with poor reading performance and an increase in the number of programs that had been developed to meet these needs. The type of instructional practices used to assist readers was also in question. According to a state wide study (Illinois Reading Recovery Project, 1991) a depressingly large percentage of the children who did not learn to read by the end of the first grade went on to fail in later grades. They suffered from poor self-esteem. They were candidates for retention and special education. They were likely to become apathetic, troublemakers, or dropouts. Most existing remedies for failing readers were expensive, and, on the whole, not very effective.

Chapter 2

PROBLEM EVIDENCE AND PROBABLE CAUSE

Problem Background

As pointed out in Chapter 1, primary age students' reading abilities were inadequately developed to meet the curriculum requirements on a district level. Academic concerns were evidenced by the implementation of a variety of supplemental reading programs. The district implemented the Rising Stars program for preschool children at risk of academic failure. The school age programs included Chapter 1 services for kindergarten and first grade, Reading Recovery services at the first grade level, and certified and non-certified tutorial services at the elementary level.

The goal of the Rising Stars program was to assist developmentally disadvantaged students. The program included both children and their parents in a wide variety of activities, field trips, class projects, and technology. The staff included a full time early childhood teacher, a one half time social worker, and a classroom paraprofessional. Identified children throughout the district were provided transportation to one elementary school. The program was fully implemented during the second semester of the 1992-1993 school year.

Chapter 1 reading services had been provided for students in grades two through eight until a pilot program

for services for first grade students was implemented during the 1989-90 school year. Chapter 1 services were implemented district wide for first grade students during the 1990-91 school year. During the second semester of the 1992-93 school year services were expanded to include kindergarten students. In order for the district to include kindergarten and first grade students additional teachers were not needed because services to upper grade students were reduced. The focus of the program was changed to intervention in the early primary grades.

During the 1992-93 school year, Reading Recovery was implemented as a pilot program in one elementary building to reduce the number of students exhibiting difficulties with reading and writing. The benefits of Reading Recovery were not only the improvement of reading skills in students who showed early signs of difficulty in reading but also the improvement in students' writing skills (Clay 1985 and Deford 1991). Funded by a state grant during the 1993-94 school year, the Reading Recovery program employed eight half time reading teachers all of whom had extensive inservice training before implementing the program. A Reading Recovery coordinator assisted in the implementation of the program.

Tutorial programs were provided on two levels. On one level, certified teachers worked collaboratively with the classroom teacher to serve students who displayed delays in reading. Each group of five or fewer students met daily

with the reading tutor for 30 minutes. On the second level tutors were provided to help within the regular classroom setting. These tutors were part of a group of students enrolled in a child development class at a local high school.

Problem Evidence

The school district increased its efforts and funding to meet the needs of reading delayed students in the primary grades. This effort was evidenced by an increase in the number of support services to primary students who had reading delays. These needs were addressed through referrals based on teacher evaluations, reading levels and test scores of students.

Table 1

Holt Reading Levels and Grade Equivalents in Percentages of First Grade Students May 1993

Holt Levels	Grade Equiv.	% Students
3	1.0	0%
4	1.2	0%
5	1.3	0%
6	1.4	15%
7	1.5-1.6	38%
8	1.7-1.9	46%
9	2.0-2.4	0%
10	2.5-2.9	0%

Table 1 represents the percentages of first grade students and their Holt reading level at the end of first grade, May 1993. First grade students were expected by district standards to complete level eight by the end of first grade. As indicated in table 1, 46 percent of the students completed level 8. Thirty-eight percent of the students completed level seven which was one level below the expectation level. Fifteen percent of the students completed level six which was two levels below their expectation level. The students reading at level 7 needed remedial help and those reading at level 6 were in critical needed of remediation (Appendix A: 46).

Table 2

Percentages of First Grade Students and Grade Equivalents For Reading Comprehension on the Iowa Test of Basic Skills March 1993

Grade Equiv. Range	% Students
K.1 - K.3	0%
K.4 - K.6	4%
K.7 - K.9	8%
1.0 - 1.3	26%
1.4 - 1.6	19%
1.7 - 1.9	19%
2.0 - 2.3	8%
2.4 - 2.6	8%
2.7 - 2.9	4%
3.0 - 3.3	4%
3.4 - 3.6	0%

The Iowa Test of Basic Skills was given the last week of March 1993. The reading expectation level of a first

grader at this time would have been, first grade seventh month. Using the 1993 reading comprehension results 57 percent of the students were reading below the expectation level. Thirty-eight percent of the students were reading below the first grade third month level and were in critical need of remediation. Forty-three percent of the students were reading at or above the expectation level (Appendix A: 46).

A summary of the data recorded indicated a need or a critical need for remediation in reading. The reading levels and test scores both indicated that over 50 percent of the students were not reading at the expectation level. This data was also supported by teacher evaluations of students' achievement, and teacher classroom observations.

Probable Causes of Problem

Data to indicate probable causes were gathered from two sources, interviews and and an analysis of curriculum. The intent of the interview was to determine students' attitudes and perceptions about reading and writing. Hillerich (1990) reported a significant relationship between reading success and early knowledge of the purpose of reading. An analysis of the districts' general curriculum and textbooks was completed to evaluate the integration of reading and writing instruction at the primary level (Appendix B: 47).

An analysis of the Reading Interview, designed by Hillerich in 1990, indicated the majority of students interviewed enjoyed reading and writing stories (Appendix C: 48). Those interviewed knew a good reader, who in most cases was a member of their family. Students interviewed had books at home, were read to at home and could name a favorite book. Only one half of the students interviewed had library cards. A majority of the students could not internalize when they were doing an acceptable job reading, but needed external reinforcement. When confronted with a word they did not know the majority stated they would ask someone rather than rely on reading strategies or contextual clues.

Probable cause data from the literature indicated a need to integrate the reading and writing processes throughout the curriculum and to further create purposeful reading and writing to demonstrate higher order thinking skills. If, reading and writing were taught together improvements would be shown in both areas. The integration would foster critical thinking (Shanahan 1990).

A review of the schools district's MacMillan/McGraw-Hill (1991) Mathematics in Action textbook revealed manipulatives were available in the student's text. These manipulatives were used to stimulate hands-on activities, sharing ideas, and for use in cooperative groups. Critical thinking skills involving problem solving and reasoning skills were available in various forms within each lesson.

Throughout the text there were multiple curriculum connections which linked math with science, art, music, social sciences, and language arts. The text also provided opportunities for students to apply their math skills to situations through written language.

A review of the Holt, Rinehart, and Winston (1986) reading textbook revealed a three step implementation plan for each story; preparing to read, reading and comprehension, and developing and applying skills. Questions for teacher-guided reading consisted of inferential thinking and literal understanding. Critical thinking skills were revealed in making judgements through context and picture clues. Critical thinking skills were lacking in the areas of attributing, comparing/constrasting, classifying, sequencing, prioritizing, inferring, and analogies. Prewriting skills failed to incorporate brainstorming, webbing, or Venn diagrams. There were limited follow-up writing activities. Higher order thinking skills, student originated writing opportunities, and integration of reading and writing skills were neglected in this reading series.

A review of the Holt, Rinehart, and Winston Social Studies (1986) and Charles E. Merrill Science (1985) textbooks revealed supplementary assessment materials consisting of worksheets and tests were available in the form of multiple choice and fill in the blank tests. There were limited opportunities for children to demonstrate

higher order thinking skills in either content area. In both texts, enrichment and extension activities involved listing, labeling, drawing, and charting. Cognitive tasks were concentrated in the gathering information stage. The tasks directed students to name, locate, and describe. Higher order questioning techniques were left to the discretion and creativity of the teacher.

Curriculum analysis indicated a newer textbook, such as the mathematics book addressed a more integrated curriculum and more higher order thinking skills. The reading series and science and social studies textbooks did not address these issues throughly.

Chapter 3

THE SOLUTION STRATEGY

Review of the Literature

Analysis of probable cause data suggested reasons related to lack of reading progress were attributed to students' attitudes and perception of the reading and writing processes and the lack of development of higher thinking skills. The literature search for solution strategies found that reading deficits were easier to remediate when addressed in the early grades. The literature also indicated pull-out programs and specialized programs were ineffective in bringing students up to adequate levels of performance. Educators showed an increased interest in reading and writing strategies which could be implemented in the classroom setting.

Research regarding the benefits of full-day versus half-day kindergarten programs in teaching basic skills and reducing grade retentions and special education referrals was inconclusive. It was observed that full-day kindergarten programs were designed to prevent or remediate academic delays in disadvantaged children (Peskin, 1987) and to meet the needs of working women (Salzer, 1982). The full-day programs implemented a more structured academic curriculum with an increased use of support staff. Research showed that short term gains were achieved in full-day

kindergarten programs for educationally disadvantaged children when the extended time in the classroom continued to emphasis academic skills (Puleo, 1988; Karweit, 1992).

There was conflicting evidence regarding the number of special education referrals of children completing a full-day kindergarten program. Three studies of the number of special education referrals were cited. Evans and Marken (1983) found a higher number of referrals, the Madison Metropolitan report (1985) found no difference in the number of referrals, and Nieman and Gastright (1981) found fewer referrals (Puleo, 1988). The Nieman and Gastright study found fewer referrals of children, who had attended a full year of preschool prior to kindergarten.

Less conflicting evidence existed regarding retention of children who completed a full-day versus a half-day kindergarten program. For those students who completed full-day kindergarten it was determined that the number of students retained at the end of third grade was ten percent lower than for those who completed half-day program (Puleo, 1988). A ten percent reduction in the number of retentions could greatly affect a district's financial situation.

Researchers not only looked at the issue of whether a full-day kindergarten experience promoted success in the later grades but also how children came to kindergarten at different levels of readiness for reading. Attention focused on the use of phonics or whole language to teach reading at the kindergarten level. Stahl and Miller (cited

Karweit, 1992) reviewed studies that compared whole language and language experience which integrated the use of written language with the use of basals for the teaching of reading. Seventeen studies favored the using of whole language and language experience, 14 studies found no difference in the type of approach used, and two studies favored the use of basals (Karweit, 1992). This suggested that the use of a reading approach that integrated reading and writing could be effective.

Special classrooms such as the nongraded and transitional classrooms were developed to address low academic gains in students. The nongraded primary concept let pupils develop at their own pace. Grouping students encompassed a two to four year span allowing movement between levels. Students stayed with the same teacher and the older children helped teach the younger students. The nongraded classroom was designed because individual grade levels were too restrictive to meet the individual students' needs (Connell, 1988). Goodland and Anderson (cited in Cohen 1990) argued textbooks keyed to grade levels nurtured conformity and tempted teachers to cover material whether or not it was appropriate to the wide range of individual differences among pupils. The nongraded classroom was one strategy designed to implement developmentally appropriate primary grade curriculum. Nongraded schools were viewed as unsuccessful (Cohen 1990).

Transitional classrooms were designed to address the increasing number of children failing to master the curriculum of kindergarten and being identified as unprepared for first grade (May and Kundert, 1993). The structure of transitional classrooms was to prepare students for the next grade by reteaching skills which had not been mastered rather than reteaching the entire curriculum. Advocates for and against transition classrooms agreed the classroom redirected energy that could be better used to change the fundamental curriculum within the regular classroom (Bredekamp, 1990).

Evidence showed that programs which pulled students out of the regular education setting and provided additional reading services had little effect on students long-term remediation (Slavin, Karweit, Wasik, 1993). The Chapter I remediation program serviced students in low income areas. The services provided students of similar reading delays with small group reading instruction. Research indicated that Chapter I services had little effect past the third grade level (Slavin, et al., 1993). Analysis of the Chapter I program suggested remedial instruction set low expectations for the students and depended on a slow plodding instructional pace for basic sequential skill instructions. These shortcomings were evidenced by an annual gain in reading of one twenty-first of a standard deviation per year (LeTendre, 1991). This small reading

gain made it difficult to change the reading level of the students' long-term reading level.

Chapter I recognized its shortcomings and revised its teaching strategies and program goals. Chapter I was a pull-out program, where students were removed from the regular classroom setting and given special reading instruction. The program's goal was to coordinate its efforts with the regular classroom teacher and use instructional strategies and materials which complimented the regular program. The concept was if the reading processes were similar the information would transfer easier into the regular classroom setting.

Chapter I looked beyond basic skills and set higher expectations for students. The Hawkins-Stafford School Improvement Amendment of 1988 made dramatic changes in Chapter I services (LeTendre, 1991). The amendment called for several improvements. It provided opportunities for flexibility and creativity and stressed higher-order thinking skills. It called for accountability of student performance and made it the responsibilty of the school and parents.

The special education resource program was another pull-out program which demonstrated little overall success in remediating students with mild reading delays. A large percentage of students with learning disabilities remained in special education programming throughout their school career (Halgren and Clarizio, 1993). Studies indicated

students within the resource room were actively engaged in learning most of the time, but when the students went back to the regular classroom they became passive learners (Reid, Baker, Lasell, and Eastina, 1993).

Special education resource programs separated the students from the mainstream and substituted a more repetitive, task-oriented curriculum. This curriculum served to intensify the disparity between real life and textbook-based reality (Reid, et al., 1993). Special education failed to give meaningful alternatives to students who, without support, could not succeed within the regular classroom.

Studies showed an interrelationship between academic skills and social skills. Social interaction determined how students thought, interacted, communicated, and transmitted what they knew. Within group settings, special education students were able to make connections easier between reading and the real world, through interaction. Resource programs began to see socialization as an important element to learning (Hoover and Collier, 1992).

Special education resource classrooms revised instruction to a more integrated curriculum. This was accomplished through instructions that revolved around reading comprehension and writing. Integration of the curriculum served as a means of connecting students to the social and physical world through school experience. It created opportunities for students to develop decision-

making skills and to become aware of how they viewed the world. When learning was relevant and personal, it promoted internal motivation to learn (Reid, et al.; Keefe and Keefe, 1993).

The focus of pull-out programs radically changed. Evidence was presented that suggested that learning was based on an holistic approach, risk taking, and prior knowledge, rather than discrete skills. Both Chapter I and special education resources focused efforts on developing curriculum based on a student's past experiences, both personal and social. Reading and writing curriculums appeared to be an integral process of this change.

Reading Recovery was an early intervention program for first grade students experiencing difficulties learning to read. The program was directed at the bottom 20 percent of first graders. It was a one time intervention that came at the earliest stage of the child's schooling. The goal of Reading Recovery was to accelerate students and to help them develop into independent readers so they could read with the average students in their class without additional help.

Reading Recovery required one-to-one individualized instruction, but only for an average of 12 to 16 weeks. It was a supplemental pull-out intervention that did not replace the regular reading and writing classes. It worked to enhance these classes. Each Reading Recovery lesson included reading books and composing and writing a message or brief story. During these holistic reading and writing

tasks, teachers used special techniques to help children become effective readers and writers. The intent of Reading Recovery was to make a student aware that reading and writing are interconnected (Clay, 1985).

The effective intervention of Reading Recovery required an initial investment of materials and extensive teacher training. It was a long term cost benefit intervention. The savings due to the implementation of Reading Recovery were achieved through the reduction in retentions, Chapter I services, and special education placement. Reading Recovery offered a short-term educationally sound program that was a cost effective alternative to more commonly used programs.

In 1984, Reading Recovery was introduced to the United Stated by Dr. Marie Clay. The Ohio State University, the Ohio Department of Education, and the Columbus Public Schools joined forces to implement Reading Recovery in Ohio. Results form this pilot study were positive (Huck and Pinnell, 1985). A longitudinal study conducted in the Columbus Public Schools found that a high proportion of children serviced by Reading Recovery demonstrated sustained progress through the third grade without further intervention (Pinnell, DeFord, and Lyons, 1988). The MacArthur Foundation awarded the Reading Recovery faculty at Ohio State University a grant to compare four other reading interventions, each of which contained some elements similar to those in Reading Recovery. This study, known as the Early Literacy Research Project, found that Reading

Recovery, with its emphasis on reading and writing integration, was significantly more effective than the other approaches (Pinnell, et al., 1988).

Project Outcomes

The terminal objective of this problem intervention was related to the discrepancy data presented in Chapter 2; the Holt reading levels and the reading comprehension scores on the Iowa Test of Basic Skills. These scores indicated a need for remediation; over 50 percent of the students were not reading at the expectation level. Probable cause data from the literature indicated a need to integrate the reading and writing processes throughout the curriculum and to further create purposeful reading and writing to demonstrate higher order thinking skills. Therefore:

> As a result of curricular modifications and changes in teaching practices during the 1993-94 school year, primary students will develop a meaningful purpose for reading and writing as measured by student interviews; and the number of students reading below grade level will decrease as measured by teacher evaluation of student's performance.

In order to accomplish the terminal objective, the following intermediate objectives defined the major strategic procedures proposed for problem resolution.

> 1) As a result of curricular modifications and changes in teaching practices, the teacher will develop activities for students to integrate the reading and writing process.

2) As a result of curricular modifications and changes in teaching practices, the student will apply reading and writing to communicate their own ideas.

3) As a result of curricular modification and changes in teaching practices, the students will use reading and writing to demonstrate higher order thinking skills.

Proposal Solution Components

The major elements used to reduce the reading discrepancy between students' achievement and grade expectancy involved incorporating writing within the reading program. The first element involved providing students with activities which integrated the reading with the writing process. The second element involved writing activities which provided students the opportunity to communicate their own ideas from what they read. The final element involved activities which required students to use higher order thinking to demonstrate how they could incorporate new information they read into existing schema. These elements related to the terminal objective in that they attempted to change the perceptions of reading from isolated word units to meaningful activities. Discrepancy data indicated a large percentage of students were behind the reading expectations of the district. Probable cause data indicated students' inaccurate perceptions of the reading and writing process and inappropriate curriculum design were factors that contributed to the delays in reading.

Chapter 4

ACTION PLAN FOR IMPLEMENTING THE SOLUTION STRATEGY

Description of Problem Resolution Activities

The action plan was designed to address three major solution components: intergration of the reading and writing processes throughout the curriculum, increased communication of student ideas in oral and written form, and improved student usage of higher order thinking skills through reading and writing activities.

The curriculum development phase of the plan began in the fall of 1993. Four elementary teachers met bi-weekly to plan and incorporate the action plan into the existing curriculum. Using assessment data collected from the previous school year, the teachers designed lesson plans which integrated reading and writing strategies for reading improvement.

The implementation plan began with an after school meeting in September of 1993 and continued bi-weekly throughout the year. The purpose of the meetings was to organize and share effective lessons that were implemented in the classroom and to assess reading and writing improvements.

The improvements sought in the implementation plan included: increased frequency of student reading and

writing, improved student attitudes relating to reading and writing, and established gains in reading levels.

The implementation plan is presented below in outline form allowing for the overlapping of strategies.

1. Develop activities for students to integrate the reading and writing processes through the curriculum.
   A. Who: A committee of four teachers will design curricular modifications and changes in teaching practices.
   B. What: They will create lessons integrating reading and writing processes throughout the curriculum.
   C. When: This will occur during the first semester, the 1993 school year.
   D. Where: Committees will meet at an elementary building after school for an hour bi-weekly.
   E. How: They will use resource materials collected over the past year and individual staff expertise.
   F. Why: The lessons will be used as a resource for the committee members during the first semester, thus insuring integration of the reading and writing curriculum.
2. Increase student's ability to communicate ideas in reading and writing.
   A. Who/What: The teacher will implement lessons to encouage students to express ideas in the written form and read the finished product to an audience.
   B. When: These selected lessons will be given through-

out the instructional day during the first semester of the 1993 school year.

C. Where: The setting will be a primary elementary school classroom.

D. How: Decisions will be reached at committee meetings.

E. Why: Increasing students use of communication skills.

3. Improve students' usage of higher order thinking skills through reading and writing activities.

A. Who/What: The teacher will implement lessons to encourage students' demonstration of the higher order thinking skills of sequencing, comparing and contrasting, predicting, and metacogntion.

B. When/ Where: The selected lessons will be given throughout the instructional day in a primary elementary classroom during the first semester of the 1993-1994 school year.

C. Why: Research indicates the development of higher order thinking skills is related to improvement in reading (Costa, 1991).

Methods of Assessment

A variety of data collection methods were used in order to assess the effects of the intervention. Reading inventory tests were administered at the completion of each reading level. The results of the reading comprehension

test on the Iowa Test of Basic Skills were recorded for each student and compared to the district's expectation level. Reading levels for the Holt reading series were recorded for each student and compared to the district's expectation level. In the fall of 1993 and in the spring of 1994 reading interviews were conducted with students.

Formal classroom observations assessed the ability of students to engage in higher order thinking skills. Participation levels were observed in class discussion, cooperative groups, and writing activities.

Each students had a journal. The journal included directed writing activities and shared writing activities. Students were required to read journal entries to a class member or to the teacher.

A collection of each student's work was kept in a Reading and Writing Portfolio. The portfolio included a record of books students read at school and home, samples of required writing assignments and writing assignments students completed independently for pleasure.

The purpose of including a record of books read at home and school was to assist in evaluating the influence reading had on each student's writing skills. The writing section of the portfolio was evaluated by using a checklist which included the following items; fluency, composition, capitals, and punctuation. (Appendix D: 49). The writing assignments were evaluated and discussed with the students.

The intent of the checklist was to reveal an improvement in each area as the year progressed.

Chapter 5

EVALUATION OF RESULTS AND PROCESS

Implementation History

The terminal objective addressed the inadequate development of reading and writing skills to meet primary grade curriculum. Test scores and observations indicated 20 percent of the students were in critical need of remediation. Therefore, the terminal objective stated:

> As a result of curricular modifications and changes in teaching practices during the 1993-94 school year, primary students will develop a meaningful purpose for reading and writing as measured by student interviews; and the number of students reading below grade level will decrease as measured by teacher evaluation of student's performance.

The development of a curricular component to address the delays in reading in a first grade elementary classroom began with a review of the discrepancy data. This indicated a large percentage of students were below the reading expectations established for first grade. Probable cause data indicated inaccurate perceptions of the reading and writing process and inappropriate curriculum design were factors that contributed to the delays in reading. This activity took place at the beginning of the 1992-93 school year.

The program had three components that attempted to change the perceptions of reading from isolated word units to meaningful information (Appendix E: 50). The first

element involved providing students with activities that integrated the reading with the writing process. At the beginning of the year, first grade writing activities involved consonant sounds, short vowel sounds, basic sight words, and the patterning of consonant-vowel-consonant vocabulary words. As the students gained experience with writing, the activities became less directed by the teacher.

The second element involved writing activities that provided students the opportunity to communicate their own ideas. The students were involved in describing events from personal experiences or from what they had read (Appendix F: 51). Writing activities were expanded to include science and social studies topics (Appendix G: 52). Science and social studies material utilized by the district did not include student writing activities for first grade (Appendix B: 47).

The final element involved activities that required students to use higher order thinking skills. The students were engaged in writing activities that required sequencing, comparing and contrasting, and predicting (Appendix H: 53-55). The intervention plan was designed to have the first grade students use higher order thinking skills in written form early in the school year. During the early implementation of the plan it became apparent that first grade students needed to develop writing skills before using higher order thinking skills in written form. Writing activities using metacognition were not attempted with the

students. The skill needed development orally before advancing metacognition to written form.

The analysis of the strategies employed to improve reading through writing revealed overlapping components (Appendix E: 50). Few of the writing activities met only one intermediate objective. The greatest overlap was between writing to communicate ideas and writing using higher order thinking skills.

Presentation and Analysis of Project Results

In order to assess the effects of the planned intervention, students' reading levels were evaluated. The reading levels of students, in May 1993, were compared to the reading levels of students in March 1994. The results of this comparison are presented and summarized in table 3 (Appendix I: 56).

Table 3

Holt Reading Levels and Grade Equivalents in Percentages of First Grade Students May 1993 and March 1994

Holt Levels	Grade Equiv.	% students May 1993	% students March 1994
3	1.0	0%	0%
4	1.2	0%	0%
5	1.3	0%	0%
6	1.4	15%	8%
7	1.5-1.6	38%	42%
8	1.7-1.9	46%	50%
9	2.0-2.4	0%	0%
10	2.5-2.9	0%	0%

Table 3 represents the comparison percentages of first grade students and their Holt reading level in May 1993 and March 1994. First grade students were expected by district standards to complete level seven by the end of the third nine weeks and level eight by the end of the year.

The data indicated that in May 1993, 15 percent of the students were reading at level six, in March 1994, eight percent were at level six. This represented a decrease in the number of students reading below grade level by seven percent. Thirty-eight percent of the students were reading at level seven in May of 1993. In March 1994, 42 percent of the students were reading at level seven. According to district standards, this indicated an increase in the number of students reading at or above district expectation level. Forty-six percent of the students completed level eight in May 1993. In March 1994, 50 percent of the students were reading at level eight. A total of 92 percent of the students were reading at or above district expectation levels by March of 1994.

Table 4

Percentage of First Grade Students and Grade Equivalents
For Reading Comprehension on the
Iowa Test of Basic Skills
March 1993 and March 1994

Grade Equiv. Range	% Students 1993	% Students 1994
K.1 - K.3	0%	0%
K.4 - K.6	4%	0%
K.7 - K.9	8%	0%
1.0 - 1.3	26%	27%
1.4 - 1.6	19%	23%
1.7 - 1.9	19%	12%
2.0 - 2.3	8%	23%
2.4 - 2.6	8%	4%
2.7 - 2.9	4%	0%
3.0 - 3.3	4%	4%
3.4 - 3.6	0%	8%
3.7 - 3.9	0%	0%

Table 4 summarizes data for the reading comprehension test for first graders on the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (Appendix I: 56). This table presents a comparison of students' scores in March of 1993 and March of 1994. The reading expectation level of a first grader when this test was given was first grade seventh month.

The data in the table indicates that 57 percent of the students were reading below the expectation level in 1993. In 1994, 50 percent of the students were reading below the expectation level, this indicated seven percent fewer students were reading below expectation level. In 1993, 38 percent of the students were reading below the first grade third month and were in critical need of remediation. The data indicated in 1994 that 27 percent of the students were

in critical need of remediation, representing a 11 percent decrease. Twenty percent of the students were reading at the second grade level in 1993. In 1994, 27 percent were reading at the second grade level, an increase of seven percent. Four percent of the students were reading at third grade level in 1993 and in 1994 twelve percent were reading at this level representing an increase of eight percent.

A summary of the data recorded indicated a decrease in the number of students in need of critical remediation. Test scores on the Iowa Test of Basic Skills represented an increase in reading comprehension. This data was also supported by teacher evaluations of students' achievement and teacher classroom observations.

The students were interviewed in the fall of 1993 to establish perceptions and attitudes toward reading and writing. A follow-up interview was completed in March 1994 (Appendix J: 57). The results of the follow-up interview indicated two major changes in student perceptions and attitudes. Students now relied on using reading strategies or contextual clues to decode new vocabulary. The students also perceived themselves as good writers rather than naming published authors as they did in the fall.

Reflections and Conclusion

The integration of reading and writing reduced the number of students reading below grade level as measured by teacher evaluation of student performance. This was

accomplished through curricular modifications and changes in teaching practices. Standardized test scores supported the decrease in the number of students reading below grade level.

A critical component of the intervention plan was a change in the classroom teacher's perception regarding teaching reading to first grade students. The district's first grade curriculum prescribed the teaching of reading without writing. It was discovered through experimentation with writing activities that first grade students had a desire to learn writing skills from the start of the school year. The reading, social studies, and science curriculum were modified to integrate writing into learning activities.

Another important factor was the teacher's willingness to make changes in present teaching practices and set expectation levels for student writing. The teacher had to deviate from established practices and develop appropriate lessons to supplement the existing curriculum. The development and implementation of the supplmental writing lessons required creativity and additional planning on the part of the teacher (Appendix E: 50).

A positive factor influencing the outcome of this intervention plan was the self-contained classroom. Students were not scheduled for any special classes during the language arts teaching time. Lessons were presented and completed without any interruptions. The self-contained classroom provided continuity to the intervention plan and

the opportunity to integrate reading and writing in other curriculum areas.

Chapter 6

DECISIONS ON THE FUTURE

The Solution Strategy

The data indicated that the integration of reading and writing should be continued. However, modifications of the original design are suggested. The expectations were overextended. The development of writing skills should occur within a sequential order and within realistic expectation levels.

Expectations in the area of writing, using higher order thinking skills were unrealistic. The intent of the original implementation plan involved sequencing, comparing and contrasting, predicting and metacognition. Prior to the development of higher order thinking skills, the development of basic reading readiness skills was necessary. The introduction of consonant sounds, short vowel sounds, basic sight words, and the patterning of consonant-vowel-consonant vocabulary words were necessary before writing could begin.

The first stage of writing involved descriptive writing. This related to the reading readiness skills. This process stage was concrete and did not involve the higher order thinking skills listed in the implementation plan. The next stage involved sequencing and comparing and contrasting information in written form. Toward the completion of the

intervention plan students were capable of writing predictions and students were able to address metacognition verbally but not in the written form.

Throughout the implementation of the program, the curriculum should not be addressed in isolation, but should be viewed as a comprehensive plan to improve the reading and writing skills of the student. Remediation of students should occur within a coherent, comprehensive program designed to address individual needs. Writing activities had various stages from short four word sentences to short stories that incorporated quotation marks (Appendix K: 58). The major focus of this intervention plan was to integrate reading and writing in a meaningful way for the student.

Additional Application

In order to facilitate comprehensive planning, efforts should be made to work collaboratively with colleagues to develop the reading and writing intervention plan. The integration of reading and writing should be a part of each grade level's curriculum. Individual students not performing at the district's expectation level should be identified and programs should be established to address their needs within the classroom curriculum. As part of the comprehensive planning, staff development pertaining to the integration of reading and writing should occur. This program provided the student with an opportunity to interact with reading in a meaningful way.

Dissemination of Data and Recommendations

The results of this study indicated that classroom environment was a critical component of the program's success. A self-contained classroom represented the most conducive way to implement the integration of reading and writing. The incorporation of direct instruction, required supplemental reading at school and home, and hetergeneous reading groups that provided students with appropriate modeling were factors for success of the intervention.

Programs needed to assist students with delays must rely on support programs that integrate the classroom program with special services. Special service teachers should actively integrate their curriculum with the classroom teacher. The materials and concepts must be consistent between programs in order to enable students to make the proper connections.

Results of the study should be shared with staff members. The staff should be encouraged to make changes in teaching practices to incorporate the prescribed intervention of integrating reading and writing. Staff development should include a progressive list of activities that will allow for a natural acquisition of writing skills from structured writing to creative writing.

The critical variable in the success of this implementation plan is the competence and commitment of the staff. Extensive materials are not a requirement for the

success of the integration of reading and writing. However, a staff with experience in teaching and developing higher order thinking skills and a developed knowledge of teaching reading and writing is necessary. Present staff members not displaying strengths in these areas should attend an extensive staff development seminar on these related topics. Teachers should be given the opportunity to assess and evaluate the intervention program throughout the school year with their colleagues.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

Holt Reading Level and ITBS Comprehension Scores

Student	Reading Level	ITBS
1	8	2.8
2	8	1.5
3	6	1.2
4	8	2.4
5	8	1.4
6	7	1.6
7	7	K 9
8	7	1.6
9	7	K 7
10	7	1.1
11	8	1.0
12	8	1.2
13	8	2.8
14	7	1.3
15	8	3.0
16	6	K 4
17	8	1.7
18	8	2.3
19	8	2.0
20	8	1.9
21	7	1.7
22	6	1.3
23	6	1.3
24	7	1.4
25	7	1.7
26	7	1.7

Appendix B

Curriculum Ranking

		Holt, Rinehart, and Winston Reading	McMillan/ McGrace-Hill Math	Holt, Rinehart, and Winston Social Studies	Merrill Science
Students' Original Writing	5				
	3		●		
	1	●		●	●
Integration of Reading and Writing Processes	5				
	3		●		
	1	●		●	●
Higher Order Thinking Skills in Written Form	5		●		
	3				
	1	●		●	●

Code 5 = Very Evident

3 = On Occasion

1 = Non Existent

Appendix C

Reading Interview

1. Do you like to read? Why?	Yes 24	No 5	Occasionally 2
2. Do you know a good reader?		Yes 29	No 2
Who? How do you know they are a good reader?		Family Member 20	Other 9
3. How do you know when you do a good job reading?	Tells Me 15	Don't Know 5	Other 11
4. What do you do when you come to a word you don't know?		Ask 20	Other 11
5. Do you like to write stories? Why?	Yes 28	No 2	Occasionally 1
6. Do you know someone who writes good stories? Who?		Yes 26	No 5
7. What makes a good story?	Topic Responses 17		Other 14
8. Do you have books at home? Which ones are your favorite?		Yes 29	No 2
9. Do you have a library card?		Yes 15	No 16
10. Does someone read to you at home? Who?		Yes 24	No 7

Appendix D

Writing Checklist

Name _____

Fluuency _____

Composition _____

Capitals _____

Punctuation _____

S Satisfactory

P Progress

N Needs Improvement

Appendix E

Lesson Plans

	Integrate Reading & Writing	Commuicate Ideas	Higher Order Think. Skills
Consonant Sounds descriptive	x		
Vowel Sounds- Short label	x		
Seasonal (Halloween Thanksgiving, etc.) draw a picture write about it		x	
Sight Words	x		
Pilgrims/Indians Writing	x		x
Pet Store Book	x	x	
Word Box Activity			x
Friendship		x	
If I had $100		x	x
Compound Words	x		
Bears		x	x
If I were President		x	x
St. Patrick's Day		x	x

Appendix F

Personal Experience Writing

The pilgrims came to America on the Mayflower. The pilgrims built house's. They planted corn. They planted corn so they can eat. The pilgrims and Indians becam fiands. The pilgrims and Indians eat a big Turkey. That was the fierst Thanksgiving.

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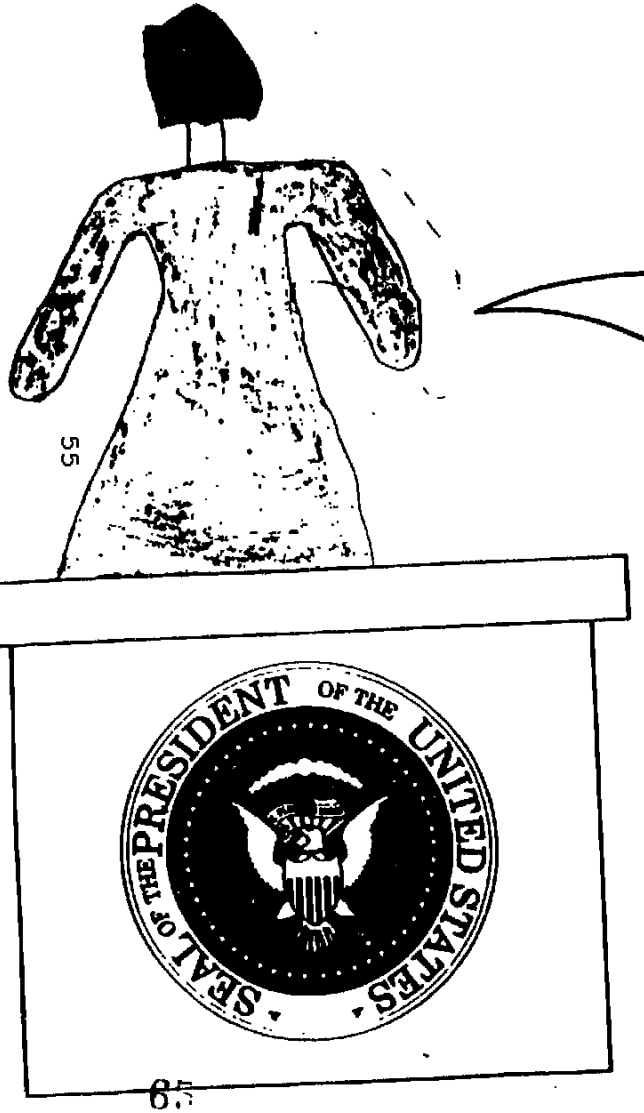
Appendix H

Sequencing, Comparing and Contrasting, Predicting

If I had $100 I would take my family out for lunch. Next I would buy my teacher some roses. Then last I would buy a puppy and a kitten.

In the winter it is cold. In the winter it snows a lot. In the winter plants do not bloom beacs it is so cold. In the spring it is warm. It rains a lot in the spring. In the spring all the plants bloom again. I like both beacs you can play outside.

If I were president,
I would give a speech.
I would say...



I would
Make sher that the kids that do not have a home will have one soun. And make sher that they have nice parint And make sher that they make friends.

Appendix I

Holt Reading Level and ITBS Comprehension Scores

Student	Reading Level	ITBS
1	7	2.0
2	8	3.4
3	8	2.3
4	7	1.6
5	7	1.2
6	8	2.3
7	7	1.2
8	7	1.6
9	8	3.4
10	6	1.0
11	7	1.5
12	8	2.2
13	7	1.3
14	6	1.1
15	7	1.2
16	7	1.5
17	7	1.2
18	8	1.9
19	8	2.1
20	8	1.4
21	8	2.1
22	8	1.7
23	8	2.4
24	8	3.1
25	7	1.4
26	8	1.7

Appendix J

Reading Interview

1. Do you like to read? Why?	Yes 23	No 1	Occasionally 2
2. Do you know a good reader?		Yes 26	No 0
Who?	Family Member	Other	
How do you know they are a good reader?	8	18	
3. How do you know when you do a good job reading?	Tells Me 23	Don't Know 0	Other 3
4. What do you do when you come to a word you don't know?		Ask 6	Other 20
5. Do you like to write stories? Why?	Yes 22	No 1	Occasionally 3
6. Do you know someone who writes good stories? Who?		Yes 23	No 3
7. What makes a good story?	Topic Responses 21		Other 5
8. Do you have books at home? Which ones are your favorite?		Yes 26	No 0
9. Do you have a library card?		Yes 22	No 4
10. Does someone read to you at home? Who?		Yes 22	No 4