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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was designed to increase the reading abilities of students in the targeted first and third grade classes in two elementary schools located in the Midwest. The study involved an action research project highlighting the overall growth of the students' academic achievement through increased reading growth. The study was conducted from September through December 2002 and included 94 participants (47 students and 47 parents), all residents of a small suburban neighborhood. Among factors influencing students' low reading abilities are: the absence of strategies (Chard, 2000), low parental involvement (Anderson, 2000), low motivation and self-esteem (McCray, Vaughn, Neal, 2001), high student-teacher ratio (Elliot, Arthurs, Williams, 2000), and time restraints (Vaughn 2001). According to Chard (2000) students who are suffering from a lack of reading strategies may not be engaged in independent or one on one reading time viewed as essential in meeting their needs. Davies (1999) also related students' reading abilities to low test scores and self-esteem. To document students' progress in reading, the following methods of assessment were used: a behavioral checklist, anecdotal records, and surveys of parents and students. Checklists involved analyzing students' reading strategies for possible improvement. Similarly, running records of students' knowledge of words, letter-sound patterns, and comprehension was maintained using anecdotal notes of student behavior. Lastly, two surveys were used to: understand how students feel about reading and measure the frequency of in-home parental support. Post intervention data indicated that there was a marked improvement throughout the study. The series of learning activities that addressed comprehension strategies appeared to help the students feel more confident when answering questions about their reading. The students were able to find unknown words and to use the strategies they learned to find pronunciation and meaning of the unknown words. The extended and interactive read-aloud times increased the students' confidence about answering comprehension questions. The Listen, Sketch, and Write (LSW) and role-playing helped in the achievement of raising the students' reading abilities. Increasing the Language Arts time to 90 minutes from 60 minutes was a positive solution strategy. The results of all these interventions showed a remarkable increase of the students' reading levels and abilities. Appendixes contain parent and student surveys, a reading strategy checklist, and a blank running record form. (Contains 30 references, 5 tables, and 2 figures.) (Author/RS)

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INCREASING READING ABILITY AMONG FIRST AND THIRD GRADE STUDENTS

Colleen C. Commare
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Abstract

The purpose of this study was designed to increase the reading abilities of students in the targeted first and third grade classes in two elementary schools located in the Midwest. The study involved an action research project highlighting the overall growth of the students' academic achievement through increased reading growth. The study was conducted from September through December 2002 and included 94 participants (47 students and 47 parents), all residents of a small suburban neighborhood.

Among factors influencing students' low reading abilities are the absence of strategies (Chard, 2000), low parental involvement (Anderson, 2000), low motivation and self-esteem (McCray, Vaughn, Neal, 2001), high student-teacher ratio (Elliot, Arthurs, Williams, 2000), and time restraints (Vaughn 2001). According to Chard (2000) students who are suffering from a lack of reading strategies may not be engaged in independent or one on one reading time viewed as essential in meeting their needs. Davies (1999) also related students' reading abilities to low test scores and self-esteem.

To document students' progress in reading, the following methods of assessment were used: a behavioral checklist, anecdotal records, and surveys of parents and students. Checklists involved analyzing students' reading strategies for possible improvement. Similarly, running records of students' knowledge of words, letter-sound patterns, and comprehension was maintained using anecdotal notes of student behavior. Lastly, two surveys were used to: understand how students feel about reading and measure the frequency of in-home parental support.

Post intervention data indicated that there was a marked improvement throughout the study. The series of learning activities that addressed comprehension strategies appeared to help the students feel more confident when answering questions about their reading. The students were able to find unknown words and to use the strategies they learned to find pronunciation and meaning of the unknown words. The extended and interactive read-aloud times increased the students' confidence about answering comprehension questions. The *Listen, Sketch, and Write* (LSW) and role-playing helped in the achievement of raising the students' reading abilities. Increasing the Language Arts time to 90 minutes from 60 minutes was a positive solution strategy. The results of all these interventions showed a remarkable increase of the students' reading levels and abilities.

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To my Mom and Dad, thanks for putting me on that train.

-Colleen

To my family for watching over, thank you for supporting me through this educational time.

-Sarah

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CHAPTER 1

PROBLEM STATEMENT AND CONTEXT

General Statement of the Problem

Students of the targeted primary classes exhibit low reading abilities that interfere with their overall academic growth. Evidence of the problem includes a teacher behavioral checklist analyzing reading strategies, anecdotal notes of students' performance, and student and parent surveys.

Immediate Problem Context

The elementary school is located in a northwestern suburban neighborhood in the Midwest. The school was built in 1973. It consists of approximately 27 classrooms, kindergarten through fifth grade, including two multiage groups. The building holds a multi-purpose room, a gym, a music room, and an art room. The classrooms are clustered into groups of four rooms referred to as "pods". Four of the pods have mixed grade levels, and one pod includes all fifth grades. The library and media center is located in the center of building, connecting all the classroom clusters together.

The school program includes a core curriculum and separate classes in the Fine Arts (music, art, physical education, and health). There are also classes for students with learning disabilities and other special needs including a program for gifted students. Additional programs include computer literacy; English, as a second language; hot

lunch; and band. There are two speech pathologists, a social worker, and a school psychologist. There are also two reading specialists and a literacy teacher who works with kindergarten through second grades. The school has a very supportive Parent Teacher Organization. There is also a “before and after” school program for the school district through the community park district.

The total school population consists of 670 students. Of this number, 87.3% of the students are White, 0.6% are Black, 10.3% are Hispanic, and 2% are Asian/Pacific Islander. Approximately 9% are considered low income, and 7.3% have limited proficiency in English. The overall attendance rate for students is 95%. The mobility rate is 13% and the average class size is 33 students per teacher. There are 35 teachers on the school faculty (three men, 32 women). Among these, 13 have earned bachelor degrees and 22 have received their master’s degrees.

The Surrounding Community

The community is a city of about 35,000 people. It is 49 miles northwest of a major metropolitan center. The community is primarily residential and has industrial developments including almost 20 manufacturing firms. It is the largest commercial and retail area in its county. Based on the 1996 Census, the per capita income for the community is approximately \$49,200. The general population of the community is 94.1% White, 0.56% Black, 0.16% Native American, 1.97% Asian, and 7.01% Hispanic.

The school district was organized in 1920. The targeted school site is one of eight elementary schools in the district. The total number of schools in the district is 12, and includes three middle schools. The total student population for the district is 8,426. The district employs 900 people, including 500 certified staff and 400 support staff. The

school population in the district includes students from a 44 square mile area. The administrative structure consists of one superintendent and a principal and an assistant principal for each school. There is also a school board of seven members.

National Context of the Problem

The problem of low reading abilities interfering with students' overall academic growth has caused concern among the educational population. Elementary and secondary educators agree that there is a need to improve students' literacy skills (Thompson, 2000). According to Short, Kane, and Peeling (2000) "learning to read is the basis for success in school" (p. 284). The problem of low reading ability has been evaluated throughout the history of education. According to Gay (2000) a "*one size fits all*" attitude towards reading instruction is a possible cause for this. For students with low reading abilities, this does not give much hope towards their future as students or as productive adults in our competitive society.

Historically, there has been no improvement in the average reading scores since 1969, according to the National Assessment of Educational Progress (Mithers, 2001). Mithers (2001) stated that, today, the average 9-year-old's reading score is actually lower than that of 20 years ago. At the national level an estimated 44% of fourth-grade students read below their grade level (McCray, Vaughn & Neal, 2001). National leaders have declared illiteracy an emergency in need of immediate attention (Mithers, 2001). In a 1996 State of the Union Address, President Clinton acknowledged that "a significant goal of his administration was to ensure that all children could read by the end of grade 3" (Vaughn, 2001, p. 2).

Research supports the fact that, after third grade, teachers depend on students' reading ability to be at grade level. This ensures that whether teaching math, science or social studies the relevant materials can be read (Mithers, 2001). It is assumed at the secondary level that "reading in the content areas is separate and distinct from teaching subject matter" (Thompson, 2000, p.19). If this is to be assumed by educators at all levels, elementary students need to be taught foundational reading skills before reaching the secondary level.

Struggling readers lack the critical elements they need to become effective readers. However, not all readers who struggle have the same deficiencies. For example, some readers may lack fluency skills, while others may lack basic knowledge of how sounds map to letters. Therefore, educators need to differentiate reading instruction to meet all the students' needs. "One size instruction has never fit anyone" (Gay, 2000, p. 42). The job of finding and correcting reading deficiencies early, is very important considering "reading is the backbone of education" (Mithers, 2000, p. 3).

A review of the literature supports the fact that early intervention will assist poor readers eventually becoming average readers. However, if the problem is not discovered and interventions are not started by age nine, there is a seventy-five percent chance the child will have difficulty reading throughout high school (Mithers, 2001). Not only do the students' academics suffer, but students' suffer socially as well. They often are disengaged from their teachers and peers and have low self-esteem (Hettinger & Knapp, 2001). Students may also sustain low self-efficacy towards reading, never believing they will succeed at reading (McCabe & Margolis 2001).

Beyond the struggling readers' academic years, research shows that there are long-term consequences. It is noted that there is a relationship between low literacy skills and poverty among adults (Thompson, 2000). Lack of reading skills interferes with the individuals' ability to compete for jobs. Mithers (2001) observed, "workers with little or no reading ability earn roughly a third as much as the most literate" (p. 107). All of these findings suggest that reading improvement is a national problem and improving reading is imperative to the continual success of our society.

CHAPTER 2

PROBLEM DOCUMENTATION

Problem Evidence

In order to document the extent of students' reading abilities, running records, reading strategy checklists, and student and parent reading surveys were given in the month of September 2002. Of the 50 students in the first and third grade targeted classrooms, a total of 10 students were involved. Five students from each classroom were selected because of their low reading levels and abilities.

The running record document (Appendix D) was used to show evidence of below grade level reading and low reading strategies. A running record was administered to each of the 10-targeted students in September.

Figure 2.1 represents the running record results for September 2002. The average first grade student was reading at a guided reading level B. The average third grade student was reading at a guided reading level M. The targeted first grade students all entered the beginning of the year at an A. The targeted third grade students started at different levels ranging from J to L. A further analysis of the running record indicated that seven of the targeted students were three levels below grade level and only two targeted students were one level away from grade level.

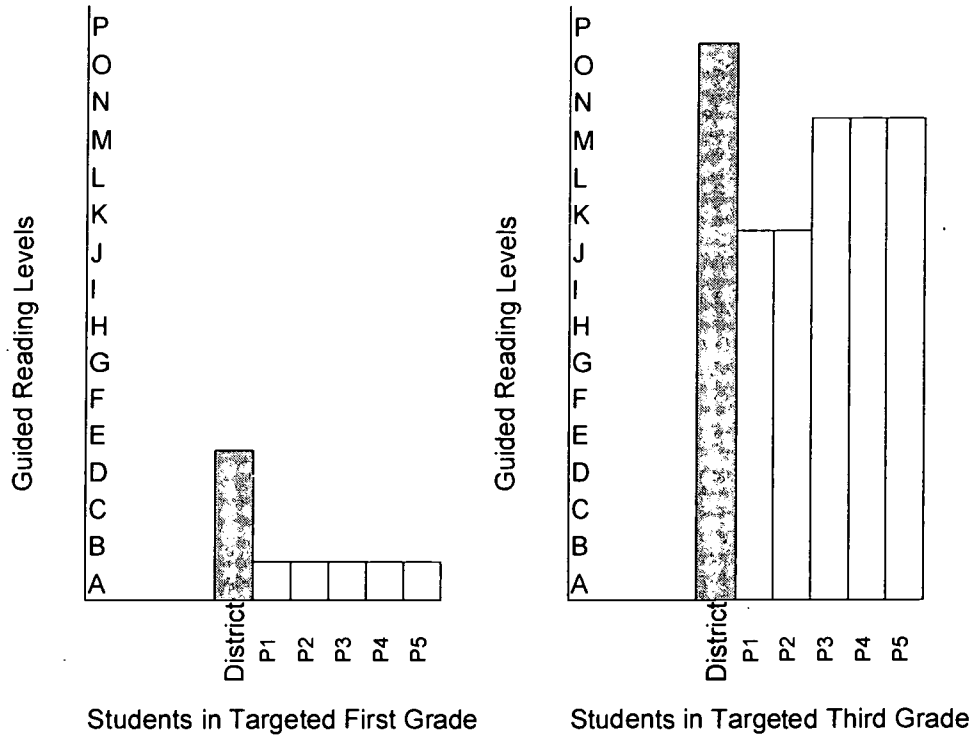


Figure 2.1 A Comparison Of District And Students' Guided Reading Levels For Targeted First And Third Grade Classes Prior To Intervention

The Reading Strategy Checklist was designed by the researchers (Appendix C) to document the targeted students' reading strategies used while reading. A summary of the strategies used by the targeted first and third grade students is presented in Table One.

Table 2.1

Frequency and Reading Strategies Observed Using Class Checklist for First and Third Grade Targeted Students Prior to Intervention

Reading Strategies Used	Frequency					
	Never		Sometimes		Consistently	
	1 st	3 rd	1 st	3 rd	1 st	3 rd
Uses Context Clues	4	2	1	3	-	-
Uses Picture Clues	-	-	2	5	3	-
Decodes	2	2	3	3	-	-
Knows Sight Words	-	-	5	5	-	-
Rereads for Self Correction	4	4	1	1	-	-
Pauses Frequently	-	-	3	5	2	-
Appeals for Help	2	-	3	4	-	1

N=10

The results of Table 2.1 show that most of the targeted first and third grade students did not use reading strategies consistently to guide them through a text. The first grade students used picture clues and paused more often than the third grade students. These results may be due to the fact that the first grade text is more picture-based compared to the third grade text. As represented above, the use of context clues and rereading for self-correction are two strategies that needed the most individual instruction for the students to improve upon. Decoding was also a strategy that needed to be addressed with the targeted students on a more in-depth level. All the targeted

students showed that they had acquired some sight words and could apply them to their reading.

The Student Attitude Survey (Appendix A) was designed by the researchers to gather information from the first and third grade classrooms about the students' attitudes towards reading. The survey was administered to both of the first and third grade classrooms in September 2002. The results of the survey are presented in Table Two.

Table 2.2

Participants Self Report of Attitude Towards Reading Prior to Intervention

Reading Topics Surveyed	<u>Feelings Surveyed</u>					
	Happy		O.K.		Sad	
	1 st	3 rd	1 st	3 rd	1 st	3 rd
Reading During Free Time	15	11	2	12	2	2
Reading Different Genre	12	16	5	13	2	1
Answering Questions About Reading	13	7	2	16	3	2
Reading at School	12	15	4	13	3	2
Reading School Materials	11	11	5	13	3	1
Working in Reading Group	11	12	5	11	3	2
Reading Aloud	9	11	6	7	4	6
Come to a Unknown Word	4	2	7	18	8	5
<hr/>						
N=49 (n=44)						

In Table 2.2 the students responded by checking a shape under how they felt about the question being read. The feeling choices were: *happy*, *O.K.*, and *sad*. The first grade students were mostly *happy* to be part of any type of reading in the

classroom. More than half of the first grade students were uncomfortable when they came to an unknown word in text. Comparing the third grade students, half of the students, or more, felt good about reading in general, with the exception of comprehending the text. Eighteen students felt *o.k.* or *sad* when having to answer questions about their reading. Most of the third grade students felt *ok* when coming to an unknown word in text.

The Parent Reading Survey (Appendix B) was sent home in September 2002. It was designed by the researchers to gather evidence of at home parental support in reading. Some of the questions were also designed to find out how parents felt about reading with their child.

Table 2.3

Levels of Frequency for Parent Self Report of Response Items Prior to Intervention

Response Items	Frequency			
	Regularly	Very Often	Seldom	Never
Parent Reads to Child	.32	.38	.26	0
Child Reads to Parent	.29	.29	.32	.6
Parent Correct Child's Mistakes	.41	.41	0	.3
Assistance When Child Appeals for Help	.68	.26	0	0
Parent Frustration	.6	.15	.44	.35
Child Frustration	.9	.18	.5	.21
Time Spent Reading with Child	.35	.38	.24	0

The results of Table 2.3 suggest that the parents of the first and third grade students were spending ample reading time with their children. When analyzed further

though, two of the topics have high percentages. The topics: *Parent Corrects Child's Mistakes* and *Assistance when Child Appeals for Help* were areas in which the researchers would like to see a lower percentage. If these areas were done incorrectly or too much of the time, this might have been the basis for the way the targeted students responded during guided reading instruction to reading and reading strategies.

Probable Causes

A review of the literature suggests that low reading abilities are caused by a multiple of factors. These include a lack of strategies, low parental involvement, a lack of student motivation, high teacher-student ratio, and time restraints.

McCray, Vaughn, and Neal (2001) found that even if students have any reading strategies, these strategies are being misused and these students are given minimal amount of time to read in class. A lack of strategies is prevalent among primary students. According to the research, basic skills, like phonemic awareness, alphabetic knowledge, and decoding are the primary building blocks for reading. Moats (2001) stated that when children receive instruction rich in phonological and alphabetic skills, they learn to apply their knowledge to decoding words and to becoming successful readers. Evidence shows that if these strategies are not taught and developed in the primary grades, it can affect students all the way to high school.

Quellette and Dagostino (1999) stated that some of the reasons why students come to school with low reading abilities are they are not read to at home. Low parental involvement is another factor influencing low reading abilities. Not enough parental involvement in the home or at school can cause a student to not be reading at grade level. Students may not see a lot of printed materials in their everyday home life. Some

parents may not be involved in their child's reading because they do not know how to read or are at a lower reading level themselves. Mithers (2001) questioned how a parent could read to or with their child and teach him/her the pre-reading skills he/she needs if that parent cannot read themselves? Finally, having parents involved in their child's reading can be a positive experience, especially if it is followed through to high school. Anderson (2000) states that parents are the ones who lay the foundation for students learning how to read and parents increase their ability to develop reading strategies.

A lack of student motivation can be a negative factor to a student's reading ability (Hettinger & Knapp, 2001). If a student does not have the motivation or self-esteem, then he/she may lack the ability to grasp concepts, which in turn could affect their overall learning. Short, Kane, and Peeling (2000) stated that for students with low reading abilities it is best to meet with them in small groups and one-on-one for individual needs. It is also imperative to give these students the same amount of time and opportunity to succeed as the higher ability groups. If this is not done, the students in the low reading ability groups will develop low motivation and negative attitudes toward reading. In the end, if students struggle with their reading they will suffer low self-esteem and motivations making them feel they are not part of their classroom community.

High teacher–student ratio and time restraints are major factors that deal with students' low reading abilities (Chard, 2000). When the class size increases then there is less time for the teacher to reach each student one-on-one or in small groups to give everyone the attention they need. Even when the teacher is able to meet with students

in small groups, the teacher's time is limited because there are so many small groups within a large class size. Vaughn's (2001) biggest concern when implementing fluency and comprehension interventions was the limited amount of time the teachers are given to teach reading. She states that the time allotment set for reading instruction was not as long as she would like it to be. When there is so much curriculum to teach in a certain time period some subjects always seem to get pushed aside. Chard (2000) believed that if an effective reading instruction were put into place early, reading difficulties would be eliminated. Based on the literature, reading instruction is a number one priority in the classroom not just during reading workshop, but across the curriculum.

CHAPTER 3

THE SOLUTION STRATEGY

Literature Review

Increasing reading ability is such a common issue in education that there is an abundance of literature to review in this area. There is not much debate on why there is a need to increase students' reading ability. The fact that "40 million adults in this country are considered to be functionally illiterate and 50 million other Americans have marginal literacy skills" (Illinois Reads, 2002, p. A8) makes this a huge concern among educators. Although the research reflects many different ways to approach the issue, most studies state that we need to start interventions in the primary grades.

A number of different approaches to increase reading abilities are reflected in the research such as: a variety of reading strategies, read alouds, think alouds, paired reading, increasing quality-reading time, professional development, and promoting self-efficacy.

After elementary school it is a challenge for some students to be able to read and learn old strategies (Moats, 2001). If reading strategies are not taught and developed in the primary grades, then it can affect students all the way to high school.

Comprehension Strategy Glove is an approach that was used in a primary elementary classroom. The teacher constructed different types of icons to place on the glove and

provided questions that went along with the glove. Each set of icons and questions went with a type of glove for example there is the pre-reading glove. There are many different variations on how to use the Comprehension Strategy Glove. The glove proved to be a benefit to the students' overall ability to comprehend stories (Newman, 2002).

Martin and Martin (2001) provided suggestions for practiced reading instruction before starting the reading activities and to use during the reading activities, such as scaffolding and coaching. They suggested two literature response activities called *character cubing* and *character books*. Cubing helps the students to learn about a character with six different prompts. The students are asked to describe the character, compare the character, associate with the character, and then to analyze, apply, and argue for or against the character. Working in small groups, focusing on one prompt, then sharing with the whole class does accomplish this task. Eventually, the goal is for the students to work independently on each prompt. Book making helps the students to analyze the character. By making the book the student can put the character into parts on each page to show how he or she was created in the story.

A report in *The Scholastic News* (2001) provided seven strategies useful in building the reading power of the student. The seven strategies are using a reading journal, personal connections, building vocabulary, fact and opinion, problems and solutions, posing questions, and sequencing. Also provided are activity sheets for each strategy and teaching guidelines to help teachers with struggling readers.

Marlene Asselin (2002) gave a recommendation to support and improve students' comprehension strategies. She discusses two types of research that has been done on

comprehension: the processes used by proficient readers and instructional strategies used by teachers. Processes include a reader's prior knowledge or background. A reader's prior knowledge can affect how he/she infers what is being read. Instructional strategies come in three types: single instructional strategies, multi-dimensional strategies, and direct instruction to teach strategies.

Good, Simmons, and Smith (1998) focused on four main areas of reading skills: phonological awareness, alphabetic understanding, phonological reading, and accuracy and fluency with connected text. Their main idea was to implement interventions early enough so that the "trajectory" (a reading process that is continuously smooth and progresses through Kindergarten to Fifth grade) of a student is not diminished. The primary grades are the most opportune time for positive early reading skill experiences.

According to Mastropieri, Leinart, and Thomas (1999) reading fluency needs to be a focus in the primary classroom. The researchers believed that fluency is left behind comprehension and decoding. The intervention they used was called repeated reading. Repeated reading is asking a student to read one passage of a book at his/her reading level several times until that child is fluent in reading the passage. The researchers found that there is a positive correlation between fluency and comprehension. As fluency increases, so does comprehension. Vaughn (2001) focused on comprehension and fluency interventions called collaborative strategic reading (CSR) and partner reading (PR). Collaborative strategic reading includes four components, preview, click and clunk, get the gist, and wrap-up. One strategy is introduced each week and they are modeled and practiced in the classroom. Partner reading is when a fluent reader is paired with a less fluent reader. The fluent reader is responsible for reading the text

first, listening to their partner read, and helping their partner with unknown words. This helps the less fluent reader becomes more responsible for his/her actions during their reading.

Another approach is reading aloud in the classroom to all students by the teacher. Research has shown “that teaching modeling of strategic reading is a critical component of reading comprehension instruction” (Smolkin & Donovan, 2001, p. 2). Reading to young children by their teachers can be a benefit to all students. There are many goals that can be attained by reading to students in an educational setting (Blok, 1999). Quellette and Dagostino’s (1999) primary goal in their study was to research the effects of reading aloud to students with low reading ability on their development of story structure and reading comprehension. They believe that “when young children take an active part in read aloud experiences, they demonstrate improved oral language, more complete story comprehension, and increased awareness of the structural aspects of the story” (p. 73).

Wilhelm (1999) stated that think-alouds could help students develop inferencing skills. Wilhelm stated think-alouds make it possible for students to visualize mental processes. Teachers model their thinking while they read aloud to students. The steps for think-alouds are: a reader as a detective, read aloud a short story to students and think-aloud. The teacher has the students practice think-alouds on his/her own. They can make a chart to follow and check off the strategies as they go. They can also make comments and set goals for themselves.

An intervention called PALS (peer-assisted learning strategies) was implemented by Fuchs, Fuchs, and Yen (2001). They focused on students in first grade improving their

ability to be fluent readers. Two first grade students are paired together. One is the coach and one is the reader. They tutor each other with a series of activities that have been directed by the teacher beforehand. After a 22-week study they found that PALS promoted fluency and comprehension. In comparison, Griffin (2002) also found that, in her research, paired reading was influential in helping promote stronger reading abilities. Griffin studied 15 of her students. They were paired at the same reading level. Not only did their reading strategies increase, but so did their length of reading time.

In much of the research a large concern was a lack of quality reading time. Baker (2002) gives an overall layout of how a *Reading Workshop* should work and what it should look like in an elementary classroom. A *Reading Workshop* would include shared reading, reading aloud to students, small-group strategy lessons, and literature circles. Baker (2002) stated that the primary focus is supporting the students to use all the reading workshop time as quality time. The students are engaged in reading authentic literature for an extensive amount of time. Baker believes that it is important to use books that are appropriate for the students' level of reading. The teacher analyzes the books and questions how these books will help the students become better readers in the end. To help the students be a part of their reading and how they are improving, Baker designed a reading rubric. It is posted in the classroom so the students are able to reflect on their reading behaviors. Baker introduced reading strategies to her students by providing post-its, so the students could write down what strategies they were using when they came to an unknown word. Yadegari and Ryan (2002) designed a study to help inspire struggling readers by implementing the Intensive Reading and Writing program (I.R.W.). The program was set up to add an

additional thirty minutes to a typical classroom reading schedule. The students would receive 120 minutes of daily reading instruction. They also tried to integrate reading with math, social studies, and science. Nine different strategies were used throughout the day. Some of them are modeling, cross-age reading, and scaffolding.

Peterson and VanDerWege (2002) reported about a two-week professional development workshop on how to teach students to focus on reading strategies to improve their overall reading ability. Most of the teachers who attend were from schools that felt that single remedial reading programs were not working and wanted to stay away from the idea that a “*one-size fits-all*” reading program works. Besides having a developmental continuum, the teachers and district were asked to follow a comprehensive program which incorporates all the parts of a reading workshop program using the three-cueing system. Smith, Baker, and Qudeans (2001) stated that with professional development they learned that is not the change in curriculum, but the knowledge that the teacher has for the curriculum that improves students reading ability.

One could have all the reading strategies and approaches in place, but if a student does not feel confident with his or her reading he/she could still continue to struggle. Self-efficacy is the ability to believe that one can succeed at a particular task. The self-efficacy of a struggling reader is low and that in turn makes the student resist reading and learning reading strategies. McCabe and Margolis (2001) provided twenty-two suggestions on how to promote self-efficacy and motivation to struggling readers in the classroom.

After reviewing the literature, there is one common theme and that is addressing the issue of increasing reading abilities of primary students. All the approaches are

important reasons for educators to do the best they can to guarantee that students develop good reading abilities.

Project Objectives and Processes

As a result of extended and interactive read aloud time, comprehension strategies, and increased reading instructional time allotment during the period of September through December 2002, the students of the targeted first and third grade classes will increase their reading abilities to enhance their overall academic growth.

In order to complete the project objective, the following processes are necessary:

- (1) Materials for interactive and extended read aloud time will be developed (Quellette & Dagostino, 1999).
- (2) A series of learning activities that address comprehension strategies will be developed for reading instruction time (Martin & Martin, 2001; Newman, 2002; Vaughn, 2000).
- (3) Reading instructional time will be increased from 60 minutes per day to 90 minutes per day (Yadegari & Ryan, 2002; Vaughn, 2000).

Project Action Plan

September

- Send home parent consent form and letter (first week of school).
- Administer Student Reading Attitude Survey (second week of school).
- Send home Parent Survey (second week of school).
- Complete Running Records
- Complete Reading Strategy Checklist (second week of school).
- Create Comprehension Strategy Gloves.
- Create standard character cube.

- Prepare materials for character books.
- Prepare materials for CSR.
 - ❖ CSR poster
 - ❖ Clunk cards
- Introduce Collaborative Strategic Reading (CSR) strategies.
- Develop interactive read aloud activities.
 - ❖ Role playing
 - ❖ Listen, Sketch, Write
 - ❖ Story Sequence activity
 - ❖ Metacognitive discussion
- Schedule 90 minutes for reading into daily schedule.

October

- Select five targeted students for homogeneous reading groups.
- Complete Running Records weeks one and three.
- Begin read aloud activities (throughout study).
- Engage students in small group comprehension activities:
 - ❖ Comprehension Strategy Gloves
 - ❖ Character cubes and character books
 - ❖ CSR

November

- Complete Running Records weeks one and three.
- Complete Reading Strategy Checklist week two.
- Continue read aloud activities.
- Continue comprehension strategy activities.

December

- Complete last set of Running Records (week one).
- Complete Reading Strategy Checklist (week three).
- Administer Student Reading Attitude Survey.
- Analyze data taken from surveys, checklists and anecdotal records (running records).
- Review and assess data

Methods of Assessment

To document students' progress in reading the following methods of assessment will be used: a behavioral checklist, anecdotal records, and surveys of parents and students. Checklists involve analyzing students' reading strategies for possible improvement. Similarly, running records of students' knowledge of words, letter-sound patterns, and comprehension will be maintained using anecdotal notes of student behavior. Lastly, two surveys will be used to: understand how students feel about reading and measure the frequency of in-home parental support.

The Student Reading Attitude Survey (Appendix A) was designed to collect data from participants on how they feel about reading. The survey was administered by the researchers in two parts, one in September and one in December. The survey was administered to 47 students on a volunteer basis from the targeted first and third grade classrooms. Researchers read each of the eight items from Part One and Part Two, one at a time, and instruct students to circle one of the symbols that they thought best fit their feelings. The Student Reading Attitude Survey was intended to assist researchers with understanding how students in the targeted classes felt about reading. Researchers used the results to select appropriate interventions.

The Parent Reading Survey (Appendix B) was designed for the parents to answer questions about how they were spending reading time at home with their child. The Parent Reading Survey was sent home to all the parents of the targeted first and third grade students. The survey was sent in an individual envelope with a return envelope. It was sent home at the beginning of the year/study. There was a letter attached asking the parents to fill out the survey and to make any additional comments. Then parents placed it in the provided envelope, sealed it, and returned it to school. The Parent Reading Survey was needed to gather information on how much time was spent reading at home.

The Reading Strategy Checklist (Appendix C) was designed to show evidence of which strategies the targeted first and third grade students use. The checklist was administered to 5 first grade students and 5 third grade students. The teacher used the checklist at the beginning, middle, and end of the study. The classroom teacher/researcher selected books for the students reading level before meeting with a student one on one. At the meeting the student selected one book to read aloud out of the 3. While the student was reading the classroom teacher/researcher checked the appropriate box for each strategy. The Reading Strategy Checklist was needed to analyze what strategies the targeted students may lack and need to improve.

The Running Record (Appendix D) was designed to document students' progress in reading and comprehension. The Running Record was administered by the researchers, once every two weeks beginning in September and ending in December, to five first grade and five third grade students in the targeted classroom. Researchers used the Running Record while analyzing each child's reading and comprehension level

on an individual basis. As a part of this process, researchers selected a book and asked participating students to read aloud for at least 100 words. While the student read, researchers used the Running Record to record students' accuracy, self-correction, repeats, omits, and errors. Afterwards, researchers asked the student to retell the story as they recorded the participants' response as either *complete/almost complete, adequate, or limited*. The Running Records are intended to assist researchers with understanding students' knowledge of words, letter-sound patterns, and comprehension.

CHAPTER 4

PROJECT RESULTS

Historical Descriptions of Interventions

The object of this project was to increase the reading abilities of the targeted first and third grade students. The total number of student participants for the targeted first and third grade classroom was ten. Due to attrition (placement in reading and moving out of district) the total number of targeted students was seven. The implementation of extended and interactive read aloud time, comprehension strategies, and increased reading instructional time allotment was selected to effect the desired changes.

Several things were done to implement the project. First, to find out how the students felt about reading a Student Reading Attitude Survey (Appendix A) was administered in September and in December. A Parent Survey (Appendix B) was also sent home in September to be completed and sent back. Running Records (Appendix D) were administered to the targeted students to record their reading level at the beginning of the study and also every two weeks until December. A Reading Strategy Checklist (Appendix C) was also used to determine what strategies the targeted students were using during reading in September, November, and December.

An extended and interactive read aloud time was incorporated in the first and third grade language arts period. The language arts period went from 60 minutes to 90

minutes. During this extended time, read aloud was the focal point. During read aloud several interactive activities were used. Students had an opportunity to role-play while the researcher was reading the text. Students were also asked to retell what was happening in the text by role-playing. *Listen, Sketch, and Write* was an activity that the students completed while a read aloud of a picture book was used. This activity incorporated active listening skills; comprehension of what was being read, and the ability to write about it. Story sequencing was used in two different ways. In the first grade-targeted room, the researcher read the text aloud and chose pictures from the main events of the story. Then she asked the students to put them in sequential order. In the third grade-targeted room the researcher read aloud a chapter and then the students verbally discussed the story sequence of the chapter. The last interactive read aloud activity was metacognitive discussions. The researcher used modeling and think alouds to show the students types of questioning one might ask themselves before, during, and after reading. All of the activities for the extended and interactive read aloud were started in September and used until December for research purposes.

Comprehension strategies were implemented September through December. Only the five third grade-targeted students were introduced to Collaborative Strategic Reading (CSR). During the targeted students' reading group meetings they used the five strategies that make up CSR: preview, click and clunk, get the gist, and wrap up. This strategy was to help improve their written comprehension at their reading level. The strategy also helped the students to become aware of unknown words and how to use strategies to find out the meaning of the unknown words. This strategy was used

through the end of October. The researchers thought that this particular intervention was too complex to be used in the first grade setting with first grade text.

Character books were used with the five-targeted third and first grade students. The targeted third grade students used this strategy with three reading books within their small reading group. A character book was used in the first grade room as a whole group read aloud activity. The character books helped the students to focus on one character in a book and to analyze that character in different ways. The character book included written pages and illustrations to match.

Character cubes were used with the five-targeted third grade students to develop a view of a character in six different ways-only in a written form. The *character cubes* were not used with the first grade-targeted students.

Comprehension gloves were used with the five-targeted first grade students in a large and small group atmosphere. The narrative glove was introduced to a large group within a week's time. During these large group times, each component (setting, characters, main events, problem, and solution) was broken down. They were then used in the targeted students' reading group as a follow-up activity after reading the text. The pre-reading glove was introduced in the small group after the narrative glove to be used as a pre-reading activity. The gloves were not used with the third grade-targeted students because the researcher felt that the strategies used with the *comprehension glove* were already in place at the third grade level.

Presentation and Analysis of Results

In order to assess the effects of the targeted students' reading levels Running Records were taken two times a month throughout the study. At the beginning of the

study the targeted first grade students were 3 levels below the average first grade student. The targeted third grade students were 2-3 levels below the average third grade student. Upon review of the last running record in December (Figure 4.1) all targeted students had made gains. Within the targeted first grade students, one was at the December benchmark of a "D" and two had gone above at an "E". The targeted third grade students had moved up within their reading levels as well. Three of the students were at the December benchmark of an "N". One student, although not at the benchmark, moved from a "J" to an "M".

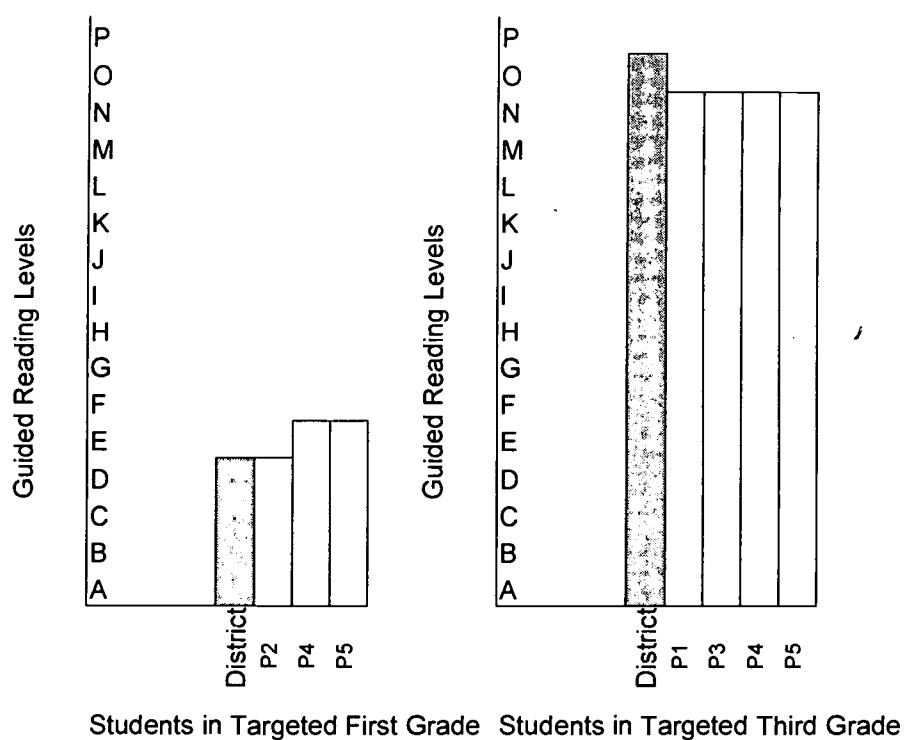


Figure 4.1 A Comparison Of District And Students' Guided Reading Levels For Targeted First And Third Grade Classes Post Intervention

The Reading Strategy Checklist was administered for the last time in the study in December. This checklist was used to track the targeted students' reading strategies used while reading. When analyzing the results of the Reading Strategy Checklist from

September through December, all the students had improved in using reading strategies while reading. The results of table 4.1 show that all of the targeted students were using some strategy during their reading.

In first grade the targeted students were beginning to use context clues within the text. They consistently used their picture clues. The targeted first grade students were still working on decoding unknown words. Two out of the three students knew their sight words, as well as reread the text to make corrections. They continued to pause frequently while reading and still appealed for help sometimes.

Out of the four targeted third grade students, three consistently used context and picture clues, while one targeted student used those strategies sometimes. Half of the targeted students decoded unknown words consistently. All of the third grade targeted students knew their sight words for their grade. Half reread the text for self-correction consistently. All of the targeted students sometimes appealed for help and paused frequently.

Table 4.1

Frequency and Reading Strategies Observed Using Class Checklist for First and Third Grade Targeted Students Post Intervention

Reading Strategies Used	Never		Frequency		Consistently	
	1 st	3 rd	Sometimes 1 st	3 rd	1 st	3 rd
Uses Context Clues	-	-	2	1	1	3
Uses Picture Clues	-	-	-	1	3	3
Decodes	-	-	2	2	1	2
Knows Sight Words	-	-	1	-	2	4
Rereads for Self Correction	-	-	1	2	2	2
Pauses Frequently	-	-	3	4	-	-
Appeals for Help	-	-	2	4	1	-

N=7

The Student Attitude Survey was administered at the beginning and at the end of the study. Table 4.2 shows the results of the December survey. The first grade students continued to feel happy about reading overall. The amount of first grade students feeling uncomfortable when they came to an unknown word had improved. Looking at the third grade data many of their attitudes had changed over the study. There was an improved change when it came to how they felt about answering questions about the text and how they felt about reading school materials. When coming to an unknown word, more students felt *o.k.* rather than *sad* or *happy*.

Table 4.2

First and Third Grade Participant Results of Student Attitude Survey December 2002

Reading Topics Surveyed	<u>Feelings Surveyed</u>					
	Happy		O.K.		Sad	
	First	Third	First	Third	First	Third
Reading During Free Time	10	13	9	6	2	3
Reading Different Genre	14	18	6	4	1	1
Answering Questions About Reading	9	13	8	5	4	2
Reading at School	10	18	10	3	1	1
Reading School Materials	15	16	5	6	1	1
Working in Reading Group	9	14	10	7	2	1
Reading Aloud	11	12	4	8	6	2
Come to a Unknown Word	6	3	11	15	4	4
N=49 (n=43)						

Conclusions and Recommendations

Based on the presentations and analysis of the data on increasing students' reading abilities there was marked improvement throughout the study. The series of learning activities that addressed comprehension strategies appeared to help the students feel more confident when answering questions about their reading. The first grade students were able to use the visual cues from the comprehension gloves on their own. Upon implementing the CSR strategy, the third grade students were able to come to an unknown word and to use the strategies to find the pronunciation and the meaning. They seemed to find it more beneficial to summarize a story after they had learned how to use "get the gist" and "wrap up" in the CSR strategy. The character

books and character cubes also had a positive effect on the students' reading comprehension. By focusing on one characters development throughout the book, the students could better understand the whole text.

The extended and interactive read aloud times in the targeted classrooms benefited the students as well. By looking at the Student Reading Survey some of the students changed how they felt when having to answer questions about comprehension in class. The metacognitive discussions during the read aloud time allowed the students to watch the teacher "think aloud". They were able to interact with the teacher as well. This increased their confidence about answering comprehension questions.

The Listen, Sketch and Write (LSW) and role-playing also helped in the achievement of raising the students' reading abilities. The LSW made the students think about what was being read to them and then they were able to decide how they were going to interpret that information on paper. The student's role-playing during and after read aloud permitted them to show their comprehension of the text.

Last, being able to add thirty minutes to the language arts time was a very positive solution strategy. When a teacher can spend more time guiding students with lower reading abilities, it will most likely improve their reading abilities and reading level. This was shown in the Running Records. Five out of the seven-targeted students were reading at grade level by the end of the study

Our recommendations include modifications, and improvement for future inquiries; drawbacks will be noted as well. The modifications are small; however, they would be helpful if this problem were to be researched again. We would choose to use the comprehension gloves only in a first grade setting. Unless the targeted students in

third grade had no sense of the elements of a story, the *comprehension gloves* would be more helpful and appropriate in first grade. The *character cube* could be changed somewhat. The language it uses, such as “associate” and “apply” were difficult for the students to comprehend. We would change “associate” to the phrase “remind me of” and “apply” could be changed to “doing” or “what does the character do in the story?”. We also discussed taking out the term “analyze”. This solution strategy asked for the students to analyze the character by asking the question “What makes this character who he/she is?”. We believe that analyzing would be for a higher-level reader.

In the area of drawbacks, we felt like most of the interventions were more useful with third grade students than first grade students. At the beginning of the study, the researchers were both teaching third grade, however, one of the researchers moved to first grade which changed the dynamics a little. When we started the study the solution strategies and interventions were suited for a primary level. As time progressed it seemed that most of the interventions were for late primary instead of beginning primary. Also, the problem was to improve the students’ reading ability. The reason we chose this problem was because our major concern was transfer of reading in language arts to math, science, and social studies. In first grade children are just beginning to become readers and there is not a lot of individual reading in other subject areas besides reading—at least not as much as in third.

The improvements we, as researchers, would make are staying with one grade. If there were different grade levels, we would have interventions apply to both grades or have separate interventions for each grade level. We would also create another method of assessment to check comprehension for the targeted students. The running

record does have a small section for comprehension, but it mainly focuses on ability level and skills that are used when coming to an unknown word.

Overall, we felt this research project supported all the students involved. It also opened our eyes to all the possible solution strategies that are out available to us. In the future we would like to try other interventions that we encountered in our research, but we will continue to use the interventions from the study to benefit other students with low reading abilities.

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Appendices

Appendix A
Student Reading Attitude Survey
 Part I

Read the questions below and circle how you feel about each question?

	Happy <input type="checkbox"/>	O.K. <input type="radio"/>	Sad <input type="checkbox"/>
1. How do you feel about spending your free time reading?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. How do you feel about reading different kinds of books?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. How do you feel when the teacher asks you questions about what you read?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. How do you feel about reading at school?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Comments:

Student Reading Attitude Survey Part II

Read the questions below and circle how you feel about each question

	Happy <input type="checkbox"/>	O.K. <input type="radio"/>	Sad <input type="checkbox"/>
5. How do you feel about reading schoolbooks?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6. How do you feel when it's time to work in reading group?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7. How do you feel about reading aloud in class?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8. How do you feel when you see a word you don't know?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Comments:

Appendix B
Parent Reading Survey

Circle one response for each of the following eight items.

	Regularly	Very Often	Seldom	Never
1. How often do you read to your child?	1	2	3	4
2. How often does your child read <i>to you</i> ?	1	2	3	4
3. How often do you correct your child's mistakes while reading together?	1	2	3	4
4. How often do you help your child with a word when he/she appeals for help?	1	2	3	4
5. How often do you feel frustrated while reading with your child?	1	2	3	4
6. How often does your child seem frustrated when reading?	1	2	3	4
7. How often do you spend time reading with your child?	1	2	3	4

Comments:

Appendix C
Reading Strategy Checklist

Participant # _____

Reading Strategies used:	- Never	√ Sometimes	+ Consistently
1. Uses context clues	-	√	+
2. Uses picture clues	-	√	+
3. Decodes	-	√	+
4. Knows sight words	-	√	+
5. Rereads for self correction	-	√	+
6. Pauses frequently	-	√	+
7. Appeals for help	-	√	+

Comments:

Appendix D

RUNNING RECORD							
Name:			Date:				
Title:			Level:				
$\frac{rw}{e} = \frac{\text{error}}{\text{rate}}$		$\frac{e + sc}{sc} = \frac{sc}{\text{ratio}}$		Accuracy Rate: _____ 95-100% Easy _____ 90-94% Instructional _____ Below 90% Frustration			
Self Correction Rate: _____ 1:1 - 1:2 Excellent _____ 1:3 - 1:5 Good		Comments:					
Error Rate 1:100 1:50 1:35 1:25 1:20 1:17 1:14 1:12.5 1:11.75 1:10 1:9 1:8 1:7 1:6 1:5 1:4 1:3 1:2	% Accuracy 99 98 97 96 95 94 93 92 91 90 89 87.5 85.5 83 80 75 66 50	Comprehension: _____ Student's response demonstrates knowledge of: _____ Character _____ Setting _____ Problem _____ Solution _____ Personal Connection _____ Factual (Literal) _____ Inferential		(Empty space for comments)			
Page				E	SC	Error- M S V	SC- M S V



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