INCREASING READING COMPREHENSION OF ELEMENTARY STUDENTS

THROUGH FLUENCY-BASED INTERVENTIONS

Veda S. Neumann, B.A.
Dorothy K. Ross, B.A.
Anita F. Slaboch, B.A.

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ABSTRACT

The authors of this action research project report implemented oral reading fluency-based interventions for the purpose of improving students' reading comprehension. Six students in grade three, six students in grade five and six students in grade six participated in the study from Monday, August 27 through Friday, December 7, 2007.

Researchers observed that in the targeted reading groups, deficiencies in any element of oral reading fluency were associated with reading comprehension problems. The teacher researchers used the following tools to document evidence; Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) Oral Reading Fluency (ORF), which indicated that 50% of students at Site A and 83% of students at Site B were below benchmark score for oral reading fluency. The comprehension based assessment (Choose-A-Title) resulted in 61% of the students choosing the incorrect title. As a result of the student survey, it indicated that 17% of the students responded "almost never" when asked "I think others like my reading". Students' struggles with accuracy, rate, and prosody revealed deficiencies that inhibited the processing of meaning.

The interventions implemented were three 20-minute weekly sessions consisting of one session of reader's theater activities including choral reading, echo reading, and poetry, and two sessions of partner reading during which student pairs engaged in repeated oral reading and reading along silently while listening as oral reading was modeled. Teachers are encouraged to model fluent reading illustrating proper rate and accuracy. Reading and rereading exercises such as reading with a model reader, choral reading, reader's theater, and partner reading can improve fluency (Vaughn & Linan-Thompson, 2004).

As a result of the interventions, students demonstrated increased awareness of the three elements of oral reading fluency: accuracy, rate, and prosody. Students practiced self-monitoring these elements while participating in paired reading and cooperative learning groups. The post data revealed that there was a decrease in students' positive responses to "I read with expression and feeling". Thirty-three percent of students responded "almost always" on pre documentation and 28% on post documentation. The "usually" category declined from 50% to 44%. Students responded best to interventions that involved repeated reading in the form of rehearsal followed by performance, such as choral poetry reading and reader's theater. Students demonstrated engagement in the activities while becoming more realistic in self-evaluation

CHAPTER 1

PROBLEM STATEMENT AND CONTEXT

General Statement of the Problem

The purpose of this action research project was to improve reading comprehension through oral reading fluency. Students' problems with reading comprehension are revealed through difficulty with one or more of the three elements of oral reading fluency: automaticity, accuracy, and prosody. Fluency rates were determined through DIBELS Oral Reading Fluency assessment. Comprehension was assessed by requiring students to identify the main idea of a grade-level passage. Students reported their attitudes about oral reading by responding to a six question survey.

Immediate Context of the Problem

Site A

Site A is a parochial elementary school established in 1957 located in a northwest suburb of a major city. This parish was established in October of 1955. At that time, the pastor envisioned the creation of a "fully functioning faith community" encompassing the church, a convent, a rectory, and school. The parish school opened its doors for classes in September of 1957 for grades 1-6. As the school population increased to about 1,000 students, construction of three additions were underway including eight classrooms, two balcony classrooms, and a junior high wing. Today, the day school services over 500 students and includes preschool, kindergarten, and grades 1-8. Grades 1-4 are self-contained instructional classrooms and grades

5-8 are departmentalized. An extended-day after school program is also available. The faculty consists of 41 teachers and includes full-time instructors of library, physical education, computer, art, and music. The school has co-curricular coordinators or directors including an athletic director, band coordinator, and choral coordinator. Co-curricular programs include foreign language, student council, student newspaper, student yearbook and service outreach groups (Site A school website, 2007).

The school's total student body includes a population of 507. Of these 507 students, 252 (50%) are males and 255 (50%) are females. The graduation rate at Site A is consistent at 100% yearly. The students display an average-daily attendance rate of 96%, with a mobility rate of 8**%** transferring out and 16% transferring in, and a truancy rate of 0**%.** The predominate ethnic representation is caucasian. The ethnicity breakdown is shown in Table 1 (Site A school report, 2006).

Table 1

Ethnicity at Site A (n=507)

	Asian	Black/African American	Caucasian	Hispanic	Multiracial	Native American
%	3	1	80	5	12	0
n	13	3	407	24	59	1

The school's teaching staff consists of 28 full-time teachers. Of the full-time teachers, 2 (7%) are males and 26 (93%) are females. There is a total of three teacher aides working at Site

A. Of these three aides, one (33%) is working full time, and two (66%) are working part time. All of the teaching staff are Caucasian. The percent of teachers with masters degrees is approximately 22% (n=28). The average years of employment is at six years. There is a 19.5:1 student to teacher ratio and the teachers have a 97% average-daily attendance rate (Site A school report, 2007).

Daily instruction involves all core subjects including religious education, language arts, mathmatics, science, and social studies. In the curriculum the greatest emphasis is in Communication Arts across grade levels. The breakdown of instructional minutes is shown in Table 2 (Site A handbook, 1997).

Table 2

Breakdown of Instructional Minutes

Curriculum Area	Primary Level	Intermediate Level	Upper Level
Religious Education	150	150	175
Art/Drama/Music	120	120	120
Communication Arts	850	650	550
Health/Physical Education	130	130	130
Mathematics	200	200	225
Science	100	200	225
Social Studies	100	200	225

Students in grades 3, 5, and 7 take the Terra Nova Multiple Assessment Achievement Tests as mandated by the Archdiocese of Chicago. This test differs from the California

Achievement Test or the Iowa Test of Basic Skills because 20% of the test students are required to provide a written response as opposed to a multiple choice option (Site A home report, 2006).

The Terra Nova scores indicate that Site A's students score at or above the national norms in all subjects and at all grade levels. Terra Nova Achievement test results based on national percentiles for 2005/2006 years are shown in Table 3 (Site A home report, 2006).

Table 3

Terra Nova Achievement test Results Based on National Percentiles. 2005/2006 Comparison

	Grade 3	Grade 5	Grade 7
Reading	66/79	83/85	81/76
Language	70/77	84/86	89/86
Mathematics	77/83	78/83	83/76
Total	73/83	82/85	87/81
Science	60/78	65/80	71/77
Social Study	67/68	75/81	85/80

School personnel includes a principal, an assistant principal, 28 full-time teachers (PK-8), 3 teachers aides (PK), 2 librarians, 3 secretaries/clerks, and 3 janitors and or maintenance workers. There are a total of 100 volunteers. Of these volunteers, 20 (20%) work on a regular basis, 70 (70%) work periodically, and 10 (10%) work with Pre-K only. There is no registered nurse on the staff (Site A school report, 2006).

Site A is affiliated with the Catholic Church and has many programs available which help

to serve the school community. Programs like Rainbows for all God's Children and Kids Who Care, assist those who are in need in the school community and beyond. Rainbows for all God's Children is a year-long discussion for students of have experienced a loss through either death or divorce. Fourth through eighth grade students participate in service learning projects, coordinate the Saint Angela's Christmas party, as well as, the Christmas bazaar. In addition, each year a theatrical production, Summer Stock, is performed by 5th through 8th grade students. The show is cast in the spring and rehearsals continue through the summer. This program introduces students to the elements of staging including set design and building, lighting, choreography, and acting (Site A family directory, 2006).

The building complex includes the church, a rectory and gathering space, 33 classrooms, 1 science lab, 1 computer lab, 2 gymnasiums, 1 faculty lounge, 1 business office, 4 meeting rooms, 1 art room, 1 music room, 1 library, a playground and another parking lot play area (Site A school website).

The school has an approved technology plan in place. The school has a local area network and uses a wireless network. All administrators, teachers, and librarians have access to the internet. Students have monitored access to the internet. Teachers and parents have access to Pearson Centerpoint, which is a software program that maintains grades for students. In addition, a school e-mail system is utilized (Site A technology survey, 2006).

Site B

Site B is a parochial school located in a northwest suburb of a major city. The school has been a vital part of the community since 1925. It attracts students from a variety of the surrounding areas. While 63% (n=452) live within 1.5 miles of the school, 37% (n=268) live more than 1.5 miles from the school. Of the 720 students who attend the school, 52% (n=377) are male and 48% (n=343) are female. The predominate ethnic representation is Caucasian. The ethnicity breakdown is shown in Table 4 (Site B school report, 2006).

Table 4

Ethnicity at Site B by Percentage (n=720)

	Asian	Black/African American	Caucasian	Hispanic	Multiracial	Native American
%	2	0	94	3	1	0
n	15	0	677	23	5	0

At this time, 0% of the students are English Language Learners (ELL), even though 1% (7) of Site B's students was born outside of the United States. As there is no food service program, 0% of the students receive free lunches and 0% receives reduced lunches. A scholarship fund provides full tuition assistance for 1% (5) of the students and partial tuition assistance for 1% (4) of Site B's students. The average student daily attendance rate is 99% (Site B school report, 2006).

Of the 37 teachers at Site B, 100% are Caucasian and 100% are female, 41% (15) have a masters degree and 100% have a bachelors degree. The average teacher's salary is $34,000.00 and the mean year of employment is nine. There is a 17/1 student to teacher ratio and the teachers have a 95% average daily attendance rate (Site B school report, 2006).

Site B is a traditional 9/10 month school year with preschool, prekindergarten, and kindergarten self contained and 1st through 8th departmental. Programs are offered in art, library, physical education, computer, and LD/Remedial. Co-curricular programs are offered in athletics, band, chorus, foreign language, student council, school newspaper, school yearbook, and Rainbows. Site B offers a before school and extended day program for prekindergarten through 8th grade. In 2003 Site B received certificates from the Illinois State Board and The Office of Catholic Education (Site B school brochure, 1998). Site B's institutional development plan includes a school improvement plan, long range planning, and endowment fund (Site B school report, 2006). In the curriculum the greatest emphasis is in Communication Arts across grade levels. The breakdown of instructional minutes is described in Table 5 (Site B handbook, 1997).

Table 5

Weekly Instructional Minutes

Curriculum Area	Primary Level	Intermediate Level	Upper Level
Religious Education	150	150	175
Art/Drama/Music	120	120	120
Communication Arts	850	650	550
Health /Physical Education	130	130	130
Mathematics	200	200	225
Science	100	200	225
Social Studies	100	200	225

The Terra Nova scores in Table 6 indicate that Site B's students score at or above the national norms in all subjects and at all grade levels. Although all students of the Archdiocese take the same test each year, schools do not receive results with comparisons to other parochial schools. Since local public schools do not take the same test, comparisons with schools districts are not possible (Site B home report, 2006).

Table 6

Terra Nova Achievement Test Results Based on National Percentiles 2005/2006 Comparison

	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5	Grade 6	Grade 7
Number Taking Test	69	77/74	62/58	81/75	68/64
Reading	76	77/81	87/79	80/76	80/84
Language	78	81/75	83/86	82/81	88/92
Math	76	70/75	79/79	76/88	85/83
Total Score	78	76/78	84/84	82/83	85/87
Science	64	72/75	80/83	79/81	81/84
Social Studies	79	82/89	90/89	81/83	88/89

Site B's administrative staff consists of a principal and an assistant principal. There are six teacher aides employed at Site B, 67% (4) of whom have earned a bachelors degree and 33% (2) having earned some college. A full time staff member is employed for art, music, physical education and technology. Site B employs one librarian, one business manager, three secretaries/clerks, and three janitors/maintenance. Site B has co-curricular programs in athletics, band, chorus, foreign language, student council, school newspaper, school yearbook, and Rainbows. Additional activities that contribute to a well rounded educational experience include: sharing activities with inner city schools, scouting, art club, chess club, Battle of the Books, acolyte service, scholastic competitions, and fine arts presentations (Site B school report, 2006).

The original building for Site B was built in 1925. It is still standing today and is now considered the Elementary Grade Center which houses preschool through 4th grade. In the 1960s, a second building was constructed across the alley from the original and it is now

considered the Upper Grade Center and houses 5th through 8th grade. In 2002 a 7.5 million dollar renovation was completed on both buildings which added 5 classrooms, science lab, art room, computer lab, library, parish life center, and meeting rooms. Replacement windows, air conditioning, and updated wiring for technology were also installed (Site B school report, 2006 & school brochure, 1998).

Site C

Site C is a K-5 public school in the same suburban community. Opened in 1950 and expanded in 1995, Site C is one of five K-5 buildings. The Site C student enrollment of 399 includes 51% (n=205) boys and 49% (n=194) girls. Ethnicity at Site C is reported in Table 7.

Table 7

Ethnicity at Site C by Percentage (n=399)

Asian	Black / African American	Caucasian	Hispanic	Multiracial	Native American
4.8	0.0	93.5	1.3	0.5	0.0

Other information about the student population is reported in Table 8.

Table 8

Other Information by Percentage (n=399)

Low-Income	Limited-English Proficient	Chronic Truancy	Mobility	Attendance
1.0	1.3	0.0	2.3	95.1

The total of 37 teachers at Site C includes 34 (91.9%) females and 3 (8.1%) males. The 24 teaching assistants are female. One teacher is Asian-American, and the remainder of the Site C teaching staff is Caucasian.

There are three regular education classes of each grade level at Site C. Two kindergarten teachers provide three half-day sessions, staffing two morning classes and one afternoon class. Two additional classrooms serve kindergarten and first grade students with special physical or learning needs. Each special needs classroom is staffed by a teacher and assistants, with a total of two teachers and seven assistants working in the special needs K-1 classrooms. The autism resource program is staffed by two teachers and eleven assistants, divided into one primary and one intermediate classroom. A full-time early intervention position is shared by two teachers. One half-time teacher provides pullout support in reading or math for low-achieving second and third grade students. An instructional resource program for students identified for special education services is staffed by two teachers with three assistants. A teacher who divides time between two schools provides enrichment in math and reading to high ability primary students who participate in weekly pullout groups. One teacher provides daily math and reading instruction for gifted intermediate students.

The Site C staff includes three physical education teachers, two art teachers, two music teachers, and a foreign language teacher who divides time between two schools. The Learning Resource Center (LRC) is headed by a director who is also a certified teacher. Two half-time assistants and a full-time technologist complete the LRC staff. Additional staff members include two speech pathologists and two half-time social workers. A physical therapist and an occupational therapist work with the special needs population. Site C also houses a special education facilitator.

The district's average annual teacher salary is $61,257. Teachers have an average of 11.9 years teaching experience. At Site C, 25 (69%) teachers hold master's degrees and 12 (31%) are at the bachelor's level. Districtwide, the pupil - certified staff ratio is 12 to 1. Class sizes in regular education rooms range from 16 students per kindergarten classroom to 25 fifth grade students per classroom.

The core subjects at Site C are English / language arts, mathematics, science, and social science. The core subjects are taught daily, as shown in Table 9.

Table 9

Grades 1-5 Daily Instructional Minutes

English / language arts	144
Mathematics	57
Science	30
Social Science	30

All students participate weekly in one 45-minute art class and two 30-minute music classes. Students in grades 1 through 5 have four 30-minute physical education classes per week. Kindergartners have three 30-minute physical education classes a week. Beginning in second grade, students participate in the Foreign Language in the Elementary School program. French is taught in classrooms for 30 minutes twice a week.

Overall Illinois Standards Achievement Test performance at Site C in 2004-2005 was 87.7%, slightly above the district level of 87.5%. Table 10 shows improvement in the percentage of ISAT scores meeting or exceeding standards in 2004-2005 compared with 2003-2004.

Table 10

Percentage of ISAT Scores Meeting or Exceeding Standards

Grade	Subject	2003-2004	2004-2005
3	Reading	80.0	86.5
3	Math	91.8	100.0
4	Science	81.4	92.0

Site C's principal has served since 1999, and will soon complete her doctorate. The average annual salary of an administrator in the district is $120,313. There is no assistant principal at Site C, but one classroom teacher and one instructional resource teacher are designated to provide assistance when need arises. The office is staffed by one full-time secretary and one half-time office assistant. A registered nurse works as the full-time health assistant. These staff members are female. A full-time maintenance team of three men oversees the building and grounds. The staff members listed above are Caucasian except for one non-certified member of the office staff who is Asian-American.

Site C is the location of the district's STRIVE resource rooms. The STRIVE program serves students with autism and related disorders, supporting inclusion and providing special education services. Students with special needs are included in regular classroom activities as much as possible, and they are further integrated into the student community through voluntary peer-to-peer outreach programs such as the Circle of Friends model.

Site C is a single story building located in a neighborhood in which most houses were built after World War II. The school property is one block wide and two blocks deep. Originally L-shaped, the building received an addition in the mid-1990s that provided a new LRC, a separate computer laboratory, a second gymnasium, and additional classrooms. The renovation resulted in the building's present rectangular configuration. The four hallways surround a central

courtyard that has been the focus of improvement projects in which teachers, students, and parents have collaborated. Over several years these teams have added features such as landscaping and a small pond, along with paths, benches, and a picnic table.

The construction project completed in 1995 included a computer laboratory to accommodate all the students in a class, with teachers scheduling time as needed. In addition, every classroom is equipped with at least five student computers. Recently, a laptop cart that can be reserved for classroom use has been added to the available technology resources.

There is a blacktop and an intermediate playground at the northeast end of the building. Another blacktop adjoins the primary playground at the southwest corner of the building. The remaining land consists of a large grassy field that is used for physical education activities and extracurricular activities such as park district youth soccer practices and games.

Based on examining evidence about the population demographics of the community in which Sites A, B, and C are located, the teacher researchers are confident that students' reading comprehension difficulties are not related to economic and social status. Reading instruction that focuses on decoding skills and lower order thinking neglects the development of reading comprehension in the true sense of reading for meaning. In many cases, students are not taught strategies that build a framework for reading comprehension by engaging in higher order thinking (Zimmerman & Hutchins, 2003).

Through informal observation and DIBELS scores Site A and B teachers report that the majority of their students who struggle with comprehension perform in the low average to below average range in reading ability. Their comprehension concerns can most likely be linked to poor reading foundation skills such as decoding, phonemic awareness, and fluency skills.

At Site C, many students are well-prepared to acquire decoding skills. Primary teachers

have incorporated guided reading practices into the daily reading block, using DIBELS assessments in August, January, and May to measure individual growth. Students are screened for weekly challenge pullout on the basis of DIBELS scores and performance on special classroom identification lessons incorporating reading comprehension and higher order thinking, followed by running records with a comprehension component. Students who demonstrate good comprehension also have high DIBELS scores. Other students with equally high DIBELS scores do not demonstrate good reading comprehension. Teachers at Site C find that implementing reading instruction to improve students' reading comprehension is challenging and complex. Poor decoding skills are the cause of some students' reading comprehension problems, but good decoding skills are not always associated with good comprehension.

Local Context of the Problem

Site A, Site B, and Site C are all located in the same northwest suburban area. The community has a population of 37,274 people. The 2000 census listed the population as 38,114 indicating the population has remained relatively stable. The median income is $82,092 and the median age is 42. Per the census, 92% of the population graduated from high school and 46% graduated from college.

There are 13,438 households and an average household size of 2.6 persons. The crime index suggests the risk of certain types of crime occurring in this community as compared to the national average. The national average for each crime equals a score of 100. The total crime index equals 37 of which the following categories are listed; Personal (28), Murder (7), Rape (38), Robbery (11), Assault (51), Property (54), Burglary (61), Larceny (64), and MV Theft

(27). The census listed an employment rate of 97%. The work force is considered 81% white collar and 19% blue collar. The types of employment are shown in Table 11.

Table 11

Type of Employment by percentage

Manager/Professional	50
Sales/Administration	30
Production/Repair	7
Operators/Laborers	5
Service Occupation	8

Sites A, B, and C are located in a suburb a few miles northwest of a major city. Convenient access to the city contributed to the growth of the town from its beginnings in the nineteenth century as a small farming community. In the 1870s a businessman secured a rail connection between the small town and the city. Well-maintained nineteenth century homes that still ring the uptown area were constructed in the years that followed, as locally grown produce and manufactured goods were sent into the city by rail and the local economy grew.

Home building expanded from this central area, taking over farm land through the first three decades of the twentieth century. The Great Depression that began in 1929 halted growth until around 1950, when the post-World War II building boom pushed into undeveloped land to the north, west, and south.

Sites A and C serve neighborhoods in the south and west areas while Site B serves the central uptown area of postwar expansion. During the second half of the twentieth century

Georgians, ranch styles, and split level homes lined the blocks, with a few white frame farmhouses scattered among them. In recent years, the unavailability of building lots and continuing demand for the area's proximity to the city and the regional airport have driven a market for replacing existing homes with larger ones. Most recently, the city is implementing a redevelopment plan renovating the town's uptown area with new retail establishments and restaurants.

The city has several recreational facilities including a leisure center, a community center, an ice arena, a driving range, batting cages, a nature center, a senior center, a dog park, a skate park, an art center, and three swimming pools.

The mission statement of Site A expresses the following.

Mary, Seat of Wisdom, believing that our children are our greatest resource, is committed to both excellence in education and the holistic development of the child. An integral part of Mary, Seat of Wisdom is the faith community, which actively involves itself in the fostering of Christian values and serves as a role model of Catholicism in action. Mary, Seat of Wisdom strives to empower its students with the knowledge, values, and skills which will enable them to become active participants and effective leaders in both the church and world community."

The mission statement of Site B expresses the following.

St. Paul of the Cross Parish School is committed to reach out through prayer, service, and education to the needs of the community. In this supportive atmosphere, students are encouraged and challenged by the partnership of parents and teachers to use their unique abilities to be lifelong, contributing Catholic Christians.

The public elementary school district has an enrollment of 4,400 K-8 students. The mission of the district is “to enable all students to achieve their full potential as they develop the skills, knowledge, and attitudes to live successful, socially responsible lives in a changing global economy.” The mission statement of Site C expresses that “In partnership with the community, (Site C’s) mission is to provide opportunities that challenge all children to reach their potential in a safe and supportive environment.” At the district level and at the building level, the slogan “Meeting the Needs of the Whole Child” reflects a philosophy of promoting social and emotional development along with academic growth.

A superintendent oversees the district’s two 6-8 middle schools, five K-5 elementary schools, and one early childhood special education center. Two assistant superintendents serve the district. Their responsibilities are divided, with one assistant superintendent for curriculum and instruction, and one assistant superintendent for human resources. Each middle school has a principal and an assistant principal. The five K-5 schools and the early childhood center are headed by principals. The two largest K-5 buildings share one assistant principal.

In 2003-2004, local property taxes provided $35,582,243 toward expenditures of $46,514,806. Despite efforts to control expenses, expenditures continued to outpace sources of revenue. The passage of a referendum in 2007 averted the need to cut $1,500,000 from the 2007-2008 budget. The most recent previous referendum passed in 1996. The focus of that successful campaign was to build a second middle school.

In the K-5 buildings, there are at least five student computers and one computer for the teacher in each classroom. Computer laboratories in K-5 schools accommodate about 30 students during sessions scheduled by the teachers. Laptop carts are the latest convenience for bringing technology into the classroom. The carts are equipped with 20 laptops. There are six laptop carts

at each middle school and there are at least two laptop carts at each K-5 building.

The demographic statistics confirm the teacher reasearchers' observations that students' deficiences are not related to economic and social issues. The majority of students at Sites A, B, and C come to school well prepared for learning.

National Context of the Problem

Research reveals that elementary-school children exhibit reading insufficiency to such a degree that it affects their ability to successfully learn (U.S. Department of Education, 2003). When students struggle to read fluently, cognitive processes are affected and students fail to fully process meaning (Rasinski, 2004). Improvement in the fluency elements of accuracy, rate, and expression increase students' reading comprehension because dysfluency is an indicator of problems with reading comprehension (Kuhn, 2004).

CHAPTER 2

PROBLEM DOCUMENTATION

Evidence of the Problem

The purpose of this action research project was to improve reading comprehension by promoting the development of students' oral reading fluency. Eighteen students in grades third, fifth, and sixth participated in the study from Monday, August 27 through Friday, December 7, 2007 during their reading class. The teacher researchers used the following tools to document evidence; Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) Oral Reading Fluency (ORF), a student survey, and a comprehension based assessment (Choose-a-Title). Documentation occurred from September 3, 2007 through September 7, 2007.

Student Survey

The purpose of this instrument was to assess students' attitudes toward their own oral reading fluency. All 18 participants received and completed the survey during their reading class on September 4, 2007 for a 100% return rate. To introduce the survey the teacher researchers modeled oral reading fluency by reading an age appropriate poem. Students were asked to focus on rate, accuracy, and prosody. The survey consisted of six positively phrased statements addressing students' self-assessment of their own oral reading. The likert scale included the following choices; almost always, usually, sometimes, and almost never. A copy of the student survey can be found in Appendix A.

The first statement on the survey asked students to respond to the statement, "I am able to read all of the words". Ninety-four percent could almost always (83%, n=15) or sometimes (11%, n=2) be able to read all of the words. One student responded "usually". No students responded "almost never". Please refer to Figure 1.

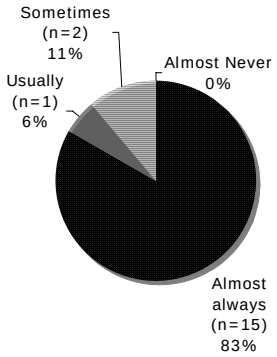


Figure 1; Survey Statement "I am able to read all of the words"

The second statement on the survey asked students to respond to the statement, "I pay attention to punctuation marks". Sixty-seven percent could sometimes (17%, n=3) or usually (50%, n=9) pay attention to punctuation marks. Six students responded "almost always" (33%, n=6). No students responded "almost never". Please refer to Figure 2.

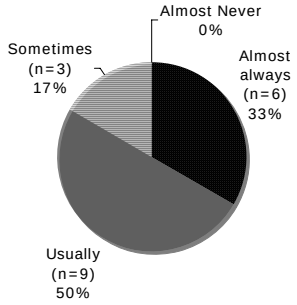


Figure 2; Survey Statement "I pay attention to punctuation marks"

The third statement on the survey asked students to respond to the statement, "I read with expression and feeling". Sixty-seven percent could sometimes (17%, n=3) or usually (50%, n=9) read with expression and feeling. Six students responded "almost always" (33%, n=6). No students responded "almost never". Please refer to Figure 3.

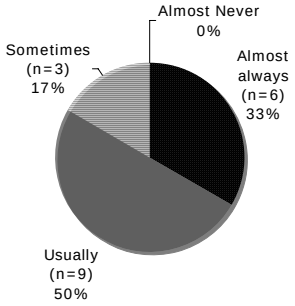


Figure 3; Survey Statement "I read with expression and feeling"

The fourth statement on the survey asked students to respond to the statement, "My reading is smooth and not too fast or not too slow". Ninety-four percent could almost always (50%, n=9) or usually (44%, n=8) read smoothly and not too fast or not too slow. One student responded "sometimes". No students responded "almost never". Please refer to Figure 4.

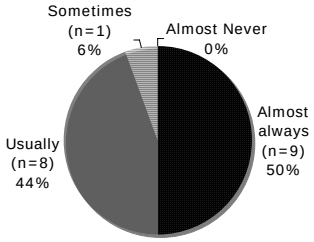


Figure 4; Survey Statement "My reading is smooth and not too fast or not too slow"

The fifth statement on the survey asked students to respond to the statement, "I am able to answer questions about what I read". Eighty-three percent could almost always (44%, n=8) or usually (39%, n=7) are able to answer questions about what they read. Three students responded "sometimes". No students responded "almost never". Please refer to Figure 5.

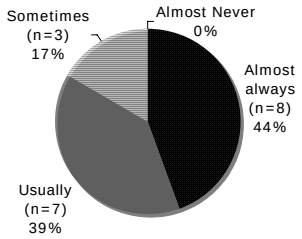


Figure 5; Survey Statement "I am able to answer questions about what I read"

The sixth and final statement on the survey asked students to respond to the statement, "I think others like my reading". Four students responded "almost always" (22%). Five students responded "usually" (28%). Six students responded "sometimes" (33%). Three students responded "almost never" (17%). Please refer to Figure 6.

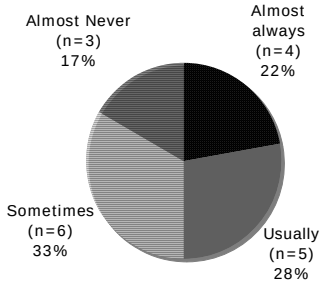


Figure 6; Survey Statement "I think others like my reading"

Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) Assessment

The purpose of this instrument was to assess students' fluency rates compared to benchmark scores of the national average. All 18 participants received and completed the

DIBELS assessment during the week of September 4, 2007. The DIBELS assessment was administered to six sixth grade students at Site A, six third grade students at Site B, and six fifth grade students at Site C. Depending on the students' scores, they were determined to be *at risk, some risk, or low risk.* A copy of the DIBELS assessment can be found in Appendix B.

The following data was collected at Site A. One student was considered at risk (17%), two students were considered some risk (33%), and three were considered low risk (50%). Please refer to Figure 7.

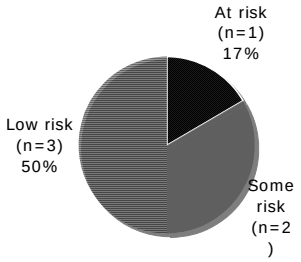


Figure 7; Site A DIBELS Assessment Results

The following data was collected at Site B. Two students were considered at risk, three students were considered some risk, and one student was considered low risk. Please refer to Figure 8.

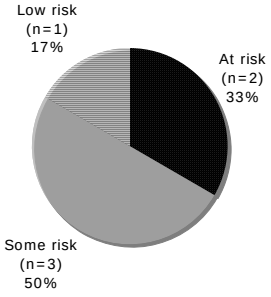


Figure 8; Site B DIBELS Assessment Results

The students at Site C were in an above-level reading group; all six students scored in the low risk category.

Choose-A-Title

The purpose of this instrument was to assess students' reading comprehension based on their ability to identify the main idea of a passage. All 18 participants engaged in the activity in their reading classes on September 5, 2007. Students read a passage silently, and then selected from a list of possible titles, attempting to identify the title that best conveyed the main idea. Students at Site A and C read a sixth grade-level passage while students at Site B read a third grade-level passage. A copy of the Choose-A-Title assessment can be found in Appendix C.

The following graph includes the data from all three sites. Please refer to Figure 9.

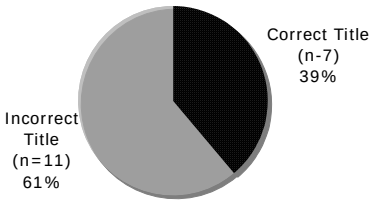


Figure 9; Choose-A-Title Assessment Results

Summary

Based on our data collected we determined that 78% (n=14) of the students surveyed indicated a lack of confidence in their oral reading skills. In assessing fluency rates, it was determined that 56% (n=10) of the students were at benchmark for grade level. Yet, when analyzing the comprehension assessment, 61% (n=11) did not successfully comprehend the grade level passage.

Reflection

We found that the documentation tools provided information that indicated two problems within implications for reading instruction. First we found that some students were deficient in decoding skills. Their reading fluency was negatively impacted due to a lack of automaticity. We agreed that these students needed direct instruction and practice in specific decoding skills. We also found that successful decoding did not ensure adequate comprehension. Some students who read fluently lacked the comprehension skills required to determine the main idea. These students needed direct instruction to develop comprehension strategies. In our research project we provided opportunity to engage in repeated reading of enjoyable materials such as poetry and reader's theater dialogues. These lessons combined decoding skills with instruction relating to main idea, supporting details, and sequence.

PROBABLE CAUSES

Reading is a complex process that is crucial to students' academic success. According to Sloat, Beswick, and Willms (2007), students who do not learn to read during the primary grades will probably never read well. Furthermore, students with low literacy skills have less access to the regular curriculum, and they are prone to poor self-esteem, low motivation, behavioral difficulties, and academic underachievement (Sloat et al., 2007)). Nationwide, there are many disillusioned students; the reasons why they struggle with reading are vast, making it difficult to find solutions (Ambe, 2007). The long-term consequences of inadequate reading instruction have national implications. Currently, 25% of U.S. adults are functionally illiterate, unable to read the directions on a medicine bottle or a note from their child's school (Fuchs et al., 2001). Understandably, the question of how to improve literacy is receiving intense attention, and is the subject of much research and debate.

Effective Reading Instruction

Reading teachers face a number of problems as they strive to implement effective instruction. Henk, Moore, Marinak, and Tomasetti (2000) noted that school professionals often experience difficulty as they attempt to work together toward the identification and accomplishment of common literacy goals. According to Sloat et al. (2007), "Reading is a complex process and that complexity is reflected in the range of philosophies, pedagogies, curricula, and programs available to guide early elementary reading instruction" (p.523). Sloat et al. concluded that with so many options available, and with the constraints imposed by limited resources and students' diverse skills, practitioners and researchers face the crucial question of how best to ensure that children learn to read well in their early years. Vaughn, Klingner, and Bryant (2001) stated that the student population in the general education classroom has become

very diverse. The classroom environment, materials, and the teacher's practices must support literacy development for students representing a wide range of ability and background. Academic diversity creates challenges for the general education teacher; some teachers avoid dealing with the students who fall at the extremes of the range, teaching mainly to the middle group (Fuchs & Fuchs, 1998). When students' learning needs are not met, gaps in reading achievement widen as struggling readers lose confidence (Fuchs et al, 2001). Failing to experience success when they engage in literacy activities, students lack motivation to continue reading. Students who experience lowered confidence and poor self-esteem often add behavior concerns to the demands on teachers' time (Ambe, 2007; Fuchs et al., 2001).

In order to teach reading, teachers must draw on knowledge of children, learning styles, and the reading /learning process, combined with ongoing assessments, as they make a series of complex decisions that influence and mediate literacy (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996). Unfortunately, teachers often lack the assessment skills necessary for proper collection and organization of student data used as a means of reflecting on instructional interventions (Conderman & Strobel, 2006). Additionally, teachers have inadequate time to devote to analyzing students' reading errors (Dewitz & Dewitz, 2003). Davidson and Myhre (2000) reported that although teachers had access to many assessments to determine how well a student is reading, many of these methods were teacher- or district-developed; consequently the assessments were not tested for validity or reliability. Seven years later, Sloat et al. (2007) stated that while teachers still relied extensively on informal assessments, "they expressed a desire to augment these approaches with measures that provided empirically-derived learning benchmarks, concrete data on children's progress, and clear evidence of where children were struggling" (p.524).

Early Literacy is Essential

According to Vaughn et al. (2001), the nation is putting emphasis on early intervention with reading instruction so that students are capable readers by the third grade. Due to pressure from educational and political influences, younger students are expected to have their reading skills assessed (Paris, 2002). This movement is driven by evidence that students who do not acquire phonemic awareness for successful reading achievement will not fully benefit from reading instruction (Allor, Gansle, & Denny, 2006), and that low reading scores have been linked to weaknesses in phonics and phonemic awareness skills (Fuchs & Fuchs, 1998; Vaughn, Hughes, Schumm, & Klinger, 1996). Consequently, K-3 instruction in many schools has focused heavily on phonemic awareness, phonics, and word recognition (Teale, Zolt, Yokota, Glasswell, & Gambrell, 2007). Teale et al. stated that elementary school literacy programs have become mechanized and test-driven rather than content- and meaning-driven because of an overemphasis on the results on standardized testing to determine literacy progress (p.499). Despite public and professional attention to the issue of implementing effective reading instruction, Schmoker (2006) concluded that "current practice is very much at odds with the best we know about helping students to become authentically literate" (p.76).

Schmoker (2006) stated that the current preoccupation with basic literacy prevents students from acquiring the ability to read for meaning, which is the most important and practical form of reading. Schmoker contended that while reading teachers are required to spend time conducting lengthy, student-by-student reading assessments, teachers seldom use assessment results to adjust or improve instruction. Instead, assessments are used to group or regroup students. Schmoker also observed that authentic literacy is neglected from the earliest grades.

Teaching for Comprehension

Addressing concerns about literacy programming, Sloat et al. (2007) cited the need to respect empirical evidence of what constitutes effective practice while at the same time taking into account the involvement of students, parents, teachers, and administrators. Classroom teachers are anxious to learn about appropriate interventions that will increase learning for their students (Fuchs & Fuchs, 1998; Vaughn, et al., 1998). Emphasis is placed on assessing primary students' phonics skills and phonemic awareness, but Fuchs (2005) presented evidence that teaching phonological skills without connecting them to text is not the best practice for increasing literacy skills (Hatcher et al., 1994). Taberski (2000) asserted that meaning, structure, and graphophonics work best together as strategies. Taberski described the complex set of attitudes, understandings, and behaviors involved in learning to read, and concluded that children need to be active agents who assume responsibility for their learning. Reading instruction as described by Harvey and Goudvis (2000) develops strategic readers who carry out self-monitoring in the form of an inner conversation for the purpose of making sense of what they read .

Recognizing that a possible reason for lack of reading skills is the student's failure to be an engaged reader and to use strategies that have been taught (Malone & Mastropieri, 1991), reading teachers at all levels face the challenge of implementing instruction that emphasizes the reader's construction of meaning. (Harvey & Goudvis, 2000) Teaching comprehension strategies is difficult for many teachers (Fuchs, et al., 2001; Pressley, 1997). Gauthier (2001) stated that although increasing students' comprehension is a theme that permeates all reading programs, not much effort has been made to form a joining together of promising strategies to encourage

reading comprehension. Miller (2002) observed that it is essential for most books to be at students' instructional level so that children have the opportunity to apply strategies for decoding and constructing meaning independently. The goal is difficult to achieve in classrooms where teachers deal with time constraints and academically diverse student populations. Access to appropriately engaging instructional materials are limited in some districts, and many texts that are geared to teach reading comprehension are too obvious (Dewitz & Dewitz, 2003).

Dewitz and Dewitz (2003) observed that comprehension is influenced by text type, method of reading, level of the reading material, and prior knowledge. According to Bolton (2007), students must have prior knowledge of a subject in order to use top-level structures efficiently. Ambe (2007) concluded that teachers need to spend an inordinate amount of time building background knowledge for the struggling student. However, Dewitz and Dewitz (2003) list over-reliance on prior knowledge as one cause of poor comprehension; other causes are excessive elaboration, failure to make causal references, failure to properly parse syntax, and failure to know a key vocabulary word.

Students need to be taught specific strategies to improve comprehension, and a large time commitment is required to teach comprehension strategies correctly (Vaughn et al., 2001). According to Goudvis and Harvey (2000), readers need specific instruction to understand how strategies can be used to make sense of text when the meaning breaks down, and students must learn to analyze their comprehension problems in order to choose the best strategy to use. However, researchers Eme, Puustien, and Coutelet (2006) found that most of their student subjects seemed unaware of inconsistencies in text, and the subjects reported being highly confident of the accuracy of incorrect answers. Vaughn et al. (2001) cautioned that teachers need to keep in mind that students who are taught too many comprehension strategies may become

overwhelmed and end up not using any. According to Maggliano (1999), some intervention strategies may interfere with other strategies for some students (Dewitz & Dewitz, 2003).

Miller (2002) addressed the difficulties of evaluating comprehension, noting that comprehension ability and the level of development are not linked directly to a child's ability to decode. Taberski (2000) recounted the experience of observing two first graders reading words in context as they shared a book, then finding that the children were unable to decode the same words out of context on a vocabulary page in the text. Taberski used the example to show how young readers draw upon their knowledge of language and textual structures, along with letter-sounds, in order to construct meaning. Teachers find that gaining insight into students' comprehension difficulties is less clear cut than assessing difficulty with skills that have been shown to inhibit effective fluency: basic print ability, phonemic awareness, sight word recognition, and phonetic skills (Rinehart, 1999).

The Connection Between Reading Comprehension and Oral Reading Fluency

Research links comprehension deficiencies and reading fluency (Therrien, Wickstrom, & Jones, 2006), and shows that a lack of reading fluency is a reliable predictor of reading comprehension problems (Hudson, Lane, & Pullen, 2005). Fluent readers demonstrate control over surface-level text processing, and thus are able to focus effectively on comprehension by processing deeper levels of meaning in the text (Rasinski , 2004). Alber-Morgan, Ramp, Anderson, and Martin (2007) stated that students who struggle with fluency avoid reading activities, and also have problems with word recognition, comprehension, and motivation (Chard, Vaughn, & Tyler, 2002; Mastropieri, Leinart, & Scruggs, 1999; Stanovich, 1986). When readers' ability to accurately comprehend text is impaired because they lack effective fluency, the readers often choose not to participate in reading behaviors such as making words,

identifying words in texts, and writing words, as they attempt to protect themselves from potential failure (Glazer, 2007). According to Share and Stanovich (1995), readers lacking effective fluency skills cannot easily convert speech sounds to written language and back again (Langdon, 2004), and as a result their personal vocabulary is limited and inhibits effective comprehension (Torgeson, 2000). Some cases of reading disability are linked to a lack of fluency related to word recognition skills (Moyer, 2001).

Rasinski (2004) listed accuracy in word decoding, automatic processing, and prosodic reading as the three important dimensions of reading fluency that make students must master for effective comprehension. Readers must be able to decode words routinely with ease; many less skilled readers do not have the basic decoding skills necessary to secure successful reading (Rasinski, 2003). According to Vaughn and Linan-Thompson (2004), slow word recognition inhibits automaticity and weakens reading comprehension. Emerging readers may make decoding errors, and they require a great deal of effort to read words correctly, so they have no more cognitive ability to be successful with comprehension; these readers may read words correctly but fail to connect them in a way to give meaning to their oral reading (Rasinski, 2006). Less-skilled readers do not use effective strategies for monitoring their comprehension, and they do not fully process information (Torgeson, 1997). LaBerge and Samuels (1974) found that students with slow reading rates process less text, recall less information, and struggle to integrate prior knowledge (Al Otaiba & Rivera, 2006).

Oral Reading Fluency as a Component of Literacy Programs

Reading fluency is an important component of literacy growth (Rasinski, 2006), but reading fluency has been ignored in reading instruction (Kuhn, 2004). Based on research supporting the connection between oral reading fluency and reading comprehension, teachers and school leaders must be active in pursuing the goal of reading fluency (Rasinski, 2004), but there are many reasons why it has been neglected. Dowhower (1991) stated that teachers were never taught to incorporate fluency instruction as part of their reading curriculum (Richards, 2000). Fluency is perceived as a result of predetermined reading goals as opposed to being part of the cause (Zutell & Rasinski, 1991). Lacking direct instruction, struggling readers may not gain fluency automatically (Hudson et al., 2005). According to Vaughn and Linan-Thompson (2004), oral reading fluency appears to be the missing link in reading instruction for most teachers because they focus on accuracy and comprehension. Basal readers dictate that teachers focus on word recognition, vocabulary growth, and comprehension while excluding oral fluency (Zutell & Rasinski, 1991).

Teacher understanding of oral reading fluency, and further research of the topic, are necessary for future success (Fuchs, Fuchs, & Hosp, 2001). Fuchs et al. recommended research on understanding the reading process and reading development, the analysis of the effects of treatments, the appropriate instructional materials, and the identification of those needing special attention. Teachers need ways to assess fluency in order to address individual learning needs, but lack of training and support leaves many teachers unprepared in the area of oral reading fluency (Rasinski, 2004). Screening measures are administered in a short time period, and may provide inaccurate data (Hasbrouck & Tindal, 2006). According to Hasbrouck and Tindal (2006), some

educators hesitate to use fluency measures, fearing the results may holistically categorize a student's reading skill level (Hamilton & Shinn, 2003).

At the same time that awareness of the importance of oral reading fluency is rising, educators may lack thorough understanding of its role in reading instruction. According to Rasinski (2004, 2006), the current emphasis on fast reading has a negative impact on comprehension: when students focus on speed rather than expressive reading, they do not pay attention to meaning. The three elements of fluency are accuracy, rate, and prosody; teachers need reliable means of assessing all three elements, and assessment results should be used to guide instruction (Hudson et al., 2005). Readers may experience frustration and lose confidence if material is beyond their level of oral reading fluency (Bear, 2001).

Teachers who understand that below-grade level reading skills result in oral reading fluency problems (Al Otaiba & Rivera, 2006) seek to implement appropriate interventions. Statistical evidence has not been found to show that silent reading is associated with improvement in students' oral reading fluency (Al Otaiba & Rivera, 2006). Repeated reading has been proven to be a positive way of increasing reading fluency, but it requires one-to-one adult supervision, which is not always possible to achieve in a classroom (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2005). Fuchs and Fuchs (2005) observed that peer-assisted learning strategies increased oral reading fluency for many students, but they found that 10 to 20 % of students did not respond to the treatments. Moyer (2001) noted that the use of a repeated reading method to increase fluency may be a dull process.

Summary

There is consensus among professionals and the public that literacy is an essential goal for students, but educators face many challenges in implementing effective reading instruction.

Learning to read is a complex process, and research supports the importance of engaging students in activities that promote the development of reading comprehension along with decoding skills. Students' reading comprehension is more difficult to assess than phonemic awareness, phonics skills, and word recognition. Lack of oral reading fluency is an indicator of students' difficulties with reading comprehension, and oral reading fluency is an important component of effective reading instruction. Although the three elements of fluency are accuracy, rate, and prosody, recent emphasis has been placed on fast reading. Teachers need efficient means of assessing their students' reading difficulties, and teachers should use assessment results to implement appropriate interventions.

CHAPTER 3

THE SOLUTION STRATEGY

Review of the Literature

Children think all the time, but why don't some think while they read? Perhaps it is because they do not know they are supposed to be thinking while reading. A vast amount of research has taken place concerning comprehension, but are we properly addressing comprehension strategies in our classrooms? Comprehension is an important element at all stages of literacy development (Taberski, 2000). Adams (1990) states that since comprehension is the objective of reading, those who read fluently are able to focus on meaning, hold more of the information in their working memory, and incorporate their own background knowledge with what they have read. Research has supported the theory of "automatic information processing", which indicates that reading accurately and with effective speed allows the reader to focus on the meaning of the words (Al Otaiba & Rivera, 2006). Reading fluency is one of the fundamental elements of reading success (Alber-Morgan et al., 2007). Adams (1990) and The National Reading Panel (2000) maintain that reading with confidence and comprehension is what opens up the opportunity for success as our hi-tech society relies more and more on knowledgeable employees (Al Otaiba & Rivera, 2006).

The components of fluency are difficult to scrutinize in isolation. Cutler and Isard (1980) believe fluency is a mingling of various components that cannot be distinctly isolated. Teachers are encouraged to monitor oral reading fluency so that readers can make sense of what they read (Bear, 2001). Research reveals that fluency is a significant component that

joins the gap between word recognition and comprehension (Vaughn & Linan-Thompson, 2004).

According to Bear (2001), for oral reading fluency success, four basic activities should take place; reading with, reading to, writing, and word study. Skilled comprehenders focus on higher-order processes: finding the meaning, identifying important ideas, and integrating information (Eme, et al., 2006). To make students more capable of understanding high level text, they need to be taught meta-skills that could be used whenever they needed them. Teaching meta-skills for comprehension could make the student more independent when it came to understanding more complex text (Anderson, 2006).

Teaching reading fluency is an essential element of reading instruction. A student's problem with fluency is a reliable indicator of problems with reading comprehension (Rasinski, 2004). Accurate comprehension depends on understanding the vocabulary words and how they connect to the text. Gardner and Lambert (1972) feel teachers need to assist hesitant readers in choosing appropriate reading materials that will help motivate them. (Ambe, 2007).

The best reading teachers serve as facilitators in a well-balanced literacy program encompassing a wide variety of literacy activities that accommodate students' individual learning styles (Archer, 2004). It is beneficial for students to understand how a text is structured as this understanding will aid their comprehension (Bolton, 2007). Dewitz and Dewitz (2003) cite research that indicates students need to predict, self-question, infer, summarize, visualize, and monitor their own comprehension (Dole, et al, 1991; Pressley & Afflerbach, 1995).

Teachers are encouraged to model fluent reading illustrating proper rate and accuracy. Reading and rereading exercises such as reading with a model reader, choral reading, tape-recorded readings, reader's theater, and partner reading can improve fluency (Vaughn & Linan-Thompson, 2004).

In order to gain oral reading fluency, teachers must promote reading and rereading instruction, which will aid in gaining effective fluency for the reader (Glazer, 2007). Assessing the three elements of fluency (accuracy, rate, and prosody) provides information about students' individual learning needs and enables the teacher to choose appropriate interventions (Hudson, et al, 2005).

Fluent readers use expression and prosody (make what they are reading sound like spoken language), and identify words instinctively and correctly. Using prosody correctly is an indication that the reader comprehends what they have read. When one considers the role automaticity and prosody play in comprehension, it would seem logical that developing a reader's fluency will encourage increased comprehension (Hudson, et al, 2005). Accuracy, automaticity, and prosodic instruction should occur simultaneously. Some texts such as poetry, song lyrics, rhymes, and plays are suitable for oral reading practice. By practicing the various text (poetry, etc.), students increase their skills in accuracy, automaticity (rate), prosody, and comprehension (Rasinski, 2006).

Effective reading teachers use a variety of frequent assessments to keep track of student progress for the purpose of delivering appropriate instruction (Archer, 2004). Progress monitoring of student performance is a vital component of education so that if an instruction method is not working with a particular student, the program can be altered to fit the needs of that student (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2005). Evidence links reading fluency to gains in reading

comprehension, and teachers should regularly assess students' reading fluency and use the information to target a range of skills (Conderman and Strobel, 2006). Teachers can use informal or formal assessment for measuring and improving rate and accuracy (Fluency Training, 2004). If one evaluates a student's errors, it may be possible to determine the cause of the problem and the student's way of thinking. This could provide guidance in the type of intervention (Dewitz & Dewitz, 2003).

A solution to gaining vital oral reading fluency information is through a system called Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS). DIBELS provides measurements of basic pre-reading skills that guide the reader to fluent decoding, word-level reading, and connected-text reading comprehension (Langdon, 2004). Oral reading fluency norms are a useful reference for reading assessment. Norms provide the means for screening, diagnosis, and monitoring oral reading fluency. The measurements offer insight into the strengths and weaknesses of the reader. Teachers can use national oral reading fluency norms as important tools for creating, applying, and assessing successful instructional programs (Hasbrouck & Tindal, 2006).

Reliable monitoring systems are necessary to meet individual learning needs (Sloat, et al**.,** 2007). Teachers should use the results of assessments flexibly. When a teacher assesses students' reading levels, it allows the teacher the opportunity to analyze the data and pinpoint the particular program that would be beneficial for each student (Paris, 2002). The data used to determine reading levels should include information about the students' word recognition skills, the text type, student background knowledge, and their ability to make inferences (Dewitz & Dewitz, 2003).

According to Van den Broek, Lynch, Naslund, Ivers-Landis, & Verduin, (2003), detecting the main idea is a good indicator of a student's successful comprehension, and the task of selecting the best title for a passage requires the reader to connect text elements. In a 2000 report from the National Reading Panel it was recommended that reading instruction should include phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. Research supports the practice of guided oral reading fluency instruction for increasing reading skills. Two works cited (Greenwood, Delquadri, & Hall, 1989; Mathes & Fuchs, 1994) indicate cooperative groups or pairs of students reading together can be a positive means to provide practice with another person (Al Otaiba & Rivera, 2006).

Some ways of improving reading comprehension are cooperative learning, discussion, and strategic questioning. "Cooperative learning is a concept that can serve as an umbrella over several specific instructional avenues. As such, it leaves a wide range of possibilities for implementation" (Gauthier, 2001, p. 217). Fuchs et al., (2001) document numerous studies that maintain students' reading ability can increase when they work cooperatively with other students in well thought-out activities (Greenwood, et al, 1989; Rosenshine & Meister, 1994; Stevens, et al, 1987). Through cooperative groups, students can be involved in a variety of levels of the core curriculum and be exposed to optional learning approaches. Teachers are able to address the numerous and varied students' needs when collaborative groups are put into action (Fuchs et al., 2001). Simmons, et al (1994) reported that reading fluency and accuracy have increased through the use of Partner Reading (Fuchs et al., 2001).

Kuhn and Stahl's 2003 study says the most frequently used strategy to improve fluency is repeated readings (Alber-Morgan et al., 2007). Research reveals that repeated reading methods have contributed to an increase in fluency for some readers. A solution to increasing

the rate of oral reading fluency is using multiple oral rereading in the classroom (Moyer, 2001). Research by Rasinski and Zutell (1990) determined a solution to gaining oral reading fluency is through paired oral readings whereby two students work as a team to increase fluency (Richards, 2000). This same article cited Miccinati (1985) that a solution to gaining oral reading fluency is incorporating poetry in a choral reading lesson focusing on sound, stress, duration and pitch which ultimately aids in gaining fluent oral reading.

Research reveals how reader's theater is an effective instructional tool that potentially contributes to effective fluency and sight word instruction. In addition, the reader's theater is a forum for reading opportunities geared toward enhancing children's interest and self-confidence in skilled reading. Reader's theater promotes a holistic approach for building on fluency, sight word recognition, and awareness. There are activities available that support reader's theater text such as shared book experiences, echo reading, and repeated readings allowing students additional opportunities within a wide-ranging intervention (Rinehart, 1999).

A solution to gaining oral reading fluency is through a school-based peer-tutoring intervention for unskilled readers utilizing a program called "Listening-while-reading." This intervention allows the delayed reader a chance to practice or rehearse a passage through silent reading while a skilled reader reads aloud. Finally, the delayed reader reads the passage again, but out loud and receives a remedial response (Wright & Cleary, 2006).

The following strategies have been used to successfully improve oral reading fluency: repeated reading, repeated reading with teacher model, repeated reading with modeling by a more proficient peer, repeated reading, modeling with an audiotape/CD, prepactice preview, paired reading, choral reading, shared reading, praise/attention, appropriate-level text,

predictable or patterned text, word drill, phrase drill, letter-naming drill, corrective feedback, models of fluent reading, class wide peer tutoring, reader's theater, computer, parent/school reading program (Welsch, 2006). "When students work together, communicate their thoughts, and seek answers to different questions, reading comprehension has a fertile setting in which to occur." (Gauthier, 2001, p.217).

Reading competence is vital for school success (Alber-Morgan et al., 2007). Reading competence requires orchestrating many different elements automatically in order to acquire success (LaBerge & Samuels, 1974, as cited in Fuchs, Fuchs, & Hosp, 2001. Reading to children is a means to develop a love of reading, but to become skilled readers, they must be actively engaged in the reading of connected text (Kuhn, 2004). With proper training teachers are able to identify oral reading fluency problems and correct these deficiencies with confidence (Zutell and Rasinski, 2001).

Project Objective and Processing Statements

During the period of August 27, 2007 through December 7, 2007, teacher researchers incorporated partner reading and reader's theater into reading lessons in an attempt to improve students' reading comprehension. The following tasks were accomplished prior to the implementation of the project: select appropriate grade level reading passages for use with partner reading, select appropriate grade level reading passages and poems for use with readers' theater, train a researcher in the use of DIBELS, and create no titled passages with a list of possible title choices for each grade level passage.

Project Action Plan

Of the 14 weeks dedicated for this project, 10 weeks of intervention took place and two weeks of pre- and post- documentation occurred. The pre-documentation took place from August

27, 2007 through September 7, 2007 and included sending out and collecting parental consent letters, copying pre-documentation tools, choosing age appropriate poems for student survey, as well as selecting grade level passages for the various reading activities. In addition, the DIBELS Oral Reading Fluency (ORF) and the Choose-a-Title assessments were administered and the survey was distributed to the students. All scores and results were compiled, recorded, and ranked as was appropriate.

The intervention took place from September 10, 2007 through November 16, 2007. During this time, teachers paired students with compatible reading abilities and attitudes, modeled appropriate prosody, and allowed for 20-minute partner reading activities two times per week. One day per week teachers incorporated readers' theatre into the lesson. Readers' Theatre included echo reading, choral reading, and poetry.

The post-documentation period occurred from November 26, 2007 through December 7, 2007. A final DIBELS ORF and Choose-a-Title assessment were given to the students, as well as a final student survey. The data was compiled, analyzed, and graphed accordingly.

Methods of Assessment

The researchers used a student survey to determine students' attitudes toward oral reading. The survey was distributed to 18 students during the week of December3, 2007. Veda Neumann, Dorothy Ross, and Anita Slaboch each worked with 6 students who were surveyed during their reading period. Researchers modeled effective oral expression of a poem and drew students' attention to the elements of fluency: accuracy, rate, and expression. Students were then asked to reflect on their own oral reading fluency. The survey questions were meant to elicit students' predictions about their ability to read aloud with accuracy, appropriate rate, and expression. Points were assigned to each response category for a total score ranging from 6-16,

with six through ten indicating a negative attitude and eleven through sixteen indicating a positive attitude. Points were assigned to each task with a range from 1-4. Students rated themselves as performing the task *almost never (1), sometimes (2), usually (3), or almost always (4).* The survey remained anonymous in order to preserve confidentiality. Its purpose was for researchers to determine students' attitudes toward oral reading and the results were kept in a secure file in each teacher researcher's classroom.

Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) is a formative and summative reading measurement tool. Please refer to www.dibels.uoregon.edu for additional information. This research tool evaluated the Oral Reading Fluency (ORF) component of DIBELS. Its purpose was to determine baseline oral reading fluency information of a reader. During the week of December 3, 2007, 18 students participated in the study. Veda Neumann worked with six 5th grade students, Dorothy Ross worked with six 3rd grade students, and Anita Slaboch worked with six 6th grade students. During the students' reading periods they were asked to read orally three grade-level passages. The teacher timed the reading of each passage for one minute and the number of words read correctly was counted. The highest and lowest scores were eliminated in the results according to DIBELS guidelines. The middle score was recorded for each student to assess rate and accuracy. The researchers administered the test individually in a removed area of the classroom and the results were kept confidential in a secure file in each teacher's classroom.

During the week of December 3, 2007, 18 students during their reading period had their reading comprehension assessed using a researcher created extension of a DIBELS passage. Please refer to www.dibels.uoregon.edu for additional information regarding DIBELS. Veda Neumann worked with six 5th grade students, Dorothy Ross worked with six 3rd grade students,

and Anita Slaboch worked with six 6th grade students. After reading the grade-level passage, the student was asked to choose the best title from a list of five choices, based on his or her understanding of the narrative passage. Selecting the best title for a narrative text is a good indicator of a child's successful comprehension because he or she is required to identify the main idea, and prioritize the importance of events (Van den Broek, 2003). The researchers administered the assessment individually during class and the results were kept confidential in a secure file in each teacher researcher's classroom.

CHAPTER 4

PROJECT RESULTS

From August 27, 2007 through December 7, 2007 six sixth grade students at Site A, six third grade students at Site B, and six fifth grade students at Site C participated in oral reading fluency based interventions designed to improve reading comprehension. The teacher researchers devised this action research project to address their students' comprehension deficiencies and negative attitudes about reading aloud. DIBELS scores, student surveys, and an assessment that required students to identify the main idea of a passage by choosing an appropriate title documented the existence of reading problems. Since the literature review yielded data connecting oral reading fluency and reading comprehension, the teacher researchers implemented interventions consisting of paired reading, reader's theater, and echo and choral reading.

Historical Description of the Intervention

During the week of pre-documentation, we introduced the concept of oral reading fluency by modeling the reading of a grade-level appropriate poem. We demonstrated effective and ineffective use of the elements of fluency consisting of rate, accuracy and prosody. Through a discussion we elicited student recognition that effective oral reading fluency conveys the meaning of the passage. After choosing a grade level passage appropriate for our student population, we removed the title and assessed reading comprehension of the passage by providing a list of possible title choices. We assessed students' oral reading fluency by administering Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS).

During the week of September 10, 2007 we introduced students to paired reading and echo reading. We observed that the students' responding positively to both interventions. One of the benefits of echo reading was the elimination of accuracy problems. We encountered time management problems with paired reading based on the varied amount of time required for pairs to complete the task.

During the week of September 17, 2007 students participated in choral reading in addition to the paired reading. During choral reading we observed the students' enthusiasm for this activity, however, we noticed difficulty in staying in unison. This highlighted the importance of appropriate phrasing and attention to punctuation.

During the week of September 24, 2007 students participated in reader's theater in addition to the paired reading. During reader's theater performance appeared to be a motivator, providing students with an incentive to practice appropriate usage of rate, accuracy, and prosody.

During the week of October 1, 2007 students began to display negative responses to participating in paired reading. Some students were dissatisfied with their assigned partner. Some pairs displayed less task dedication and there was an increase in off task behavior. We concluded that the students' initial enthusiasm for paired reading had been based on the novelty of the activity.

During the remaining intervention weeks we minimized the focus on the paired reading and emphasized our focus on echo and choral reading, and reader's theater. Students responded positively to these interventions demonstrating improved rate, accuracy, and prosody.

During these weeks we determined that some material was more effective in engaging students: humorous poetry, plays, and meaningful curriculum connections elicited the best response. In the final weeks, we chose reading materials based on these observations. As the

novelty wore off we had to redirect and remind students that the purpose of oral reading fluency is to convey meaning. Based on these observations we concluded that material selection was a key element in engaging students in fluency-based interventions.

We observed that students demonstrated increasing ability to evaluate their own and their classmates' fluency from week to week. Students developed the ability to recognize the need for improvement in the specific areas of accuracy, rate, and prosody. As students' self-monitoring skills grew, they learned to set attainable goals. The goals reflected their awareness of the elements that enhance oral reading performance.

We found that group performance activities such as choral poetry reading and reader's theater motivated the students to exert their best efforts. Students were detail oriented in identifying ways to improve their own and their classmates' oral reading for the purpose of fully expressing the meaning of these materials. We observed positive effects on students' attitudes toward their own learning as they self-monitored to set goals and evaluate progress toward those goals. In addition the partner and group activities enhanced students' ability to give and receive constructive feedback. We observed the benefits of cooperative learning as students worked together with a goal of delivering an effective group performance. Students appeared to be motivated to improve their own skills in a collaborative rather than in a competitive way. Students' demonstrated pride in the group's achievement celebrating successful performances. We concluded that the cooperative learning based interventions were effective in fostering individual self-esteem and positive attitudes toward group learning.

Partners engaged in repeated oral reading of selected grade-level passages as they focused on improving elements of fluency. Two twenty minute weekly sessions of partner reading began with teacher reading the passage aloud after directing the students' attention to the

elements of fluency. As the students read along silently they heard the teacher demonstrate fluent oral reading in which the words were accurate, the rate was appropriate, and the meaning was enhanced through expression. Partner reading began with one student in each pair reading the passage orally while the second student read along silently. The second partner then read the passage orally while the first student read silently. After one round of alternating oral and silent reading of the passage the students repeated the process. Following the reading the partners shared reflections about improvements or struggles in specific elements of fluency. The third twenty minute weekly session was devoted to a rotation of echo and choral reading and reader's theater. Please refer to Appendix B for examples of materials used during these fluency-based interventions.

Our observations of students engaged in paired reading confirmed the findings of Winn (2006) who noted that paired reading tasks that include repeated reading and reading while listening engage students in collaborative growth monitoring while elements of fluency develop. As Moyer (2001) noted, the use of a repeated reading method to increase fluency may be a dull process. Initially our students responded to the novelty of paired reading positively. As the weeks of intervention proceeded we observed that students lost interest unless we provided engaging materials. We learned to choose high interest materials that promoted repeated reading in the form of rehearsal. The best reading teachers serve as facilitators in a well-balanced literacy program encompassing a wide variety of literacy activities that accommodate students' individual learning styles (Archer, 2004).

Implementing this project and these interventions in my Site A classroom has revealed thought provoking and insightful results. It is important to note that my 6th grade class was a heterogeneous grouping unlike Site B and Site C. With these varied levels of skill, I feel it may

have been beneficial to connect our interventions with the curriculum (i.e. classroom textbooks, novels, or other supplemental readers) instead of relying solely on varied random passages. With this in mind, I would have been able to reflect on our current school curriculum and propose changes to benefit the learning process. In addition, it became quite evident that performance was a motivator of practicing and ultimately increasing oral reading fluency. The majority of my students, regardless of a students' reading skill ability related to fluency, were willing and eager to perform in the reader's theater activities offered in the classroom. This welcomed novelty never tired my students and they were as excited and enthusiastic about reader's theater at the end of our intervention period as they were from the beginning.

This experience has enriched my character, tested my resilience, and impacted my teaching philosophy. I have learned to be grateful for the challenging times in life for these life-altering events reform one's character. This experience has been life altering both professionally and personally. Professionally I have learned that when I am dedicated to an endeavor as profound as this action research project, I will do what it takes to successfully accomplish my goals. Personally I have learned that past life experiences have prepared me for this moment in time. The wisdom tied to these experiences gave me the confidence to serge toward a faith filled future. Along the way, there were times when I feared I could not stay afloat and the tide of this project was stronger than I. Just when I thought all was lost a buoy swept in, the tide receded, and I was once again sailing smoothly. It was during these times that I was able to reflect on my teaching philosophy. I began to look at my role as a teacher differently. I was no longer a facilitator of learning, but rather an observant, and analytically driven teacher researcher. I believe I will never be the same teacher that I was when I began this journey. Today, there exists within me a different sense of responsibility to my students. Perhaps you can take the teacher out

of a “teacher researcher”, but you cannot take the “teacher researcher” out of the teacher. Once that ball starts rolling along there’s no catching up with it.

What I have learned as a result of implementing this program and these interventions at Site B in my classroom is that students of all ability levels are capable of responding positively to reading fluency instruction. It was with a bit of trepidation that I ventured into this project thinking that perhaps my special needs students would not be as proficient in this area. I look back warmheartedly as I recall their almost daily reading of the poem “The Kids at Our School”, the first one used in the documentation process. They voluntarily read the poem with enthusiasm and expression while standing in line to enter their next class. The implementation of Reader’s Theater was a tremendous motivator for my participants and something I have encouraged my colleagues to incorporate in their classrooms. With the most recent changes in IDEA, general education teachers are facing greater responsibility for addressing the educational needs of Tier II students. This intervention is one that could be implemented quite easily with all grade levels. Finally, what I have learned about myself is that I need to forgive myself for what I did not get done and celebrate what I have accomplished. As I read through the weekly PMI’s, I kept noticing negative comments about not enough time to complete tasks. As I reflect back and consider the big picture, I realize I did achieve a successful mission that resulted in my students becoming more aware of the vital components of reading fluency, which ought to result in increased comprehension.

The students at Site C were fifth graders in an accelerated reading group. When I introduced rate, accuracy, and prosody as the three elements of oral reading fluency, my students expressed confidence in their decoding skills and identified prosody as an area for improvement. During the early weeks of interventions, students demonstrated increasing awareness of the

details that constitute effective prosody: I noticed that constructive criticism during paired reading activities became more specific as students analyzed the effects of phrasing and voice. Friday 'performance days' generated enthusiasm, and provided students with the incentive to make good use of the paired reading times for rehearsal. I concluded that the act of preparing for a performance made repeated reading meaningful to the students. Students became increasingly comfortable performing in front of the group, and the shared experience seemed to enhance their collaborative bond. In addition to observable improvements in oral reading fluency, students benefited from participating as performers and audience members, giving and receiving praise and advice. As the weeks went on I felt that the activities promoted a sense of community, encouraging the students to take responsibility for their own and their classmates' learning. It seemed that the focus on identifying specific elements for improvement enhanced students' ability to set goals and self-monitor to evaluate progress.

Presentation of Analysis of Results

The purpose of this action research project was to improve students' reading comprehension by implementing oral reading fluency-based interventions. The teacher researchers gathered pre- and post-intervention data consisting of students' attitude surveys, DIBELS scores, and results of a main idea identification activity called Choose-A-Title. The post documentation occurred from November 26, 2007 through December 7, 2007.

Student Survey

The purpose of this instrument was to determine students' attitudes about their own oral reading. All 18 participants received and completed the survey in their reading classes during the week of November 26, 2007.

The first statement on the survey asked students to respond to the statement, “I am able to read all of the words”. According to the post data, 50% were *almost always* (n=9) able to read all of the words while 50% were *usually* (22%, n=4) or *sometimes* (28%, n=5) able to read all of the words.

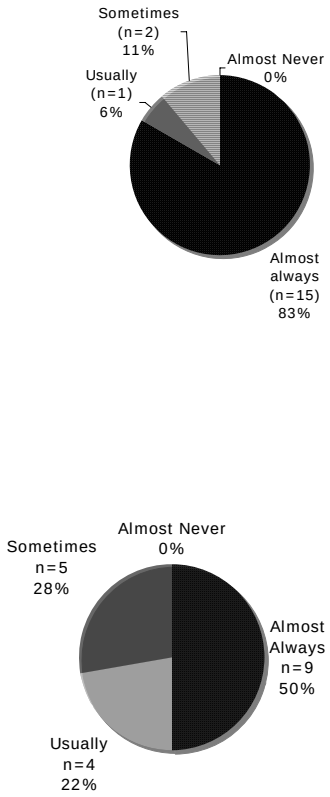


Figure 10; Pre- and Post Data Survey Statement “I am able to read all of the words”

The most notable change was a decrease in the number of students responding *almost always* to the statement, “I am able to read all of the words”. The pre data total of 83% (n=15) declined to 50% (n=9) in the post data. Students responding *usually* to the statement increased from 6% (n=1) in the pre data to 22% (n=4) in the post data. Students responding *sometimes*

increased from 11% (n=2) in the pre data to 28% (n=5) in the post data. No students responded *almost never* in either pre- or post data.

Please refer to Figure 10 for pre- and post-data comparison.

The second statement on the survey asked students to respond to the statement, “I pay attention to punctuation marks”. According to the post data, 56% could usually (n=10) pay attention to punctuation marks. Forty-four percent could almost always (33%, n=6) or sometimes (11%, n=2) pay attention to punctuation marks. No students responded “almost never”.

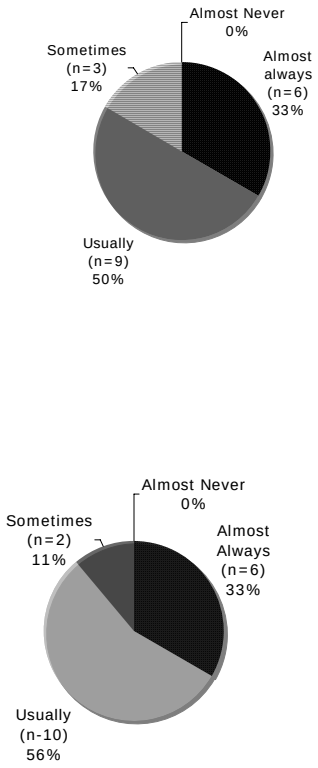


Figure 11; Pre- and Post Data Survey Statement “I pay attention to punctuation marks”

Compared with the pre data there were no changes in the *almost always* and the *almost never* categories. The 6% (n=1) increase in the *usually* category correlates with the 6% decrease in the *sometimes* category.

Please refer to Figure 11 for pre- and post data comparison.

The third statement on the survey asked students to respond to the statement, “I read with expression and feeling”. According to the post data, 50% could almost always (28%, n=5) or sometimes (22%, n=4) read with expression and feeling. Forty-four percent could usually (n=8) read with expression and feeling. One student (6%) almost never could read with expression and feeling.

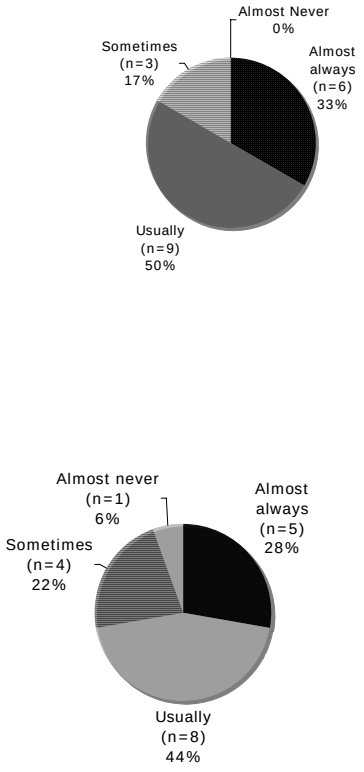
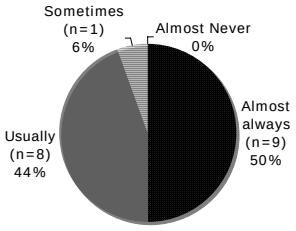


Figure 12; Pre- and Post Data Survey Statement “I read with expression and feeling”

In the post data, decreases occurred in the *almost always* and *usually* responses: *almost always* declined from 33% (n=6) to 28% (n=5), and *usually* declined from 50% (n=9) to 44% (n=8). In the *sometimes* category there was an increase from 17% (n=3) to 22% (n=4). In the pre data no students responded *almost never* compared with the post data total of 6% (n=1).

Please refer to Figure 12 for the pre- and post data comparison.

The fourth statement on the survey asked students to respond to the statement, “My reading is smooth and not too fast or not too slow”. According to the post data, 55% could almost always (n=10) read smoothly and not too fast or not too slow. Twenty-eight percent could usually (n=5) read smoothly and not too fast or not too slow. Seventeen percent could almost never (11%, n=2) or sometimes (6%, n=1) read smoothly and not too fast or not too slow.



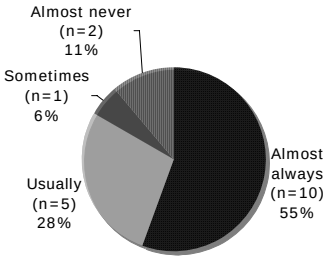
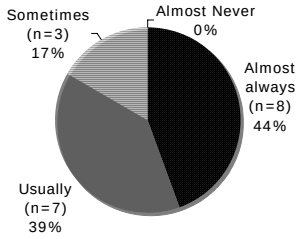


Figure 13; Pre- and Post Data Survey Statement "My reading is smooth and not too fast or not too slow"

The most notable change was a decline in the number of students responding *usually*, from 44% (n=8) in the pre data to 28% (n=5) in the post data. The *almost always* response category increased from 50% (n=9) to 55% (n=10). The *almost never* category increased from 0% in pre data to a post data total of 11% (n=2).

Please refer to Figure 13 for pre- and post data comparison.

The fifth statement on the survey asked students to respond to the statement, "I am able to answer questions about what I read". According to the post data, 72% are almost always (33%, n=6) or sometimes (39%, n=7) able to answer questions about what they read. Twenty-two percent are usually (n=4) able to answer questions about what they read. One student almost never (6%) is able to answer questions about what he or she read.



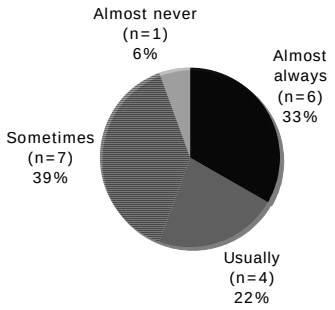
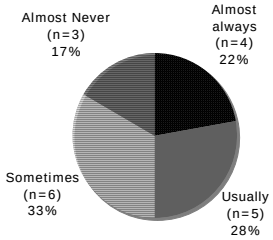


Figure 14; Pre- and Post Survey Statement "I am able to answer questions about what I read"

In the post data decreases occurred in the *almost always* and *usually* responses: *almost always* declined from 44% (n=8) to 33% (n=6), and *usually* declined from 39% (n=7) to 22% (n=4). In the *sometimes* category there was an increase from 17% (n=3) to 39% (n=7). In the pre data no students responded *almost never* compared with the post data total of 6% (n=1).

Please refer to Figure 14 for pre- and post data comparison.

The sixth and final statement on the survey asked students to respond to the statement, "I think others like my reading". According to the post data, four students responded "almost always" (22%). Five students responded "usually" (28%). Five students responded "sometimes" (28%). Four students responded "almost never" (22%).



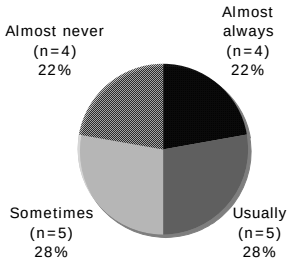


Figure 15; Pre- and Post Data Survey Statement "I think others like my reading"

Between the pre- and post data there were no changes in the *almost always* category, which stayed constant at 22% (n=4), and the *usually* category, which stayed constant at 28% (n=5). The decrease in the *sometimes* category, from 33% (n=6) to 28% (n=5) correlates with an increase in the *almost never* category from 17% (n=3) to 22% (n=4).

Please refer to Figure 15 for pre- and post data comparison.

Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) Assessment

The purpose of this instrument was to assess students' fluency rates compared to benchmark scores of the national average. All 18 participants received and completed the DIBELS assessment during the week of November 26, 2007. The DIBELS assessment was administered to six sixth grade students at Site A, six third grade students at Site B, and six fifth grade students at Site C. Depending on the students' scores they were determined to be *at risk, some risk, or low risk.*

The following post data was collected at Site A. One student was considered some risk (17%), five students were considered low risk (83%). There were no students in the *at risk* category, compared with a pre data total of 17% (n=1). The *some risk* category decreased from a pre data total of 33% (n=2) to 17% (n=1) in the post data. The pre- and post data decrease in the

at risk and *some risk* categories correlate with an increase in the *low risk* category, from a pre data total of 50% (n=3) to a post data total of 83% (n=5).

Please refer to Figure 16 for pre- and post data comparison.

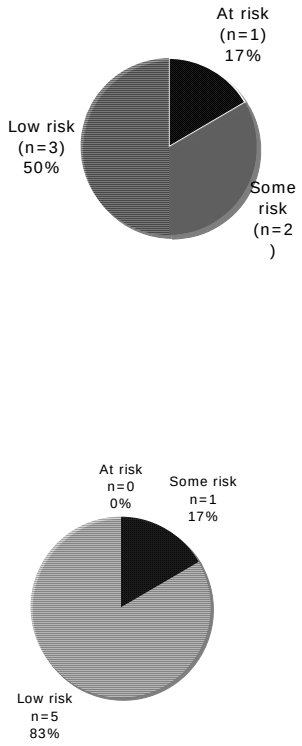


Figure 16; Pre- and Post Data Site A DIBELS Assessment Results

The following post data was collected at Site B. Two students were considered some risk (33%), and four were considered low risk (67%).

There were no students in the *at risk* category, compared with a pre data total of 33% (n=2). The *some risk* category decreased from a pre data total of 50% (n=3) to 33% (n=2) in the post data. The pre- and post data decrease in the *at risk* and *some risk* categories correlate with an increase in the *low risk* category, from a pre data total of 17% (n=1) to a post data total of 67% (n=4).

Please refer to Figure 17 for a pre- and post data comparison.

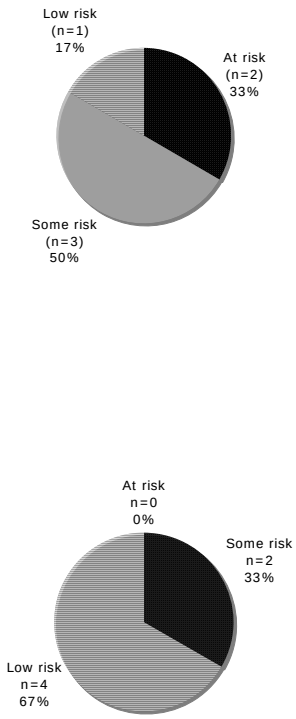


Figure 17; Site B DIBELS Assessment Results

The students at Site C were in an above-level reading group; all six students scored in the low risk category in both pre- and post data.

Choose-A-Title

The purpose of this instrument was to assess students' reading comprehension based on their ability to identify the main idea of a passage. All 18 participants engaged in the activity in their reading classes on November 27, 2007. Students read a passage silently, and then selected from a list of possible titles, attempting to identify the title that best conveyed the main idea. Students at Site A and C read a sixth grade-level passage while Students at Site B read a third-grade level passage.

The following graph includes the data from all three sites. In pre data a total of 39% (n=7) chose the correct title compared with an increase to 78% (n=14) in post data, correlating with a decrease from 61% (n=11) to 22% (n=4) choosing an incorrect title.

Please refer to Figure 18 for pre- and post data comparison.

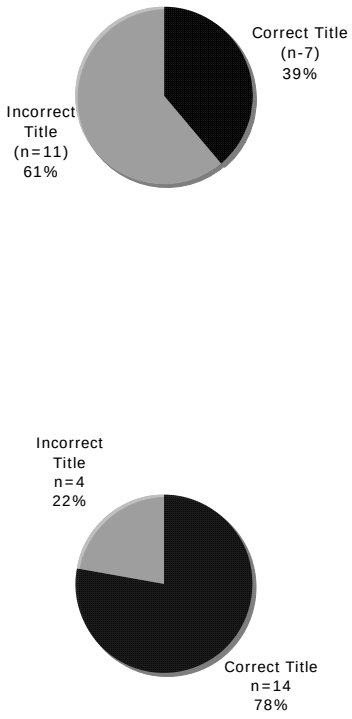


Figure 18; Pre- and Post Data Choose-A-Title Assessment Results

Conclusions and Recommendations

As we reviewed the months of intervention, we were interested to find that although our teaching situations differ there were commonalities in student response. Site A was a typically developing heterogeneous 6th grade class, while Site B was a 3rd grade resource support class, and the Site C students were high ability 5th grade readers.

We conclude that making the students aware of the three elements of fluency: prosody, rate, and automaticity contributed to their ability to self-monitor and to set goals for improvement. Regarding the first survey question, “I am able to read all of the words”, we attribute the notable decrease in students responding *almost always* to a more realistic evaluation of their decoding skills (Figure 10).

Pre and post-data for the third, fourth, and fifth survey questions revealed a decline in the *almost always* and *usually* categories. The third survey question was, “I read with expression and feeling” (Figure 12), the fourth survey question was, “My reading is smooth and not too fast and not too slow” (Figure 13), and the fifth survey question was, “I am able to answer questions about what I read” (Figure 14). We conclude that the increase in students responding *sometimes* and *almost never* reflects a more realistic self-assessment. We find it interesting that students heightened awareness of areas of individual improvement did not seem to be accompanied by a loss of confidence. Throughout the weeks of interventions, students participated enthusiastically in group activity. Students showed great engagement in collaborative intervention such as choral poetry reading and reader’s theater, which provided the benefits of modeling and meaningful repetition in the forms of rehearsal and performance. Students became comfortable exchanging compliments and constructive suggestions. We conclude that the focus on working toward specific personal goals in a cooperative setting de-emphasized competition and resulted in improved attitudes toward learning.

The sixth survey question, “I think others like my reading” showed almost no change between pre and post-data (Figure 15). We believe that this would be an interesting area for further investigation because we wonder if it reflects young children’s inability to accurately

interpret audience responses. Research into egocentrism in young children might provide strategies for increasing their awareness of the responses of others.

The results of the DIBELS oral reading fluency assessment indicated that at Site A all students but one was benchmarked (Figure 16). Site B had two students who were not benchmarked (Figure 17). We conclude that since the students at Site B were 3rd grade emerging readers their reading skills were not as secure or developed as a typical 6th grader's. It should be noted that at pre documentation there were two students *at risk* from Site B and one student *at risk* at Site A. At post documentation all three students had moved out of that *at risk* category. We conclude that the oral reading fluency interventions had a positive impact on this component of reading.

We observe the results of the Choose-A-Title intervention indicated that there was a notable increase in the correct title choice (Figure 18). We conclude that the weekly practice of paired reading, echo and choral reading, and reader's theater contributed to increased comprehension.

Our students' positive response to ten weeks of fluency-based interventions convinced us that many of the activities warrant continued implementation. Performance related activities proved to be highly motivating and we plan to continue gathering material for reader's theater and poetry for choral reading. Paired reading proved most effective when it was closely linked to the curriculum, rather than as an isolated fluency activity. We plan to implement paired reading in connection with curriculum, to make it practical and meaningful for students, facilitating transfer of learning.

We feel that assessing students' reading comprehension is an essential and difficult facet of instruction. In our research the Choose-A-Title tool fell short of our expectations because we

questioned its validity; we had adapted material for our varied grade levels. We recommend a standardized form of this type of assessment as opposed to a teacher created tool.

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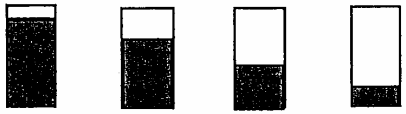
Reading Survey

How do you feel when you read aloud to the class?

	 almost always	usually	sometimes	almost never
1. I am able to read all of the words.				
2. I pay attention to punctuation marks.				
3. I read with expression and feeling.				
4. My reading is smooth and not too fast or not too slow.				
5. I am able to answer questions about what I read.				
6. I think others like my reading.				

Appendix B

Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills™ 6th Ed.
University of Oregon
Sixth Grade Benchmark Assessment

Name: _____ Teacher: _____

School: _____ District: _____

	Benchmark 1 Beginning/Fall	Benchmark 2 Middle/Winter	Benchmark 3 End/Spring
Date			
DIBELS Oral Reading Fluency	(middle score)	(middle score)	(middle score)
Retell Fluency (Optional)	(middle score)	(middle score)	(middle score)

Good, R. H., & Kaminski, R. A. (Eds.). (2002). Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (6th ed.). Eugene, OR: Institute for the Development of Educational Achievement. Available: http://dibels.uoregon.edu/.

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Appendix C

Name_____

Choose-A-Title:

____Exercise is Fun

____Adult Yoga

____The Basics of Yoga

____Yoga for Kids

____A Yoga Session

What's your favorite type of exercise? For many kids, it's soccer, basketball, tennis, swimming, or maybe pressing the buttons on a computer game, but another form of exercise that's becoming more popular is yoga.

Yoga is a great way to exercise the whole body, regardless of your physical ability. Yoga exercises consist of poses, or postures, that help strengthen, stretch, and tone the body. In addition, they promote balance and relaxation.

No special equipment is required to practice yoga. Some people use exercise mats, but you can always use the bare floor and a towel. When practicing yoga, you should wear comfortable clothes such as tights or shorts and a loose shirt.

You can purchase or check out books and videotapes that teach the basics of yoga, or you can attend a class. The best way to learn yoga is from an experienced instructor who enthusiastically practices yoga.

If you were to attend a yoga class, you might begin by warming up with some gentle stretches. Next, you might do special work poses such as the "tree pose." In this pose, you stand on one leg with the foot of the other leg placed on the inside thigh of the standing leg. Then you slowly raise your arms above your head, placing your palms together.

Some poses may be sitting or squatting poses, or you might lie on your back with your legs stretched over your head. Some yoga poses may look strange, but they feel great, like a nice long yawn.

Breathing deeply and steadily is quite important in yoga, because it helps you stretch your body and relax into the poses. Speaking of relaxing, an essential part of a yoga session is lying still and quiet for a several minutes at the end. "Allow your body to melt into the floor," a yoga instructor might say. This is a time of rest and making room for the calm, silent part of us that sometimes gets lost in the noise of everyday life. No wonder this is the most popular part of a yoga session!

Appendix D

There is a fuzzy, faded picture of my great-great-great-grandmother in the Clarion County Museum. The museum is located in the main room of an old schoolhouse that the local historical society saved from the wrecker's ball by having it declared an historical landmark. My ancestor is marching behind Susan B. Anthony who is leading a group to the polls in Rochester. In the picture, my ancestor is wearing bloomers, which was what they called the trousers that were invented by Amelia Jenks Bloomer of Homer, New York, and suffragette is what they called the women who were fighting for a woman's right to vote. Instead of getting to vote, my triple-great-grandmother got arrested.

There is no picture of her at the first convention for [illegible] but she was there. In the family archive, [illegible]r Draper passed on to my mother [illegible]rida, there is a letter from her, post-[illegible]d dated 1848.

[illegible]mers and educators on both sides of [illegible]ere have been tractors and black-[illegible]been strong women on my mother's

↓ Start

Last August when I was visiting my grandmother Draper in Florida, notice came that my homeroom teacher for grade six would be Mrs. Olinski. Unless she proved to be someone who had changed her name because of marriage or some other legal procedure, she would be new to Epiphany Middle School. I hoped she was. Having a teacher who didn't know I had an older brother would be a welcome change.

There is nothing wrong with Lucas, and that is what is wrong with him. He is a genius, a star athlete, and is always doing something wonderful and/or record setting. Half the population of Epiphany is convinced that Luke Potter will become so famous that his name will become a noun like Kleenex or Coke. The other half is convinced that Luke Potter will become a verb like Xerox or fax. And if someday, someone says, "*Luke* me that information, please," that information will be organized, memorized, and set to music.

Luke is six years older than I. He is in college now, but that has not put an end to his reputation. He has become a myth like Paul Bunyan or Davy Crockett. Because my name is Potter but not Lucas, I have been a disappointment to every one of my teachers during my previous six years—kindergarten counts.

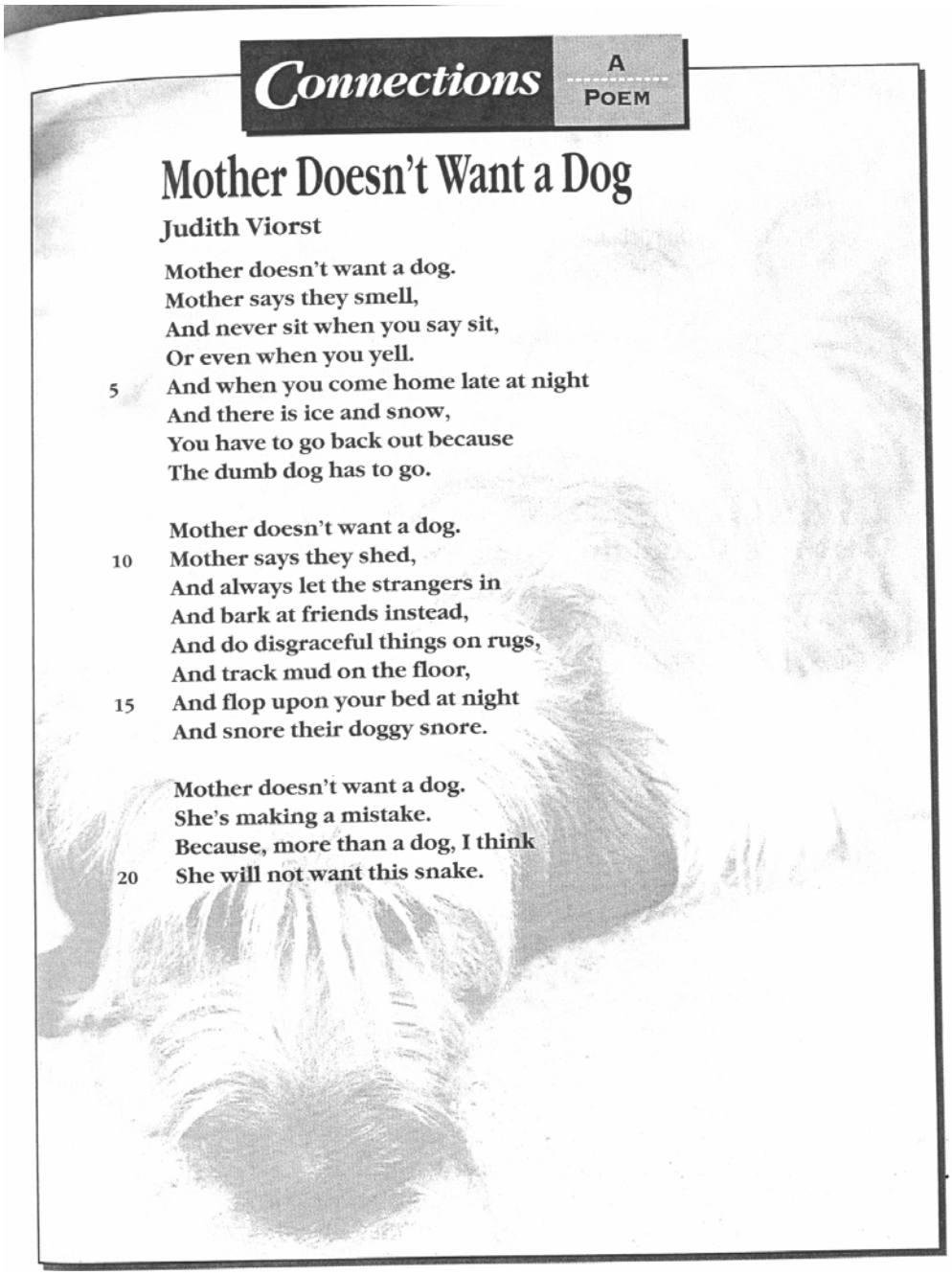
← End

The bus swung through t[illegible]
Farm, the subdivision that was
place. The last of the Sillingto[illegible]
land to Clarion College. The co[illegible]
it sold all the surrounding land [illegible]
roads, sidewalks, and sewers, divided it up into lots, and sold it to builders. Every subdivision has a name. They named this one The Farm. It is no more a farm than the Aquarium at Epcot is the Atlantic.

None of the historical residents of Epiphany liked the idea of having the Sillington place parceled off for a subdivision. My parents, for example, hated it. My mother says that if people want to live in a place where every tree and shrub is put in place by a landscape architect, why don't they go live in a theme park? Mother avoids the subdivision as if it were a toxic waste dump. She refers to the people who live in The Farm as *them*. In her mind, there is a big difference between *them* and *us*, between living *on* a farm and living *in* The Farm. To *them* farming is a lifestyle not a livelihood. The fact that milk comes from cows has probably occurred to *them*, but *they* prefer to think of it as recycled grass.

THE VIEW FROM SATURDAY by E.L. Konigsburg

Appendix E



Connections A POEM

Mother Doesn't Want a Dog

Judith Viorst

Mother doesn't want a dog.
Mother says they smell,
And never sit when you say sit,
Or even when you yell.
And when you come home late at night
And there is ice and snow,
You have to go back out because
The dumb dog has to go.

Mother doesn't want a dog.
Mother says they shed,
And always let the strangers in
And bark at friends instead,
And do disgraceful things on rugs,
And track mud on the floor,
And flop upon your bed at night
And snore their doggy snore.

Mother doesn't want a dog.
She's making a mistake.
Because, more than a dog, I think
She will not want this snake.

Appendix F

First Day of School

Summer Goes

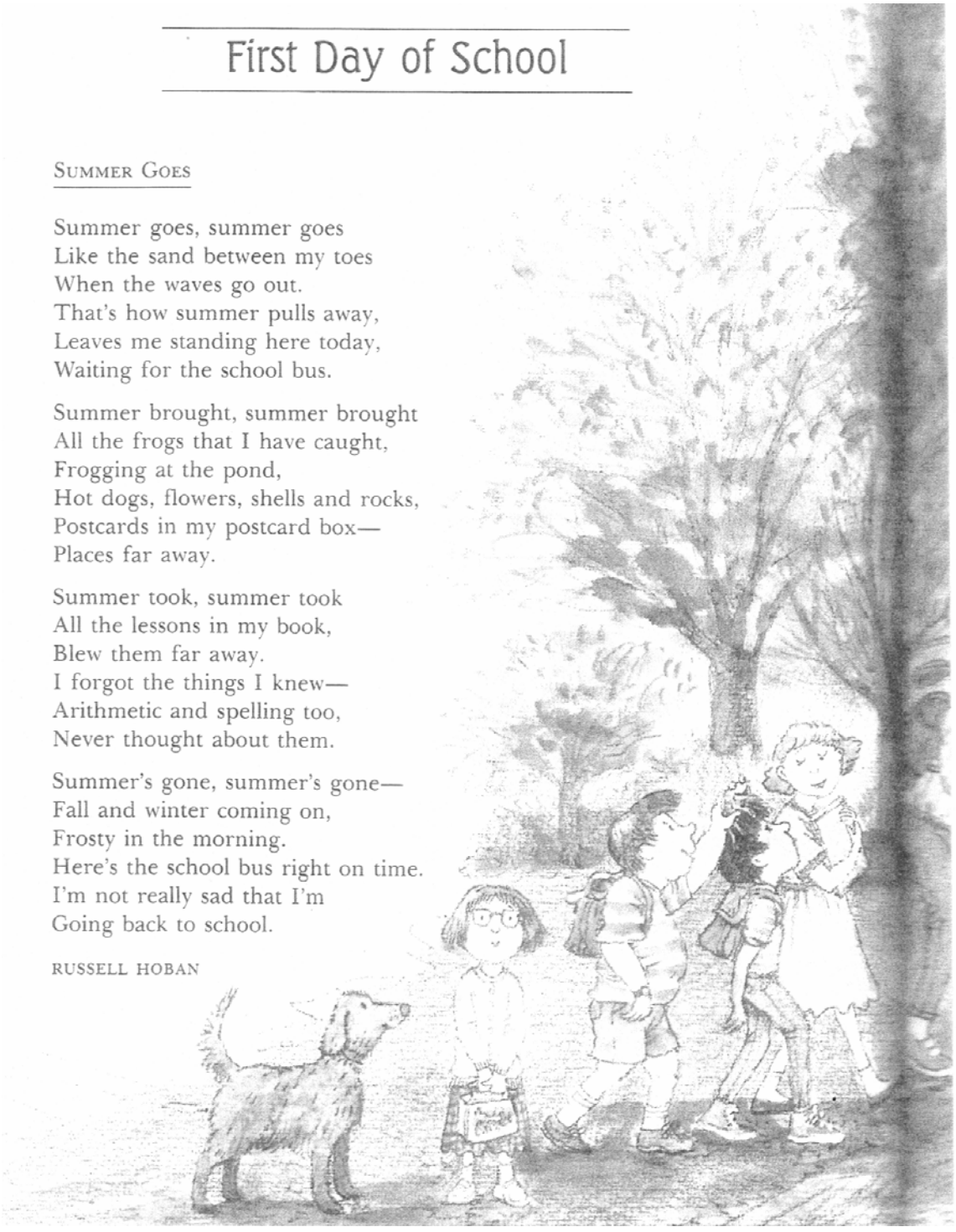
Summer goes, summer goes
Like the sand between my toes
When the waves go out.
That's how summer pulls away,
Leaves me standing here today,
Waiting for the school bus.

Summer brought, summer brought
All the frogs that I have caught,
Frogging at the pond,
Hot dogs, flowers, shells and rocks,
Postcards in my postcard box—
Places far away.

Summer took, summer took
All the lessons in my book,
Blew them far away.
I forgot the things I knew—
Arithmetic and spelling too,
Never thought about them.

Summer's gone, summer's gone—
Fall and winter coming on,
Frosty in the morning.
Here's the school bus right on time.
I'm not really sad that I'm
Going back to school.

RUSSELL HOBAN



Appendix G

Jimmy Jet and His TV Se

Shel Silverstein

A
I'll tell you the story of Jimmy Jet—
And you know what I tell you is true.
He loved to watch his TV set
Almost as much as you.

B
He watched all day, he watched all night
Till he grew pale and lean,
From *The Early Show* to *The Late Late Show*
And all the shows between.

Appendix H

Name_____

Funny Fables for Fabulous Fluency

There are three fables in this packet.
You will practice fluent reading with one or two other students, using a different fable each week.

Begin the practice session by recalling that the three elements of fluency are *accuracy, rate*, and *prosody*.

Round 1: One student reads aloud while the partner reads along silently, then the second student reads aloud (followed by third student).
Reflect on your own reading, and think about goals for improving your oral reading in Round 2.

Round 2: Repeat the oral and silent reading as in 1.
After everyone in the group has read, tell about good examples of the elements of oral reading fluency that you noticed.
Write one goal telling how you plan to improve your oral reading in Round 3.

Round 3: Repeat the oral and silent reading as in 1 and 2.
Group reflection: Talk about good examples, putting the spotlight on effective uses of fluency skills to highlight the meaning and enjoyment of the fable.
Write a goal for the next session.