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Concurrent Session 4 (2:10 p.m. – 2:50 p.m.)
The Impact of Field Experience on Elementary Students

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Students who did not acquire basic reading skills in the early grades were shown to be at risk not only for school failure but also for negative outcomes beyond the school years (Karweit & Wasik, 1992; Kennedy, Birman, & Demaline, 1986). However, according to the 2007 National Assessment of Educational Progress, 33% of fourth graders read below the basic level for their grade, and 67% of fourth graders read below the proficient level for their grade (Lee, Grigg & Donahue, 2007).

Federal initiatives such as the America Reads Challenge Act (1997) and the No Child Left Behind Act (2001) made a national commitment that all students would read independently by the end of third grade. Both of these initiatives proposed adult volunteers as individual reading tutors for those students who are at risk of not meeting that goal.

In response to these federal initiatives, the Elementary Education Program at Indiana University Southeast (IUS) and Mt. Tabor Elementary School in New Albany, Indiana have embarked on a collaborative project, Students and Mentors Achieving Reading Together (SMART). This project places IUS students as individual tutors with struggling first- and second-grade readers as part of their requirements for field experience. The major objective of the tutoring program is to help struggling readers raise their reading levels. Each struggling reader is given half an hour individual reading tutoring on Monday through Thursday for one semester. Each IUS student in provides 30 minutes of individual tutoring each week to two different SMART students. Therefore, each struggling second-grade reader receives a weekly total of two hours of one-to-one tutoring provided by four different IUS students. Each IUS student provides 60 minutes of tutoring divided equally between two different SMART students each week.

The SMART program focuses on reading fluency, reading comprehension, building vocabulary and practicing writing. Specifically, the first grade SMART program includes reading a book; talking about main idea, plot, characters, and check comprehension; reviewing unfamiliar words in the book; writing a sentence about the story; putting the sentence in correct word order; practicing sight words. The second grade SMART program includes reading a story; answering comprehension questions; putting unfamiliar words in the story to a vocabulary packet; practicing sight words and using them to make sentences; writing letters to their teachers about something they read or learned that week. At the end of each tutoring session, the IUS students assess how well the children read, comprehend and write.

The present study examined the impact of field experience on elementary students. Specifically, does the SMART program improve the reading skills of struggling readers?

Participants

All 96 first and 94 second graders at Mt. Tabor Elementary School were given the Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA; Beaver, 2003) at the beginning of the semester. Fifty first graders and 42 second graders had reading scores below their grade levels. Ten of these 50 first graders and 7 of these 42 second graders were selected to the SMART program by their grade teachers to receive supplemental reading tutoring in addition to regular classroom instruction on reading.

Instrument

Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA; Beaver, 2003). The DRA is a criterion-referenced test, and no normative data are presented. Students' reading performance is assessed within a literature-based reading program incorporating both fiction and nonfiction. Rubrics are provided for evaluating story retelling and for oral reading accuracy. The DRA is administered in a one-on-one conference between the teacher and the student. The teacher then records the student's responses. The DRA gives the teachers feedback on the reading strengths and weaknesses of the student in the areas of phonological awareness, metalanguage, letter/high-frequency words, phonics, structural analysis and syllabication, oral reading accuracy, oral reading fluency, and oral reading comprehension.

Student scores are translated into reading level. The scores for kindergarten readiness level is 1 and 2; Grade 1 Pre-Primer level is 3 to 8; Grade 1 Primer level is 10; Grade 1 level is 12 to 16; Grade 2 level is 18 to 28; Grade 3 level is 30 to 38. For treatment purpose, scores are then described as Intervention, Instructional, Independent, and Advanced.

Procedure

At the beginning and the end of the SMART program, all SMART students were given the DRA to test their reading skills. The SMART program gave each struggling first- and second-grade reader half an hour individual reading tutoring from Monday through Thursday for one semester. Each IUS student provides 30 minutes of individual tutoring each week to two different SMART students.

Results

All struggling readers in the SMART program show substantial increase of reading scores. At the end of one semester, the first graders raised their reading scores from 1.3 to 8.2; and the second graders from 13.1 to 16.

Discussion

The present study showed a positive impact of field experience on elementary students. The use of teacher candidates as individual tutors in the SMART program improves the reading skills of struggling readers.

In a typical classroom, little time is available for individual children to read aloud under the classroom teacher's direct supervision. This lack of supervised reading time is particularly harmful to struggling readers who desperately need practice in a situation where feedback is available. Wasik and Slavin (1993) have argued that one-to-one tutoring potentially can increase time on task, ensure instruction at the appropriate level, and afford timely reinforcement and corrective feedback during reading. They conducted a review of five adult-delivered, one-to-one instructional programs in reading for first graders with reading difficulties. They concluded that all five programs had significant positive effects. Elbaum, Vaughn, Hughes, and Moody (2000) conducted a meta-analysis of supplementary, adult-instructed one-to-one reading interventions for elementary students at risk for reading failure. They also showed that students who received one-to-one instruction performed higher than the average level of the comparison group who did not receive any one-to-one instruction.

The positive result showed by the present study encourages the use of field experience to benefit more struggling readers. It is recommended that teacher educators incorporate individual tutoring as part of the field experience for teacher candidates.

References

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