

How Does Paragraph Shrinking Affect the Reading Comprehension
of Struggling Intermediate Students?

Renee Estebo

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the

Master of Science Degree in Education

Action Research Project

Southwest Minnesota State University

April, 2012

37086 337th St.

Redwood Falls, MN 56283

Telephone: 507-644-3288

Email: prestebo@hotmail.com

Facilitators: Dr. Tanya McCoss-Yerigan

Scott Jans

Abstract

Effective reading comprehension is essential for academic success. Students who are unable to comprehend what they are reading struggle across all curricular areas. Explicit instruction and application of comprehension strategies is essential in the classroom setting. Summarization and main idea identification are a pair of comprehension strategies that all students need to perform at proficiency. In this study, the researcher measured the effects of a specific reading strategy, Paragraph Shrinking, on the reading comprehension skills of fourth grade students receiving 30 minutes of Title I reading services per day. Paragraph Shrinking, a peer-mediated reading strategy designed to develop comprehension through summarization and main idea identification, was used on a daily basis for nine weeks. The findings of the study revealed that the implementation of explicit reading comprehension instruction resulted in increased reading comprehension scores on norm-referenced, criterion-referenced, and core reading curriculum assessments.

Table of Contents

Abstract.....2

Chapter One: Introduction4

Chapter Two: Literature Review8

Chapter Three: Methodology.....23

Chapter Four: Results31

Chapter Five: Discussion.....36

References.....43

Appendix A: Parent Letter.....46

Appendix B: Paragraph Shrinking Question Sheet.....47

Appendix C: Paragraph Shrinking Point Sheet.....48

Appendix D: AIMSWeb Benchmark Passage.....49

Introduction

Researchers have proven that the ability to comprehend is not innate. Students must be taught how to comprehend text. Unfortunately, as acknowledged by Tankersley (2005), “The National Center for Educational Statistics (2001) recently reported that 45 percent of all 4th graders tested in the United States are not fluent readers” (p.46). Therefore, it is possible that fifty-five percent of American fourth graders are struggling to decode and comprehend. According to Tankersley (2005), “Students must understand that reading is thinking. From 4th grade on, most of our work in literacy development is about helping students understand that thinking and making meaning are the essence of reading” (p. 113). Although it is a complicated process, explicit comprehension instruction is essential to reading success.

Purpose of the Study / Problem Statement

The purpose of this study was to identify the effects of a specific reading strategy on the reading comprehension skills of struggling intermediate students. Due to the current emphasis on state mandated assessments and student proficiency results; I focused on increasing student achievement levels on comprehension assessments. The comprehension assessments I chose were predictive of proficiency on state mandated assessments. I specifically chose to study the impact of a reading strategy that targets main idea identification and generation for three reasons. First, a large percentage of items on state mandated assessments address main idea. Second, students need to be able to identify and generate a main idea statement in order to summarize text. Third, there is a limited amount of research available on students’ abilities to independently summarize a main idea into one sentence. I investigated and examined how a specific reading

strategy, Paragraph Shrinking, affected the reading comprehension skills of struggling intermediate students.

Setting

This study took place in a rural southwestern Minnesota elementary school with a population of approximately 420 students in kindergarten through fourth grade. Eight 9 and 10 year old fourth grade students who qualified for Title I services were chosen for the study.

Definitions

The following definitions were provided to ensure understanding of these terms throughout the study.

- *RIT score*- This score is derived from the Rausch UnIT (RIT) scale. The RIT scale is an equal interval achievement scale that helps measure growth over time and has the same meaning regardless of the grade or age of the student. Student results calculated on a RIT scale are reported as a RIT score.
- *Lexile*- A lexile is a measure used to match readers to leveled text. Students earn a Lexile score in a variety of assessments. Text materials can be leveled using a Lexile measure.

Limitations /Assumptions

In this study, I examined the use of Paragraph Shrinking, a main idea identification and generation strategy. This strategy is typically incorporated into a peer tutoring program named Peer Assisted Learning Strategies (PALS). Existing research on PALS does not address the use of Paragraph Shrinking in isolation. PALS is also typically used in a heterogeneously grouped general classroom setting. For this study, I focused on a small group of students who are of similar ability levels, in the below average range of reading abilities. For these reasons, the

results of this study should not be compared to results derived from the use of PALS in a general classroom setting.

The Paragraph Shrinking strategy used in this study incorporates partner reading. However, the emphasis of this strategy is on main idea identification and generation. Results of this study should not be compared to results of studies focusing on partner reading.

Significance of the Study

The results of this study will impact main idea instruction in general education classrooms as well as reading intervention settings. Educators will know how to incorporate and explicitly teach main idea identification and generation in a variety of texts. Educators will also know how to assess the impact of the Paragraph Shrinking strategy on the comprehension skills of the students in their classrooms.

Organization of the Study

In Chapter Two, literature from scholarly articles and texts related to comprehension instruction, peer collaboration, and collaborative instructional strategies will be examined. In Chapter Three, the research methodology selected to respond to the needs of struggling intermediate readers will be delineated. In Chapter Four, data collected from the study will be presented and analyzed. The study will conclude with Chapter Five, which will include a summary of conclusions drawn from the data presented in Chapter Four.

Summary

In this introductory chapter, I have described the purpose of completing this study. The purpose is to examine the use of a reading comprehension strategy targeting main idea generation. I have also defined the problem the study addresses. There is a limited amount of research available on students' abilities to independently summarize a main idea into one

sentence. In addition, definitions and limitations associated with this study were discussed. Finally, the significance of the study for educators was shared. The results of this study will impact main idea instruction in general education classrooms as well as reading intervention settings. In Chapter Two, I will detail literature on comprehension instruction, peer collaboration, and collaborative instructional strategies to address problems identified in working with struggling intermediate readers.

Literature Review

Introduction

Numerous studies have been done to discover how reading comprehension is developed and how to increase the comprehension skills of students that struggle to understand what they read. It has been a common assumption that once students learn to decode words, they can comprehend what they read. Researchers have proven that the ability to comprehend is not innate. Students must be taught how to comprehend text. Fluent decoding is an indication of a readiness to transition between learning to read and making meaning, but it is not an absolute (Coyne, Zipoli, Chard, Faggella-Luby, Ruby, Santoro, and Baker, 2009). Unfortunately Tankersley (2005) indicates, “The National Center for Educational Statistics (2001) recently reported that 45 percent of all 4th graders tested in the United States are not fluent readers” (p.46). Therefore, it is possible that fifty-five percent of American fourth graders are struggling to decode and comprehend. Tankersley (2005) argued, “Without this solid weave in the tapestry of reading, we cannot expect students to develop strong understandings of academic content and expository text” (p.46).

In this study, the researcher implemented the use of a reading comprehension strategy named Paragraph Shrinking. The researcher also explored existing studies on reading comprehension instruction and strategies, main idea instruction, peer collaboration, and collaborative instructional strategies.

Reading Comprehension Instruction

Reading comprehension instruction supports students in developing skills and strategies to construct meaning from text. According to Coyne et al. (2009), “Comprehension is the goal of reading. Therefore, the ultimate purpose of reading instruction should be to improve

comprehension” (p. 222). Reading comprehension is the process in which readers construct meaning by interacting with a text. Understanding how readers make connections to text and how the interaction with text affects the readers are the first steps to improving comprehension instruction. Teachers need to work collaboratively with students to effectively help them develop the abilities to comprehend narrative and expository text (Pardo, 2004). According to Tankersley (2005), “Students must understand that reading is thinking. From 4th grade on, most of our work in literacy development is about helping students understand that thinking and making meaning are the essence of reading” (p. 113). Although it is a complicated process, explicit comprehension instruction is essential to reading success.

A reader’s comprehension is impacted by his world knowledge, purpose for reading, and motivation to read. The more world knowledge a reader has about the text topic, the more likely they will construct meaning from the text. In addition to world knowledge, motivation influences the application of comprehension strategies and effort put into making meaning. Motivation influences a reader’s interest, purpose, emotion, and persistence with the reading task. Authentic purposes for reading reflect reading and writing purposes that occur in the world outside of school (Pardo, 2004). Teachers can support all three of these elements through practices used in the classroom.

Engagement in reading is facilitated when classroom teachers provide instruction in cognitive strategies and a motivational support system to encourage reading. Highly engaged readers are strategic, using such comprehension strategies as questioning and summarizing to gain meaning from text. Likewise, highly engaged readers are internally motivated to read, therefore reading more frequently. Researchers have found that reading engagement and reading comprehension are correlated (Wigfield, Guthrie, Perencevich, Taboada, Klauda, McRae, and

Barbosa, 2008). When students do not respond to instruction with a high level of reading engagement, comprehension outcomes are relatively low. Wigfield et al. (2008) found direct evidence that the amount of reading engagement exhibited by students directly affects reading comprehension. By optimizing students' reading engagement in the classroom, teachers can realistically expect to increase students' reading comprehension.

Many young readers today have limited world knowledge. A reader's world knowledge is built throughout life by experiences and conversation (Pardo, 2004). Conversation helps readers make sense of the world and when used as a connection to thinking strategies, fosters comprehension acquisition (Ketch, 2005). Teachers help increase world knowledge through the use of informational text and classroom conversation. Teachers are using informational texts more in the primary grades to help students learn content knowledge as well as to prepare them for expectations in the intermediate grades and beyond, where the majority of texts they read will be informational (Reading Study Group [RAND], 2002). One research study found that fourth grade students exposed to more informational text had better reading performance with informational text than with other text types (Shanahan, Callison, Carriere, Duke, Pearson, Schatschneider, and Torgesen, 2010). By reading and listening to informational books, readers will build background knowledge about the world that can be activated at a later time (Pardo, 2004).

Peer Collaboration

Decades ago, the work of Vygotsky helped establish that learning is social. In a series of studies, Vygotsky found that children could solve more difficult problems with some assistance from a more knowledgeable peer. Thus, Vygotsky coined the term Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) (Brown, 2006). Vygotsky defined ZPD as "the distance between the actual

development level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers” (as quoted in Brown, 2006, p. 29). Interactions between peers contribute to each partner gaining a higher level of understanding than when working independently.

Ketch (2005) found that conversation leads to critical thinking and comprehension acquisition. Students can build the strategic self-talk in their heads by talking about the strategies they are learning with others. Peer collaboration has proven to be a powerful strategy to increase student engagement, response levels, and complex academic behaviors (O’Connor, 2011). Tankersley (2005) found that:

The best classroom environment for struggling readers is one where they can think and talk aloud with their classmates and the teacher about their ideas and questions. The focus of the classroom should not be on the reading itself, but rather on the process of making meaning and creating understandings about content. (p.25)

One of the few studies in the field that directly addressed student talk centered on partner reading. Griffin (2002) supported the use of similar ability partners to scaffold learning. Her results established that peers of equal ability were able to scaffold one another to higher skill levels. She recommended that classrooms design instruction to include peer literacy assisting strategies.

Given the power of peer support during reading, Brown (2006) examined how peer talk enhanced literacy learning, specifically how it affected partner reading. Partner reading in this study means two children sitting side-by-side reading a text. Student pairs were driven to make meaning, using their talk to make connections, inquire, and reconstruct text. Most partners held

some type of conversation that re-told the main events of the text. In every situation, peer talk functioned as a scaffold for each learner to different degrees and in different ways. Talk between partners also helped less confident readers mediate the text. By sharing these literacy events, students were able to provide a scaffold for each other while reading text (Brown, 2006).

Teachers can prepare students for partner reading by modeling the necessary peer collaboration behaviors and reading techniques, then gradually releasing this responsibility to the students. Collaborative learning activities are most productive when the students perceive their roles as valuable and teachers motivate students to help their peers learn rather than simply giving their peers the answer (Shanahan et al., 2010).

Reading Comprehension Strategies

Reading researchers support the idea that readers who are taught and use a variety of specific comprehension strategies are likely to recall and comprehend what they read (Stahl, 2004). “Readers must intentionally and purposefully work to construct meaning from the text they are reading” (Coyne, 2009, p.225). O’Connor & Vadasy (2011) stated: “When considering the advances made in designing effective interventions to remediate decoding deficits, there is considerably less research in comprehension strategy training to alleviate comprehension deficits of struggling readers” (p.199). Skilled readers identify a purpose for reading, apply strategies flexibly, monitor their comprehension, and repair breakdowns in comprehension. Students experiencing learning difficulties are less likely to learn concepts and strategies that are presented in an implicit manner (Coyne, 2009). RAND (2002) concluded that “the explicitness with which teachers teach comprehension strategies makes a difference in learner outcomes, especially for low-achieving students” (p.33). Presenting comprehension instruction explicitly and systematically allows students to integrate new information and strategies with previous

knowledge and skills. This integration allows students to become more flexible in applying comprehension strategies across a variety of text structures. Shanahan, et al. (2010) defined strategies as “intentional mental actions during reading that improve reading comprehension” (p. 11). RAND (2002) found two skills that are particularly well suited to an instructional emphasis on strategic integration: the ability to apply multiple strategies in expository text and the ability to apply strategies within and across content areas. Consistent with this recommendation, RAND (2002) concluded that “teachers who provide comprehension strategy instruction that is deeply connected within the context of subject matter learning, such as history and science, foster comprehension development” (p. 39). It is the goal, as students learn strategies in the classroom, that they will transfer them to other appropriate settings (Stahl, 2004). Explicit instruction on applying comprehension strategies within and across content areas supports the generalization of strategy use.

Effective comprehension strategy instruction follows a cycle of modeling, explaining, and guiding that leads to independent practice and fluency. Strategies are taught in sequential steps following this cycle. Think-aloud procedures may be used to make metacognitive processes overt for students. If independent practice does not lead to fluency, then more diagnostic teaching is required. Once a strategy has become fluent, teachers should introduce more challenging strategies and text. Important strategies, such as finding main ideas and summarizing, should be reviewed throughout each year and reintroduced every year in K-8 literacy instruction (Afflerbach, Pearson & Paris, 2008).

Review is sufficient when a student can perform a task automatically and fluently. Instruction should be extended over several lessons, with many opportunities for review and practice of previously learned strategies. Long-term retention is enhanced when review is

distributed over time rather than done in mass practice (Coyne, 2009). Afflerbach, Pearson, and Paris (2008) stated: “The general rule is, teach children many strategies, teach them early, reteach them often, and connect assessment with reteaching” (p. 371).

Shanahan, et al. (2010) reviewed thirteen studies from the 1990’s testing the effects on reading comprehension of instructional practices that include reading comprehension strategies as a major or minor component. Twelve of the studies, including five in which teachers gradually released responsibility for strategy use to students, found positive reading comprehension effects for students exposed to the recommended strategies relative to students who were not taught to use the strategies. Eleven of the studies met the standards of the What Works Clearinghouse (WWC), a government entity that evaluates evidence for the validity of instructional programs and practices according to WWC standards. Two of the studies related to teaching multiple comprehension strategies. The first study found that for struggling students, teaching multiple comprehension strategies and showing them how to choose which one to use improved the students’ reading comprehension. The second study found that:

Students who were quickly taught multiple strategies along with an explanation of how to select and apply them were offered an extended period to use them in combination strategies more slowly without either an explanation of how to connect them or designated opportunities to use them in combination. (p.11)

Despite the evidence from these two studies, Shanahan, et al. (2010) believes that teachers can effectively use single- or multiple-strategy instruction. The panel did not find enough evidence to prove that the use of multiple-strategy instruction is superior over single-strategy instruction. Single-strategy instruction may be easier to implement because it allows the teacher and students to master one strategy at a time. Instruction in single strategies is

implemented until students demonstrate independent application of several individual strategies. The instructional emphasis can then shift toward explicit instruction on the simultaneous use of multiple comprehension strategies (Coyne, 2009).

A multiple-strategy approach may require more professional development than a single-strategy approach (Shanahan et al., 2010). Gill (2008) also found that teaching even one comprehension strategy can improve students' comprehension. With either approach, the goal is to teach students several strategies throughout the school year. Teachers who choose single-strategy instruction must not forget to incorporate review of previously learned strategies. Students should be encouraged to use all of the strategies they have learned so they do not stop using effective ones when new strategies are introduced. Teachers need to provide opportunities for students to practice strategies with peers, adult facilitators, and independently (Shanahan et al., 2010).

Regardless of the strategy integration approach, readers need to use strategies at the automatic level in order to successfully comprehend text (Pardo, 2004). Tankersley (2005) suggested "Good modeling, reading material at an appropriate level of difficulty, and choice in the selection of reading material can all improve reading achievement among students" (p.25). This motivates students to focus more on gaining meaning from text, building world knowledge, and finding a purpose in their reading. Thus, instruction should focus on the automatic use and transfer of reading comprehension strategies across a variety of texts and content areas. Tankersley (2005) also suggested that "After they've read a text, we want students to be able to summarize, evaluate, and draw their own conclusions about the material" (p.138). Authentic reading materials from various content areas can be used to encourage the use of comprehension strategies. As students become increasingly proficient using strategies in one content, explicit

connections can be made with other content areas. A sign of sophisticated and fluent comprehension skills is the ability to make connections between texts.

The National Reading Panel (2000) has identified seven comprehension strategies that have a solid scientific basis to improve reading comprehension. The strategies are: comprehension monitoring (where readers learn how to be aware of their understanding of text), cooperative learning, the use of graphic and semantic organizers, question answering, question generation, story structure to recall story content, and summarization (where readers are taught to integrate ideas and generalize from the text information). The Panel provided evidence that suggests teaching a combination of strategies was the most effective. When students use a combination of strategies appropriately, these techniques can improve results on standardized comprehension tests.

Main Idea Instruction

A growing body of literature has shown that explicit teacher-mediated instruction can effectively promote main idea comprehension. A specific strategy identified by the National Reading Panel, summarizing/retelling, requires students to briefly describe, orally or in writing, the main points of what they read. The panel suggested that students describe the text in their own words to a partner or teacher (National Reading Panel, 2000).

Main idea instruction, including identifying and constructing main ideas are recursive processes that require readers to monitor and regulate their thinking as they read. Main idea generation requires constructive responsive reading where the reader actively searches, reflects, and responds to text. Understanding the characteristics of text and priming the reader's background knowledge assist readers in the understanding and application of the main idea (Jitendra et al., 2001). The limited amount of research on main idea and summarization strategy

training provides strong evidence of enhancement of written summaries and an increase in reading comprehension skills. Identification of the main idea from a text is essential to the skills of summarization, drawing inferences, and thinking critically (O'Connor & Vadasy, 2011).

Explicit teacher-mediated instruction can effectively promote main idea comprehension.

Historically, however it has not been offered in many classrooms on a regular basis. Curriculum programs from the 1980's and 1990's showed little main idea instruction or instruction in how to use text structure to find the main idea. Despite the evidence in research that students benefit from multiple opportunities to find main ideas in stories and informational texts, few lessons across grade levels and across programs prioritized main idea instruction and construction. Instructional sequences for main idea identification were rare (Jitendra et al., 2001). Jitendra et al. (2001) found: "There was no clear effort on the part of the textbook authors to exploit connections between text structures and meaning to teach students one simple technique for identifying the main idea" (p.70).

There is a limited amount of research available on students' abilities to independently summarize a main idea into one sentence after explicit instruction. Many researchers report the effects of instruction on students' abilities to identify main idea statements. Studies completed between 1980 and 2000 supported generating main idea statements versus simply identifying the main idea of text. Results of four studies that required self-questioning and main idea generation indicated improvement in strategic knowledge, summarization skill, and reading comprehension of new narrative and informational text. The positive results were prevalent on several immediate, near transfer, and far transfer tests in all four studies (O'Connor & Vadasy, 2011).

As cited in Jitendra et al. (2000), researcher A.W. Graves (1986), compared the effects of three different instructional conditions: direct instruction only, direct instruction plus self

monitoring, and a control group on identifying main ideas of passages. Students with learning disabilities in both conditions were taught an explicit strategy for identifying main ideas of passages. In addition, students in the direct instruction plus self-monitoring condition were taught to use a self-questioning procedure to check main idea comprehension. Results indicated that both experimental groups' performance was better than that of the control group. Further, direct plus self-monitoring was found to be more effective than direct instruction alone.

Another early study cited in Jitendra et al. (2000), emphasized a comprehension-monitoring strategy to restate paragraph contents. Students in grade three to grade six diagnosed with learning disabilities were taught a restatement procedure with self-questioning. Students asked themselves questions to answer "who" the paragraph was about and "what was happening". After the questions were answered, students wrote a brief three or four word gist of each paragraph. Results showed an increase in overall reading comprehension.

Jitendra et al. (2000), investigated the effects of a small group integrated reading comprehension and self-monitoring program on the main idea comprehension performance of students with high-incidence disabilities. Unmodified grade level textbook passages were used in both the experimental and control group settings. Results indicated that students in the experimental group statistically outscored students in the control group on posttest training items requiring the identification and production of main idea statements. The experimental group participants also maintained their improved performance on a delayed posttest. These findings provide implications for classroom practice. One implication is that teachers may include this relatively simple and generalizable strategy into their daily instruction with a variety of materials. Also, because instruction in this study was provided in small groups, results support the effectiveness of using main idea strategies in small-group instruction.

In beginning main idea and self-questioning instruction, researchers suggested that teachers carefully choose passages to scaffold instruction. Teachers should start with passages in which the main idea can be easily identified and move towards passages where the main idea is not explicitly stated. Providing examples and nonexamples for students to evaluate is also a supportive scaffold. A great deal of practice will be needed before students will be able to express the main idea in one sentence without instructional support (Carnine, 2006).

Collaborative Instructional Strategies

A research synthesis developed to identify key instructional practices associated with improving reading outcomes showed that the most important components of quality instruction when teaching complex skills to adolescents is found to be extended practice with immediate feedback and group size (Calhoon, 2005). An instructional strategy that provides both an increase in practice opportunities with immediate feedback and delivery of instruction in small groups is Classwide Peer Tutoring (CWPT). This collaborative strategy uses a system in which all class members are organized in tutor-tutee pairs. During CWPT, practice is guided and provides immediate feedback, in contrast to typical teacher-led instruction. The results from studies implementing CWPT have demonstrated that it keeps students actively engaged nearly 100% of the time, versus 30% of the time with teacher-led instruction. Practice time is also documented to have doubled or tripled over that of teacher-led instruction. Furthermore, research supporting CWPT has suggested that students persist longer on a task when they are actively engaged and take an active role in their own learning (Calhoon, 2005).

Modeled after CWPT, Peer Assisted Learning Strategies (PALS) for grades two through six, a U.S. Department of Education best practice strategy, was developed by Douglas Fuchs and Lynn Fuchs and their colleagues at Vanderbilt University (McMaster, 2007). According to

Fuchs et al. (2000), “PALS was designed to strengthen general education’s capacity to meet the academic needs of a broader range of children” (as cited in Maheady, Mallette, & Harper, 2006, p. 85). Maheady, Mallette, & Harper (2006) reviewed evidence on PALS and found:

Empirical findings to date indicate that the PALS programs produce statistically significant improvements in reading fluency rates and comprehension for groups of low-, average-, and high-achieving pupils as well as students with learning disabilities.

Additional evidence suggests that the PALS model is an efficient and socially acceptable classroom-based intervention. (p.85)

To implement PALS, students are put into pairs, with each pair consisting of a higher- and a lower-performing student. These roles are reciprocal, so each student in a pair serves as coach and reader during each session. The teacher determines pairs by rank ordering all students in the classroom from the strongest to the weakest reader. The teacher then divides the rank-ordered list in half and pairs the strongest reader from the top half with the strongest reader from the bottom half, and so on, until all students are paired. In PALS, partners share texts selected by the teacher. These texts should be at an appropriate level for the lower-performing reader in each pair (McMasters, Fuchs & Fuchs, 2007).

Paragraph Shrinking is one peer-mediated activity in the PALS set of comprehension strategies for grades two through six. This activity is designed to develop comprehension through summarization and main idea identification. The students read orally in pairs and stop at the end of each paragraph to identify the main idea. The higher performer is the first reader, and the lower performer is the first coach. McMasters, Fuchs and Fuchs (2007) listed the directions for Paragraph Shrinking as:

The Coach asks the reader to identify (a) who or what the paragraph is mainly about and (b) the most important thing about the ‘who’ or ‘what.’ Then the Reader must condense, or ‘shrink,’ this information into 10 words or less. If the coach deems the Reader’s answer incorrect, she says, ‘That’s not quite right. Skim the paragraph and try again.’ After the Reader provides a new answer, the Coach decides whether the answer is correct. If it is correct, she gives 1 point each for correctly identifying the ‘who’ or ‘what,’ for stating the most important thing, and for using 1- words or less to state the main idea. If the Coach determines that the answer is incorrect, she provides a correct answer and the pair continues reading. After 5 min, the partners switch roles. (p.100)

Partners remain the same for three to four weeks, after which time, the teacher re-evaluates skill levels and reassigns partners.

Research done by the developers of PALS for grades two through six, found strongly positive results in the area of reading comprehension after the implementation of the paragraph summarization activity provided in PALS. The researchers speculated that the summarization activity gave children more opportunity to benefit from the peer tutoring role. The action of tutoring put metacognitive and cognitive demands on each partner due to the role reciprocity of the Paragraph Shrinking activity (McMasters, Fuchs & Fuchs, 2007).

Summary

As acknowledged in this review of literature, researchers have claimed positive effects of direct instruction in metacognitive skills and a combination of strategies with peer collaboration to enhance the main idea comprehension of elementary-age students. Identifying the main idea of a text is a difficult task for students. However, producing and condensing the main idea into a single sentence is even more challenging (Carnine, 2006). A strategy like Paragraph Shrinking

from the Peer Assisted Learning Strategies (PALS) takes this challenging skill and breaks it down into achievable steps. The Paragraph Shrinking strategy incorporates instructional components supported by a fore mentioned research: strategy instruction incorporating teaching and modeling; guided practice with gradual release and independent practice; peer collaboration and conversation resulting in high student engagement; self-questioning and self-monitoring of learning, and carefully chosen text at the appropriate level. By providing this multi-faceted research-based main idea instruction, the researcher can enhance the overall reading comprehension of students. The Paragraph Shrinking strategy can fill a gap left in main idea instruction in grades two through six. As stated previously, teacher-mediated main idea instruction has not been offered in many classrooms on a regular basis (Jitendra, et al., 2001). The Paragraph Shrinking strategy provides a way to teach main idea identification and generation using a variety of texts while providing students with the peer collaboration that increases their motivation and attention rates.

In Chapter Three, this researcher will preview the methodology used in implementing the Paragraph Shrinking strategy with a small group of fourth grade students who receive Title I services. In addition to a description of the research methods; the subjects, project design, and procedures used will be addressed.

Methods

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to identify the effects of a specific reading strategy on the reading comprehension skills of struggling intermediate students. This study addressed one research question: How does Paragraph Shrinking affect the reading comprehension of struggling intermediate students?

In this chapter, the researcher describes the methodology and procedures that were used to conduct the study. It also addresses the following topics: (a) a description of the population, (b) the instrumentation used in the study, (c) an explanation of the data collection techniques used to answer the research question, and (d) a description of the data analysis procedures.

Restatement of the Problem

Due to the current emphasis on state mandated assessments and student proficiency results, the researcher focuses on increasing student achievement levels on comprehension assessments. The standardized assessments chosen are predictive of proficiency on state mandated assessments. The researcher specifically chose to study the impact of a reading strategy that targets main idea identification and generation for three reasons. First, a large percentage of items on state mandated assessments address main idea. Second, students need to be able to identify and generate a main idea statement in order to summarize text. Third, there is a limited amount of research available on students' abilities to independently summarize a main idea into one sentence.

Research Methodology

In this study, the researcher measured the effects of a specific reading strategy, Paragraph Shrinking, on the reading comprehension skills of fourth grade students receiving 30 minutes of

Title I reading services per day. Paragraph Shrinking, a peer-mediated reading strategy designed to develop comprehension through summarization and main idea identification, was used on a daily basis for nine weeks. A quasi-experimental, quantitative methodology was used in this research.

In Paragraph Shrinking, students read orally in pairs and stopped at the end of each paragraph to identify the main idea. The higher performer in the pair was the first reader, and the lower performer was the first coach. The researcher provided the pairs with nonfiction text in the forms of articles and books matched to their interest areas. After the first reader orally read a paragraph, the coach asked the reader to identify (a) who or what the paragraph was mainly about and (b) the most important thing about the who or what. Then the reader summarized the information into 10 words or less. If the coach deemed the reader's statement incorrect, he asked the reader to skim the paragraph and try again. If the reader was still unable to provide a correct statement, the coach provided a correct statement and the pair continued reading. If the statement was correct, the coach awarded the reader one point each for correctly identifying who or what, for stating the most important thing, and for using 10 words or less to state the main idea. After five minutes, the partners switched roles. Partners remained the same for three to four weeks, when the researcher re-evaluated the skill levels and reassigned partners.

Subjects

In this section, an overview of the general population of the school setting where the study took place is described. The specific details of the study's sample population are also described.

Population. This study took place in a rural southwestern Minnesota elementary school with a population of approximately 420 students in kindergarten through fourth grade. This was

the only public elementary school in the school district. In 2010, 39 percent of the children attending the elementary school qualified for free and reduced lunch, making the school a targeted-assistance Title I school. The school district included 4 small communities, an American Indian reservation, and a multitude of farms. The primary means of employment of the school district residents were agriculture-related. There was also a large American Indian casino that employs hundreds of workers. The majority of families living in the school district were Caucasian. The largest minority population in the school district was American Indian. In 2010, the population of the elementary school was 70 percent Caucasian, 23 percent American Indian, five percent Hispanic, one percent Asian, and one percent Black. One percent of the students in the elementary school were of limited English proficiency in 2010.

Sample. The population for this study consisted of eight 9 and 10 year olds, 5 girls and 3 boys, chosen from four general education fourth grade classrooms. The study took place during the fall of 2011. The researcher collected data from eighty-three fourth grade students to choose eight subjects to participate in this study. The data collected consisted of fall 2011 scores from the Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) assessment and the AIMSWeb general outcome measure assessment. In addition to these standardized assessment scores, a review of the students' core reading curriculum comprehension assessment data from spring 2011 and fall 2011 was completed.

Design

In this section, the instruments used to collect data are described. The researcher also describes how the instruments are used and the scores are reported.

Instrumentation. Three instruments were used to assess the success of this study. In this section, the content and format of each instrument is discussed.

Measures of academic progress (MAP) reading assessment. The MAP reading assessment was published by the Northwest Evaluation Association (NWEA) as a summative assessment that may be given in several academic areas, including reading. The content and format of this assessment is discussed in this section.

Content. The MAP reading assessment measures student achievement in the areas of narrative text comprehension, informational text comprehension, word analysis/vocabulary, and literature. The test is administered on the computer and provides the user with multiple choice questions to answer about information provided on the screen. The test can be given three times per school year, during season assessment windows set by the school district. The results of the MAP assessment are reported in the form of a RIT cut score, percentile, and Lexile score.

Format. The MAP assessment was completed by students as a baseline and a posttest to determine if the Paragraph Shrinking strategy increased their reading comprehension skills. This assessment was given to the fourth grade students the third week of September 2011, then again in December 2011. The test was administered on the computer and provided the user with multiple-choice questions to answer about information provided on the screen. The results of the MAP assessment were reported in the form of a RIT cut score, percentile, and Lexile score. According to NWEA, a RIT cut score of 201 and a percentile rank of 34 indicates that a fourth grade student has a likelihood of achieving proficiency on the Minnesota Comprehension Assessment, second edition (MCA-II) in the spring of 2012.

AIMSweb general outcome measures. AIMSweb General Outcome Measures are a set of measures for assessing the acquisition of literacy skills from kindergarten through eighth grade. The content and format of these measures is described in this section.

Content. The AIMSWeb measures are designed to be short (one minute) fluency assessments used to regularly monitor the development of reading skills. Each measure has been thoroughly researched and demonstrated to be reliable and valid indicators of early literacy development and predictive of later reading proficiency to aid in the early identification of students who are not progressing as expected.

Format. The AIMSWeb oral reading fluency benchmark assessment was also completed by students as a baseline and a posttest. This assessment was given due to the strong correlation between oral reading fluency and reading comprehension skills. The oral reading fluency assessment was given to the fourth grade students the second week of September 2011, then again in December 2011. The test consisted of three, fourth grade-leveled passages in which a student read individually to an examiner. The students were given one minute to read each passage. The number of words read correctly and errors made were recorded for each of the three passages. The final score was the median of the words read correctly and the errors made. The target score for September was 95 words read correctly per minute and 114 words read correctly per minute in December. If a student reached the target score, he has a high likelihood of achieving proficiency on the MCA-II in the spring of 2012. According to Heartland Education District in Iowa, a realistic growth rate for fourth grade students is 0.85 words correct per week. An ambitious growth rate for fourth grade students is 1.1 words correct per week. The researcher compared each student's growth rate between benchmark seasons to this standard to assess their level of progress.

Core reading curriculum comprehension assessments. The content and format of comprehension assessments given in the core reading curriculum are described in this section.

Content. The students in this study participate in core reading instruction for 90 minutes per school day. As a component of their core reading instruction, students completed a comprehension mastery test every 10 lessons. The tests are paper-pencil assessments with multiple choice and fill-in-the-blank questions that asked about text read in the last ten reading lessons. The questions covered vocabulary and reading comprehension skills, including main idea identification.

Format. Throughout the study, the researcher reviewed the core reading curriculum comprehension scores of the students. The researcher reviewed these scores on a monthly basis to look for strengths or weakness in comprehension skills. Scores for the core reading comprehension mastery tests are reported in percentage answered correctly.

Procedures

The procedures and timeline for the collection and analysis of data from the study are discussed in this section. The process for answering the research question is also covered in this section.

Data collection procedures. The data was collected within a 13-week period, starting with September 9, 2011 and ending on December 9, 2011. The researcher/reading coordinator sent a letter to parents on October 3, 2011 describing the purpose of the study. The letter provided the parents with detailed information on how to contact the researcher if there were any questions about the study. The researcher also obtained permission from the elementary building level principal to conduct the research. Baseline data collection started on September 9, 2011 and on October 3, 2011 the 30-minute reading intervention started with an introduction to Paragraph Shrinking. To insure program success, a training phase is written into the manual used to teach Paragraph Shrinking. On October 3, 2011 through October 6, 2011 the students

completed the training phase of the program. This phase of the program allowed the researcher to model what paired reading looked and sounded like. The researcher also modeled the questioning, summarizing, and point awarding portions of the Paragraph Shrinking strategy. On October 7, 2011, the researcher began the actual Paragraph Shrinking strategy with the group of eight students.

The AIMSWeb oral reading fluency baseline benchmark assessment was administered the second week of September 2011 by trained school staff. The posttest benchmark assessment was given to students the second week of December 2011 by the researcher. The Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) baseline assessment was administered the third week of September 2011 by the students' reading teacher. The posttest was given to students the second week of December 2011 by the researcher. The researcher reviewed the students' core reading curriculum comprehension assessments each month in September, October, November, and December in an online data folder on the school district's staff server. Only the students' reading teachers and the researcher have access to this data folder. Data from the AIMSWeb and MAP assessments will be housed in the school district's password-protected online data warehouse.

Data analysis procedures. The quantitative data collected during the study were analyzed using the criteria provided by each assessment tool. The students' MAP assessment RIT scores and percentiles were compared to the RIT cut score and percentiles needed to lead to the likelihood of proficiency on the MCA-II. AIMSWeb oral reading fluency results were compared to fall and winter target scores that indicate a likelihood of proficiency on the MCA-II. Individual student oral reading growth rates were compared to those provided by Heartland Education District in Iowa, to determine if a student made realistic or ambitious growth over the

course of the study. Core reading comprehension assessment scores were analyzed according to the percentage of questions answered correctly, with 85 percent correct considered proficient.

Baseline and posttest data for both standardized assessments was compared using bar graphs. Bar graphs were used to compare the whole group as well as show each student's individual results. The whole group's progress on core reading comprehension assessments was compared using bar graphs as well as each individual student's progress from September 2011 through December 9, 2011.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to identify the effects of a specific reading strategy on the reading comprehension skills of struggling intermediate students. Students were trained in and implemented Paragraph Shrinking, a peer-mediated reading strategy designed to develop comprehension through summarization and main idea identification. Baseline and posttest assessment data was collected and compiled by the researcher to determine student achievement levels before and after the strategy was implemented.

In Chapter Three, the researcher has explained the methods and data collection procedures used to conduct this study. The researcher has also included the population and sample. The data collection procedures, assessment instruments used to collect data, and the quantitative (baseline and posttest scores) methods used to compile data have been described. In Chapter Four, the researcher presents in detail the findings of the study.

Results

Introduction

In Chapter Four, the researcher will present the findings and results of the Paragraph Shrinking study. The researcher will discuss the findings of the three instruments used to assess the success of the study. In addition to a narrative description of results, graphs will be used to illustrate quantitative assessment results. A brief summary of the results will conclude Chapter Four.

Findings and Results

Three instruments were used to collect data during the nine-week Paragraph Shrinking study. Data from the Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) reading assessment, AIMSWeb General Outcome Measures, and core reading curriculum comprehension assessments was obtained before and after implementation of the Paragraph Shrinking strategy and then compared.

Measures of academic progress (MAP) reading assessment. This assessment was given before and after the implementation of the Paragraph Shrinking strategy to determine if the strategy instruction increased target students' reading comprehension skills. Baseline data collected in September 2011 showed that all eight students in the study achieved a RIT cut score below 201. Achieving the RIT cut score of 201 by the spring 2012 assessment season indicates a likelihood of achieving proficiency on the Minnesota Comprehensive Assessment, second edition (MCA-II). The average score of the baseline September 2011 assessment was 188, fifteen points below the proficiency cut score.

After the Paragraph Shrinking strategy was introduced and implemented for nine weeks, the MAP reading assessment was administered again. Seven out of the eight students in the

target group increased their RIT cut score. Four out of eight students in the target group met or exceeded the MCA-II proficiency target RIT score of 201. The average score increased eleven points from the September 2011 baseline assessment, putting the average at 199, two points below the MCA-II proficiency cut score. The results of the baseline and posttest MAP reading assessments are illustrated in Figure 1.

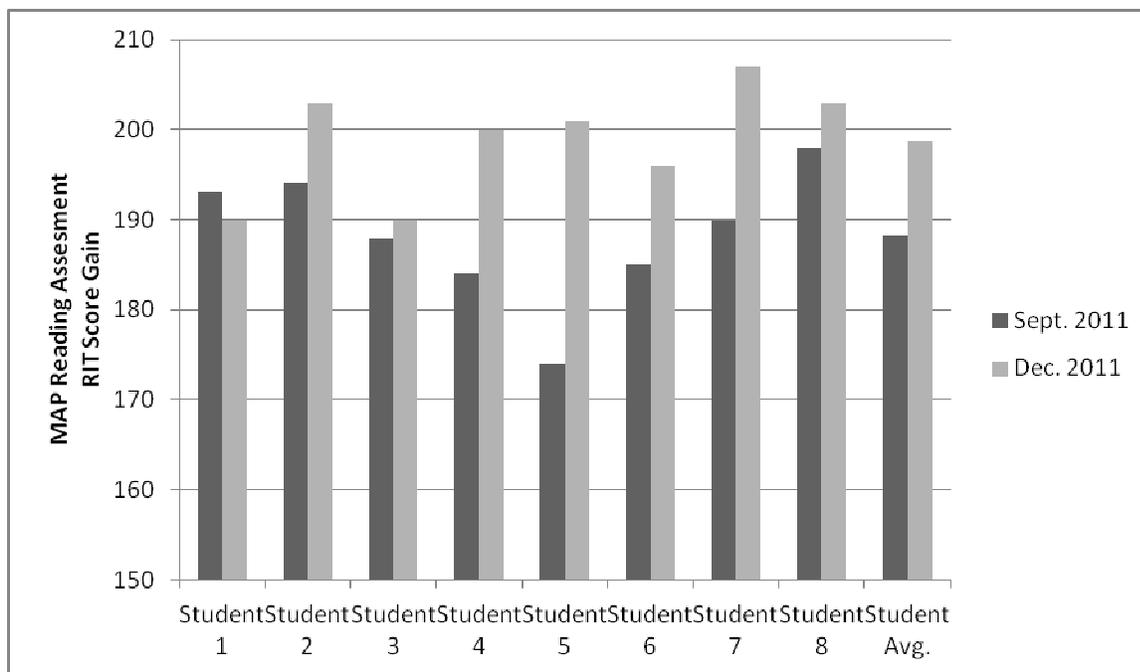


Figure 1. MAP baseline and posttest assessment results.

AIMSWeb general outcome measures. This instrument was used to measure the oral reading fluency of students in the target group. This assessment was given before and after the implementation of the Paragraph Shrinking strategy. The target score for September 2011 was 95 words read correctly per minute. Baseline data collected in September 2011 showed that four of the eight students in the target group read more than 95 words correctly per minute. Students were assessed again after a nine week implementation of the Paragraph Shrinking strategy. All eight students in the target group read more than 95 words correctly per minute with an average gain of 3.38 words per week. According to Heartland Education District in Iowa, an ambitious

growth rate for fourth grade students is 1.1 words per week. The students in this study exceeded this ambitious growth rate by 2.28 words per week. The results of the AIMSWeb baseline and posttest assessments are illustrated in Figure 2.

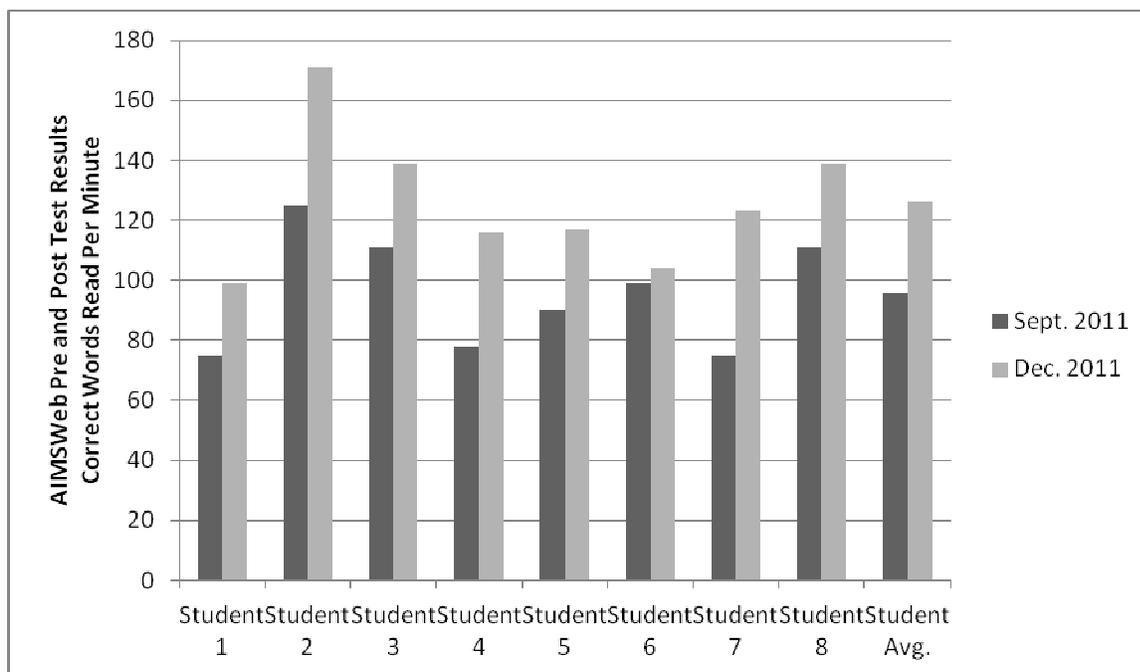


Figure 2. AIMSWeb baseline and posttest test results.

Core reading curriculum comprehension assessments. This instrument was used to assess student progress in the core-reading curriculum over the course of the nine week Paragraph Shrinking study. Students were given a core reading curriculum comprehension assessment one time per month during the months of September, October, November, and December 2011. The September assessment was given prior to beginning the nine week Paragraph Shrinking study. The December assessment was given after the study was complete. The core reading curriculum comprehension assessment results show that six of eight students in the target study group had an increase in their assessment results between September 2011 and December 2011. Two of the eight students showed more variable results over the same time

period. The individual student results on the core reading comprehension assessments are illustrated in Figure 3.

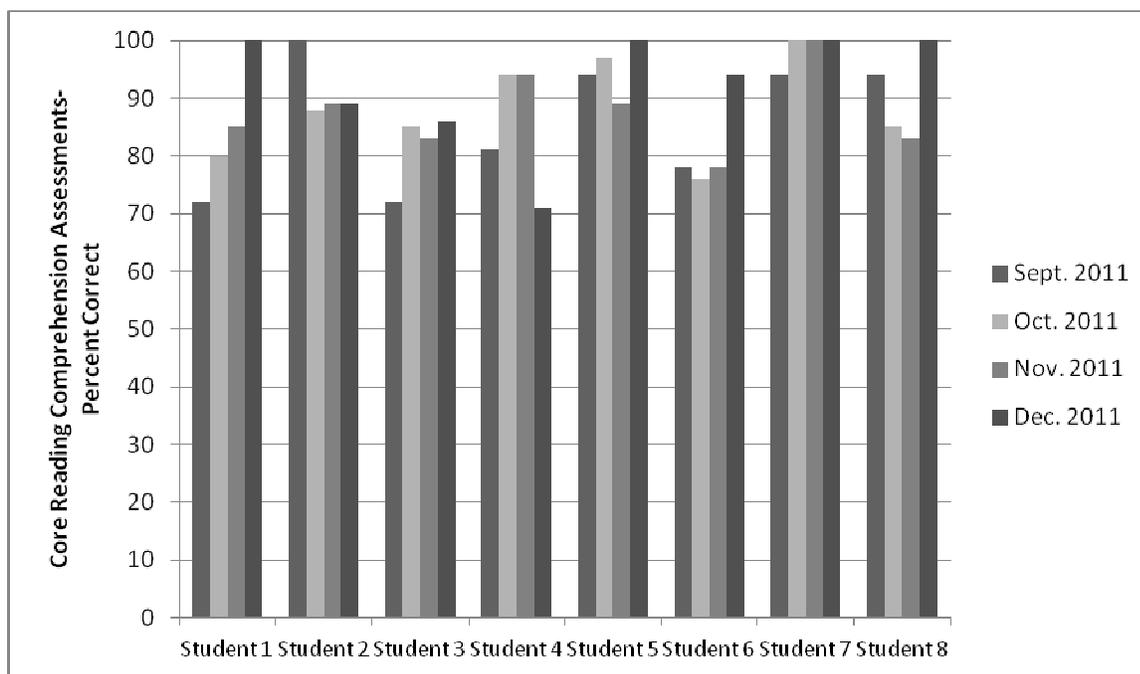


Figure 3. Core reading curriculum comprehension assessment.

Summary

In Chapter Four, the findings and results of the Paragraph Shrinking study were presented. The three instruments used for data collection were the Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) reading assessment, AIMSweb General Outcome Measures, and core reading curriculum comprehension assessments. Prior to implementing the Paragraph Shrinking strategy, the target group’s average RIT cut score on the MAP reading assessment was 15 points below the MCA-II proficiency indicator cut score. After nine weeks of the Paragraph Shrinking strategy, the target group’s average RIT cut score increased eleven points, just two points below the MCA-II proficiency indicator cut score. The second data collection tool was the AIMSweb General Outcome Measures oral reading fluency assessment. Quantitative data collected showed that the target group’s fluency increased from 50% of students on target to 100% on or above

target with an average gain of 3.38 words per week. The students in this study exceeded ambitious growth rates published by the Heartland Education District by 2.28 words per week. The third instrument used to collect data were core reading curriculum comprehension assessments. The core reading curriculum comprehension assessment results showed that six of eight students in the target study group had an increase in their core reading assessment results while the two remaining students in the group had more variable results. In Chapter Five, the author will present the summary, conclusions, recommendations, and implications of this study.

Discussion

Introduction

Chapter Five is organized into four sections. In the first section, the summary, I will review the key details of the study. In the summary of the findings and conclusions section, I will present and compare findings and conclusions to research done by others. In the recommendations section, I will explain how the findings of my study can be put into practice. This section will also detail recommendations for future research. In the final section, implications, I will cover the significance of this study and how it will benefit the world.

Summary

In this study, I examined the effects of a specific reading strategy, Paragraph Shrinking, on the reading comprehension skills of fourth grade students receiving 30 minutes of Title I reading services per day. Paragraph Shrinking, a peer-mediated main idea and summarization strategy, was used on a daily basis for nine weeks.

Numerous studies have been done to discover how reading comprehension is developed and how to increase the comprehension skills of students that struggle to understand what they read. Researchers have proven that the ability to comprehend is not innate. Students must be taught to comprehend text (Coyne, Zipoli, Chard, Fagella-Luby, Ruby, Santoro, and Baker, 2009). Reading researchers support the idea that readers, who are taught and use a variety of specific comprehension strategies, are likely to recall and comprehend what they read (Stahl, 2004). RAND (2002) concluded that “the explicitness with which teachers teach comprehension strategies makes a difference in learner outcomes, especially for low-achieving students” (p.33). Presenting comprehension instruction explicitly and systematically allows students to integrate new information and strategies with previous knowledge and skills. A growing body of

literature has shown that explicit teacher-mediated instruction can effectively promote main idea comprehension (O'Connor & Vadasy, 2011).

Due to the current emphasis on state mandated assessments and student proficiency results, I focused on increasing student achievement levels on comprehension assessments. The standardized assessments chosen were predictive of proficiency on state mandated assessments. Baseline and posttest assessment data was collected and compiled to determine student achievement levels before and after the strategy was implemented.

Summary of the Findings and Conclusions

The limited amount of research on main idea and summarization strategy training provides strong evidence of an increase in reading comprehension skills. In addition to these findings, Ketch (2005) found that conversation leads to critical thinking and comprehension acquisition. As acknowledged in this study, researchers have claimed positive effects of combining explicit teacher mediated instruction with peer collaboration to enhance the main idea comprehension skills of elementary-age students. In this study, I presented findings to support this conclusion. Explicit teacher mediated comprehension instruction on main idea generation with partner reading and peer collaboration significantly increases students' overall achievement on standardized norm referenced comprehension assessments, core reading curriculum assessments, and criterion-referenced oral reading fluency assessments.

In my study population, student achievement on standardized comprehension and oral reading fluency assessments was accelerated significantly. Fifty percent of students were able to accelerate their MAP RIT scores to a level at or above projected proficiency for the 2012 MCA-II test. The average MAP RIT score grew by eleven points, putting the average RIT score only two points below the spring MCA-II projected proficiency target.

Standardized oral reading fluency assessments showed that 50 percent of the study participants grew 3.38 words per week, exceeding ambitious growth rates set for fourth grade students by 2.28 words per week. All students started the study below the fall 2011 oral reading fluency target and finished the study above the winter 2012 oral reading fluency target. These results show that partner reading, paired with an explicit comprehension strategy, can significantly increase the fluency rates of readers in the below average range.

Core reading comprehension assessment scores were positively impacted through the study. Six out of the eight students in the study experienced positive growth in their classroom reading assessment scores. These scores show that implementing one explicit comprehension strategy can positively affect the everyday comprehension skills of readers in the below average range.

The findings of my study compare to previous research done on main idea and summarization strategies. Four studies completed between 1980 and 2000 supported generating main idea statements versus simply identifying the main idea of text. The positive results were prevalent on several immediate, near transfer, and far transfer tests in all four studies (O'Connor & Vasdasy, 2011).

Based on the findings of my small scale study, the following conclusions may be drawn and applied to other settings and populations. Explicit instruction in main idea generation can positively impact the reading comprehension achievement of intermediate aged students who have below average reading skills. Partner reading and peer collaboration, paired with explicit comprehension strategy instruction, can positively impact the oral reading fluency rates of intermediate aged students who have below average reading skills. Paragraph Shrinking, a specific strategy designed to be used as part of the Peer Assisted Learning Strategies (PALS)

system, can increase student achievement in isolation from the other components of the PALS system. Paragraph Shrinking can be used with a small group of below average readers in addition to its intended use in the PALS system, in a heterogeneously grouped general education classroom. Peer collaboration, through partners, positively affects individual student reading achievement in the intermediate elementary grades.

Recommendations

In the recommendations section, I will explain how the findings of my study can be put into practice. This section will also detail recommendations for future research.

Recommendations for practice. The Paragraph Shrinking strategy from the Peer Assisted Learning Strategies (PALS) takes the challenging skill of main idea generation and breaks it down into achievable steps. The Paragraph Shrinking strategy incorporates instructional components supported by research: strategy instruction incorporating teaching and modeling; guided practice with gradual release and independent practice; peer collaboration and conversation resulting in high student engagement; self-questioning and self-monitoring of learning, and carefully chosen text at the appropriate level. By providing this multi-faceted research-based main idea instruction, teachers can enhance the overall reading comprehension of students.

The Paragraph Shrinking strategy can fill a gap left in main idea instruction in grades two through six. As stated previously, teacher-mediated main idea instruction has not been offered in many classrooms on a regular basis (Jitendra, et al., 2001). The Paragraph Shrinking strategy provides a way to teach main idea identification and generation using a variety of texts while providing students with the peer collaboration that increases their motivation and attention rates.

Teachers may include this relatively simple and generalizable strategy into their daily instruction with a variety of materials. The results of my study support the effectiveness of using an explicit main idea strategy in small-group instruction. Previous research on similar strategies supports the effectiveness of using an explicit main idea strategy in heterogeneous general education instructional settings.

Recommendations for future research. There is a limited amount of research available on students' abilities to independently summarize a main idea into one sentence after explicit instruction. In addition to this research weakness, existing research on Peer Assisted Learning Strategies (PALS) does not address the use of Paragraph Shrinking in isolation. PALS is also typically used in a heterogeneously grouped general classroom setting. For this study, I focused on a small group of students who are of similar ability levels, in the below average of reading abilities. Broader range studies, implementing the use of Paragraph Shrinking with larger groups of students, in a variety of grade level settings, at a variety of ability levels, would benefit educators and their students.

The Paragraph Shrinking strategy used in this study incorporates partner reading. What would the results be if students read the text independently? The results of this study showed a significant increase in students' oral reading fluency. Research comparing the fluency gains using the Paragraph Shrinking strategy to a specific research based fluency intervention would be interesting. Does repeated oral reading result in stronger gains than a strategy that incorporates partner reading and peer collaboration on a comprehension strategy?

Implications

The results of this study will impact main idea and summarization strategy instruction in general education classrooms as well as reading intervention settings. The Paragraph Shrinking strategy provides educators with a way to teach main idea identification and generation using a

variety of texts while providing students with the peer collaboration that increases their motivation and attention rates. Educators will also know how to assess the impact of the Paragraph Shrinking strategy on the comprehension and oral reading fluency skills of the students in their classrooms.

The Paragraph Shrinking strategy incorporates instructional components supported by a fore mentioned research: strategy instruction incorporating teaching and modeling; guided practice with gradual release and independent practice; peer collaboration and conversation resulting in high student engagement; self-questioning and self-monitoring of learning, and carefully chosen text at the appropriate level. By providing this multi-faceted research-based main idea instruction, educators can enhance the overall reading comprehension of students.

The implications of using Paragraph Shrinking to increase overall reading comprehension achievement are promising. Existing research has shown positive effects of combining explicit teacher mediated instruction with peer collaboration to enhance the main idea comprehension skills of elementary-age students. The study that I conducted supports these findings with accelerated progress in comprehension and oral reading fluency for intermediate aged, below average readers. The Paragraph Shrinking strategy can fill a gap left in main idea instruction in grades two through six. Educators using the Paragraph Shrinking strategy can feel confident in its effectiveness, based on the existing main idea strategy research and the results of my small scale study.

References

- Afflerbach, P., Pearson, P.D., Paris, S.G. (2008). Clarifying differences between reading skills and reading strategies. *The Reading Teacher, 61*(5), 364-373.
- Brown, S.A. (2006). Investigating classroom discourse surrounding partner reading. *Early Childhood Education Journal, 34*(1), 29-36.
- Calhoun, M.B. (2005). Effects of a peer-mediated phonological skill and reading comprehension program on reading skill acquisition for middle school students with reading disabilities. *Journal of Learning Disabilities, 38*(5), 424-433.
- Carnine, D.W., Siblert, J., Kame'enui, E.J., Tarver, S.G., & Jungjohann, K. (2006). *Teaching struggling readers and at-risk readers: A direct instruction approach*. Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Education, Inc.
- Coyne, M.D., et al. (2009). Direct instruction of comprehension: Instructional examples from intervention research on listening and reading comprehension. *Reading and Writing Quarterly, 25*, 221-245.
- Gill, S.R. (2008). The comprehension matrix: A tool for designing comprehension instruction. *The Reading Teacher, 62*(2), 106-113.
- Griffin, M. (2002). Why don't you use your finger? Paired reading in first grade. *The Reading Teacher, 55*(8), 766-773.
- Jitendra, A.K., Hoppes, M.K., Xin, Y.P. (2000). Enhancing main idea comprehension for students with learning problems: The role of a summarization strategy and self-monitoring instruction. *The Journal of Special Education, 34*(3), 127-139.
- Jitendra, A.K., et al. (2001). An evaluation of main idea strategy instruction in four commercial

- reading program: Implications for students with learning problems. *Reading & Writing Quarterly*, 17, 53-73.
- Ketch, A. (2005). Conversation: The comprehension connection. *The Reading Teacher*, 59(1), 8-13.
- Maheady, L., Mallette, B., Harper G.F. (2006). Four classwide peer tutoring models: Similarities, differences, and implications for research and practice. *Reading & Writing Quarterly*, 22, 65-89.
- McMaster K.L., Fuchs, D., Fuchs, L.S. (2007). Promises and limitations of peer-assisted learning strategies in reading. *Learning Disabilities: A Contemporary Journal*, 5(2), 97-112.
- National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, (2000). Report of the national reading panel. *Teaching children to read: An evidence-based assessment of the scientific research literature on reading and its implications of reading instruction* (NIH Publication No. 00-4769). Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.
- O'Connor, R.E. & Vadasy, P.F. (2011). *Handbook of reading interventions*. New York, NY: The Guilford Press.
- Pardo, L. (2004). What every teacher needs to know about comprehension. *The Reading Teacher*, 58(3), 272-280.
- RAND Reading Study group. (2002). *Reading for understanding: Towards a research and development program in reading comprehension*. Santa Monica, CA: Office of Education Research and Improvement.
- Shanahan, T., et al. (2010). *Improving reading comprehension in kindergarten through 3rd grade: A practice guide* (NCEE 2010-4038). Washington, DC: National Center of Educational Evaluation and Regional Assistance, Institute of Education Sciences, U.S.

Department of Education.

Stahl, K.A. (2004). Proof, practice, and promise: Comprehension strategy instruction in the primary grades. *The Reading Teacher*, 57(7), 598-609.

Tankersley, K. (2005). *Literacy strategies for grades 4-12*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Wigfield, A., et al. (2008). Role of reading engagement in mediating effects of reading comprehension instruction on reading outcomes. *Psychology in Schools*, 45(5), 432-445.

Appendix A

Parent Letter

To the family of _____,

Reede Gray Elementary is fortunate to have Title I intervention services for students who need extra support in the area of reading. These services provide students with the opportunity to receive targeted small group instruction in addition to their daily reading class.

Your child has been chosen to receive a daily 30 minute reading comprehension intervention. I will deliver the reading intervention instruction to your child. This intervention will take place during Cardinal Time, an intervention and enrichment time that is built into the school day for all students. Student progress is monitored on a weekly basis. Your child's performance in this intervention as well as his/her performance in reading class determines how long the service continues.

As a part of this daily intervention, I will be incorporating components from my action research project. I am completing this action research project as part of a master's degree through Southwest Minnesota State University. My action research project is focused on main idea instruction. If you have immediate questions about this service or my action research project, please contact me at 507-644-7107 or restebo@redwood.mntm.org.

Sincerely,

Renee Estebo
K-12 Reading Coordinator
Redwood Area Schools

Appendix B

Paragraph Shrinking Question Sheet

PARAGRAPH SHRINKING

1st Reader reads. Coach says:

1. Name the most important who or what.
2. Tell the most important thing about the who or what.
3. Say the main idea in 10 words or less.

1 point
for each
step

.....

2nd Reader reads. Coach says:

1. Name the most important who or what.
2. Tell the most important thing about the who or what.
3. Say the main idea in 10 words or less.

1 point
for each
step

How to give Paragraph Shrinking help

If the Reader says the wrong answer:

Coach: "Check it!"

"Let me give you a hint..."

"The answer is _____."

If the Reader says the main idea in more than 10 words:

Coach: "Shrink it!"

Appendix D

AIMSWeb Benchmark Passage

As soon as the temperature drops, people start getting excited up in Nome, Alaska. They never go to bed at night without peeking out their windows first. They want to see what the weather is doing. If a light snow is falling, they know that by morning the roads will be dangerous. That's where the sled dogs come into play.	12 25 39 52 60
Sled dogs are fun, peppy, medium-sized dogs. Their colors are different, but they all have thick, downy coats of fur. The dogs' tails curl up when they are excited.	71 85 90
There's nothing a sled dog loves more than the cold, fierce winds of winter. Even though most owners build shelters for their sled dogs, the dogs prefer to sleep outside. They tuck their noses into their tails. They snuggle their bodies deep in the snow.	103 115 128 135
Sled dogs are playful, intelligent, and very vocal. They do not bark. Instead, they howl like wolves. It's not uncommon for a pack of sled dogs to have a group howl at sunset and sunrise.	147 160 170
A person who owns sled dogs can be sure that their sleep will be disturbed on the mornings after a deep snow has fallen. The dogs will be up on the roofs of their doghouses, welcoming the snow with their long yowls of anticipation. "Wake up, wake up, WAKE UP!" They seem to be howling. "We want to play in the snow!"	184 197 210 222 232
The two most important things in a sled dog's life are running and pulling. Quite simply, that is what they are born to do.	245 256
A sled dog will like nothing better than to trot in front of a person on skis or a sled filled with supplies. They've been known to race with their owners on bikes or rollerblades. Pulling is a good way for them to get exercise and stay in shape all summer long. It's also great for the dogs' owners.	272 286 300 314 315
Together the dog and person team can romp and play in many ways during the snowless months. Nothing beats the thrill, however, of winter's return and a dog sled run through the snow.	327 338 348