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A Study of the Effectiveness of Using Volunteer Tutors in a Corrective Reading Program

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**A STUDY OF THE EFFECTIVENESS OF
USING VOLUNTEER TUTORS IN A CORRECTIVE READING
PROGRAM**

**A Research Paper Presented to the
Graduate Faculty of the Department of Occupational and Technical Studies
At Old Dominion University**

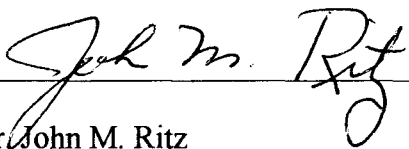
**In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Master of Science
in Occupational and Technical Studies**

**Jay R. White
January 2000**

Signature Page

This research paper was prepared by Jay R. White under the direction of Dr. John M. Ritz in OTED 636, Problems in Occupational and Technical Studies. It was submitted to the Graduate Program Director as partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Science in Occupational and Technical Studies, Business and Industry Training Emphasis.

Approved by:



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1-10-00

Date

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CWO4 Jeff Farmer USCG, Bonnie Hashberger, CPO Roger Jones USCG, JoAnne Kurtz, Thelma Louvar, PO2 Gary Perriman USCG and Jeri Pierce

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Jay R. White

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Peasley Middle School is located in upper Gloucester County, Virginia. The school is one of two middle schools serving the needs of this rural county. The population of the county is approximately 40,000. Peasley Middle School provides public education to grades six through eight.

In the 1998-1999 school year, the incoming class of sixth graders were tested for reading skill level using the Gates-MacGinitie Reading Test for level 5/6. Ninety-six of the three hundred thirty incoming sixth graders (29%) tested at a reading skill level one or more grades below the sixth grade. During the same period approximately 32% of the seventh and eighth graders also tested one or more grades below level in reading skill.

The school administration felt that reading skills are the foundation of all learning. They decided to conduct corrective instruction beginning with the seventh and eighth graders who had tested below their grade range in order to prepare them to advance to high school and to take the Standards Of Learning tests. This remediation effort was focused in two areas. The first was aimed at a smaller group with reading levels two to three years below grade level, plus behavioral issues. This effort involved one-on-one instruction with a teacher using the Science Research Associates (SRA) instructional materials. The other intervention targeted the seventh grade group with reading skill levels between 5.0 and 5.9 and the eighth grade group with reading skill levels between 6.0 and 6.9. This second intervention incorporated a segregated group approach using the SRA instructional materials.

In the 1999-2000 school year, budget cuts required the administration at Peasley Middle School to discontinue both reading skill remediation interventions and place all of the identified below level readers back into mainstream classrooms for reading remediation. The staff and administration at Peasley felt that some intervention other than mainstream classroom instruction was needed and sought to explore a no-cost volunteer tutoring approach. Concerns regarding the efficacy of a volunteer tutor program were raised and a pilot program was launched. This study sought to compare the reading skill improvement of the identified below level learners who were tutored by volunteers in addition to classroom instruction with that of below level learners receiving only mainstream classroom instruction.

Statement of the Problem

The problem of this study was to determine the correlation between volunteer tutoring of students reading below grade level at Peasley Middle School and their reading skill improvement.

Hypothesis

The following hypothesis was used to evaluate this study:

H₁: Students in the corrective reading program who engage in a volunteer tutoring approach to reading skill improvement will show greater reading skill improvement than those students only exposed to the academic classroom approach.

Background and Significance

The reading level of rising sixth graders has been showing a decline over the past three school years, but the Gates-MacGinitie Reading Test was not used at Peasley Middle School until the 1997-1998 school year. During that year the reading skill level of 29% of the incoming sixth graders was one or more years below the sixth grade.

According to Danny Fary, Principal of Peasley Middle School, the poor reading skills inhibited learning in all areas of the curriculum. The scores from the Gates-MacGinitie testing seemed to validate the suspicions of the teaching staff at Peasley Middle School of poor reading comprehension and consequent poor performance in general studies.

There was no assessment of reading skill level at the elementary school level which aligned perfectly with the Gates-MacGinitie test and there seemed to be no connection between low reading skill and any particular elementary school. In the Gloucester County school system, several elementary schools feed each of the two middle schools.

This study was needed for two reasons. First, the reading remediation interventions which pulled the below level learners out of the mainstream classes were going to be discontinued and an alternative volunteer tutor program needed to be identified, evaluated and developed. Second, no research regarding the use of adult tutors with below level readers in the Gloucester County middle schools has ever been conducted.

This study showed whether volunteer tutors using standardized classroom instructional materials increased the reading skill level of below grade level readers when used in conjunction with mainstream classroom instruction.

Limitations

This study took place between August 1, 1999, and December 10, 1999. It took the form of a pilot corrective reading program. It was completed before the holiday break 1999 to provide data and recommendations to the Peasley School administration regarding the efficacy of such a volunteer tutor program.

All testing, tutoring and exercises took place within the confines of Peasley Middle School. The tutor sessions were limited to three times per week for forty-five minutes per session. The administration of the Gates-MacGinitie test was limited to two times during the course of this study. Pre-test, post-test, SRA testing, observational and anecdotal information were collected during the course of the study.

Assumptions

Several assumptions were made regarding this study including:

1. The SRA materials were of sufficient rigor to improve reading skills of participating students.
2. Parents would desire their children to participate in a tutor reading remediation program.
3. The tutoring would not detract from the other academic studies of participants.

4. The participants in the tutoring sessions would also receive classroom instruction from their regular teachers.
5. No instruction would be withheld from the control group other than this pilot corrective reading program.

Procedures

This study utilized a quasi-experimental research method to achieve the study goals. A group of thirty-six incoming seventh graders were identified with a reading level between 4.0 and 5.7 for participation in the study. The group of thirty-six participants was randomly divided into two smaller groups of eighteen each. One group received only regular classroom instruction. The other group received regular classroom instruction in addition to participation in a volunteer tutor corrective reading program. No other factors were controlled except for participation of the eighteen students in the tutor program in addition to regular classroom instruction.

The Gates-MacGinitie Reading Test was used to identify the study participants and as a post-test at the conclusion of the study. SRA assessment was used to place the tutor program participants in appropriate groups. The report of findings contained comparative pre- and post-test results of the Gates-MacGinitie tests.

Definition of Terms

The following terms may not be familiar to the reader. These definitions are provided to aid the readers of this study.

1. Middle School: Accredited public school providing education to grade six through grade eight.
2. Gloucester County: A rural county of the Commonwealth of Virginia located on the Middle Peninsula of Tidewater Virginia.
3. Gates-MacGinitie Reading Test: A test instrument designed to provide a general assessment of reading achievement. The test reports in numerals representing grade level. For example, 4.0 is beginning fourth grade, 5.5 is mid-fifth grade, etc.
4. SRA: A complete corrective reading curriculum by Science Research Associates, Inc.
5. Tutor: An adult volunteer, recruited and trained to provide relationship based tutoring to below level reading students using the SRA materials.
6. Mainstream: The educational track providing central and core learning at grade level not including special education.

Overview of Chapters

Chapter I outlined the purpose of this study, general background information and rationale for completing this study. Peasley Middle School administration decided to evaluate a volunteer corrective reading program as it positively correlated to improved reading skills. This study provided the data and methodology to evaluate such a program and in fact served as the pilot for a volunteer tutor program for all areas of the school curriculum requiring remediation.

Chapter II is a review of applicable literature and supporting material. Chapter III includes the methods and procedures used to collect study information. Chapter IV

details the research study's findings. Chapter V provides a summary, conclusions and recommendations for future study.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The field of reading instruction is very well defined. Chapter II of this study, Review of Literature, was conducted to examine the parts of this field related to remediation of reading skills and the use of volunteer tutors at the Middle School level.

Reading is essential to success in our society. The ability to read is highly valued and important for social, educational and economic advancement. “Current difficulties in reading largely originate from rising demands for literacy, not from declining absolute levels of literacy. In a technological and information based society, the demands for higher literacy are ever increasing, creating more grievous consequences for those who fall short.” (Snow, 1998, p. 1) The ability to read, write and speak English proficiently is the key to living a full and free life in America (Literacy Volunteers of America, Inc., 1997).

Learning to read poses real challenges, even to children who will eventually become good readers (Snow, 1998, p. 21). The English language presents a comparatively difficult task. Spoken English has approximately 5,000 different possible syllables. Written English relies on an alphabetic system that represents the parts that make up a spoken syllable, rather than representing the syllable as a unit as in Japanese or Chinese. Alphabetic systems pose a special challenge to the beginning reader. Of course, once the learner of written English gets the basic idea that letters represent small sound units, the system has many advantages. English has a much more limited set of graphic symbols (letters), strategies for sounding out unfamiliar letter strings and many syllables become recognizable automatically.

The following topics were explored in this Review of Literature:

- 1) Reading skill remediation, 2) Adult volunteer tutors, and 3) Summary

REMEDICATION

Meaning of Remediation

The words used to discuss remedial reading are not exempt from the subjective interpretation that pervades our study of language, education and philosophy. The word *remedial* is used by different people to describe different things in different ways. The word remedial comes to us from the Latin roots *re*, meaning “again,” and *mediare*, meaning “to divide in the middle.” *Webster’s New Collegiate Dictionary* gives a narrower meaning of *remedial* as “intended as a remedy” or “concerned with the correction of faulty study habits and the raising of a pupil’s general competence.” An initial concern is for the use of the term *remedial* with connotations of sickness. This association with sickness may have evolved around 1900 from the interest of the medical profession with children who did not acquire reading proficiency (Johnston, 1991, p. 985).

Uhl (1916) introduced the term *remedial reading* in an article entitled, “The Use of Results of Reading Tests as Bases for Planning Remedial Work.” Within a decade the term was popularized and in wide use in the literature of the period. “There is a not-so-subtle shift in usage here, from *remedial* as a characteristic of instruction to a characteristic of the reader.” (Johnston, 1991, p. 985)

The terms, theories and approaches of the early twentieth century to remedial reading were borrowed from medicine. As other fields became interested in literacy,

sociologists and educational psychologists invaded the scene. Both of these two new fields advanced a theory of deficit hypothesis, in which deficits in literacy were rooted in the child as a result of environment, experience or heredity (Critchley, 1964, p.9).

The Nature of Remedial Reading

Arthur Gates describes the nature and problem of remedial instruction in his book, *The Improvement of Reading* (1927):

Remedial instruction, often conceived as an emergency measure, is frequently a form of teaching radically different in type and intent from ordinary measures. For this reason, in part, such follow-up methods are frequently of distinctive character. Indeed some of the worst devices and inadequate teaching methods are to be found in remedial reading instruction for pupils who have had difficulties with a subject and are in need of the best possible teaching. The fact is that remedial teaching should follow the same general principles of learning that are, or should be, observed in any other type of instruction, with certain occasional departures to meet particular types of need. (Gates, 1927, p. 19)

Remedial instruction is still done separately from regular instruction, but at least since the 1930s it has been done by more specialized and trained teachers using continuously improving methods and practices. The evidence leads us to look at some common characteristics of remedial instruction that seem to illustrate the practice as it exists today.

The first area of consideration is the quantity of instruction. Those who have studied instructional time allocations report that participation in reading remediation does not insure larger quantities of reading instruction (Stanley & Greenwood, 1983). In fact, the one predictable characteristic of remediation seems to be that these efforts are more likely to reduce the quantity of reading instruction than increase it. Even if the

“opportunity to learn” is defined as the time allocated to instruction, it is surprising that the design of remedial instruction rarely results in increased reading instructional time (Allington & Johnston, 1989).

The second area of focus is the instructional emphasis of a remedial reading program. The same increase in awareness that has led to greater understanding of the complex process of learning to read has a secondary effect on remedial instruction. The general focus of remediation in many programs tends to be on attention to accuracy of print and not on the composition or construction of meaning. In other words, another characteristic of remedial reading programs tends to be on activities other than reading books and on goals other than the comprehension of texts.

A third area of consideration is the nature of instruction. Quite often in remedial reading sessions the teacher involvement is limited to monitoring on-task behaviors and providing feedback on the accuracy of responses. Individualization as currently practiced means that each child in a small group in the remedial setting will work alone primarily on a different skill sheet. The teacher in these typical settings will move about monitoring activity and checking responses. Each child receives but a few moments of teacher attention. Cazden (1988) describes the nature of such interactions as, “abrupt,” “perfunctory” and “ritualized praise.” She notes that such interactions maintain high time on task but will not “stimulate a child’s thinking or language development.” (p. 20)

Consequences of Remedial Reading

A clear and unfortunate characteristic of current remediation is the limited success the various efforts have had in resolving the difficulties of learners who have failed to learn to read on the school's schedule. While reports of spectacularly successful programs can be found in the professional literature, there exist few large-scale longitudinal studies of the effects of remediation. Those that are available suggest that while participation in remediation has a small positive effect, most children who get off schedule in reading acquisition remain off schedule for their school careers (Carter, 1984). Remediation has a small effect on enhancing standardized test performance generally, though it has a large effect in a few cases.

The basis for participation in many remedial reading programs is a comparison with what is considered normal, particularly with respect to performance on a standardized test. Many states mandate remedial instruction below a particular score on a given test. Tests differ in the aspects of reading they assess at different grade levels and produce differing schedules. In the United States the overall schedule is quite different from the schedules of Russia, Great Britain, Sweden and New Zealand, and their schedules are different from each other. Schedules also differ from state to state and school to school within the United States so that a child considered a candidate for remedial instruction in one location would not be a candidate in another location.

It is clear that the public expects a normal range of performance in intellect, speech development and athletic ability but expects "on grade-level" performance in reading. In reading, it is only acceptable to perform at or above the median level for one's age group (Johnston, 1991, p. 1003).

VOLUNTEER TUTORS

This part of the Review of Literature is focused on the use of volunteer tutors in the reading remediation setting. The first area of interest is the volunteer.

Volunteers

Although it is a widely held belief that the participation of volunteers in schools is positive and beneficial, surprisingly little is known about school-based volunteerism (Michael, 1990). Data from large surveys give us information about the characteristics of volunteers in the schools but tell us little about the effects of their work. The typical school volunteer is no longer a mother of school aged children but a senior citizen or a college student. The highest percentage of volunteers are in elementary schools where about half of their activities are in areas of instructional support such as tutoring, grading papers and monitoring class assignments. The average school volunteer contributes about three hours a week to a school. Unfortunately, schools with the greatest need of volunteers, such as high-poverty schools, are less likely to have volunteers than more affluent schools (Michael, 1990).

Tutor Programs

Volunteer tutors, with rare exceptions, are not classroom teachers, reading teachers, or learning specialists. Tutors may possess many characteristics essential to success in the learning environment, but they are not trained teachers. In many cases

tutors will be working with children who require the services of a skilled reading specialist, but such personnel are not available.

The average volunteer tutor possesses qualities that are basic to the success of any reading program:

- a. a desire to help,
- b. enthusiasm for the program,
- c. a liking for people,
- d. time to devote to the program, and
- e. a willingness to learn.

One-to-one tutoring is one of the most effective forms of instruction (Bloom, 1981). This individual attention is very difficult to provide when in a classroom of 25 to 30 students. Understanding of tutoring has been greatly influenced by 4 well-researched tutoring programs: Reading Recovery, Success for All (which use certified teachers as tutors), the Howard Street Tutoring Program and Book Buddies (which use community volunteers as tutors). While very different in approach, these four programs have enough similarities to provide an understanding of the components necessary for effective tutoring. Wasik (1998a) gives us a clear blueprint for success at both the tutor and the program level. Her recommendations follow:

1. A certified reading specialist needs to supervise tutors. Lesson planning, student assessment, matching student to tutor and daily feedback to the tutors is a necessary part of the contributions of this key person.
2. Tutors need ongoing training and feedback. The higher the commitment to training and feedback the better the program.

3. Tutoring sessions need to be structured and contain basic elements. Rereading a familiar story, word analysis, writing and new stories is a part of all four of the model programs.
4. Tutoring needs to be intensive and consistent. Students should participate a minimum of 1 1/2 to 2 hours per week. Relationships form around the tutoring and the same tutor should work with a given student.
5. Quality materials are needed to facilitate the tutoring model. The school, in making the commitment to use volunteers, needs to be willing to provide the basic materials.
6. Assessment of students needs to be ongoing.
7. Schools need to find ways to ensure that tutors will attend regularly. Rewards, recognition and transportation are often very productive incentives to keep the tutors coming back.
8. Tutoring needs to be coordinated with classroom instruction. (pp. 565-569)

Wasik (1998b) goes on to summarize her views after a review of 11 volunteer tutor reading remediation programs in this way, "One important finding is that there is a surprising lack of evidence about achievement effects of one-to-one tutoring by volunteers (p. 282)." She identifies four insights from this study that emerge when the 11 programs are considered together. These four significant insights are:

1. The presence of a designated coordinator who knows reading and reading instruction is necessary.
2. The tutoring sessions and basic components of the program must be structured.

3. Tutors must be well trained.
 4. The tutor program must be coordinated with regular classroom instruction.
- (Wasik, 1998b, pp. 282-283)

SUMMARY

Chapter II, Review of Literature, presented the existing applicable literature regarding reading skill remediation and the use of adult volunteer tutors. While the field of reading instruction is well defined and documented, the area of this field referred to in the literature as remediation is not so well defined. In addition, the research showing widespread performance improvement of reading skills due to the use of volunteer tutors is simply nonexistent. Evidence is presented that there are exemplar programs which illustrate those “best practices” which should be incorporated into any new program such as that developed for this study. The next chapter will present the methods and procedures utilized which will compare the results of regular classroom instruction and an adult tutor program.

CHAPTER III

METHODS AND PROCEDURES

The purpose of this study was to determine the correlation between volunteer tutoring of below grade level readers at Peasley Middle School and their reading skill improvement. The research problem of this study was that students in the corrective reading program who engage in a volunteer tutoring approach to reading skill improvement will show greater reading skill improvement than those students only exposed to the academic classroom approach. This chapter discusses the methods and procedures used to complete the study's goals. Included are discussions of Population, Research Variables, Instrument Use, Classroom Procedures, Methods of Data Collection and Statistical Analysis.

POPULATION

The sample population for this study was made up of rising seventh graders who tested at a reading skill level between 4.0 and 5.7. Seventy-two incoming seventh grade students tested below grade level with 51 students testing at the 4.0-5.7 range. Two groups containing 18 students each were selected from this group of 51 below grade level readers. A stratified random sample technique was used to balance the experimental and control groups according to gender and pre-test scores.

RESEARCH VARIABLES

The control group of 18 students received only regular classroom instruction. The experimental group received regular classroom instruction in addition to participation in a volunteer tutor corrective reading program. No other factors were controlled except for

participation of the eighteen students in the tutor program in addition to regular classroom instruction.

INSTRUMENT USE

The Gates-MacGinitie Reading Test (GMRT), Third Edition, was used to identify the study participants and as a post-test at the conclusion of the study. The designed purpose of the GMRT is to assess student achievement in reading. The Science Research Associates, Inc. (SRA) Corrective Reading program used in the study contained placement tests which were used to place the tutor program participants in appropriate groups. The SRA programs are divided into two strands, decoding and comprehension. Assessment is required to determine the needs of individual participants based on the level of remedial instruction within these two strands.

CLASSROOM PROCEDURES

This study took place between September 21, 1999, and December 10, 1999. It took the form of a corrective reading program. All testing and tutoring took place within the confines of Peasley Middle School. The tutor sessions were limited to three times per week for forty-five minutes per session. The study procedures included the following:

1. Seven adult volunteer tutors were recruited and screened for appropriateness. The seven tutors were trained as a group at two sessions in the SRA methodology and general tutor guidelines. All tutors used the standard SRA materials which were provided by the school.
2. Tutor assignments were made by the Principal and a Performance Checklist was used to ensure consistent methods were being used. The SRA teacher-consultant and other

qualified school staff observed the tutor sessions and provided feedback to the tutors on a random basis and when requested.

3. Two tutors were assigned to each group of six students with the three sessions each week split between the two tutors. The classroom assigned for each session changed as the school administration scheduled the tutor sessions.
4. A post-test was performed on both groups of students. The GMRT was the pre- and post- test instrument; the SRA test was for placement within the SRA Corrective Reading program.

METHODS OF DATA COLLECTION

The primary means of data collection was the Gates-MacGinitie Reading Test. The administration of the Gates-MacGinitie Reading Test was limited to two times during the course of the study, pre-test and post-test. The GMRT was administered as a pencil and paper test in a classroom setting to the control group and the experimental group on the same day.

STATISTICAL ANALYSIS

Statistical analyses were done to compare the change in GMRT results of the control group and the experimental group. The measure of central tendency used was the mean to determine the average change for each of the two groups. The t-test was applied to determine if there was a significant difference between the two sample means of each group.

SUMMARY

Chapter III presented a description of the population, research variables, instrument use, classroom procedures, methods of data collection and statistical analysis used to determine the effectiveness of using volunteer tutors in a corrective reading program. Chapter IV provides the findings of the research.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

This study was conducted in order to determine the correlation between volunteer tutoring of below grade level readers at Peasley Middle School and the reading skill improvement of the study participants. This chapter will report the findings of a quasi-experimental comparison of two groups of below grade level readers. The topics explored in this chapter included: 1) Pre-test and Post-test results, 2) t-test results, and 3) Summary.

PRE-TEST AND POST TEST RESULTS

There were two groups used in this study. The experimental group received approximately 30 hours of tutoring from trained volunteers over a ten week period. The control group did not receive any tutoring from the trained volunteers. Also, both groups participated in regular classroom instruction. Both groups were given a pre-test and a post-test to determine their individual reading grade level.

Measures of central tendency were calculated to find the mean of the test results for each group. The mean represents the average test score for each group. Figure 1 shows a comparison of the mean for both groups, pre-test and post-test.

The mean reading grade level of the pre-test for the control group was 5.094 and the mean reading grade level of the pre-test for the experimental group was 5.117. This shows that the initial reading grade level of both groups was comparable. The mean reading grade level of the post-test for the control group was 6.22 and the mean reading grade level of the post-test for the experimental group was 6.1. Figure 2 shows the pre-

test results of the GMRT for both groups and Figure 3 shows the post-test results of the GMRT for both groups.

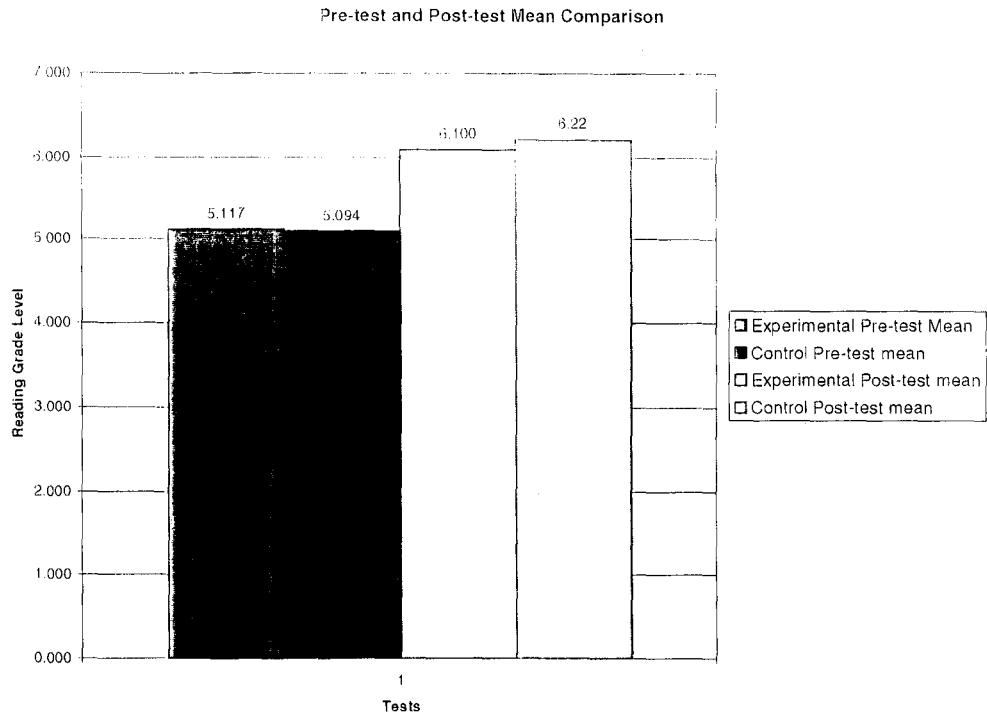


Figure 1

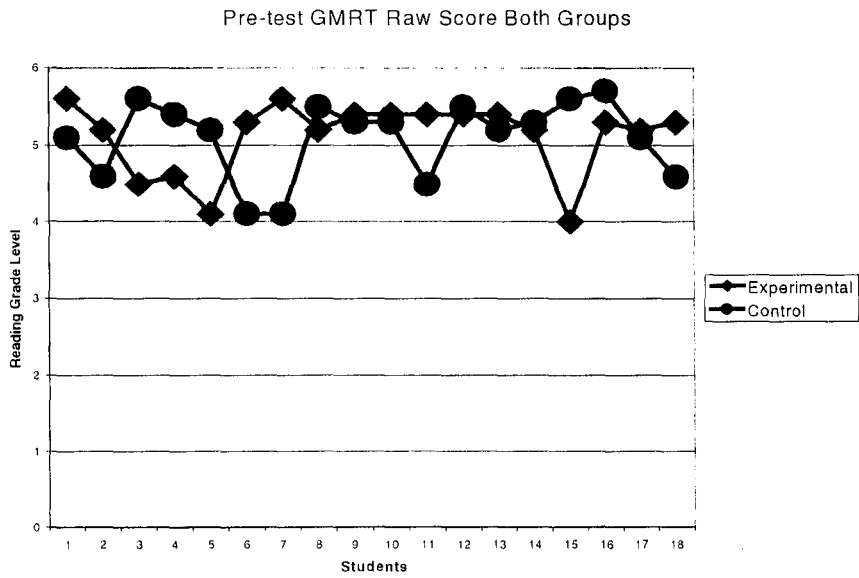


Figure 2

Post-Test GMRT Raw Scores Both Groups

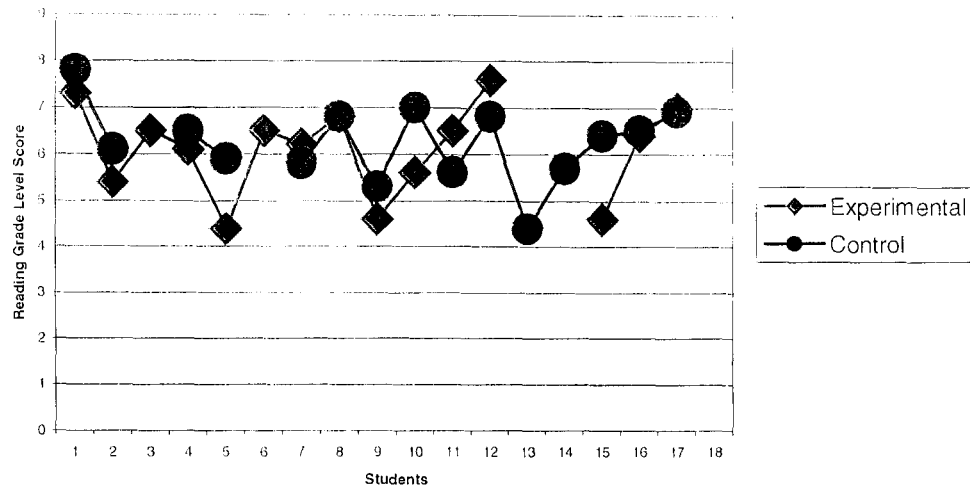


Figure 3

t-TEST RESULTS

A t-test was used to determine if there was a significant difference between the two sample means of the pre-test scores from the experimental group and the control group. The pre-test t-test shows no significant difference, -0.069 . The negative sign is not relevant. The values from the table were 1.697 at the .05 level and 2.457 at the .01 level.

A t-test was used to determine if there was a significant difference between the two sample means of the post-test scores from the experimental group and the control group. The post-test t-test had a value of $.3676$, showing no significance at the .05 level or the .01 level. The values from the table were 1.701 at the .05 level and 2.467 at the .01 level. All t-test calculations can be found in APPENDIX A.

SUMMARY

This chapter has reported a comparison of the reading grade level test results from two groups of below grade level readers. Chapter V will analyze these findings as well as provide conclusions and recommendations.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this chapter is to summarize previous chapters, to draw conclusions based on the data presented, to make recommendations and to suggest ideas for further study.

SUMMARY

This research was conducted to determine the correlation between volunteer tutoring of below grade level readers at Peasley Middle School and their reading skill improvement. The following hypothesis was used to evaluate this study:

H₁: Students in the corrective reading program who engage in a volunteer tutoring approach to reading skill improvement will show greater reading skill improvement than those students only exposed to the academic classroom approach.

This study was needed for two reasons. First, the reading remediation interventions which pulled the below level readers out of the mainstream classes were going to be discontinued and an alternative volunteer program needed to be identified, evaluated and developed. Second, no research regarding the use of volunteer tutors with below grade level readers in the Gloucester County middle schools has ever been conducted. This study determined if the use of volunteer tutors using standardized classroom instructional materials increased the reading skill level of below grade level readers when used in conjunction with mainstream classroom instruction.

This study took place between August 1, 1999, and December 10, 1999. It took the form of a pilot corrective reading program. It was completed before the holiday break

1999 to provide data and recommendations to the Peasley School administration regarding the efficacy of such an volunteer tutor program.

All testing, tutoring and exercises took place within the confines of Peasley Middle School. The tutor sessions were limited to three times per week for forty-five minutes per session. The administration of the Gates-MacGinitie test was limited to two times during the course of this study. Pre-test, post-test, SRA testing, and observational and anecdotal information were collected during the course of the study.

A review of the literature showed that while the field of reading instruction is well defined and documented, the area of this field referred to in the literature as remediation is not as well defined. In addition, the research showing widespread performance improvement of reading skills due to the use of volunteer tutors is simply nonexistent. The literature shows that there are exemplar programs which illustrate those “best practices” which should be incorporated into any new program.

The sample population for this study was rising seventh graders who tested at a reading skill grade level between 4.0 and 5.7. Seventy-two incoming seventh grade students tested below grade level, with 51 students testing at the 4.0-5.7 grade range. Two groups containing approximately 18 students each were selected from this group of 51 below grade level readers. A stratified random sample technique was used to balance the experimental and control groups according to gender and pre-test scores.

The Gates-MacGinitie Reading Test (GMRT), Third Edition, was used to identify the study participants, as a pre-test and as a post-test at the conclusion of the study. The designed purpose of the GMRT is to assess student achievement in reading by grade level. The Science Research Associates, Inc. (SRA) Corrective Reading program used in

the study contained placement tests which were intended to be used to place the tutor program participants in appropriate groups. The SRA programs are divided into two strands, decoding and comprehension. Assessment is required to determine the needs of individual participants based on the level of corrective instruction within these two strands.

The primary means of data collection for both groups was the Gates-MacGinitie Reading Test (GMRT). The administration of the Gates-MacGinitie Reading Test was limited to two times during the course of the study, pre-test and post-test. The GMRT was administered as a pencil and paper test in a classroom setting to the control group and the experimental group on the same day.

The experimental group received approximately 30 hours of tutoring from trained volunteers over a ten week period. The control group did not receive any tutoring from the volunteers. Measures of central tendency were calculated to find the mean of the test results for each group. The mean reading grade level of the pre-test for the control group was 5.094; the mean reading grade level of the pre-test for the experimental group was 5.117. The initial reading grade level of both groups was comparable when an initial t-test reported no significant difference, $t=-.069$. The negative sign is not relevant. The values from the table were 1.697 at the .05 level and 2.457 at the .01 level.

CONCLUSIONS

The hypothesis of this study was:

H₁: Students in the corrective reading program who engage in a volunteer tutoring approach to reading skill improvement will show greater reading skill improvement than those students only exposed to the academic classroom approach.

Based on the calculated results, the hypothesis H₁ was rejected. There was no significant difference, $t=.3676$, between the group that received tutoring by volunteers and the group that received only classroom instruction. The values from the tables were 1.701 at the .05 level and 2.467 at the .01 level.

One student in the control group had a single pre-test score of 5.6 and was included in the sample for this reason. However, his post-test score was 10.0 and far above the norm for either group in reading skill improvement. His scores were removed from the sample as an anomaly. Experimental mortality accounted for a total loss of three students from both groups.

All participants in this study showed an average improvement of one grade level over the three month study period but it is important to note that with few exceptions all remain behind grade level in their reading skills. This seems to reinforce the premise as previously stated on page 12 of this study, “while participation in remediation has a small positive effect, most children who get off schedule in reading acquisition remain off schedule for their school careers (Carter, 1984). Remediation has a small effect on enhancing standardized test performance generally, though it has a large effect in a few cases.”

Many of the participants in the experimental group had previously been exposed to the SRA materials and all three tutor groups accelerated to Lesson 30 in the SRA Corrective Reading Program after the initial session. No SRA placement testing was actually done by the reading specialist to determine whether individual students needed the comprehension strand or the decoding strand. All participants received the decoding strand only.

These findings appear to indicate the below level reading performance of the students at Peasley Middle School is not an indication of skill-knowledge deficiencies. Rather, anecdotal remarks by the tutored students combined with the performance of the control group lead this researcher to consider motivational and environmental factors as more compelling causal factors. The middle school students who participated in the study appeared to have little personal value for the benefits of reading. Feedback from the tutors indicated that this personal value for reading appeared to increase as a byproduct of the student-tutor relationship.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the results of this study, the following recommendation were made:

1. The Peasley Middle School Reading Tutor Program (RTP) should be discontinued with a primary goal of improving the reading of below grade level readers and should be carefully reviewed for the presence of the negative consequences of remediation.
2. Further research should be conducted to identify those factors present in the control group of this study which resulted in improvement of reading achievement.

3. Further research should be conducted at the elementary school level to determine the point at which students begin to fall behind in reading skills.
4. Further research should be conducted to identify other influences that tend to improve reading skills such as student needs and motivation, social conditions and family support.

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APPENDIX A

**t-test Calculations for Pre-test and
Post-Test**

t-test CALCULATIONS PRE-TEST

$$t = \frac{M1 - M2}{\sqrt{\left(\frac{\sum d_1^2 + \sum d_2^2}{N_1 + N_2 - 2}\right) \left(\frac{N_1 + N_2}{N_1 N_2}\right)}}$$

$$t = \frac{5.094 - 5.117}{\sqrt{\left(\frac{18.18 + 15.34}{18 + 18 - 2}\right) \left(\frac{18 + 18}{18 \times 18}\right)}}$$

$$t = \frac{-.023}{\sqrt{\left(\frac{33.52}{34}\right) \left(\frac{36}{324}\right)}}$$

$$t = \frac{-.023}{\sqrt{(.985) (.111)}}$$

$$t = \frac{-.023}{.109}$$

$$t = \frac{-.023}{.330}$$

$$t = -.069$$

p at the .01 level is 2.457

p at the .05 level is 1.697

**t-test CALCULATIONS
POST-TEST**

$$t = \frac{6.22 - 6.1}{\sqrt{\left(\frac{9.38+13.7}{15+15-2}\right)\left(\frac{15+15}{15 \times 15}\right)}}$$

$$t = \frac{.12}{\sqrt{\left(\frac{23.08}{28}\right)\left(\frac{30}{225}\right)}}$$

$$t = \frac{.12}{\sqrt{(.82)(.13)}}$$

$$t = \frac{.12}{\sqrt{.1066}}$$

$$t = \frac{.12}{.3264}$$

$$t = .3676$$

p at the .01 level is 2.467

p at the .05 level is 1.701

APPENDIX B

**Volunteer Reading Tutor Program
Guidelines**

Peasley Middle School

Volunteer Reading Tutor Program Guidelines

Pilot Program September 1999

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Volunteer Reading Tutor Program Guidelines

Purpose of this Guide

This guide was developed to support the adult volunteer reading tutor program at Peasley Middle School in Gloucester County, Virginia.

The guide contains information about middle school and middle schoolers, the environment, tutoring relationships and what is expected of tutors in general.

Background information about the tutor program

In the 1998-1999 school year, the incoming class of sixth graders were tested for reading skill level using the Gates-MacGinitie Reading Test for level 5/6. Ninety-six of the three hundred thirty incoming sixth graders (29%) tested at a reading skill level one or more grades below the sixth grade. During the same period approximately 32% of the seventh and eighth graders also tested one or more grades below level in reading skill. The school administration felt that reading skills are the foundation of all learning.

In the 1999-2000 school year, budget cuts required the administration at Peasley Middle School to discontinue both reading skill remediation interventions and place all of the identified below level readers back into mainstream classrooms for reading remediation. The staff and administration at Peasley felt that some intervention other than mainstream classroom instruction was needed and sought to explore a no-cost volunteer tutoring approach. Concerns regarding the efficacy of an adult tutor program were raised and a pilot program was launched. This study sought to compare the reading skill improvement of the identified below level learners who were tutored by adults in addition to classroom instruction with that of below level learners receiving only mainstream classroom instruction.

The reading level of rising sixth graders has been showing a decline over the past three school years, but the Gates-MacGinitie Reading Test was not used at Peasley Middle School until the 1997-1998 school year. During that year the reading skill level of 29% of the incoming sixth graders was one or more years below the sixth grade.

According to Danny Fary, Principal of Peasley Middle School, the poor reading skills inhibited learning in all areas of the curriculum. The scores from the Gates-MacGinitie testing seemed to validate the suspicions of the teaching staff at Peasley Middle School of poor reading comprehension and consequent poor performance in general studies.

Continued on next page

Volunteer Reading Tutor Program Guidelines, Continued

Description of the Reading Tutor program

The Reading Tutor Program at Peasley Middle School is a small group approach using the SRA Corrective Reading Program materials. Each child participating in the program receives three 45 minute remedial sessions per week. The sessions are scheduled during normal class times but are scheduled in such a way as to not interfere with core studies.

Participation is voluntary and is based on the results of the Gates-MacGinitie Reading Test. Participants are further assessed for placement within the SRA Corrective Reading Program.

Students are placed in groups of five for maximum group dynamic and individual contact in conformance with the SRA guidelines. Each group of five participants is assigned two tutors to provide coverage and to allow positive relationships to develop.

Middle School Students

The period of early adolescence can be marked by great stress. Students in the middle-school years undergo substantial changes in the areas of physical, psychological, social and cognitive growth. These changes affect how young adolescents respond to adults, their peers and the demands of schooling.

It's important that teachers provide the assurance and understanding necessary to help middle-schoolers make informed decisions about personal and academic matters.

NELS

According to the National Education Longitudinal Study (NELS, 1990), 86 percent of eighth graders are proficient in reading a simple paragraph for the main idea and supporting details. But only one-third are able to infer, summarize or generalize about what they have read.

Your role

Drop the authoritative teacher role. Be an interested human being.

Be real

Communicate by transmitting attitudes and feelings. Do this by being real; it's more effective than simply to use words.

Avoid Barriers

Arrange the physical setting so as to be close to the student. Remove barriers between student and tutor.

Continued on next page

Volunteer Reading Tutor Program Guidelines, Continued

Talk Alert!	Talk only about one-third of the time when engaging the student in discussion. This gives him or her the opportunity to do most of the talking and shows that you are interested.
Questioning	Ask questions that cannot be answered with a yes or a no. Instead of saying, "Do you like to read?" say, "What do you dislike about reading?"
Interrupting	Don't interrupt the student when he or she is talking. This communicates that what is being said is important. However, sometimes you must refocus the student by asking questions such as, "What does this mean to you?"
Silence	Give the students time to think. Realize that there will be periods during which the student is thinking. This takes practice, for in normal conversation silence produces a feeling of awkwardness.
Be concise	Keep your comments brief and to the point. Try not to confuse the student with long, complicated questions or comments.
Pause before talking	Always pause before talking. The student may wish to make additional remarks; a pause of a few seconds enables him or her to continue.
Don't lecture	Don't give lectures on ways to behave. Ask the students to provide alternatives and let them decide. Help them to explore the consequences of the alternatives. Information, possibilities and alternatives may be presented, but only for consideration. There is a big difference between telling a person what to do and suggesting alternatives.
Clarify and summarize	Clarify and reflect what you hear being said to ensure understanding. Summarize often when engaging in discussions.
Alarm	Try and avoid alarm at what the students may say to you from time to time. Try instead to focus on the reason behind what was said.

Continued on next page

Volunteer Reading Tutor Program Guidelines, Continued

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- Reassurance** Do not reassure the student that things will be all right. This will be recognized as superficial. Look instead for ways to demonstrate change and progress.
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- Don't moralize** Focus on what is behind the student's behavior; ask yourself, "What is there about this person that causes this behavior?" As a remedial teacher, do not blame the student for failures; try instead to understand the nature of the failure.
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- Avoid flattery** Praise students appropriately but avoid flattery. Focus the praise on observable behaviors that you want the student to repeat.
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- Acceptance** Do not reject the student through your remarks or nonverbal clues, but instead attempt to accept him or her. Try not to show impatience; do not threaten or argue; guard against any act that might appear to belittle.
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- Refer "Serious Cases"** A more explicit definition of "serious cases" cannot be given here. The remedial tutor must sense her or his own limitations and seek additional help when that boundary is reached.
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Notes: