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Gains in 8th Grade Student's Reading Skills in Group
Within a Group and Large Group Guided Reading Instruction

By

Brian A. Wedemeyer

A Field Project

Presented to the Faculty of
The Graduate College at the University of Nebraska at Omaha

In Partial Fulfillment of Requirements
For the Degree of Specialist of Education

Major: Educational Administration

Under the Supervision of Dr. Leon Dappen

September, 2006

UMI Number: EP74031

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EDUCATION SPECIALIST
FIELD PROJECT ACCEPTANCE

Acceptance for the faculty of the Graduate College.
University of Nebraska, in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree, Education Specialist.
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Abstract

Gains in 8th Grade Student's Reading Skills in Group Within a Group and Large Group Guided Reading Instruction

Brian A. Wedemeyer

University of Nebraska at Omaha, 2006

Advisor: Dr. Leon Dappen, Ph.D.

The purpose of this study was to compare two guided reading strategies, group within a group instruction and large group guided reading instruction to determine if one is more effective at raising student word meaning, literal comprehension, inferential comprehension and critical judgment achievement test scores.

Tri-Center had used both reading strategies. If there is a significant improvement in student achievement levels using one reading strategy over another, it would indicate that Tri-Center Middle School would need to look at converting other reading sections to the more successful reading strategy.

The study was limited to 42 students all being eighth grade students who are enrolled at Tri-Center Middle School for the 2005-2006 school year. Tri-Center Middle School has

three reading sections per grade level with approximately twenty students per section.

Northwest Evaluation Association (NWEA) Reading measure is a computerized criterion referenced individualized assessment with immediate feedback response that tailors the exam to provide specific teaching direction.

The results of the study showed that there was a gain pretest to posttest on all measures. It did not matter what group the students were in. The results indicate that either reading strategy, group within a group or large group guided reading was effective at raising student word meaning, literal comprehension, inferential comprehension and critical judgment achievement test scores.

Because no differences were found between the two groups, Tri-Center Middle School will continue to use large group guided reading and will start to focus on other ways to improve our reading scores.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

The body of research and study regarding the area of reading has been substantial. It is generally accepted that reading is part of every learning area and thus one of the most important curricular areas in education. Reading is instrumental in forming a foundation on which to build a child's educational career. The national goal is that all children will read by third grade (Taylor & Pearson, 1999). The federal legislation No Child Left Behind (NCLB) has required schools to look at assessment instruments and the achievement of all students. Public schools in Iowa are held accountable to meet annual measurable objectives in reading and mathematics at grades 4, 8, and 11. When a school district does not meet the annual measurable objectives for one year, it is referred to as not making adequate yearly progress (AYP). The goal of 100 percent proficiency by 2014 is required under the NCLB legislation. If AYP is not met for two consecutive years, the school/district will be labeled as a school in need of assistance (Iowa Department of Education, 2004).

Given the inherent importance of reading and the requirements of NCLB what can we do at Tri-Center Middle

School to improve our reading instruction and thus our students test scores in reading?

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study is to compare two guided reading strategies, group within a group instruction and large group guided reading instruction to determine if one is more effective at raising student word meaning, literal comprehension, inferential comprehension and critical judgment achievement test scores.

Tri-Center now uses both reading strategies. If there is a significant improvement in student achievement levels using one reading strategy over another, it would indicate that Tri-Center Middle School would need to look at converting other reading sections to the more successful reading strategy.

Research Questions

The following questions will guide the study.

1. Which reading strategy, group within a group guided reading or large group guided reading increased eighth grade students NWEA total reading scores the most?
2. Which reading strategy, group within a group guided

reading or large group guided reading increased eighth grade students NWEA reading scores in word meaning the most?

3. Which reading strategy, group within a group guided reading or large group guided reading increased eighth grade students NWEA reading scores in literal comprehension the most?
4. Which reading strategy, group within a group guided reading or large group guided reading increased eighth grade students NWEA reading scores in inferential comprehension the most?
5. Which reading strategy, group within a group guided reading or large group guided reading increased eighth grade students NWEA reading scores in critical judgment the most?

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical basis for this study is derived from research and analysis conducted by a number of authors. There has been considerable research examining the effect of student grouping with reading achievement. This study will focus on the two particular strategies, group within a group guided reading and large group guided reading

instruction. In group within a group each small group will read material targeted at their individual reading level while with large group guided reading will use material at one reading level based on the median level of the group.

Definition of Terms

The quantitative research questions in this study require identifying important terminology. The following definitions are presented to clarify those terms that are frequently used throughout the study.

- Northwest Evaluation Association (NWEA): Is a nonprofit organization that provides computerized adaptive testing in reading, (NWEA Reading measure) which gives test results for more than 1,500 member districts. The mean reading test scores for students are divided into four areas: reading strategies/word meaning, literal comprehension, inferential/interpretive comprehension, and critical judgment.
- Guided reading helps students learn reading strategies to apply and use these reading strategies in other situations.

- Word meaning is being able to use context clues, uses synonyms, antonyms and homonyms, use component structure and being able to interpret multiple meanings.
- Literal comprehension is being able to recall details, interpret directions, sequence details, classify facts and identify main ideas.
- Inferential comprehension is being able to draw inferences, recognize cause and effect, predict events, and summarize and synthesize.
- Critical judgment is being able to distinguish fact and opinion, recognize elements of persuasion, evaluate validity and point of view, evaluate conclusions, and detect bias and assumptions.
- Rasch Unit (RIT): NWEA score which ranges from 160-230. A RIT score is, "an equal-interval score, like feet and inches; therefore, scores can be added together to calculate accurate class or school averages" (NWEA, 1998).
- Group within a group guided reading: Is a context in which a teacher supports each reader's development of effective strategies for processing

text at increasing levels of difficulty (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996). With group within a group a classroom of twenty students might be made up of four different groups of students all reading from differing literature, based on their own reading level.

- Large group guided reading: In large group guided reading, the teacher is guided by a preplanned curriculum. Instruction is clear and focused and learning progress is monitored (Butler, 2001). With large group guided reading the entire class is reading the same literature and instruction is guided toward the entire group.

Assumptions

The assumptions of this study are that each reading group will be taught by the same teacher. Each reading section will be heterogeneously grouped. The length of time from the pretest to the posttest will be exactly the same.

Delimitations

The study was limited to 42 students all being eighth grade students who are enrolled at Tri-Center Middle School for the 2005-2006 school year. Tri-Center Middle School has

three reading sections per grade level with approximately twenty students per section.

Limitations

Students with special learning needs who are already participating in pull out instruction based on their individual education plan will not be involved in this study. Only students who complete the NWEA pretest and posttest assessment will be included in the study.

Significance of the Study

The significance of the study was founded upon what it will contribute to the understanding of how reading is taught and which grouping, group within a group, or large group guided reading strategies is most effective at raising student achievement.

Organization of the Study

Chapter 2 is a review of the literature that is associated with guided reading and grouping strategies, group within a group and large group guided reading. The review will help bring to light the research that has been completed concerning which strategy is most effective at raising student word meaning, literal comprehension, inferential comprehension and critical judgment. Chapter 3 outlines the study and elaborates on the methodology,

while Chapter 4 reveals the results of the research. Chapter 5 will show the overall findings of the study, recommendations for practice, recommendations for further research and the conclusions of the study.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

This review is constructed around the value of guided reading and discussion of two aspects of guided reading instruction, those being: (1) group within a group guided reading instruction and (2) large group guided reading instruction. Implications for practice and research that are associated with the connectedness of these issues are discussed.

Approximately 32% of students across the nation cannot read at a basic level (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2003). It is generally accepted that reading is part of every learning area and thus one of the most important curricular areas in education. Reading is instrumental in forming a foundation on which to build a child's educational career (Wilson, 2002). Children who read well do better in other subjects and in all aspects of schooling and beyond (Alexander, n.d.). Schumm, Moody, and Vaughn (2000) suggest that the classroom environment created by the teacher may have an influence on a student's reading achievement. "The way in which teachers structure classroom instruction can determine how students interact with each other and with the teacher, which in turn can

affect the cognitive and affective outcomes of instruction” (Schumm, et al., 2000 p. 477).

Guided Reading

Guided reading is a strategy that helps students become good readers. The goal of guided reading is to help learners develop a self-extending system of literacy strategies that allow them to engage in independent tasks (Massengill, 2003). The benefits of guided reading include the following: individual readers have the opportunity to develop and use reading strategies so they can read progressively difficult texts, students experience success in reading for meaning and students develop as individual readers while being involved in a supported activity (Montgomery County Public Schools, n.d.).

Guided reading generally involves calling on individual students to read orally, correcting errors when mispronunciations occur, and asking questions that guide students' understanding and help teachers ascertain comprehension (Archer, Gleason, & Vashon, 2003). Guided reading helps students learn reading strategies to apply and use these reading strategies in other situations. We cannot count on silent reading in class or at home to bring about these gains (National Reading Panel, 2000). Instead,

we must organize reading groups to optimize the amount of reading practice that each student receives and supplement that practice with repeated readings (Archer, et al., 2003). Two primary strategies, group within a group and large group have been commonly used to accomplish guided reading.

Group Within a Group Guided Reading

The group within a group strategy consists of reading instruction that uses developmentally appropriate texts. These texts are carefully chosen in order to build independence, fluency, comprehension skills, and problem-solving strategies. The end result of this instruction should be increased independent use of reading strategies by the student (Ash, 2000). The teacher provides support for small groups of readers as they learn to use various reading strategies, context clues, sound relationships, word structure and so forth (Gerdes, 2001). Each guided reading lesson is individually planned based on the strengths and needs of the readers (Massengill, 2003). The smaller groups provide a greater opportunity for teachers to use instruction that scaffolds the learning and engages the learner (Ford & Opitz, 2002).

The goal of group within a group guided reading is for students to become fluent readers who can problem solve strategically and read independently and silently (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996). Group within a group guided reading assumes that if you can improve a student's independent use of reading strategies and these strategies help the students read progressively more difficult texts, that the students then experience success in reading for meaning and students then develop as individual readers all while being supported in a small group of readers where each lesson is individually planned based on their own strengths and needs.

Some teachers experience anxiety when implementing small group instruction in a classroom. Management concerns, unclear definitions of small groups, and time constraints are just a few deterrents for teachers leading to their hesitation in using small groups. Adding to these concerns, many teachers feel inadequately prepared to teach reading. Most teachers reported that whole or large group (mixed ability) instruction was covered in their preservice education, but less than 40% of the teachers reported coverage of small group, and even less coverage of

individualized instruction and pairing (Moody & Schumm, 1999).

Recently, there has been a trend towards large group or whole group instruction in an attempt to move away from ability groups and tracking. There are several reasons for this shift from ability groups. First, research does not support the use of ability groups. Second, the quality and content of instruction has shown to be inferior in low ability groups. Third, a concern has risen about the social and motivational effects of these groups on students (Schumm, et al., 2000).

Large Group Guided Reading

Large group guided reading instruction has been a commonly used strategy in the teaching of reading. The technique involves teaching to the entire class at the same time, using one selection of text. Teaching to the whole group from one text targets the middle reading level or grade level being taught. Large group guided reading is based on a preplanned curriculum guided by district or state standards. Instructional resources and teaching activities are identified, matched to objectives and reviewed for content and appropriateness and modified according to effectiveness in helping students learn

(Butler, 2001). It assumes that all students are being taught strategies to help them succeed and become effective readers.

The concern is that this instructional technique can be the only one used in many classrooms, even though student's needs and levels are different. "Such differences meant that some children kept hearing what they already knew; for others, the observed lesson was too difficult and proceeded too quickly" (Schumm, et al., 2000 p. 305).

Summary of Review and Implications

Research tells us that reading must be a constructive process in which readers create meaning and link it to their background knowledge. Reading must be fluent and strategic. Reading requires motivation, and, is a continuously developing skill (Kaufmann, 2000).

There are many different aspects to the teaching of reading. One of the primary approaches involves the grouping of students.

The reason for this study is that the research is inconclusive as to which strategy is the most effective between group within a group and large group guided reading instruction at determining if one is more effective at raising student word meaning, literal comprehension,

inferential comprehension and critical judgment achievement
test scores.

Chapter 3

Methodology

This chapter focuses upon the methods used to examine the reading interventions utilized. Methods of data collection and process for analysis regarding which reading strategy is superior, large group or group within a group will also be discussed.

Subjects

This study concentrated on students entering grade eight for the 2005-2006 school year. A total of 42 students were selected from the two reading sections at Tri-Center Community Schools. Students with special learning needs in the area of reading who are already participating in pull out instruction based on their individual education plan were not involved in this study. Only students who complete the pretest and posttest testing were included in the study.

Tri-Center Middle School is a school located about 25 miles Northeast of Council Bluffs Iowa.

According to schools records, the racial/ethnic mix for the eighth grade class is 98% White and 2% Black. Twenty three percent of the class qualifies for free or reduced

lunch. The gender make up of the class is 63% female and 37% males.

Tri-Center Middle School has three reading sections per grade level with approximately twenty students per section. For the purpose of this study a coin toss determined which section replaced large group guided reading instruction with group within a group guided reading instruction.

Instrument

The NWEA Reading measure is a computerized criterion referenced individualized assessment with immediate feedback response that tailors the exam to provide specific teaching direction. It was developed and is administered by the NWEA. NWEA was founded in 1976 by a group of school districts looking for ways to efficiently and accurately measure how much students have learned. The testing structure used in NWEA assessments is a computerized adaptive test. The process of adaptive testing uses a pool of questions with calibrated item difficulties. A student is presented with an item of reasonable difficulty based on what is known about the student's achievement. After the student answers the item, his or her success determines the next item chosen by the computerized assessment. The next item chosen for the student is one that is matched to this

new achievement level estimate. If the student missed the previous item, an easier item is presented. If the student answered the previous item correctly, a more difficult item is presented. This process of increasing difficulty or decreasing difficulty from one test question to the next continues until a marginally reliable score is attained. The range of difficulty for each test within the series is relatively narrow. The student is assigned a test where the mid-range of item difficulty approaches his or her current achievement (NWEA, 2003).

The measures of academic progress (MAP) test scores are calculated by a computer during test administration. The computer also rescores the test event to double-check its correctness immediately following the assessment. After the assessment the results are sent back to the central MAP database for score validation. Score validation also happens during this data collection process. A MAP score is invalid if:

- The student completed the test in less than six minutes.

- The standard error of measurement (SEM) is greater than 5.5 Rasch Units (RIT), unless the student's score is greater than 240 RIT's.
- The SEM is less than 1.0 RIT, which is an indicator of some kind of technical difficulty with the assessment (NWEA, 2003).

NWEA provides the following forms of validity evidence:

- The MAP administration training materials, which provide instructions on the appropriate uses and inappropriate uses of the various NWEA assessments.
- A technical manual as a document that explains the ways in which NWEA promotes valid test result interpretation.
- A technical manual as a document that provides the processes used to ensure that the content of the exams is valid.
- A technical manual as a document that provides the processes used to ensure that test scores are constructed in a manner that is valid.

- Concurrent validity statistics that correlate NWEA test results with other major national or state educational assessments (NWEA, 2003).

Marginal reliability is one of the most appropriate methods of calculating reliability for adaptive tests. It uses the test information function to determine the expected correlation between the scores of two hypothetical tests taken by the same student. It also allows the calculation of reliability across multiple test forms as in MAP (NWEA, 2003).

Marginal reliability is, therefore, a very appropriate measure of the overall soundness of the NWEA assessment. The reliabilities are between 0.89 and 0.96 for the three subject areas NWEA measures, Reading, Mathematics and Language Usage (NWEA, 2003). Values in excess of 0.70 are generally considered acceptable and values above 0.90 are considered good (NWEA, 2003).

Researcher's Role

The role of the researcher in this study involved the training of the reading instructor, overseeing the pretest and posttest testing and compilation of achievement test

scores to compare the group within a group guided reading and large group guided reading.

Instructional Materials Used

The group within a group classroom did not use a single textbook but rather used material assigned by the teacher based on the students reading ability and interests. Each group of students used reading texts that were at their reading level based on their NWEA pretest scores. The large group guided reading group used the literature textbook used by the regular reading classes at Tri-Center Middle School, Holt Elements of Literature Second Course.

Ethical Aspects of the Study

The confidentiality and integrity of the study were of utmost importance. Therefore, the collection and recording of data was contingent upon the permission of the school district, parents, and students. Application for conducting this study was sought and approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB).

Process

Students received reading instructional strategies appropriate to their grouping arrangement through the 2005-2006 school year. This was evidenced by a review of weekly

lesson plans turned in by the reading teacher and weekly classroom observations made by the building principal.

Data Collection

Students were given a NWEA Reading measures pretest at the beginning of the fall of 2005 semester and posttest at the end of the 2006 semester.

Data Recording

NWEA Reading measures test scores (RIT Scores) were downloaded from (NWEA).

Data Analysis

An analysis of each of the five questions will be completed by using the independent-measures t-test using the pre-test and post-test mean scores. Their will be a statistical significant result for the independent-measure t-test at the .05 level. All data will be reviewed retrospectively. All data will be de-identified before analysis.

Chapter 4

Results

This study compared two reading strategies, large group guided reading and group within a group guided reading instruction, to determine if one is more effective at raising student word meaning, literal comprehension, inferential comprehension and critical judgment achievement test scores. The participants in this study were students entering grade eight for the 2005-2006 school year. A total of 42 students were selected from the two reading sections at Tri-Center Community Schools. The selected participants included 20 females and 22 males.

The following research questions were drawn from the literature and used to guide the study:

1. Which reading strategy, group within a group guided reading or large group guided reading increased eighth grade students NWEA total reading scores the most?
2. Which reading strategy, group within a group guided reading or large group guided reading increased eighth grade students NWEA reading scores in word meaning the most?
3. Which reading strategy, group within a group guided

reading or large group guided reading increased eighth grade students NWEA reading scores in literal comprehension the most?

4. Which reading strategy, group within a group guided reading or large group guided reading increased eighth grade students NWEA reading scores in inferential comprehension the most?

5. Which reading strategy, group within a group guided reading or large group guided reading increased eighth grade students NWEA reading scores in critical judgment the most?

This study examined the relationship between group within a group and large group guided reading instruction to determine if one is more effective at raising student achievement. Change in NWEA reading RIT scores in word meaning, literal comprehension, inferential comprehension and critical judgment achievement were compared.

Table 1 summarizes the pretest and posttest scores for group within a group guided reading and large group guided reading.

Table #1

NWEA RIT Score and Standard Deviation

Group	n	Pretest	(SD)	Posttest	(SD)	Gain
Total Reading RIT Score						
GWG	21	219.48	11.96	221.62	18.09	2.14
LG	21	220.43	11.28	224.12	10.96	3.69
Word Meaning						
GWG	21	221.1	11.49	222.43	17.64	1.33
LG	21	223.38	12.96	224.9	11.04	1.52
Literal Comprehension						
GWG	21	221	13.53	223.14	17.18	3.14
LG	21	219.62	13.02	221.62	12.13	2
Inferential Comprehension						
GWG	21	219.95	13.21	220.91	23.99	0.96
LG	21	220.19	12.05	225.38	13.83	5.19
Critical Judgment						
GWG	21	218.76	14.74	223.24	23.99	4.48
LG	21	218.38	14.43	223.856	13.83	5.48*

*p<.05

The results indicate that both reading strategies, group within a group guided reading and large group guided reading were effective at raising student total reading word meaning, literal comprehension, inferential comprehension and critical judgment achievement test scores. The only statistically significant result was for critical judgment in the large group guided reading, which improved from pretest ($M=218.57$, $SD=14.41$) to posttest ($M=223.86$, $SD=18.23$). As is shown in Table 1, there were no other significant differences for either group within a group or large group guided reading in pretest to post test scores.

Summary

Both reading strategies, group within a group and large group guided reading were effective at raising student reading skills. There were no significant differences from pretest to posttest results for RIT scores except for critical judgment in large group guided reading.

Chapter 5

Discussion

The purpose of this study is to compare two reading strategies, large group guided reading and group within a group guided reading instruction, to determine if one is more effective at raising student word meaning, literal comprehension, inferential comprehension and critical judgment achievement test scores. The study was limited to 42 students all being eighth grade students who were enrolled at Tri-Center Middle School for the 2005-2006 school year.

This study looked at the gains between group within a group guided reading and large group guided reading instruction as determined by the change in NWEA reading RIT scores.

Overall Findings

The results of the study showed that there was a gain pretest to posttest on all measures. It did not matter what group the students were in. The results indicate that either reading strategy, group within a group or large group guided reading was effective at raising student word meaning, literal comprehension, and inferential comprehension. The critical judgment score gain for the

large group was the only gain that was statistically significant.

The group within a group guided reading students tended to have a wider standard deviation than the large group guided reading students in the post test scores. This would reflect that some students in group within a group made much smaller gains while others made much stronger gains than the large group guided reading students.

Recommendations for Practice

Because no differences were found between the two groups, Tri-Center Middle School could choose either large group guided reading or group within a group guided reading. The teacher preparation time was considerable more with group within a group since she had to prepare lessons for five different groups of students in group within a group instead of having to prepare for one large group in large group guided reading. Classroom management and classroom preparation required more teacher attention with group within a group since the teacher was usually working with one group while the other four had to work on their own and wait for her to instruct their group. This meant that the teacher had to be aware of what was going on at all times and she had to make sure that she could monitor

the progress of five different groups all working on different material at the same time. In large group instruction she could prepare for one group and monitor the entire group and their progress as they all worked on the same material. Large group guided reading was easier to monitor and track students progress than group within a group. Group within a group was like having five small classes going on at the same time and having to prepare for five classes.

Large group guided reading and group within a group guided reading instruction did not make a difference in this study, although it involved a small sample of 42 students in a small rural school in Iowa over a fairly short period of time. Results might vary in other settings with a larger sample of students carried out over a longer period of time than one school year.

Tri-Center Middle School will continue to use large group guided reading and will examine other ways to improve our reading scores.

Recommendations for Further Research

This project was limited to studying one class of students in a small rural school in Iowa. Recommendations for further research include schools in urban settings or

that have a more diverse population, larger sample sizes, longer periods of study, teacher training, and age/grade at which the students are studied.

The school population at Tri-Center is very homogeneous with only two percent minority and less than 25% free or reduced lunch. The attention given to students in group within a group could make a difference in a larger school with a more diverse population.

The sample size of students was limited to 42 students with 21 students being in each group. With the small amount of diversity we had in our sample groups it might be beneficial to expand the size of the groups.

The length of time of our study was limited to five months, the amount of time between the pretest and posttest. Would a longer period of time between tests be beneficial and would students make improvements if they were compared over several years.

Another area to research would be teacher training. Our teachers have been trained in using the NWEA pretest and posttest and evaluating the results. The reading instructor had also been trained in different reading strategies. The training could have been more in-depth and she could have been given more training if we had more

time. This was also her first attempt to teach group within a group instruction and therefore she learned many things which could be helpful if she were to continue to teach in group within a group classrooms.

A final area to study is the age/grade at which we were studying. Many students by the time they are twelve, thirteen or fourteen have learned how to read and have developed different coping skills in regards to reading. This study may have revealed different findings with elementary age students when they are learning to read.

Conclusion

The purpose of this project was to compare two reading strategies, large group guided reading and group within a group guided reading instruction, to determine if one is more effective at raising student word meaning, literal comprehension, inferential comprehension and critical judgment achievement test scores. The results of this study indicate that neither reading strategy was more effective than the other; there was no real difference between the two strategies.

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